PRONOUN PROBLEMS – Teacher’s Guide

INTRODUCTION:
Welcome to Ten-Minute Grammar! The goal of these units is to help students build a solid understanding of grade-level grammar concepts during the first ten minutes of the class period each day. Each unit goes through a progression in which new grammatical concepts are introduced (by discovery, as much as possible), built upon, and then practiced and reviewed. In addition, the concepts in each consecutive unit build on one another logically—it might seem silly to spend time reviewing nouns and verbs with 8th graders, but it’s necessary if they’re going to understand things like gerunds and infinitives or specific types of verb phrases.

The unit includes a week and a half of daily bell ringer activities, a quiz, and one or more additional practice worksheets.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE:
- Start the Day One bell ringer on a Monday.
- By Friday, if you feel the class is ready for it, give the unit quiz.
  - If you feel like the entire class needs additional practice to master the concept (or, let’s be honest, if the next week is a short one and you don’t have time to start a new unit but need bell ringers for a few extra days), there are three additional days’ worth of bell ringers.
- After the quiz, a student who clearly failed to grasp one of the week’s concepts could be assigned one of the practice worksheets. After completing the worksheet, the student could retake the unit quiz for an improved grade.
  - The worksheets can also be used during the week as extra practice for the entire class.

OBJECTIVES:
1. Students should understand that...
   a. Pronouns can be used either as a subject or an object in a sentence.
   b. The antecedent is the noun to which a pronoun refers.
   c. A pronoun must match its antecedent or it is incorrect.
2. Students should be able to...
   a. Use the correct pronoun (subject or object) for a given situation, especially in situations of compound pronouns (“She and I went to the store.”)
   b. Identify and correct errors with pronoun-antecedent agreement.
   c. Recognize when the antecedent of a pronoun is unclear or missing and correct the error.

KEYS TO THE UNIT:
The most common pronoun error I see in my students’ writing is using the subject pronoun instead of the object pronoun (or the other way around) when dealing with a compound subject or object (Me and my friends…) Knowing the terms “subject pronoun,” “object pronoun,” and “antecedent” are much less important than using the correct pronoun in context. My students always ask things like, “Why does it matter if we call it a subject or an object,” or “Who cares what an antecedent is?” Well, they’re partially right: I don’t care if they call a subject pronoun by the right name or not, but I do care
that they need to use the right pronoun in the right place, and sometimes in order to do that they need to know the difference between subject and object and understand what an antecedent is.

Also, for the record, I don’t really have a problem with using “they” or “them” as a singular personal pronoun for an unknown antecedent (“That person forgot their keys.”) Admit it, we all do it! But editors do have a problem with that. We ought to make it clear to students that just because general society doesn’t mind if we break a rule, that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t know the rule.

**DAILY ROUTINE:**

Have the day’s bell ringer activity up on a projector when the students come to class each day. I have my students do the assignment on quarter sheets of paper (I cut them up and have a stack available each day). Some days in each unit require copyediting; since it takes too long for students to copy the incorrect sentences and then edit them, a page of quarter-size student answer sheets are provided for those days (see the pages after the last bell ringer.)

Students should spend the first five minutes working silently (you should use that time to take roll and then circulate around the room to keep kids on task.) After the five minutes of work time, spend the next five minutes going over the answers. Don’t give them the answers (except as a last resort); you want the students to volunteer their answers. Use the correction session each day to explain new concepts, clarify ideas, and correct misconceptions. If a student volunteers an incorrect answer, find someone else who can give the correct answer. Help the class understand the concept a little better and then ask the first student a question like, “Explain to the class why your first answer was wrong.” I’ve never had a student feel offended by this—if anything, it gives kids a chance to redeem themselves after what might have been an embarrassing moment of being wrong in front of everyone.

If you use an overhead projector, a Smart Board, or project onto a white marker board, you can choose a student each day to come to the front and write answers or corrections as other students volunteer them.

In my class, students get full credit as long as they come up with an answer for every question, even if some answers are incorrect. At the very least, for the first few days while new concepts are introduced, students should be allowed to change their answers during the correction session—but only if they already have an answer of their own. What we want is for them to try to figure out the answer. If they get it wrong, they’ll learn when you set them straight in the correction session. But they learn nothing if they just write down answers as you dictate them!

The Wordplay at the end of each day’s questions can be a way to earn extra credit if you choose. As incentive to work quickly, I tell my students they can’t begin on the Wordplay until they’re finished with the other questions, and I always offer a piece of candy to the first student to get the answer right or the student with the best answer or most answers. (You’d be surprised what junior-high students will do for a Starburst or a Jolly Rancher!)

**LITERATURE:**

This unit contains example selections from the novel *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli.
In each sentence, choose the correct pronoun:

1. George loved (his / its) pet python, Suzan.
2. (George and her / She and George) were inseparable.
3. But whenever anyone went to George’s house to visit, (he or she / they) usually ended up getting eaten.
4. When the City Council hears about the problem, (it / they) will probably want to take the dragon away.
   Students might be confused by this. Explain that the City Council is a singular noun, like a team, so we use a singular pronoun.

Identify the ANTECEDENT of the bold pronoun (the antecedent is the noun that the pronoun is meant to replace):

5. Finally, the City Council came to collect Suzan; George had to say goodbye to her.
6. However, when members of the City Council tried to separate the boy and his pet, Suzan ate them.

Wordplay – Just for fun!

- ANAGRAM: Rearrange the letters in the nonsense phrase below to create new words that actually make sense.
  RAP JACKPOTS WIN A CAR
  (Hint: pirate)
  Captain Jack Sparrow
If you use a pronoun as the subject of a sentence (the person or thing doing the action), use a SUBJECT pronoun; otherwise, use an OBJECT pronoun.

**SUBJECT PRONOUNS**
1, He, She, We, They, It, You

**OBJECT PRONOUNS**
Me, Him, Her, Us, Them, It, You

Identify the pronoun errors. If the sentence uses the correct pronoun, write CORRECT. If the wrong pronoun is used, write the correct pronoun:

1. Taylor and I have been friends for years. CORRECT
2. When we were kids, Taylor and me did everything together. I
3. One time in the summer, Taylor and his brother met up with my friend Sam and I at night. me
4. We played football in the dark, and they beat Sam and me. CORRECT

In each of the following sentences, the underlined pronoun doesn’t match with its antecedent. Either replace the incorrect pronoun or change the antecedent to match:

5. When someone is drunk, they usually don’t drive well. people are OR he or she
6. The team lost their first game. The players OR its
7. Mr. Smith couldn’t find her keys. Mrs. OR his
8. If students want to get an A, you have to do the work. you OR they

Wordplay – Just for fun!

**CATALOGUE CREATOR:** The root word “-sent- / -sens-” means “feel.” How many words can you list that contain this root?
In your own words...

1. What is the antecedent of a pronoun? The noun or nouns that the pronoun is meant to replace.

2. What is the difference between subject and object pronouns? Subject pronouns are used to replace the person or thing doing the action in the sentence; object pronouns are used to replace nouns that are the object of a verb or of the preposition.

3. Write a sentence that contains a SUBJECT pronoun. Answers will vary.

4. Write a sentence that contains an OBJECT pronoun. Answers will vary.

Read the following sentences and then answer the questions:
(a) Mike called Jonathan and asked him to come over to hang out.
(b) Mike’s little sister wanted to tag along with him and Jonathan.
(c) She kicked him, and he ended up leaving.

5. What is the antecedent of the underlined pronoun in sentence (a)? Jonathan

6. Is the underlined pronoun in sentence (b) a subject pronoun or an object pronoun? object

7. The underlined pronouns in sentence (c) have an unclear antecedent (meaning that we don’t know for sure what noun they’re supposed to replace.) What would be the best way to fix the problem? Use the boy’s name instead of “him,” and then the “he” will be clearer.

Wordplay – Just for fun!
➢ DESCRAMBLER: Try to sort out the five scrambled words below:
   AINP    ODBOL    DNOPRA    TCNOIED    FOWKRAMR
   Pain    Blood    Pardon    Noticed    Farmwork
Read the following excerpt from *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli and then answer the following questions:

(a) Archie cocked his head, as if **he** had just caught the sound of a rare bird. (b) **He** stared at **him**. (c) “On the contrary, **she** is one of **we**. (d) Most decidedly. (e) **She** is **us** more than **we** are **us**. (f) **She** is, I think, who **we** really are. Or **were**.

1. What is the antecedent of the underlined pronoun in sentence (a)? Archie
2. Which two underlined pronouns in sentence (e) are subject pronouns? She and we
3. Which underlined pronoun in sentence (c) is incorrect? Replace it with the correct one. “**We**” should be “**us**”
4. The underlined pronouns in sentence (b) have unclear or unknown antecedents. Rewrite the sentence to fix the problem. Archie stared at it. OR He stared at Kevin (or any other name—although it says Kevin in the novel)

**Using the proper proofreading marks, correct the six errors in this excerpt:**

After dinner that **day**, **Kevin and me** walked over to **Archie’s**. Though the **official class convened on saturday** mornings, we **were** welcome anytime.

“My **school**, he said, “is everywhere and always in session.”

**Wordplay – Just for fun!**

- **VOWEL COMBINATOR:** The vowel combination “**ie**” can sound like the hard “**E**” in “field” or like the hard “**I**” in “tie.” List as many words as you can that contain this vowel combo.
REVIEW FOR TODAY’S QUIZ:

1. Which of the following words are subject pronouns, and which are object pronouns?
   
   a. I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, they, them, we, us

2. When should you use subject pronouns, and when should you use object pronouns?

3. What is the antecedent of a pronoun?

4. In what ways does a pronoun have to match its antecedent?

5. In the following sentence, the pronoun and its antecedent don’t match; do you know how to fix the problem?
   
   a. A student must never leave unless they’ve been dismissed.

6. What does it mean when a pronoun has an “unclear antecedent?” How would you fix that problem?
Identify the antecedent of the bold pronouns in each of the following sentences:

1. Rachel crashed on her motorcycle, and she broke her left arm.
2. After the players got changed, they went out for ice cream to celebrate their victory.
3. Every student needs to turn his or her book in by Friday.

In each of following example sentences, does the pronoun match its antecedent (YES or NO)?

4. If a football player sprains an ankle, you should wrap your ankle immediately. NO
5. Anyone who gets caught drinking and driving should have their driver’s license revoked. NO
6. Politicians should realize they are always being watched by the media. YES

Choose the correct pronoun:

7. Jeff and (I / me) play together in a rock band.
8. All the kids at school are talking about Annie and (I / me).
9. Building contractors must keep (their / his or her) contractor’s license current.

Wordplay – Just for fun!

- **EIGHT LETTERS**: Create as many words as you can using three or more of the letters below (at least one eight-letter word is possible):
  
  T E P E A O D R

  Operated
Read the following excerpt from *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli and then answer the following questions:

(a) At last, Kevin said, “You know what you did.”  
(b) I stared at him like he was crazy.  
(c) I badgered **him** some more.  
(d) But of course he was perfectly right.  
(e) I knew exactly what I had done.

1. List the three pronouns in sentence (b).  
   I, **him**, he
2. What is the antecedent of “he” in sentence (d)?  
   Kevin
3. Which of the two pronouns in sentence (c) is an object pronoun?  
   **him**
4. What is the verb in sentence (e)?  
   **knew**

Using the proper proofreading marks, correct the six errors in this excerpt:

I felt fingers slipping down the back of my **neck**, grabbing my **collar**, and pulling me backward. The crew was staring. “Mr. Borlock,” I heard her say, **you** and **me** need to talk.” Her voice told **you** she was not smiling.

Wordplay – Just for fun!

- **FOUR-LETTER WORDS**: Take the four-letter word below and change one letter to make a new four-letter word (keep it clean!) Then take that word and change one letter to make a new word. Then take that word and... You get the picture.  
  **GAME**
In the following examples, the underlined pronoun has an unclear antecedent. Rewrite the sentence to fix the problem:

1. Jack and Jill sat at different tables in the diner. They were filthy.
   EXAMPLE: Jack and Jill sat at different tables in the diner. Both tables were filthy.

2. When Nick crashed his car into the stop sign, he badly damaged it.
   EXAMPLE: When Nick crashed his car into the stop sign, he totaled his car.

3. Rachel told her mother that her t-shirt had a hole in it.
   EXAMPLE: Rachel told her mother, “My t-shirt has a hole in it.” OR Rachel told her mother that the t-shirt her mom was wearing had a hole in it.

In the following examples, the underlined pronoun doesn’t match the antecedent. Change the pronoun or the antecedent to fix the problem:

4. If someone doesn’t like the food at this restaurant, they can go somewhere else. Change “someone” to “people;” or change “they” to “he or she.”

5. When an employee comes to work, you should dress professionally.
   Change “an employee” to “you;” or change “you” to “he or she.”

6. Bosses should always treat his or her employees with respect. Change “Bosses” to “A boss;” or change “his or her” to “their.”

Wordplay – Just for fun!

- **FIXER-ROOTER**: How many words can you think of that have the same prefix, suffix, or root as the multisyllabic word below?
  TYPOGRAPHICAL
  (pertaining to printing)
QUIZ ANSWER KEY

Label the following pronouns as SUBJECT or OBJECT:
1. **OBJECT** Me, Us, Her
2. **SUBJECT** They, I, He
3. **OBJECT** Him, Them, It
4. **SUBJECT** We, She, You

Underline the ANTECEDENT of the bold pronoun:
5. Derrick crashed on his bike, and he sprained his ankle.
6. The bike was completely destroyed; it didn’t even have a front wheel anymore.
7. After they had spent time in the locker room thinking about their big loss, the players met with the press.
8. A student should keep his or her personal belongings in a locked locker if he or she doesn’t want to lose them.

Circle the correct pronoun in each sentence:
9. Finally, (I / me) found the missing keys.
10. Whenever anyone visits Las Vegas, (he or she / they) spend(s) a lot of money.
11. If the team wins this next game, (it / they) will go on to the semi-finals
12. Return the bikes to (we / us) when you’re done.
13. My dad and (I / me) like watching football together.
14. Since Madison went to college, I never see (she and Max / her and Max) anymore.
Rewrite the following sentences so the pronoun and antecedent match:

15. When someone is tired, they can’t think very well.
   **EXAMPLE:** When **people** are tired, they...

16. The class completed their assignment.
   **EXAMPLE:** The **students** completed their...

17. If a teenager wants to be trusted, you need to earn trust.
   **EXAMPLE:** If a teenager… , **he or she** needs to earn trust.

18. Principals can be more successful when he or she treats students with respect.
   **EXAMPLE:** Principals can be more successful when **they** treat...

In the following paragraphs, identify the pronoun that has an unclear antecedent. Rewrite that sentence to fix it:

19. Nick liked two different girls, Danielle and Samantha. He asked **her** out on a date, but **she** didn’t have any fun. Luckily for Nick, Samantha still thought he was cool.
   **EXAMPLE:** You could change the first “**her**” to the name of one of the girls.

20. **They** need to stop making so many movies based on comic books. Movies like that are starting to get old. I have no desire to see any more of them.
   **EXAMPLE:** You could change “**they**” to “Hollywood needs to...” or to “Movie directors need to...” Clarify who “**They**” are.
Pronouns are used to replace nouns, and nouns are general either subjects or objects in a sentence. If your pronoun is the subject of a sentence (the person or thing doing the action), use a SUBJECT pronoun; otherwise, use an OBJECT pronoun.

**SUBJECT PRONOUNS**
I, He, She, We, They, It, You

**OBJECT PRONOUNS**
Me, Him, Her, Us, Them, It, You

_in the following sentences, choose the correct pronoun and then write whether it is a SUBJECT or OBJECT pronoun:_

1. **SUBJECT** (I / Me) have known James since birth almost.

2. **OBJECT** I was in Mrs. Sylvester’s 2nd grade class with (he / him).

3. **SUBJECT** In 4th grade, Mrs. Jones said that (she / her) would never let me sit next to James again because we talked too much.

4. **OBJECT** A few bullies started picking on (I / me) in 5th grade.

5. **SUBJECT** But (they / them) learned to leave me alone because James always had my back.

6. **SUBJECT** In 6th grade, James ran for class president; (I / me) was his campaign manager.

7. **SUBJECT** (He / Him) won the election by a landslide.

8. **SUBJECT** (We / Us) played basketball on the same team in 7th grade.

9. **OBJECT** None of the other teams could stop (we / us).

10. **SUBJECT** By the 8th grade, it was pretty obvious that James and (I / me) would be friends for a long, long time.
In most situations, it’s fairly easy to choose between subject and object pronouns. (It’s not hard to figure out that “Me want to eat some cake” doesn’t sound right.) But when you have two subjects or two objects, it’s a little less clear. (Is it “Mom made dinner for me and James,” or “Mom made dinner for James and I?”)

If you’re unsure which pronoun to use, one trick is to ignore the subject or object that you know is correct and see which pronoun sounds the best on its own.

In the following sentences, choose the pronoun that sounds the best on its own. Then decide if the original pronoun used was correct or not:

11. **NO** Camille and me (I / me) decided to take a photography class with a couple of other friends.

12. **NO** On the first day, the teacher partnered Kevin and I (I / me).

13. **YES** Camille was mad at me, and she and Emily (she / her) paired up.

14. **YES** Kevin and I (I / me) worked really well together.

15. **NO** Unfortunately, you couldn’t say the same for she and Emily (she / her).

In the following sentences, choose the correct pronoun:

16. My dad and (I / me) get along pretty well.

17. When I was a kid, (he / him) and my mom split up.

18. So for a long time, our family was just Dad and (I / me).

19. Every Saturday, Dad and (I / me) would find something to do together, even if it was just chores.

20. I miss my mom, and I wish (she / her) and Dad hadn’t gotten divorced.

21. But I’m grateful for the good relationship that exists between my dad and (I / me).
ANTECEDENTS – A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. The antecedent is the word a pronoun is meant to replace.

Underline the antecedent of the bold pronoun:

1. Jack couldn’t find his briefcase at the end of the meeting.
2. Before she went to work, Samantha had to stop at a gas station and fill up her car.
3. Employees need to work hard if they are hoping to get a raise.
4. Each student should keep track of his or her belongings by keeping lockers locked.

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT – A pronoun must be the same number and gender as the antecedent it replaces. That’s easy when you’re talking about a person—“Suzan” should be replaced by “she,” not “he.” But it can be more complicated in other situations. For example, the antecedent “a student” is singular, so you cannot replace it with the plural pronoun “they;” instead you should use “he” or “she.”

Choose the pronoun that agrees with or matches the underlined antecedent:

5. Government workers have to pay (his or her / its / their) taxes just like everyone else.
6. Grandmas and grandpas have it easy; (he or she / they) can spoil (his or her / their) grandkids without dealing with the consequences.
7. The team won (its / their) last five games, and the players were pleased with (its / their) accomplishment.
8. Each father or mother should take responsibility for (his or her / their) children.

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT ERRORS

For sentences 9 – 10, choose a new pronoun that agrees with the underlined antecedent:

9. ___________ Neither one of the men could find their car keys.
10. ___________ People ought to do his or her best at all times.
For sentences 11 – 12, choose a new antecedent that agrees with the bold pronoun:

11. _____people_____ If a person wants to ride the city bus, they need to buy a bus pass.

12. _____you_______ Showing up late for your job could get an employee fired.

For sentences 13 – 16, rewrite the sentence to correct the pronoun-antecedent agreement:

13. One of the teachers at our school lost their job.
   All OR his job (or her job—but not “his or her” job)

14. Dogs without collars can’t be returned to its owner.
    A dog without a collar OR their owners

15. Bikers always need to make sure he or she drinks plenty of water.
    A biker always needs OR they drink

16. A camper should avoid leaving food out in the open, unless you want to deal with a bear.
    You OR they

UNCLEAR ANTECEDENTS – In some situations, it isn’t clear who or what a pronoun refers to. You must correct this problem to avoid confusing your audience.

For sentences 17 – 20, explain why the underlined pronoun has an unclear antecedent:

17. Although the giant robot tripped over our house, it was not damaged.
    We’re not sure if the robot or the house was undamaged.

18. I don’t think they should edit songs on the radio.
    We don’t know who “they” are.

19. Mr. Smith called the cops on his neighbor Mr. Jones. Needless to say, he wasn’t happy.
    We’re not sure which Mr. was unhappy.

20. George took out an insurance policy before getting in a car wreck; it was the best thing that ever happened to his family.
    We don’t know if the car wreck or the insurance policy was the best thing that ever happened.

Rewrite the following sentences so they do not contain a pronoun with an unclear antecedent:

21. Suzan got really upset and hit her sister; thankfully, she’s feeling better now.
    Replace “she’s” with “Suzan” or “her sister” or some variation of one of them.

22. They need to quit making movies about vampires and werewolves; it’s getting old already.
    Replace “they” with “Hollywood directors” or some variation of that.

23. If you keep your money in your wallet and put your wallet in your pocket, you won’t lose it.
    Replace “it” with “money” or “wallet” or some variation of one of them.

24. The truck crashed head-on into the train, and it was completely destroyed.
    Replace “it” with “the truck” or “the train” or some variation of one of them.