Common Noun

Definition of Common Noun

A common noun is used to name general things, places, ideas, events, or people. They are words that refer to things in general terms, and not in specific terms. People are also named through common nouns. Even their official names or titles, such as teacher, preacher, clerk, police officer, delivery driver, grandma, and cousin are common nouns. For example, in the sentence, "Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open." (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, by J.K. Rowling), the underlined words are common nouns.

Everyday Use of Common Noun

> Every state has different rules and laws.
> The baby is crying for his toy car.
> The dog is barking after seeing a beggar.
> I have brought new jackets.
> Ali has broken my pen.
> The movie was interrupted by noise.
> My car is parked in the driveway.
> The sky looks beautiful in the morning.

In these lines, underlined words "every state," "baby," "dog," "jackets," "pen," "movie," "car," and "sky" are general names for people and things. Hence, they are common nouns.

Difference Between Common Noun and Proper Noun

A common noun is a word that refers to general names of people, places, or things. Words like a city, a car, and a teacher are general terms. A proper noun, on the other hand, is a name that refers to a *specific* person, place, or thing, such as, Tokyo city, Honda car, and Ms. Elvis, a teacher.

Examples of Common Nouns in Literature

Example #1: *Great Gatsby* (by F. Scott Fitzgerald)

> "All my <u>aunts</u> and <u>uncles</u> talked it over as if they were choosing a prep school for me, and finally said, "Why — ye — es," with very grave, hesitant faces. The practical thing was to find rooms in the <u>city</u>, but it was a <u>warm season</u>, and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting <u>town</u>, it sounded like a great idea."

This is an excellent example in which Fitzgerald has used several common nouns. These common nouns include "aunts," "uncles," "city," "warm season," and "town," for which the author did not mention specific names.

Example #2: *Oh! The Places You'll Go!* (by Dr. Seuss)

> "You have <u>brains</u> in your *head.*
> You have <u>feet</u> in your *shoes.*
> You can steer yourself
> any <u>direction</u> you choose.
> You're on your own. And you know what you know.
> And YOU are the <u>guy</u> who'll decide where to go."

Here the author has used common nouns "brains," "feet," "direction," and "guy." All these are general names, but not specific.

Example #3: *Dave Barry's Only Travel Guide You'll Ever Need* (by Dave Barry)

> "Europeans, like some Americans, drive on the right *side* of the *road*, except in England, where they drive on both *sides* of the *road*; Italy, where they drive on the *sidewalk*; and France, where if necessary they will follow you right into the <u>hotel lobby</u>."

Here, "side of the road," "sidewalk," and "hotel lobby" are common nouns, as they do not refer to one side or another, or to a particular name.

Example #4: *Animal Farm* (by George Orwell)

> "Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself … And now, comrades, I will tell you about my dream of last night. I cannot describe that dream to you."

In this example, the Old Major is talking to his fellow humans by referring to them in general terms as "comrades." Also, he uses the word "man" to refer to all humans in general.

Function of Common Noun

A common noun is commonly used in speech and writing to perform many functions. The common noun serves to introduce or identify some general person, thing, idea, or place. It names things according to common qualities or features. Like a proper noun, it can also act as an object, a direct object, an indirect object, an object of preposition, or a predicate nominative.