All About Nouns

The adjective hasn't been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place.
—William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White

You could say that a sentence revolves around its nouns. They tell the who or the what of a sentence. This mini-lesson focuses on the following aspects of nouns:

- singular and plural nouns
- common and proper nouns
- possessive nouns
- descriptive nouns

Introduction

Begin the mini-lesson by writing a short definition and example of a noun on the board, for example, "A noun names a person, animal, place, thing, or idea: Chester is a poodle. He loves the freedom of chasing butterflies in the wheat field behind his doghouse."

Teach

Distribute copies of the model passage “The Bumblebird and the Hummingbee” on page 7 to students. Ask them to follow along as you read it aloud. Then use the teaching guide on page 6 to discuss how the writer used nouns in the passage.

(Also see the lessons on pronouns, pages 11–16; singular and plural nouns and verbs, pages 35–40; and elaboration, pages 53–58.)

Apply

Hand out the Who Are You? reproducible on page 10. After going over the directions, model a few responses that describe yourself, for example, person, teacher, hiker, cook, reader, deejay, and so on. In your response, include nouns that will encourage students to realize how many different nouns they can use to describe themselves.
Singular and Plural Nouns
A singular noun refers to one person, place, animal, idea, or thing. A plural noun refers to more than one.

**KEY POINTS**
- Regular plural nouns are formed by adding –s or –es to the end of a singular noun.
- Irregular plural nouns such as children, women, men, activities, and sheep don’t fit this pattern.
- Make a class list of the irregular plural nouns that students come across in their reading.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
4 A sentence can have a combination of singular and plural nouns in it. In this sentence, bird, hill, one, and water are singular. Only the noun flowers is plural.

7 Thieves is an irregular noun. The singular form of this noun is thief. Instead of adding –s to the end of thief, you change the final f to v and add –es.

Common and Proper Nouns
A common noun doesn’t refer to a specific person, place, animal, thing, or idea. A proper noun does.

**KEY POINTS**
- A common noun is preceded by a definite or indefinite article—the, a, an.
- A proper noun is always capitalized.
- A common noun is only capitalized if it begins a sentence.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
3 The bumblebee’s name is Zeke, which is a proper noun.

6 The writer used the common noun bumblebee here, but, for variety, she also could have used the proper noun Zeke.

8 These two common nouns are parallel. It would be strange to use one common noun and one proper noun in this sentence.

Possessive Nouns
A possessive noun tells who or what owns something.

**KEY POINTS**
- Possessive nouns indicate ownership; the flower's petals means the same as the petals of the flower.
- Singular possessive nouns are formed by adding ’s to the end of the singular noun: flower’s.
- Plural possessive nouns are formed by adding an apostrophe to the end of the plural noun: flowers’.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
2 To make the plural noun, bushes, possessive, add an apostrophe: bushes’.

5 To make the singular noun, flower, possessive, add an apostrophe s: flower’s.

Descriptive Nouns
animal dog → poodle → Chester: The more specific you are in describing someone or something, the more your reader will enjoy your words.

**KEY POINTS**
Ask students to think about a story that only uses the bird for the main character. To be more specific and descriptive, the writer could substitute the kind of bird it is—hummingbird—and give it a human name—Ruby. Then the writer could use three different nouns to describe the bird.

**TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE**
1 Instead of writing tiny bird, fast bird, or just bird, the writer tells exactly what kind of bird it is.

9 The writer has made up two nouns—bumblebird and hummingbee—to describe what happened when the bird and bee fought.
Nouns

The Bumblebird and the Hummingbee

Ruby, a ruby-throated hummingbird, darted through the garden. The sage bushes’ red flowers caught her attention. With her slender bill, Ruby sipped the nectar out of the flowers. Then, without looking, the tiny bird zoomed backward and ran SMACK into a bumblebee.

“Ouch! Ouch! OUCH!” Zeke, the bumblebee, bumbled. “Watch where you’re going!”

“So00 sorry,” the hummingbird hummed. Then two bird feeders in a nearby tree caught her attention. One was filled with red sugar water. Yellow plastic flowers decorated the feeder. The bird slipped her bill through one of the flowers to drink the sugar water.

Zeke landed on the feeder, too. He tried to suck the nectar out of a yellow flower. The flower’s petals were too hard. They were so hard that they bent his stinger and made it crooked. “Plastic!” the bumblebee spat. Then he tasted the sugar water on his tongue. Very carefully, Zeke slid his long tongue through the center of the plastic flower and drank deeply.

Suddenly, the bumblebee heard an angry hum, felt a sharp pain in his side, and tumbled down to the grass. Above him, the hummingbird flew around the feeder. “That's what happens to thieves,” Ruby hummed.

Zeke buzzed in anger. He had as much right to drink from the feeder as that flighty bird did. Fighting for his turn at the feeder seemed only fair. Poking, pushing, prodding, the bird and the bee fought. Finally, they hit each other so hard that they both fell to the ground.

“That hurts!” the bee hummed. “That hurts!” the bird buzzed. They looked at each other in surprise.

Since that day, the bumblebird and the hummingbee have always shared their food with each other.

A noun names a person, place, animal, idea, or thing. In this passage, you’ll see:

- common and proper nouns
- singular and plural nouns
- possessive nouns
- descriptive nouns
One or More Than One?

Write! Think of something that you’d really, really, really, really love to have. Then answer this question: Would you like to have just one of these things—or would you like more than one?

When you’ve finished writing, read over your work. Did you use singular nouns in the right places? Did you use plural nouns in the right places? Do all your subjects and verbs agree?

With the Rest of the Class: Talk about the different things that everyone wants. Decide how to sort them into groups. Who do you think is most likely to get his or her wish? Which wish is the most fantastic or fanciful?

Guess That Noun

Write! Choose a person, animal, place, idea, or thing to write about. In other words, pick a noun. Write a description of it—but don’t use the noun in your writing. You can use synonyms for the noun or other parts of speech to describe it. Exchange your description with a partner. Are you able to guess which noun your partner is describing?

With the Rest of the Class: Talk about how you used the clues in your partner’s work to figure out what the noun is.
Activities: Nouns

Noun-Toss Ball Game

Materials: tennis ball or other small ball

Supply the group with a common noun for each round of play. To begin a round, say a common noun, such as building, and toss the ball to a student in the group. That student thinks of a more specific noun, such as house, and tosses the ball to someone else in the group. Then the second student thinks of another noun that’s even more specific—or a proper noun—and tosses the ball to someone else in the group. If that student can’t think of a noun, another round of play begins. The student holding the ball thinks of a new common noun, such as shoe, and tosses the ball. Record the nouns and keep score: Teams earn 3 points for a proper noun, 2 points for a more specific noun, 1 point for a new common noun.

With the Class: Discuss which common nouns had the longest and shortest lists of specific nouns. Ask: Did you learn any new descriptive nouns that you’d like to use in your own writing?

A Singular and Plural Picture Book

Materials: drawing paper, colored markers or colored pencils, crayons, folder, hole punch

Assign one or more different letters of the alphabet to each student. Then have your class write an alphabet animal picture book for younger readers. Each student should think of an animal whose name begins with each assigned letter. Encourage them to think of unusual animals that younger readers might not know. Each page should also include the singular and plural forms of the noun that names the animal. Give students the model at right to format each page.

With the Class: Ask students to share their pages. Encourage older students to notice which of the plural nouns are regular and which are irregular. Compile the pages into a folder to create an alphabet book.

Does It Belong to Emma?

Pair students to play a possessive guessing game with the following directions:

1. Partner 1 looks around the classroom and secretly chooses an item that belongs to another student.
2. Partner 2 tries to guess who owns the item, writing each guess as a question: Does it belong to Emma?
3. Partner 1 writes the answers using possessive nouns: It is not Emma’s or It is Emma’s.
4. Once Partner 2 guesses the correct owner, Partner 1 can reveal what the item is.
5. Partners switch roles and play again.

With the Class: Discuss the following questions: Was it difficult to form a possessive noun out of anyone’s name? Which letter does that name end with? Did you remember to add ’s to the end of each name?
Nouns

Who Are You?

Who are you? Describe yourself. Use as many different nouns as you can.

student

Me