Indefinite Pronouns

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Determine the purpose of indefinite pronouns.
• Identify indefinite pronouns in sentences.
• Use indefinite pronouns in sentences.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Indefinite Pronouns (BLM 7)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and the practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sample sentences from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Indefinite Pronouns

Say: Personal pronouns, such as she, you, and they, refer to specific people, places, or things. But some pronouns do not refer to anyone or anything specific. This type of pronoun is called an indefinite pronoun. Some examples of indefinite pronouns are anybody, anyone, anything, one, no one, all, everybody, someone, and something. Write indefinite pronoun examples on chart paper and hang it in the room.

Say: I’m going to show you a few sentences from “Building the Transcontinental Railroad” that include indefinite pronouns. I will then explain how to identify the indefinite pronouns in the sentences.

Model Using Indefinite Pronouns

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read the text aloud to students.

1. Mr. Howden told everyone that he could control the blast.
2. No one volunteered to carry the explosives into the tunnel.

Modeling Text

After sentence 1. Say: In the first sentence, everyone is a pronoun. (Underline everyone.) It tells us whom Mr. Howden was talking to. The word everyone means all the people who were there, but we don’t know exactly who they were or how many of them there were. Everyone is an indefinite pronoun because it doesn’t name a specific person or group of people.

After sentence 2. Say: No one is also an indefinite pronoun because it doesn’t identify the specific people who refused to volunteer. (Underline No one.) Authors use indefinite pronouns to streamline their writing. It would be awkward to list the names of every single person whom Mr. Howden talked to, or every single person who refused to volunteer. But we know what the author means from the indefinite pronouns everyone and no one. Another way writers use indefinite pronouns is when they are talking about a person, place, or thing, but it’s not important to the story to tell exactly who or what.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Indefinite Pronouns

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask students to form pairs. Invite pairs to identify the indefinite pronouns in the sentences. (Students do not need to copy sentences.)

1. Will anyone take the crate into the tunnel?
2. Again, no one raised his hand.
3. “I will be forced to choose someone,” Mr. Howden said.

Practice Text

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Sentences with Indefinite Pronouns

Invite pairs to share the indefinite pronouns they identified. Ask the following question:

• To whom does each indefinite pronoun refer?

Discuss student responses. Make note of student pairs who struggle with this activity. Use this information to plan further instruction.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that indefinite pronouns do not refer to specific people, places, or things. Remember to use indefinite pronouns in your historical fiction writing when you need to refer to a person, place, or thing but it’s not important to name a particular one. Indefinite pronouns help make your meaning clear without adding a lot of extra words.

If you would like to give students additional practice using indefinite pronouns, have them complete BLM 7.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud their answers to BLM 7. Use students’ answers to provide corrective feedback. Ask students to share what they learned about indefinite pronouns.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Contrast the indefinite pronouns everyone and everybody with singular pronouns to help ELs understand their meaning. Write the following sentences on chart paper and act out their meaning. Then read the sentences again and encourage students to act them out with you.

I stand up. Everyone stands up.
I raise my hand. Everybody raises their hands.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to identify the indefinite pronouns in the practice sentences.