Follow the pronoun: who did what?

Years 3–6; short-text comprehension

Read: “Grace had left her ruler at home. Mariam lent Grace a spare ruler. After the lesson, Grace returned it to Mariam and thanked her. Both pupils smiled. Their teacher saw them and waved.”

1. In the first sentence, whose ruler is “her ruler”?

2. In the third sentence, what does “it” refer to? Who does “her” refer to? Replace each word with its meaning.

3. Who are “Both pupils”, “Their” and “them” referring to? Explain using the story.

Try it. Explain it. Check it.

4. “When Daniel met Peter, he was carrying a football.” Can we tell who was carrying it? Write two unambiguous versions.

5. “Asha put a bean plant beside a sunflower. After a week, it was taller.” Can we tell which plant was taller than before? Explain what the writer needs to add.

6. Write two linked sentences about a pencil and a notebook. Use “it” once with a clear reference, then ask a partner what it refers to.

Answers and teaching notes

1. Grace’s ruler. The sentence names Grace as the person who left it.

2. It: the spare ruler Mariam lent. Her: Mariam. “Grace returned the spare ruler to Mariam and thanked Mariam.”

3. Both pupils: Grace and Mariam. Their teacher: teacher of both pupils. Them: Grace and Mariam.

4. No single answer. “Daniel was carrying a football when he met Peter.” Or “Peter was carrying a football when Daniel met him.” Accept other clear rewrites.

5. No. The writer must name the bean plant or sunflower. Outside knowledge about plant growth cannot settle what this sentence means.

6. Open: two connected sentences with a clear referent. Example: “I opened the notebook. It had a blue cover.” Check clarity rather than insisting on this wording.

What to ask next

Ask the pupil to substitute the named person or object. If more than one reading remains possible, acknowledge the ambiguity rather than forcing the key.

Original SkillFlex activity prepared with AI assistance and editorial checks. Not classroom-trialled. Adapt to your pupils; suggested years are flexible.