Mind reading tricks for kids, with the maths that does the work

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Fourteen mind reading tricks for kids where arithmetic does the work, the maths behind each one in plain words, and the three that are not maths at all.

Almost every mind reading trick a child can do is arithmetic that always lands in the same place, so the magician knows the answer before the audience has finished working it out. That makes mind reading the easiest kind of magic to perform and the hardest to catch. No secret move, nothing up a sleeve: just a sum that cannot come out any other way.

Mind reading and prediction is the biggest kind of trick in the Peabody Magic Shop: twenty-nine of the eighty, sixteen at the easiest level and thirteen at the middle one. Not one of them is a Wizard trick, because none needs days of practice. Each one in the Mind Reader's Corner has a "why it works" box, and unlike the secret, the why is there for anybody who asks.

Sixteen, and the maths in each

- Trick: The Answer Is Always 3 · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 2 minutes · The maths doing the work: The steps cancel their number out
- Trick: The X-Ray Dice · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · The maths doing the work: Opposite faces of a die add up to 7
- Trick: The Grey Elephant Prediction · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 3 minutes · The maths doing the work: Multiples of 9, then a guess everyone makes
- Trick: The Countdown Card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · The maths doing the work: Taking the digits away walks back to the ninth card
- Trick: The Nine Times Fingers · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · The maths doing the work: The nine times table on ten fingers
- Trick: The Knuckle Calendar · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · The maths doing the work: Long and short months take turns
- Trick: The Magic Number 1089 · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 5 minutes · The maths doing the work: Place value and multiples of 99
- Trick: The Secret Number Cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 10 minutes · The maths doing the work: Binary: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 and 32
- Trick: The Magic Clock · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 10 minutes · The maths doing the work: Two counts walking towards each other
- Trick: The Heads or Tails Mind Reader · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 10 minutes · The maths doing the work: Odd and even

- Trick: The Birthday Mind Reader · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 8 to 13 · Learn it in: 10 minutes · The maths doing the work: Multiplying by a hundred, with 165 left over
- Trick: The Lightning Calendar · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 8 to 13 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · The maths doing the work: Nine times the middle number
- Trick: The Answer in Advance · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 8 to 13 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · The maths doing the work: Lines that make 9 with the line above add 9999
- Trick: The Missing Digit · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 9 to 13 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · The maths doing the work: A number minus its digit sum is a multiple of 9
- Trick: The Book Test · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 10 to 13 · Learn it in: 15 minutes · The maths doing the work: 1089 again, as page 108, word 9
- Trick: The Instant Magic Square · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 10 to 13 · Learn it in: 20 minutes · The maths doing the work: Twelve fixed boxes and four that change

The ages come from the grades each trick is written for: the youngest grade plus five, to the oldest grade plus six. The whole list of twenty-nine is on the mind-reading page.

Four, worked out

The Answer Is Always 3. Think of a number, double it, add 6, halve it, take away the number you first thought of. Doubling and halving undo each other, so what is left is your number plus 3, and taking your own number away leaves 3. It works for a huge number, and for a fraction. A child can see the whole of the why in one go.

The X-Ray Dice. Somebody stacks three dice into a tower while your back is turned, and you glance at it and say what the five hidden faces add up to. Every die is made so that opposite faces add up to 7: 1 with 6, 2 with 5, 3 with 4. Three dice are three pairs, which is 21, and the only face you can't count is the one on top that you can see. So the answer is 21 take away the top. A kindergartener can perform it; an eight-year-old can explain it.

The Nine Times Fingers. Hold up ten fingers, fold down the one for the number you are multiplying by nine, and read the fingers on the left as tens and the ones on the right as units. Fold finger number n and there are n ? 1 fingers to its left and 10 ? n to its right, which is always 9 × n for every number from 1 to 10.

The Instant Magic Square. Somebody names any number from 30 to 99, and you fill in a four-by-four grid so every row, column, both diagonals and the four corners add up to it. Twelve of the sixteen boxes hold the same small numbers every time; only four change, and each is their number minus 18, 19, 20 or 21. Every line holds exactly one changing box, and its fixed numbers make up the difference. It is twenty minutes to learn, the longest of all the mind reading tricks, and the one that looks most like genius.

The others in the table — place value, binary, the nine times table hidden in a calendar — are written up in Math magic tricks for kids.

Three that are not maths

Not every mind reading trick is arithmetic, and the pages are honest about it:

- The Crayon Mind Reader is a glance, not a sum. A crayon goes into your hands behind your back and you name the colour; the trick is in getting one look at it.
- Which Hand? is a genuine guess, made with two real clues people give away without meaning to. Its out is worth learning first.
- The Secret Partner Code is a code between two people. Its why box says plainly that there is nothing to work out.

And the Grey Elephant Prediction is half and half: the sums always land on 4, which is the letter D, and the rest is that almost everybody thinks of Denmark, an elephant and grey.

Why these suit nervous performers

Because the arithmetic cannot go wrong, the magician has nothing to fumble. The only thing that can fail is somebody doing a sum incorrectly in their head, and every trick page has an out for that. They also suit a whole room, since everybody can play along in their heads at once. Pick me a trick knows this: tell Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, that a whole room is watching, and they lean towards a prediction trick everyone can join in.

To check the maths has gone in, there is a quiz: the Maths Magician, eight three-box questions on which bit of maths is hiding in which trick.

Questions grown-ups ask

Should I tell my child how the maths works?

Yes. The why box on each Mind Reader's Corner trick is there for exactly that. Knowing why the trick works doesn't spoil it; it makes the magician more confident, because they know it cannot fail.

What age can do a mind reading trick?

From kindergarten: the X-Ray Dice and the Crystal Ball Prediction start there. The ones with longer sums, like the Birthday Mind Reader and the Instant Magic Square, start at third and fifth grade.

Is it all right to call it mind reading?

As a performance, yes. The Magician's Code has a promise for exactly this — "I will not say my magic is real" — so a child can announce that they will read your mind, do it, and still know, and say if asked, that it was maths.

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. The library is next door.