

Famous ciphers 1 – The pigpen cipher	Season	03
	Episode	10
	Time frame	1 period

Prerequisites : Concepts of cryptography. Caesar cipher.

Objectives :

- Discover and break the pigpen cipher

Materials :

- *Cipher*
- *Slideshow*

1 – Break the code

40 mins

Students are given a text using the pigpen cipher. They have 40 minutes to break it.

2 – Presentation

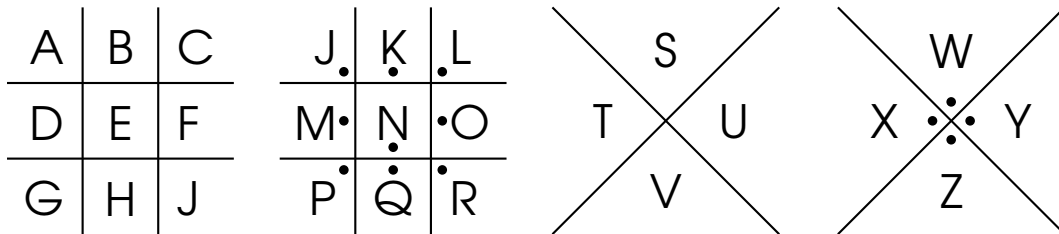
15 mins

With a slideshow, the teacher explains the pigpen cipher and gives some information about its history.

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Season 03
 Episode 10
 Document Lesson

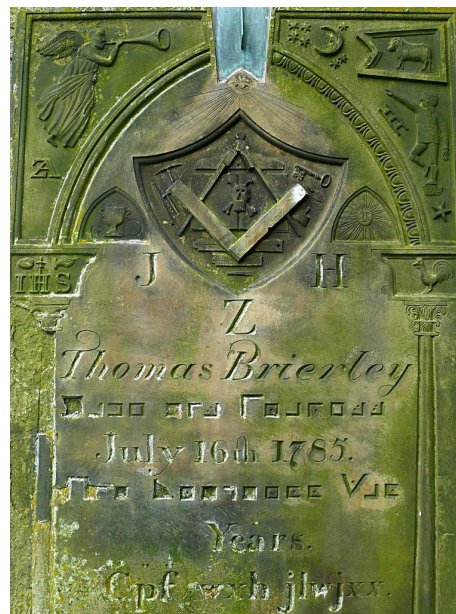
The pigpen cipher is a simple substitution cipher, based on the arrangement of the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet in 4 grids, as shown in the picture below.



To encrypt a message using the pigpen cipher, one just has to replace each letter by a symbol, as defined by the position of the letter in the grids. The table below shows in a more conventional way the correspondance between letters and pigpen symbols.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
└	┐	┌	┘	┙	┚	┛	├	┝	┞	┟	┠	┡
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
┣	┤	┥	┦	┧	┨	┩	┪	┫	┬	┭	┮	┯

The exact origin of the cipher is uncertain, but records of this system have been found which go back to at least the 18th century. Its was so often used by the Freemasons that the system is frequently called the Freemason’s cipher. They began using it in the early 18th century to keep their records of history and rites private, and for correspondence between lodge leaders. Gravestones of Freemasons can also be found, which use the system as part of the engravings, for example the gravestone of James Lesson in Trinity Church Cemetery in New York City, and Thomas Brierley’s gravestone in Mellor Churchyards in Cheshire.



This cipher can be used to hide messages from plain sight, but is so well-known that it’s not very secure. Also, being a simple substitution codes, it is easy to break with simple techniques.