

The Umbrella Nobody Could Describe

Facilitator note: The engine is proof of ownership: the difference between the feeling of mine and the knowledge of mine, and a system that tests the second instead of trusting the first. Guard two balances in discussion. First, honesty: the story is explicit that the wrong taker is usually honest - the certain man really believed the green umbrella was his - so the rule protects people from honest mistakes, not only from thieves; a class that turns this into "people steal" has missed it. Second, tone: the gabbai's line ("the rule is for the things, not against the people") and the boy's three tries on the sticky button show the door held by a person who can hear a true claim made clumsily - the rule is a filter for things, not a wall against people. The binoculars coda shows the engine generalizing past lost-and-found: Simcha swaps a claim for a plan because a plan, like a description, is made of details only the right person can supply. Note for discussion of the first system: the table "worked" for four days, which is what makes fast-and-done thinking dangerous - its failures arrived after it looked like a success.

Teacher answer key

Activity 1: 1. "TAKE WHAT'S YOURS. FIRST OF NISSAN, THE REST GOES TO THE GEMACH"; the table empties in days. 2. The third rib is taped with black electrical tape and the handle has a chip on the left side - details only the owner knows; someone else took it. 3. "DON'T TELL ME IT'S YOURS. TELL ME ABOUT IT"; describe something only the owner would know, and if it matches, the item goes home. 4. The certain man can't describe it and leaves unhappy; the elderly owner describes the loose handle and the white paint on the tip; the certain man's own umbrella turns up in his son's office closet and he apologizes.

Activity 2: 1. Guess. 2. Guess (he is puzzled, not angry). 3. Fact. 4. Fact.

Activity 3: Sample answers - 1. The table was fast but moved some things to wrong people; the door was slow but every match was true. 2. The rule filters items, and the person holding the door still listens for true claims made clumsily - it is not a wall against people. 3. Because people honestly mis-remember; feelings are cheap and can't be checked, details can.

Activity 4: 1. (a) She asks for something only the owner would know - the dent near the bottom, the sticker underneath, the initials on the cap; a detail that matches sends it home. (b) "The rule protects your stuff too - it means nobody else can walk off with your bottle by pointing; it's for the things, not against you." 2. The job of checking truth - judgment, listening, matching details; a sign can announce but not verify. 3. The plan is made of details - strap across, case while climbing, jacket in the rain - that show the binoculars will actually come home; a claim is only a feeling.

Activity 5: 1. CLAIM. 2. OWNER. 3. GLOVE. 4. SCARF.

Activity 6: 1-b, 2-a, 3-c, 4-d.

Activity 7: CLAIM row 1 columns 1-5; DESCRIBE row 2 columns 1-8; UMBRELLA row 3 columns 1-8; OWNER row 4 columns 1-5; SIGN row 5 columns 1-4; MATCH row 6 columns 1-5; PILE row 7 columns 1-4; GABBAI row 8 columns 1-6

Activity 8: Open response; look for one concrete wrong-claim risk and one question that tests owner-only knowledge.