Magic tricks with no props: the eight you can do in the car

Peabody blog · Games · updated 2026-10-30

Eight magic tricks for kids that need nothing but hands and a voice, which ones work from a back seat, and how long each one takes to learn.

There are eight tricks in the Peabody Magic Shop that need nothing at all: no coin, no card, no pencil, just hands and a voice. Seven of them work the first try, the longest takes fifteen minutes to learn, and seven of the eight work in a car, two of them if you turn round to face your audience.

I had planned to call this "four you can do in the car". Then I counted. The Magic Shop has eighty tricks done with things already in the house, and when the shop filters for the ones with an empty props list it finds eight. It is still a short list, and the no-props page says so plainly: most magic needs something to make disappear.

The eight

- Trick: The Answer Is Always 3 · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 2 minutes · Good in the car?: Yes
- Trick: The Stretching Finger · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · Good in the car?: Turn and face them
- Trick: Eleven Fingers · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · Good in the car?: Yes
- Trick: The Grey Elephant Prediction · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · Good in the car?: Yes
- Trick: Thumb Off · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 8 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · Good in the car?: Turn and face them
- Trick: The Nine Times Fingers · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · Good in the car?: Yes
- Trick: The Knuckle Calendar · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · Good in the car?: Yes
- Trick: The Secret Partner Code · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · Good in the car?: Save it for later

The ages come from the grades each trick is written for: the youngest grade plus five, to the oldest grade plus six. Five of the eight come from the Mind Reader's Corner and three from the Everyday Shelf.

The ones made of talking

Five of these are mind-reading tricks, and four of them are the real car tricks, because the audience never has to see anything.

The Answer Is Always 3 is the one to teach first. Somebody thinks of any number, does a few sums in their head, and you tell them the answer without asking a single question. The steps cancel their starting number out, so everybody who follows them lands on 3, whether they picked 7 or a million. It takes two minutes to learn.

The Grey Elephant Prediction is the strange one. A couple of sums turn into a letter, the letter turns into a country, the country into an animal and the animal into a colour, and then you announce that there are no grey elephants in Denmark. The first half is arithmetic that always lands in the same place. The second half is not maths at all: it is that almost everybody makes the same three choices.

The Knuckle Calendar and the Nine Times Fingers are the quiet show-offs. Somebody names a month, and you glance at your fists and say how many days it has, February included. Somebody calls out a number from 1 to 10, and you give the nine times table answer straight away, again and again, faster than they can. Both are things grown-ups half remember from school and are delighted to see again.

The ones made of fingers

Thumb Off and the Stretching Finger are the two you see. A thumb slides off and goes back on; a finger stretches out and is pushed back to size. Both pages carry the "only from the front" note, which matters in a car, where the audience is usually beside you. Turn round and face the person you are showing, at a stop if you are the one in the front.

Eleven Fingers is a finger trick that is really a counting trick. You claim eleven fingers, they count ten, you count out loud and get eleven. It works from any angle, which makes it the best of the three for a back seat.

The one to save for the destination

The Secret Partner Code needs no props, but it does need a partner and a room. You leave the room, your partner asks everyone to point at any object in it, and you come back, look around and put your hand straight on the right one. It is the only Conjurer trick of the eight — fifteen minutes to learn, mostly agreeing the code — and it is a wonderful thing to arrive at grandma's with. In a car there is nowhere to leave to.

A word about cars

The driver is not the audience. They can be the announcer, or the one who says "again!", but the sums and the thumbs are for passengers. None of these tricks needs anything that can

roll under a seat, which is half the reason they are good for a journey: none of the eight uses anything small enough to need the shop's choking note, and none has a step for a grown-up.

If you have a pencil after all

If a pencil and a scrap of paper count as no props where you are, the list grows quickly. The easy tricks page has forty-one Apprentice tricks, and Pick me a trick will hand you one that fits what is in your pocket: Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, asks four questions with three boxes each, and "Nothing at all — just my hands" is the first answer to the second question.

Questions grown-ups ask

Which no-prop trick is easiest for a young child?

For a five-year-old, Eleven Fingers or the Stretching Finger, both three minutes to learn. The mind-reading ones start a little older, because they need a child who can do the sums in their head; the Answer Is Always 3 fits from age six.

Do the maths tricks ever go wrong?

The arithmetic does not. What goes wrong is somebody doing a sum incorrectly in their head, which is why every trick page has an out: the line to say when it doesn't land. Each Mind Reader's Corner trick also has a box explaining why the maths works, and it is open to anyone who asks.

Are these good for a long trip?

They are good for about twenty minutes of a long trip, which is honest. Each trick is best performed once for the same people, and the Magician's Code asks for that too. Teaching one trick to a brother or sister, so they can perform it at the next stop, stretches it a lot further.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up. What a child learns stays on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody. For the quiet stretch of the drive, the library has stories to read aloud.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/magic-tricks-with-no-props