Odd One Out: Sorting Objects in Reception Maths

Key points

- Sorting objects by a single property – such as colour, size or shape – helps children develop logical thinking and reasoning skills.
- Spotting which item doesn't belong (the 'odd one out') teaches children to notice patterns and think about how things are grouped.
- These early sorting activities are hands-on and visual, using familiar everyday items from around the home.
- Sorting and classifying build the foundation for later maths skills like pictograms and data handling in Year 1.
- There's no pressure to be quick or perfect – the learning happens through play and conversation.
- Every child develops at their own pace; what matters is that they're thinking and talking about what they notice.

Things to try at home

- Sort a basket of socks, buttons or toys by colour, and then ask your child to spot the odd one out if you slip in something that doesn't match.
- Use food at dinner time – sort by colour (all the red things) or shape (all the round things) – and chat about what makes each group.
- Make a line of similar objects (blocks of one size, toys the same colour) and add something different; ask 'What doesn't belong?'
- Collect leaves, stones or sticks from outside and sort them by size, colour or texture, just for play and exploration.

Find out more

- The Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (search 'EYFS' on GOV.UK).
- Your child's Reception teacher can show you how sorting is taught in their classroom and suggest activities you can try together.
- The National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) offers free early maths guidance and activity ideas online.