

3: General Store

A song to practice noun clauses, especially those with wh-words

A. Grammar background

1. What are noun clauses?

Noun clauses are clauses that act like a noun. They can be subjects or objects. For example, read the two sentences below. In a), Mary (a noun) is the subject. In b), what Mary said (a noun clause) is the subject.

- a. Mary is funny. ← Subject is a noun
- b. What Mary said is funny. ← Subject is a noun clause

Noun clauses can be objects, too. For example, read the two sentences below. In c), smart people (an adjective + noun) is the direct object. In d), that you are so smart (a noun clause) is the direct object.

- c. I like smart people. ← Object is an adjective + noun
- d. I like that you are so smart. ← Object is a noun clause

Noun clauses can also be objects of prepositions. Read the sentences below. In e), people (a noun) is the object of the preposition “to.” In f), whoever will listen (a noun clause) is the object of the preposition “to”:

- e. I talk to people. ← Object of preposition is a noun.
- f. I talk to whoever will listen. ← Object of preposition is a noun clause

2. Types of noun clauses

a. Noun clauses with or without ‘that’

These are the simplest kinds of noun clauses. They are sentences with ‘that’ at the beginning. They often follow verbs such as *think*, *say*, *believe*, or *hope*. For example,

- f. I think that you are a nice person.

Watch out, though! Sometimes we drop ‘that’:

- g. I think you are a nice person.

b. Noun clauses with 'if' or 'whether.'

These clauses often follow verbs like *wonder*, *ask* or *don't know*.

- h. I wonder whether Steve has eaten dinner yet.
- i. I don't know if John can come to our party tonight.

Sometimes these are called *indirect yes/no questions*, because the speaker doesn't know the answer to a question. You can usually rephrase the noun clause as a yes/no question. For the above two questions, it would look like this:

- j. Has Steven eaten dinner yet?
- k. Can John come to our party tonight?

c. Noun clauses with wh-words.

Wh-words are *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, *how*, *which*, and *whose*. We can also include wh-words with *-ever*, such as *whoever*, *whatever*, *whenever*, *wherever*, *however*, and *whichever*.

Here are some examples:

- l. I don't know what you are talking about.
- m. I will buy you whatever you want.

You may notice that these wh-noun clauses have a different structure than wh-questions. With wh-questions, the auxiliary verb has to come before the subject. Sometimes we need to add "do-support" to form questions. Examples are below.

- n. What are you talking about?
- o. What do you want?

However, with wh- noun clauses, the subject comes before the auxiliary verb.

Some students use the same structure for wh- noun clauses as for wh-questions. This is an error.

- p. I don't know what are you talking about. ← Error!!
- q. I will buy you whatever do you want. ← Error!!

B. Listen to the song “General Store”

In this song, you will hear a story about a girl who works at a general store. A general store is a store in a small town that sells many of the things that people need in their houses, like bread, milk, soap, or nails. There aren't many general stores left in the United States and Europe, but there used to be many, especially in the western part of the U.S.

1. Listen to the song once. Try to understand the main story. What happens to Mary?
2. Now listen again and focus on grammar. You will hear a lot of wh- noun clauses. Try to fill some of them in on the sheet below.
3. Finally, listen one more time. Do you hear any noun clauses with 'if' or 'whether'? Do you hear any noun clauses with 'that'? Write them down on a separate piece of paper when you hear them.

General Store

Fill in the **wh** noun clauses. Some are already done for you.

Mary was a fine sweet girl whose family was so poor
She had to work most every day at Hammond's General Store
And then one day a boy came in to buy himself a pen
He saw her and he thought, "I've gotta see this girl again!"

She wondered _____, yeah
And she wondered **why he came there**
But every time she turned around
There he was again there

And she wondered _____
If they knew that he came around twice a day
She wondered **who he was**, yeah
And she wondered **why he came there**

Well that young man, he talked to Mary every single day
He asked her **what her dreams were** and **where she'd like to live someday**

They talked about _____; they talked about their lives
And then one day he asked her if she'd like to be his wife

She wondered **who he was**, yeah
And she wondered **why he came there**
But every time she turned around
There he was again there
And she wondered **what her friends would say**
If they knew that he came around twice a day
Well she wondered **who he was**, yeah
She wondered **why he came there**

They married and they had a family, happy as can be
They bought themselves a little house right down on Center Street

To get _____, they just had to go next door
'Cause that's the place they opened up their very own general store

Well, she knows **who he is**, yeah
And she knows **why he came there**
And every time she turns around,
There he is again there
And now she sees her friends much more
'Cause they all come around to the general store

Well she knows _____, yeah
And she knows that he loves her

C. After you listen

1. Practicing Forms

Look at the following lines from the song. There are three wh- noun clauses.

She wondered who he was, yeah
And she wondered why he came there
But every time she turned around
There he was again there
And she wondered what her friends would say
If they knew that he came around twice a day

How is the form of these wh- noun clauses different from wh-questions?

2. Practicing use

a. With a friend

First, write down five things that you don't know about your friend. Use 'if', 'whether,' or wh- noun clauses. Here are two examples:

I don't know where you were born.
I don't know if you like vegetables.

Then read your sentences to your partner and find the answers to these (indirect) questions.

b. Writing.

This is a story about a young woman and man who get married and have a happy family. Now you will write your own story. You can write about yourself, a friend, or an imaginary (not real) person. This person grew up in a non-English speaking country but just moved to an English speaking country to live for a year. Think about the questions and worries that this person has about the new situation. Use noun clauses when possible.

Example:

Maria was from Mexico. She went to New Jersey for a year to learn to speak English better. When she first got there, she felt very lost. She didn't know where her new school was. She didn't know when her classes started. She wondered who she could ask for help....

Lyrics to “General Store”

(Don't look until you've completed the activities!)

Noun clauses are underlined.

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She had to work most every day at Hammond's General Store
And then one day a boy came in to buy himself a pen
He saw her and he thought, "I've gotta see this girl again!"

She wondered who he was, yeah
And she wondered why he came there
But every time she turned around
There he was again there
And she wondered what her friends would say
If they knew that he came around twice a day
Well she wondered who he was, yeah
And she wondered why he came there

Well that young man, he talked to Mary every single day
He asked her what her dreams were and where she'd like to live someday
They talked about whatever they wanted, they talked about their life
And then one day he asked her if she'd like to be his wife

She wondered who he was, yeah
And she wondered why he came there
But every time she turned around
There he was again there
And she wondered what her friends would say
If they knew that he came around twice a day
Well she wondered who he was, no
She wondered why he came there

They married and they had a family, happy as can be
They bought themselves a little house right down on Center Street
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Well, she knows who he is, yes
And she knows why he came there
And every time she turns around,
There he is again there
And now she sees her friends much more
'Cause they all come around to the general store
Well she knows who he is, yeah
And she knows that he loves her

Answers to activities for “General Store”

1. Practicing Forms

Look at the following lines from the song. There are five wh- noun clauses.

She wondered **who he was**, yeah
And she wondered **why he came there**
But every time she turned around
There he was again there
And she wondered **what her friends would say**
If they knew that he came around twice a day

How is the form of these wh- noun clauses different from wh-questions?

In each case, the subject precedes the verb and any auxiliaries. However, in wh-questions, the auxiliary verb or dummy auxiliary “do” must precede the subject. The form of the wh-question corresponding to each of the noun clauses above is given below:

Who was he?

Why did he come there?

What would her friends say?