

The distinction between count and noncount nouns can be difficult for English language learners to understand. While they may be able to compare the definitions of the two terms, they may not be able to use the correct article with these categories in their speech or writing. This teaching activity is designed to help students with this through two related activities. Both of these are designed for middle or high school students who are at least advanced beginners or higher. If used together, these activities should take a single 90-minute block, but they can be used during two separate class periods if the class time is shorter.

First, students will create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast count and noncount nouns. Second, students will complete a sorting activity to pair these two types of nouns with the correct article. The sorting activity will use a foldable, a type of interactive (or 3-D) manipulative created by Dinah Zike, a former teacher who is the author of dozens of books on using interactive manipulatives in K-12 classrooms. I have used foldables in my classes before, and my students have enjoyed making them. Even students who were not very artistic seemed to enjoy using foldables since they were a change from traditional lectures and worksheets. They often provide unique ways of organizing content, which helps students of all levels connect with the material they need to learn. Using foldables also allows students an opportunity for social interaction; they can talk to other students to make sure they have followed the directions correctly and to share materials used for creating the foldable. I've found that using foldables helps kinesthetic learners since using them involves some motion, even though the activities are completed while seated.

To begin the lesson, the teacher should ask her students if they have ever used a Venn diagram before. The teacher then draws an empty Venn diagram on the board. This graphic organizer is created by drawing on large oval on the left side of the board, followed by a second

oval on the right side. The two shapes should be about the same size, but most importantly, they should overlap in the center (Figure 1). The teacher can then ask the students if they think they know how this drawing may be used to compare and contrast two different but related concepts. Having the students guess how to use a Venn diagram will help with English-speaking skills as well as their critical thinking skills since they will be hypothesizing about how Venn diagrams may be used.

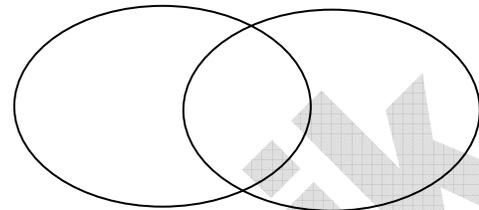


Figure 1: A blank Venn diagram

If this is the first time a Venn diagram has been used in class, the teacher may want to prepare a handout or worksheet for each student that has a blank Venn diagram on it. Students can either use this handout or draw their own Venn diagrams in their notebooks. The teacher should instruct students that as the lesson continues, they will need to label the correct areas of the diagram as the teacher explains each concept and labels the diagram on the board.

The teacher should begin by labeling the overlapped area in the center “Nouns.” She then explains to the students that this area will contain information that is shared by the concept to the left and the concept to the right. To encourage critical thinking skills, the teacher should ask the students why they think the information in the center area will be shared by the two outer ovals.

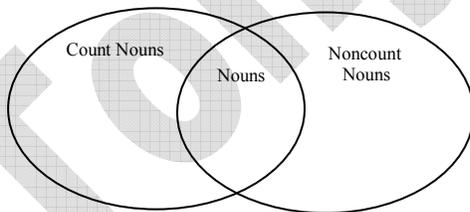


Figure 2: Venn diagram labels

The goal is to use questioning to encourage students to respond with an explanation that since the area in the middle is part of both the left and right circles, it will represent traits that are common to both the left and right

concepts. Then, the teacher should label the left area “Count Nouns” and the right area “Noncount Nouns” (Figure 2). Now that all the areas are labeled, the teacher should ask students

what characteristics they believe will fit in the diagram. She should ask the students to define what a noun is first, since those are shared characteristics, and then write that information in the central overlapping section. If students are hesitant to respond, the teacher can write a word or two on the board to remind the students of the correct definition for nouns. This part of the task should be fairly easy for upper-level beginners and intermediate students who are familiar with nouns in general but are unsure of which articles to use with count or noncount nouns.

Next, the teacher should question students about what they think count nouns are. She should encourage the students to use their knowledge of counting from when they learned English numbers. Again, the goal is to use questioning to help the students arrive at the correct conclusion on their own: Count nouns are nouns that can be counted and used in the plural. She should then write the correct explanation on the board in the left oval under the label “Count Nouns.” The teacher should repeat this procedure to elicit student responses for noncount nouns, being sure to emphasize the difference between noncount and count nouns.

Once the teacher has completed the diagram on the board, she should give students a few minutes to fill in their Venn diagrams. This is a good time for the teacher to walk around the room to monitor student progress and to answer any questions students might have about using the diagram, as well as questions about count versus noncount nouns. When everyone is finished, the teacher should have one or two students read to the class what they have written. This will ensure students understand how to read the diagram and that they have the correct information in the right areas (figure 3, next page).

Once students have completed their own Venn diagram, the teacher should transition to the second activity. She should tell students that now that they have definitions for count and noncount nouns, they will work with a partner to complete a sorting activity where they will be

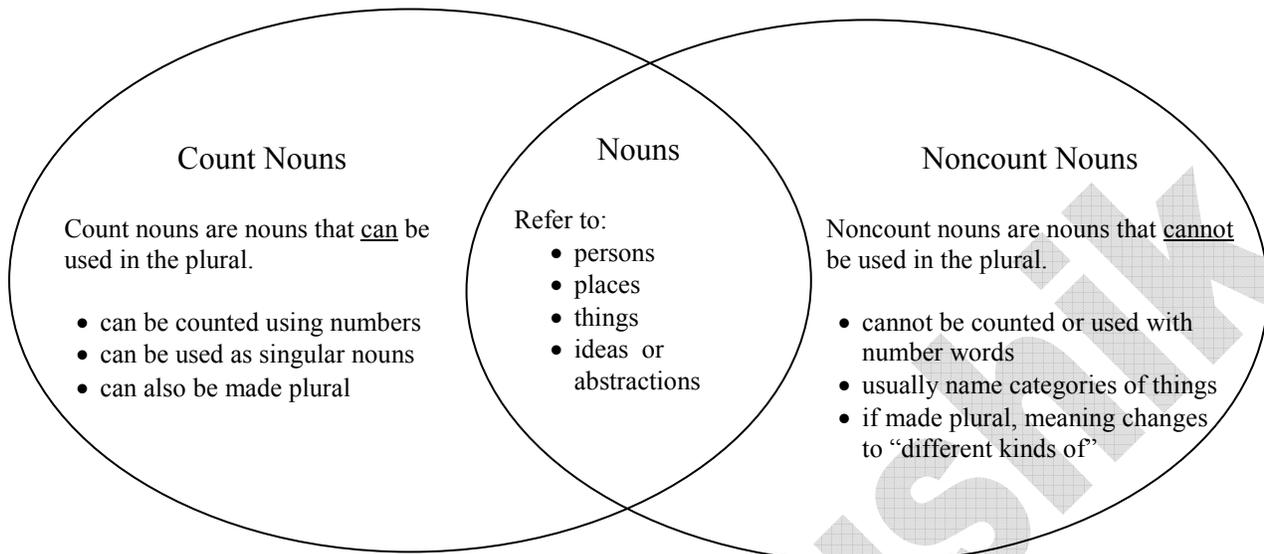


Figure 3: The completed Venn diagram

responsible for correctly identifying these two types of nouns. The teacher should tell students that the Venn diagram will remain on the board during this activity since it will be referred to again later in class. The teacher then has students find a partner since the second activity will be completed in pairs. The teacher should explain to the students that they will be creating a foldable, a type of interactive graphic organizer that is more manipulative than a Venn diagram. If time permits, the teacher can also allow students to use colored pencils or markers to decorate their foldables, but coloring the images is not a requirement.

The teacher should give each student a blank sheet of 8.5-by-11-inch paper and a copy of the attached handout. She should also have scissors and glue or a stapler available for each pair.

The first part of the sorting activity is to create a pocket foldable. The teacher should be comfortable creating this type of foldable in order to help students with the activity. It is also helpful to show students a completed example of what they will be creating. The finished product should look like a miniature two-pocket folder. Since the teacher will be demonstrating how to create the foldable, this part of the lesson is useful for helping students with their

listening skills since they will have to pay close attention to the teacher’s instructions to create

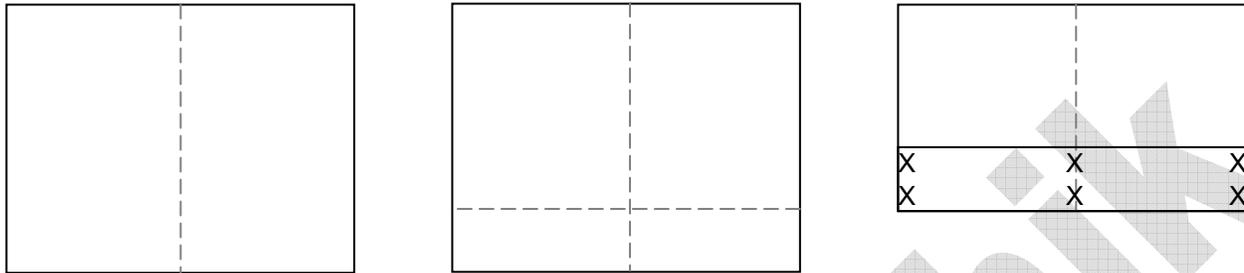


Figure 4: (a) Turn the paper to “landscape mode” where the 11-inch side is at the top and bottom. Bring the outside edges together to create the fold shown by the vertical dotted line. (b) Open the “hamburger fold” and then fold up the bottom edge to create the fold shown by the horizontal dotted line. (c) Staple or glue on the Xs to create the pockets used for sorting the types of nouns.

their foldable.

The teacher begins by folding a blank piece of copier paper in half using a “hamburger” fold. This is made by orienting the paper where the 11-inch side is at the top and bottom. Then the teacher should bring the outside edges together, and crease the paper down the middle (figure 4a). Next, the teacher should unfold the paper, and fold up the bottom edge about two inches. This measurement does not need to be exact; there just needs to be enough paper there to create a pocket (figure 4b). Students will then need to staple or glue the outside edges closed to create the pockets (figure 4c). They should also staple or glue in the center section to separate the left and right pockets. The teacher should monitor student progress as she demonstrates the foldable.

This is an excellent opportunity to encourage students to interact with their partners in English to make sure everyone is able to follow directions.

Once complete, the teacher should tell students to label the outside of the folder “Comparing Count and Noncount Nouns.” She should sketch a rectangle on the board that

Definite article: the	Definite article: the
Indefinite article: a/an (singular); some (plural)	Indefinite article: some (never a/an!)
Ø article = generalization	Ø article = generalization
Count Nouns	Noncount Nouns

Figure 5: Inside labels

looks like the folder to show students what additional information they will need to include (figure 5). The teacher should start by labeling the inside pockets. The left pocket should be labeled “Count Nouns,” and the right pocket should be labeled “Noncount Nouns.” Labeling the two pockets this way will mirror the layout of the Venn diagram, which should help visually reinforce the differences between count and noncount nouns. In the area above the pockets, the teacher should have the students write the articles that can be used with each type of noun. She should write this information on the board, questioning the students about the type of articles they think should be used with each type of noun.

The next step is to cut out the images on the attached handout. Each student will have his own copy of the nouns. Once each item is separate, students should work together to place the items in the correct pocket. The teacher should allow students about five minutes to cut out the nouns and an additional 15 to 20 minutes to sort them into categories. The teacher should encourage students to discuss the nouns with their partners. She should tell them that if they are not familiar with a word’s meaning, they should ask their partner or another student first before consulting the teacher. However, each noun has a picture associated with it to help students guess word meanings on their own. As the students complete this activity, the teacher should walk around the room to monitor student progress and to make sure everyone is on task.

When all the pairs are finished sorting the nouns, the teacher should ask different students which nouns were put into the different categories. It may be simplest to call on a student and have him or her pull out one of the items from the count or noncount category since going through a list may be confusing because students will not all have the items sorted in the same order. The teacher should explain that she will write the nouns beside the correct area on the Venn diagram since it would be difficult for the teacher to make a two-pocket folder large

enough to show the entire class where each noun should be sorted. If the classroom has a data projector, the teacher could sort the items that way or by creating a PowerPoint presentation in advance. The teacher should ask the student to explain why that noun belongs in that category and correct any mistakes that are made.

At the end of the class period, the teacher should review the information on the Venn diagram and in the pocket foldable. She should encourage the students to study the information on count and noncount nouns for future reference. As a follow-up activity, the teacher could begin the next day's lesson with an activity where students are given Post-It notes with nouns written on them that they have to arrange on the board into count or noncount categories. Similarly, the teacher could give each student an index card with a count or noncount noun written on it and have the students physically move around the room to create one line for count nouns and another for noncount nouns. A third follow-up activity would be to quiz students on using articles with count/noncount nouns. The quiz could be a cloze or gap-fill activity where students have to write in the correct article in teacher-prepared sentences. Finally, the teacher (or the students themselves) could create another list of nouns that students would cut out and then sort into their two-pocket foldables.