

The AI Writing Detective Challenge

Game + Mini Journalism

Skill: Critical Evaluation & Prompt Literacy

45–60 Minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 8–14 — Old enough to use AI tools independently and at the exact age where they're forming habits around AI assistance that will shape their entire relationship with these technologies.

WHAT YOU NEED

AI writing tool (ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot)

Paper and colored pens/pencils

Timer

Small prize or treat (optional)

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Set up the challenge (5 min):** Everyone picks a simple topic they know well from personal experience — "my favorite family vacation," "the day I learned to ride a bike," "our most chaotic morning ever." Write these topics on slips of paper.
- 02 Create the AI versions (10 min):** Each person asks the AI to write 2–3 paragraphs about their topic using a basic prompt like "write about [topic]." Print or write down what the AI produces without editing. Don't show anyone yet.
- 03 The human version (15 min):** Now everyone writes their own 2–3 paragraphs about the same topic by hand, without AI. Include specific sensory details (what did it smell like? what exact words did someone say?), feelings, and tiny moments only they would remember.
- 04 Detective round (20 min):** Take turns reading both versions out loud without saying which is which. Family members vote: which was AI, which was human? Award points for correct guesses. Then discuss: What gave it away? What did the AI get wrong? What did the human version have that AI couldn't create?
- 05 The improvement challenge (10 min):** Pick the weakest AI-generated piece. Together, spend 10 minutes asking the AI better questions. Try prompts like "add more sensory details about sounds" or "make this sound like an 11-year-old wrote it." See if you can make AI output that's harder to distinguish — but notice what still feels "off."

THE DEEPER LESSON

This game reveals what the research shows: AI can structure information quickly, but it can't access your actual memories, your family's inside jokes, or the specific detail that makes a story yours. Kids discover that the most interesting writing comes from human experience and observation — AI needs their guidance, questions, and personal knowledge to create anything authentic. They learn that "good enough" AI output is easy, but making AI truly useful requires critical thinking and iteration.

CONVERSATION STARTER

“If AI gets really good at writing in the next few years, what kinds of stories or ideas will only humans be able to tell?”