Faculty

Introduce Van Halen Contract

Adapted from Snopes: <http://www.snopes.com/music/artists/vanhalen.asp>

Start with playing “Running with the Devil.”

Van Halen was a huge rock band in the US in the height of their popularity from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s. They were one of the most popular rock acts, and their concerts would attract 10s of thousands of fans.

Van Halen was known for their amazing concerts, with pyrotechnics and huge sound systems. They would put on these shows, not only in big cities, but also smaller cities and towns, using venues that had not previously been used for Rock and Roll Concerts.

So, one of the things about playing in such a venue, as many of you who are musicians know, is that you need to sign these contract. Van Halen’s contracts were famous, they were thick with 100s of pages and riders. Van Halen did not only put in the usual riders, but used the contract to list out everything, including what food was provided by the venue.

One of the famous riders in their contract was the Brown M&M rider. (Pass out or display Student\_VanHalen1982). So, this is a page from their contract. First of all, note that the food description is all very precise. Now, look at the statement about the bowl of M&Ms.

So, Van Halen took this very seriously. If there was a brown M&M in their bowl, they would refuse to go on, or worse still, would wreck the dressing room. They wrecked the dressing room in Colorado, and New Mexico and caused thousands of dollars worth of damage. They refused to go on. And legally, they can, because right there in big letters on the first page of the contract (display Student\_VanHAlenPage1) said that if the riders weren’t followed, they could back out). Rock And Roll!

So, once this leaked, there would be all of these stories about the rider, and how Van Halen were a big bunch of pampered stars.

Here’s the thing, this also became a headache for Hersheys, that makes M&Ms. When the fans of Van Halen heard about the no Brown M&Ms, they actually petitioned Hershey’s to remove the Brown colored candy. The fans would send back letters with brown M&Ms taped to the letter, or boxes full of Brown M&Ms.

So, imagine you are a food scientist at Hershey’s. (Pass out the worksheet). Your boss from Marketing comes up to you. They are getting harassed by Van Halen fans, and they are worried that there is something wrong with the brown M&Ms, that somehow it tastes different from the other M&Ms.

Let’s come up with a hypothesis, and design and conduct an experiment that can test if there is something different about Brown M&Ms.

(Note: If you are teaching The Scientific Method, at this point you would point out how this is the Initial Observation that is the first step in The Scientific Method, and discuss this a little more).