

Exercise on Vague or Unclear Pronoun Reference

In the following pairs of sentences, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence contains a vague or ambiguous pronoun reference. Mark the CORRECT sentence.

1. A_____ When Pearl Buck was forty, her novel *The Good Earth* won the Pulitzer Prize.

B_____ When she was forty, Pearl Buck's novel *The Good Earth* won the Pulitzer Prize.

Answer A is correct.

Answer B is incorrect. The pronoun *she* refers to *Pearl Buck*, but *Pearl Buck* does not appear in the sentence. *Pearl Buck's* appears, but not *Pearl Buck*. Thus *she* refers to a noun that isn't there.

2. A_____ Buck received much critical praise and earned over \$7 million, but she was very modest about it.

B_____ Buck received much critical praise and earned over \$7 million, but she was very modest about her achievements.

Answer A is incorrect. *It* is unclear. *It* could refer either to the \$7 million or to Buck's praise.

Answer B is correct.

3. A_____ Bill bought a Norwegian canoe because he had heard that they make the best canoes.

B_____ Bill bought a Norwegian canoe because he had heard that Norwegians make the best canoes.

Answer A is incorrect. The pronoun *they* does not refer to a noun in the sentence. *Norwegian* is an adjective.

Answer B is correct.

4. A_____ Katie was an only child, and it was hard.

B_____ Katie was an only child, and her solitary life was hard.

Answer A is incorrect. The pronoun *it* does not refer to a noun in the sentence.

Answer B is correct.

5. A_____ Jennifer's sister wondered if she were tall enough to be a model.

B_____ Jennifer's sister wondered if Jennifer were tall enough to be a model.

Answer A is incorrect. The pronoun *she* is unclear. *She* could refer either to Jennifer or to her sister.

Answer B is correct.

6. A_____ Dipping the spoon into the pot of simmering soup, Jean felt the spoon slip out of her hand.

B_____ Dipping the spoon into the pot of simmering soup, Jean felt it slip out of her hand.

Answer A is correct.

Answer B is incorrect. The pronoun *it* is unclear. *It* could refer either to the spoon or to the pot.

7. A_____ At a local restaurant, they provide each table with a bucket of peanuts.

B_____ At a local restaurant, the owner provides each table with a bucket of peanuts.

Answer A is incorrect. The pronoun *they* does not refer to a noun in the sentence. *They* cannot refer to *restaurant*.

Answer B is correct.

8. A_____ Mary and Tom left their bags at the ticket counter, but then they weren't sure if their bags were safe.

B_____ Mary and Tom left their bags at the ticket counter, but then they weren't sure if they were safe.

Answer A is correct.

Answer B is incorrect. The pronoun *they* could refer either to Mary and Tom or to their bags.

9. A_____ The boat bumped the edge of the dock, but the dock didn't need many repairs.

B_____ The boat bumped the edge of the dock, but it didn't need many repairs.

Answer A is correct.

Answer B is incorrect. The pronoun *it* is unclear. *It* could refer either to the boat or to the dock.

10. A_____ Although Mike was a real sports fan, his brother never became interested in them.

B_____ Although Mike was a real sports fan, his brother never became interested in sports.

Answer A is incorrect. The pronoun *them* does not refer to a noun in the sentence. *Them* cannot refer to sports fan.

Answer B is correct.