Noun Classes

Before you try to learn about articles, you have to know about the nature of the noun that the article will or won't be used with; knowing the nature of a noun is also essential in subject-verb agreement. Read this page from http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/noun.htm. In "Nouns" (EXTRAS > Sophomores) you can find more detailed explanation of the classes presented here.

Nouns have different classes: proper and common, concrete and abstract, count and noncount, and collective.

Proper nouns name *specific*, one-of-a-kind items while *common* nouns identify the *general* varieties. Proper nouns always begin with capital letters; common nouns, on the other hand, only require capitalization if they start the sentence or are part of a title. Read these two versions:

George and Godzilla dined at Papa John's.

George, *Godzilla*, *Papa John's* = proper nouns.

A boy and his monster dined at a pizza restaurant.

Boy, *monster*, *restaurant* = common nouns.

You classify *concrete* and *abstract* nouns by their ability to register on your five senses. If you can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel the item, it's a *concrete* noun. If, however, you cannot experience the item with any of your senses, it's *abstract*. Here are two examples:

Pizza is Godzilla's favorite food.

Pizza = concrete because you can see, hear, smell, feel (though you get your fingers greasy), and thankfully taste it.

Godzilla never tips the delivery boy from Papa John's;
politeness is not one of Godzilla's strong points.

Politeness = abstract (you cannot see, hear, smell, taste, or feel the quality itself).

Many nouns can be singular or plural; these are *count* nouns. *Noncount* nouns, on the other hand, have only a singular form; to make them plural is illogical. Read the sentences that follow:

Godzilla ate three pizzas, two cooks, and six cars
that were parked outside of Papa John's.

Pizzas, *cooks*, and *cars* = count nouns. Godzilla didn't have to be such a pig; he could have eaten only *one* pizza, *one* cook, and *one* car.

After pigging out at Papa John's, Godzilla got severe indigestion.

Indigestion = noncount. You *cannot* write, "Godzilla got eleven indigestions."

Collective nouns name groups. Although the group is a single unit, it has more than one member. Some examples are *army*, *audience*, *board*, *cabinet*, *class*, *committee*, *company*, *corporation*, *council*, *department*, *faculty*, *family*, *firm*, *group*, *jury*, *majority*, *minority*, *navy*, *public*, *school*, *society*, *team*, and *troupe*.

Collective nouns are especially tricky when you are trying to make verbs and pronouns agree with them. The reason is that collective nouns can be singular or plural, depending on the behavior of the members of the group.

For example, if the members are acting as a unit, everyone doing the same thing at the same time, the collective noun is *singular* and requires singular verbs and pronouns. Read this example:

Despite the danger to its new van, the SWAT team pursues
the pizza-eating Godzilla through the streets of Miami.

In this sentence, the members of the collective noun *team* are acting in unison; each officer is engaged in the same activity at the same time. Thus, *its*, a singular pronoun, and *pursues*, a singular verb, are required. Now read the next example:

After getting their butts kicked by Godzilla, the team change
into their street clothes and sob in their cars on the way home.

Here, the team members are acting individually. They are not putting on one giant set of street clothes that covers them all; they are not in unison pulling on their left socks first, then their right socks second. Instead, each member is dressing as he wishes, driving his own car to his own home. In cases like this, the collective noun is plural and requires plural pronouns (like *their*) and plural verbs (like *change*).

Keep in mind that a single noun can fall into more than one class. Here is an example:

Godzilla has known five Georges in his life.

Georges = proper, concrete, and count.