

SPOT THE REAL PROBLEM

Before students can find innovative solutions, they need to know they're solving the right problem. Use this simple framework to guide your class (and yourself!) toward deeper, more creative thinking.

1

Define What's Really Happening

- 🕒 **Ask:** What do we notice? What evidence do we have?
- 🕒 Encourage drawing the situation - sketches often reveal hidden details words miss.

2

Ask Better Questions

- 🕒 Instead of "How do we fix this?" try "Why is this happening?"
- 🕒 Prompt students to reframe the problem in at least two different ways.

3

Visualize the Problem

- 🕒 Use a quick doodle or mind map.
- 🕒 Invite students to make multiple sketches showing the problem from different perspectives.

4

Test the Problem Statement

- 🕒 Share problem definitions with a partner or group.
- 🕒 **Ask:** If we solved this version of the problem, would it actually make things better?

Quick Classroom Use

Try it with:

- ★ Science experiments gone wrong
- ★ Group projects with messy teamwork
- ★ Real-life school issues (cafeteria, recess, homework load)
- ★ *Works for you, too* - use it in your own planning or problem-solving!

Teacher Tip

Don't skip the drawing step, even if students claim they "can't draw." The act of sketching helps them access a different part of the brain and often surfaces insights they'd otherwise miss.