

The True Story Behind "Case of a Conniving Coin Collector"

TEACHER PAGE

These extension activities are for use with the [Mini-Mystery Progressive Puzzle: Case of a Conniving Coin Collector](#), a fun "crack-the-case" problem-solving activity that can be used at any time of the year! Valuable coins have been stolen in a "smash and grab" theft. Four people are believed to be involved. The case is solved when the full names and roles of each suspect have been ascertained.

The puzzle plot is based on more than one true story in recent years. According to the American Numismatic Association, there has been a rise in thefts at coin shows. **Students can read the true story in the handout provided (next page).** A word bank is included to help students with challenging vocabulary.



EXTENSIONS for CRITICAL THINKING

Once students have read the story behind the puzzle set, give them several minutes to jot down questions they have. What would they like to know that wasn't mentioned in the story? Questioning is an important critical thinking skill and can be developed. If time allows, you might like to share these [kid-friendly facts about theft](#).

Discuss questions and possible answers. Then, use these additional questions and links to enhance understanding.

❖ HOW MANY CRIMES WERE COMMITTED BY THE THIEVES in the puzzle story?

Was stealing the bags the only crime in this case? Guide students in the idea that breaking the window is the first offense, and had that been the only crime, the thieves could have been charged with criminal mischief and held responsible for the damage done. Since they also took personal property from the vehicle and then carried it away, they are charged with theft, also called larceny. The value of the property taken determines the level of the charge. Learn more about one state's laws [here](#).

In addition, if the evidence shows [intent](#), a plan made in advance, the charges can include enhanced penalties. In this case, there were four people involved in the heist. This would lead to an investigation of whether or not this is evidence of [organized crime](#).

❖ WHEN SEVERAL PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED, ARE SOME CONSIDERED GUILTIER THAN OTHERS of the crime?

In the puzzle story, only two suspects were seen breaking windows and grabbing the "goods." The other two played a role, but did not actually do the thieving. Students may assume that the two most engaged in the crime would be deemed the guiltiest, but according to the law, [accomplices are considered just as guilty](#) for the crime as if they had committed every part of it themselves. This is known as accomplice liability. The two thieves would be considered the principals in the crime, and the lookout and driver would be accomplices. But all four would be charged with the same crime.

❖ WHO DETERMINES THE VALUE OF COINS AND CURRENCY?

In fact, what determines the value of anything? This could spark a very philosophical discussion! (A simple idea is that value is determined by the number of people who want something and how intensely they want it). Regarding coins, there are various factors. The [rarity](#) of a coin or paper currency is a key factor. If there are very few left in the world, it is rare and therefore, more valuable. Knowing about [how coins are made in U.S. mints](#) (kid-friendly video) could help students understand that when a mint produces fewer of a certain type of coin for a limited time, that means those coins are harder to find and therefore more valuable to numismatists (see "mintage number" [here](#)). Other factors also determine the value of money such as special features (see "variety" [here](#)) and the condition of the coin. If your students show more interest, you can [find lesson plans and teacher resources here](#).

The True Story Behind "Case of the Conniving Coin Collector"

In the late summer of 2024, two coin dealers attended a Coin Show in Tyler, Texas. After the show, they packed up their collections, loaded their bags into the car and prepared to drive home.

They stopped at a gas station, filled up with gas, and went inside the convenience store. While they were inside, witnesses saw three people pull up next to their vehicle in a van, get out, break a car window, and take several bags. They tossed the bags into the van, and took off.

The bags contained valuable coins and paper currency worth over \$500,000. What they didn't know was that in one of the stolen bags was also an iPad.

The police were able to track the location of the tablet and pursue the thieves. They caught up with them, arrested them, and returned the collections to the two numismatists.

In a similar incident two years earlier, a coin collector was setting up his display for the American Numismatic Association's *World's Fair of Money* which was being held in a Chicago suburb. He, too, had items worth an estimated value of \$500,000 including Rolex watches and rare coins. According to reports, several men grabbed his display case and took off.

At these events, visitors and dealers are required to wear badges, but somehow the two thieves were able to get in without any identification. According to the ANA, these kinds of crimes at coin shows are on the rise.

Vocabulary

conniving – secretly scheming or plotting

dealer – trader; one who buys and sells

currency – money used in a particular system

pursue – chase; search

numismatist – one who studies and collects rare or valuable coins and currency

suburb – a residential area outside of a city

ANA – American Numismatic Association

Questions I Have
