Same numbers. Different stories.

Read each story. Who has more? What do you know? What must you find? Use a drawing, objects, an equation or words. Label your answer in counters.

1. Amina has 24 counters. She has 6 more counters than Joseph. How many counters does Joseph have?

Draw, write or explain your thinking.

2. Amina has 24 counters. Joseph has 6 more counters than Amina. How many counters does Joseph have?

Draw, write or explain your thinking.

Both stories say “6 more”. Why are the answers different? Include who has more in your explanation.

Change the question. Keep the story.

3. Amina has some counters. She has 6 more than Joseph. Joseph has 18 counters. How many counters does Amina have?

Draw, write or explain your thinking.

How does this connect to question 1? Explain what is known and what is unknown in each.

Optional: equal groups

4. Share 24 counters equally among 6 children. How many counters does each child receive?

5. Put 24 counters into groups of 6. How many groups can you make?

Show both stories. Label what each number means.

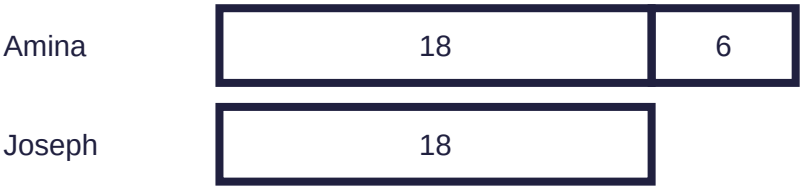
The answers have the same number. Are they answers to the same question? Explain “four of what”.

Listen for the relationship

Core: addition and subtraction within 100. Allow about 15 minutes. Questions 4–5 are optional and require equal-group understanding. Read stories aloud and accept spoken explanations.

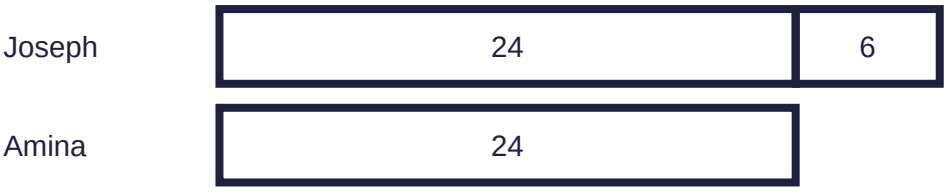
1. Joseph has 18 counters

Amina is the person with more. Joseph + 6 = 24; 24 - 6 = 18. Check: 18 + 6 = 24. A comparison bar can show the relationship:



2. Joseph has 30 counters

Now Joseph has more. 24 + 6 = 30. Check: 30 - 24 = 6. The words “more” do not tell us which amount is unknown.



3. Amina has 24 counters

18 + 6 = 24. This is the same relationship as question 1. In question 1 Joseph’s smaller amount is unknown; here Amina’s larger amount is unknown.

A correct number alone is not enough evidence. Ask pupils to identify the larger amount, explain the difference, and check their answer in the story.

Use the answers to choose a next step

Model the reasoning

Try: “I know Amina has 24. She has more, so Joseph must have fewer than 24. I can remove the extra 6 to find Joseph’s amount.” Show objects or a labelled sketch. Drawings are a tool, not compulsory evidence if a pupil explains clearly.

If question 1 gets 30

Ask “Who has more? Would Joseph having 30 fit this story?” It may be a language misunderstanding, calculation slip or keyword habit. Read it aloud, compare two piles and ask again; do not diagnose from one response.

Optional answers: four of what?

4: 4 counters per child, because 6 equal shares of 4 total 24. 5: 4 groups, because 4 groups of 6 total 24. Both use 24 divided by 6; what the 6 and the 4 represent changes.

Support and stretch

Use smaller amounts and objects if needed. Let pupils rehearse in a familiar language. For more challenge, ask them to write a new story with the same relationship but a different unknown. Check it makes sense before swapping with a partner.

Revisit without the original numbers

Another day: “Leah has 35 counters, 8 more than Tom. How many does Tom have?” Answer: 27 counters. Also ask: “Tom has 27 counters. Leah has 8 more than Tom. How many does Leah have?” Answer: 35. Mix the order; ask who has more and check both explanations.

Background and use

Approach informed by EEF maths guidance and Powell & Fuchs (2018), linked in the article. These original activities have not been classroom-trialled. Print, copy and adapt for your teaching; credit SkillFlex if redistributing. Not for resale.