All About Singular and Plural Nouns and Verbs

One of the glories of English simplicity is the possibility of using the same word as noun and verb.

—Edward Sapir

A singular noun refers to only one person, animal, thing, or idea, and plural nouns refer to two or more. A singular verb always goes with a singular subject, and a plural verb always goes with a plural subject.

This mini-lesson focuses on the following aspects of nouns and verbs:

- singular and plural nouns
- singular and plural verbs
- subject-verb agreement

Introduction

Students trying to make sense of the rules of grammar might not agree with Edward Sapir’s opinion about the simplicity of our language. Although the parts of speech are separate compartments, a word such as fire can be stored in the noun compartment or in the verb compartment. Then there are the issues of collective nouns and multiple verbs in a sentence, agreement between subjects and verbs, and noun phrases that separate a subject from the verb.

Teach

Distribute copies of the passage “Cinderella Goes Green” on page 37 to students. Read it aloud and ask them to follow along. Then use the teaching guide on page 36 to discuss how the writer used singular and plural nouns and verbs in the passage.

(Also see the lessons on nouns on pages 5–10, verbs on pages 17–22, and subjects and predicates on pages 41–46.)

Apply

Give each student a copy of the Even = Noun, Odd = Verb reproducible on page 40, and go over the list of words. Before pairs begin playing the game, model how you would create a noun sentence and a verb sentence for a word that’s not on the list, such as trick. Make sure students understand that they are not working with homophones, words that sound the same but are spelled differently.
Singular and Plural Nouns
A singular noun names one person, animal, thing, or idea. A plural noun names more than one person, animal, thing, or idea.

KEY POINTS
• A collective noun, such as team, describes a group of more than one person, animal, thing, or idea. It can be singular or plural, depending on whether the group is acting as one (singular) or individually (plural): The group of swallows wheels and turns to the south. The group of birdwatchers drive home in separate cars. To avoid confusion, suggest that students rewrite sentences that contain collective nouns: Together, the swallows wheel and turn to the south. The birdwatchers drive home in their separate cars.
• The British usually use plural verbs with collective nouns, which can sound strange to Americans—the jury are undecided.

Singular and Plural Verbs
A singular verb always goes with a singular noun. A plural verb always goes with a plural noun.

KEY POINTS
• Just as a sentence can have more than one subject, it can have more than one verb: Jack and Jill huff and puff up the hill. Both verbs must be parallel—have the same tense—and must agree with the single or compound subject.

Subject-Verb Agreement
The subject and verb in a sentence must agree. A singular subject takes a singular verb. A plural subject takes a plural verb.

KEY POINTS
• In a sentence such as The girl on the swings glides through the air, students may think that the subject is swings because of its location next to the verb glides. Emphasize that the subject of the sentence always dictates whether the verb is singular or plural.
• When a collective noun is the subject, a noun phrase often separates it from the verb.

TEACHING WITH THE MODEL PASSAGE
3 In this sentence, the word land is used as a singular noun. Land is one of those words that can be used as a noun or a verb.
5 The noun group is called a collective noun. Nouns such as band, class, team, and jury are collective nouns. They are singular nouns because they refer to a group working together as one.

1 This sentence has two verbs—throws and snaps. The verbs go with the singular noun, stepmother, so both are singular.
2 In this sentence, the word land is used as a plural verb.
7 Duck is a plural verb. The singular verb is ducks. If there had only been one mouse, the sentence would read, The mouse in the corner of the room ducks. (Duck is another word that can be used as a noun or a verb.)

4 In this sentence, the subject is one and not stepsisters, so the verb has to be singular.
6 The subject of this sentence is mice, which is a plural noun—and irregular. The verb is duck, which is plural. This subject and verb agree.
Singular and Plural Nouns and Verbs

Cinderella Goes Green

Cinderella’s stepmother throws her banana peels in the direction of the fireplace and snaps her fingers. “Burn those peels, Cindy. Then clean the ashes out of the fireplace,” she orders.

The peels land on the clean floor. Cinderella places them in a metal pot on top of a pile of apple peels, eggshells, and pea pods. She curtsies and replies, “We don’t burn trash anymore, Stepmother Dear. The smoke is bad for the air and the land. We compost our trash now.”

There is a smear of banana on one of the stepmother’s chins. Cinderella is about to point this out when her two stepsisters bustle into the room. One of the stepsisters waves a piece of paper. “The king has invited us to a ball! His handsome son, the prince—my future husband, I’m sure—will be there!”

Three weeks later, a happy group goes to the ball. Cinderella is left behind. Kicking off her shoes, she sits down to relax. A puff of smoke appears in the room. Coughing, Cinderella’s Fairy Godmother steps through the smoke. “Time to go to the ball!” She waves her magic wand. The mice in the corner of the room duck.

Cinderella shakes her head. “I’m not going to the ball. The invitation wasn’t even printed on recycled paper! And do you know how much energy the king uses to heat and cool that huge, drafty castle? What I’d really like you to do is make a windmill appear in our backyard.”

Cinderella got her windmill. Her stepsister got the prince. Almost everyone lived happily ever after.

Singular nouns and singular verbs go together. Plural nouns and plural verbs go together. In this passage, you’ll see:

- singular and plural nouns
- singular and plural verbs
- subject-verb agreement
WRITING PROMPTS

Singular and Plural Nouns and Verbs

Teachers: Duplicate these prompts on sturdy paper and then cut them apart. You may also write the prompts on the board or display them onscreen.

More Characters Move In

**Write!** A good story has the following elements:
- one or more interesting characters
- a setting that shows where and when the story happens
- a problem
- a description of how the character or characters try to solve the problem
- the solution to the problem

Write a one-paragraph mini-story about one pony, one puppy, or one cow. Then rewrite your story so it’s about more than one pony, one puppy, or one cow.

**With the Rest of the Class:** What did you have to do to change your story from one character to more than one character?

Follow That Noun Phrase

**Write!** Complete the sentences with verbs.
- The cabin in the woods ____________________________.
- Fourteen pickles in a jar ____________________________.
- The band on the field ____________________________.
- A caterpillar on the leaf ___________________________ and ____________________________.

**With the Rest of the Class:** Share your sentences with a small group. Talk about how you decided whether to use a singular or a plural verb to complete each sentence. How were your sentences alike and different?
Activities: Singular and Plural Nouns and Verbs

Book Safari!

None of the others, not even the goose, noticed that she [Charlotte] was at work.

— from Charlotte’s Web by E. B. White

Display this sentence on the board or onscreen so the class can see it. Point out that the subject (None) and verb (noticed) in the above sentence aren’t next to each other. Have students try rewriting the sentence in the present tense. When you’ve discussed why the agreement is singular (none—notices), invite groups on a book safari, giving them these instructions:

• Search through your favorite books for sentences where the subjects and verbs are separated.
• If the sentences are in the past tense, rewrite them in the present tense. (First identify the verb. Then, to find the subject, ask yourself who or what did that action.)
• Record your results in your writing folders or notebooks.

With the Class: Have students share and discuss their results.

A Short Message

Materials: a strip of card stock, colored markers

Review the characteristics of an effective bumper sticker: the message gives the driver’s opinion about something in a short phrase or sentence so people can read it quickly and from a distance. Hand out strips of card stock and have students design a bumper sticker with a two-word message using only one noun and one verb.

With the Class: Display students’ bumper stickers on the wall. Ask: Which ones really jump out at you? Which ones would you put on a car if you owned one? Do you see more singular nouns and verbs or more plural nouns and verbs on the bumper stickers?

The School Shopping Channel

Ask students to imagine that your school has its own TV channel called the School Shopping Channel. On it, they can sell items to raise money for your school. Have students work together to write a short script to read on TV. Tell them to think about the following: the product they want to sell, how much it will cost, why they want to sell it, what makes the product special, and what each group member will say. Have them consider how to put together their nouns and verbs. Give them this format for each speaker:

Sam: I’m Sam from Class 4A. Our class needs your help!

With the Class: Set aside time for groups to rehearse their scripts. Then have them perform for the class and take “orders” for their products from the other students. How much money did each group raise?
**Activity**

Name _____________________________________________________________ Date __________________

**Singular Nouns and Verbs**

**Even = Noun, Odd = Verb**

Some words can be used as nouns and as verbs. Here’s a list of some of them.

- color
- train
- fire
- speed
- dart
- dance
- trap
- stole
- ram
- fish

- plant
- kick
- hunt
- blast
- knock
- drink
- smile
- yell
- whisper
- turn

- row
- cut
- smell
- roll
- fly
- sink
- drop
- bark
- type
- drink

Can you think of three more words that can be nouns or verbs?

_______________________ _______________________ _______________________

**Use the list to play the Noun or Verb game.**

- Choose a word.
- Take turns rolling a number cube.
- If you roll an even number, use the word as a noun in a sentence. Your partner then makes up a sentence using the word as a verb.
- If you roll an odd number, use the word as a verb in a sentence. Your partner then makes up a sentence using the word as a noun.
- Write down your pairs of sentences.