**Escape Room Activity: Unlocking the Forgotten Key**

**The Haunted Chronicles**

**Age Group: 9-13**

**Objective**: Students must work together to solve puzzles and unlock clues, ultimately "breaking the curse" by finding the hidden key. This activity encourages teamwork, problem-solving, and comprehension of *The Forgotten Key* while being fun and engaging.

**Materials Needed:**

* Envelopes with printed clues
* Locked box or hidden key prop (can be a real key or a paper cut-out)
* Padlock or combination lock (optional)
* Timer (optional)
* Puzzles, riddles, and code-breaking worksheets (provided below)

**Room Setup:**

1. **The Starting Scenario**: Clara has discovered that the mansion’s curse is still active, and the students must follow in her footsteps to find the forgotten key and break the curse. The class is divided into small teams (3-5 students per team), and each team is tasked with solving clues to unlock the final treasure.
2. **Hidden Clues**: Place clues in various parts of the room (under tables, inside books, in drawers, etc.), or hand out envelopes to each team as they solve each puzzle. The clues and puzzles lead them through the key events of the book, culminating in the discovery of the hidden key.
3. **Timer**: Set a time limit for completing the activity (45-60 minutes). This adds an element of suspense.

**How It Works:**

**Introduction to the Escape Room (5-10 minutes):**

The teacher explains the backstory: Clara has found the cursed mansion, and just like her, students need to solve the mysteries left behind to uncover the key that will free the spirits trapped in the mansion. Teams must solve each puzzle to unlock the next clue. Once all the puzzles are solved, they will find the key and break the curse.

**Puzzle Stations and Clues:**

Each puzzle unlocks a clue that leads to the next station. There are five puzzles in total. Once the students complete a puzzle, they receive the next clue.

**Puzzle 1: The Hidden Door Cipher**

**Objective**: Solve a cipher to find the hidden door.

* **Clue**: A coded message that students must decrypt. Use a Caesar Cipher or simple substitution cipher. The message reads: “Look behind the mirror to find the next clue.”
* **Instructions**: Provide the cipher alphabet (for a Caesar Cipher, shift the alphabet by 3 places).
* **Clue Placement**: Hide the next envelope or clue behind an actual mirror in the classroom.

**Answer**: Once the students decode the cipher, they will find the next clue behind a mirror.

**Puzzle 2: The Attic Riddle**

**Objective**: Solve a riddle to discover the location of the next clue.

* **Clue**: “I’m found high up where secrets are stored. Dusty and old, I’m filled with the past. What am I?”
* **Answer**: "The attic."

**Instructions**: The students will find the next clue hidden in a high location in the classroom, like on a shelf or in a top drawer.

**Puzzle 3: The Antique Mirror Scramble**

**Objective**: Unscramble words to unlock the next clue.

* **Clue**: An envelope contains a word scramble of key terms from *The Forgotten Key* (e.g., “Cralca” = Clara, “Ials” = Isla, “yke” = key, “rrosim” = mirror).
* **Answer**: Clara, Isla, Key, Mirror.

**Instructions**: Students must unscramble the words and tell the teacher the correct answers to receive their next clue.

**Puzzle 4: The Curse Puzzle**

**Objective**: Solve a puzzle about the family curse to advance.

* **Clue**: A fill-in-the-blank puzzle based on information from the story. For example:
  + Clara discovers the forgotten \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Answer: key).
  + Isla’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Answer: spirit) was trapped in the mansion.
  + The curse was placed because of a broken \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Answer: promise).

**Instructions**: Students fill in the blanks with answers based on the book to receive the next clue.

**Puzzle 5: The Final Code**

**Objective**: Break the final code to find the key and break the curse.

* **Clue**: This clue is a final riddle leading to the location of the key: “I unlock what’s been forgotten, and I open doors to the past. You’ll find me where the ending and beginning meet at last.”
* **Answer**: The key is hidden inside a book (either *The Forgotten Key* or another significant book in the room).

**Instructions**: Students must search for a book (or a designated spot, such as near a bookshelf), where they will find the final clue and the key to unlock the box.

**Final Unlock: Breaking the Curse**

Once the final code is solved, the students "find" the key (which can be hidden in a locked box, behind a final clue, or presented by the teacher), symbolizing that they have broken the curse.

**Optional Variations:**

1. **Digital Escape Room**: If you’re in a classroom with digital tools, you can use Google Forms or similar platforms to create a virtual escape room where students input their answers digitally to unlock each next step.
2. **Hints and Help**: Provide each team with one or two "hints" they can use if they get stuck on a particular puzzle.
3. **Scavenger Hunt**: Add physical objects related to the story (like an old book, a toy key, or an antique-looking prop) to make the activity more immersive.

**Wrap-Up Discussion:**

After the escape room, engage students in a discussion:

* How did you work together as a team to solve the puzzles?
* What strategies helped you find the answers?
* How do the clues reflect themes from *The Forgotten Key*? (For example, hidden doors and keys representing hidden family secrets).
* What did you learn about teamwork, mystery-solving, and critical thinking through this activity?

**Assessment:**

* **Collaboration**: Observe how well students work together to solve problems.
* **Problem-solving**: Evaluate how students approach each puzzle and find solutions.
* **Literary Comprehension**: Ensure that students understood key plot points and themes from *The Forgotten Key*.