

Main clauses

Objective

Identify the main clause in a sentence.

Background knowledge

Clauses are units of language that make sense in themselves. They can be *whole* sentences, such as *The cat slept*, or they can feature *within* sentences. Within sentences they feature as distinct elements with verbs of their own. In a sentence like *The cat slept even though the orchestra played, because they didn't disturb it*, there are three distinct clauses:

- 'The cat slept'
- 'the orchestra played'
- 'they didn't disturb it'.

Each of these clauses could make a discrete, short sentence. In this sentence the 'main clause' is 'The cat slept', while the other two provide information about the cat sleeping, and are therefore 'subordinate clauses'.

Activities

As a means of reinforcing the concept of clauses to the class, these activities ask children to look for the main clause in lengthy sentences. As they do this, children need to bear in mind that a main clause is very much like a sentence in itself.

● Photocopiable page 59 'What is the sentence about?'

As children undertake this activity, one way of focusing upon the main clause in each sentence is to ask what the main event is in each of the examples given.

● Photocopiable page 60 'Find the main clause'

This activity involves children trimming sentences to isolate the main clause. Once they have done this they can also look at the elements of the sentence left over, asking themselves what job these do and seeing if they can find leftovers that have something in common (such as explaining why an event occurred).

● Photocopiable page 61 'Sentence repairs'

In this activity children match the clauses together to rebuild a broken sentence. Once they have done this, they could reflect on which parts of the rebuilt sentence can stand independently. For example, in *Shona had a leaving party so that we could all say 'Goodbye' to her*, the first half of the sentence makes sense on its own: 'Shona had a leaving party' whereas the second half does not: 'so that we could all say 'Goodbye' to her'. The first half is the main clause. The second half is a subordinate clause that explains the reason behind the party.

Further ideas

● **Roundabout way of saying:** Children could try to devise their own sentences in the style of the examples shown on photocopiable page 59 'What is the sentence about?' They can try to find a plain sentence and to create a long, flowery version of the same thing.

● **Plain words:** Ask children to find examples of flowery ways of saying something, either in material that they have read or that their parents have received. Junk mail makes an excellent starting point for this, as it tends to be verbose while saying very little!

What's on the CD-ROM

On the CD-ROM you will find:

- Printable versions of all three photocopiable pages.
- Answers to all three photocopiable pages.
- Interactive versions of all three photocopiable pages.