**Escape Room Activity: Unlocking the Secrets of the Phantom Pen Pal**

**The Haunted Chronicles**

**Objective**: Students must work together to solve clues and find their way out of a “locked” room before time runs out. The clues will lead them through key themes and elements from *The Phantom Pen Pal*, challenging them to recall plot points, analyze characters, and use problem-solving skills.

**Setup**

* **Classroom Setting**: Divide students into small groups (4–5 each), and assign each group to a “station” that represents a different location from the story (e.g., Ava’s Bedroom, The Manor Hallway, The Secret Room).
* **Time Limit**: 45–60 minutes.
* **Materials Needed**:
  + Clue cards (pre-prepared based on each clue below).
  + Locked boxes (or sealed envelopes) to store clues.
  + A final prize (such as a certificate or “Phantom Pen Pal Investigator” badge) for each team upon completing the escape room.

**Storyline for Students:**

“While reading *The Phantom Pen Pal*, you received a letter of your own from Olivia. In it, she hints that a dark force has trapped her in the manor, and only by uncovering hidden clues can you unlock the secrets needed to escape the room and save her. You must work together, solve the clues, and open the final box before time runs out!”

**Stations and Clues**

Each station requires a puzzle to be solved in order to move to the next, eventually leading to the final clue.

**Station 1: Ava’s Desk**

* **Clue 1**: Students find a “letter” from Olivia, describing strange symbols she’s discovered around the house.
* **Task**: The students must decode a series of symbols (use a simple symbol alphabet provided as a key) to reveal the phrase, “Head to the bookshelf.”
* **Solution**: Decoding the symbols reveals “Head to the bookshelf,” guiding them to the next station.

**Station 2: The Manor Hallway (Bookshelf)**

* **Clue 2**: A “dusty” old book titled *The Phantom’s Curse* with a note inside: “Find the words that are missing, they hold the key.”
* **Task**: Inside the book are sentences with missing words (created from phrases or vocabulary from the book), and the students must fill in the blanks. When they find the correct words, they must rearrange the first letters of each missing word to form the next location.
* **Solution**: Rearranging letters reveals “Cellar Door” as the next station.

**Station 3: The Cellar Door**

* **Clue 3**: A flashlight (real or pretend) is found here with a note: “Shine the light to reveal the truth.”
* **Task**: A blacklight pen is used to write a secret message on a piece of paper, invisible until the flashlight is shone over it. The message reads, “Look inside the old chest.”
* **Solution**: The light reveals “Look inside the old chest,” sending them to the next station.

**Station 4: The Secret Room (Old Chest)**

* **Clue 4**: Inside the chest is a riddle card, challenging students to recall details from the book: “I am something both seen and unseen, I am here but out of sight. What am I?”
* **Answer**: The answer is “A Shadow.”
* **Solution**: This answer leads them to a box labeled *Shadow’s Secret*.

**Station 5: The Final Box (Shadow’s Secret)**

* **Clue 5**: A lockbox containing the last clue. To open it, students must answer three questions correctly about the story (use a combination lock with digits corresponding to the answers). Sample questions:
  1. How did Olivia sign her letters? (2 - Second answer on the list)
  2. How many letters did Ava receive before realizing Olivia was from the past? (3 - Third on the list)
  3. What item revealed the past manor’s secrets? (1 - First item on the list)
* **Solution**: Input the correct numbers into the combination lock.

**Final Box Content**

Inside the final box, students find a letter from Olivia thanking them for their bravery and a “key” (a symbolic printout or small key) indicating they’ve unlocked the manor’s secrets. Each group receives their prize (e.g., certificates, small bookmarks, or “Phantom Pen Pal Investigator” badges).

**Extension Activities**

* **Reflection Questions**: Have students discuss what they found most challenging and how teamwork helped them solve the puzzles.
* **Creative Writing Prompt**: Write an epilogue from Olivia’s perspective, describing how the students’ intervention saved her.
* **Character Analysis**: Ask students to describe how Ava’s bravery was essential throughout the story.