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Web Programming Fundamentals, Section 01

Problem Solving

A Cat, a Parrot, and a Bag of Seed:

1. **Define the problem**
   1. A man must transport a cat, a bird, and a bag of seed to the opposite shore of a river in his boat. He can only transport one item at a time, and must decide in what order to transport them. The cat cannot be left alone with the bird and the bird cannot be left alone with the seed.
   2. One may not notice at first glance that this word problem states the cat *could* eat the parrot and that the parrot *would* eat the bag of seed. One is a possibility, and the other an absolute. The man could decide to leave the two animals together and hope for the best. One must also take into consideration that if he leaves the bag of seed out of his sight, there is nothing to stop any wild birds from feeding on it.
   3. The overall goal of this scenario is to transport all three items to the other side of the river, one at a time, and to choose the correct item to transport for each trip.
2. **Break the problem apart**
   1. The constraints the man faces are the inability to leave the parrot with the bag of seed, the likelihood of the cat eating the parrot, and the ability to only transport one item per trip.
   2. The sub-goals in this scenario are to safely transport each item to the opposite riverbank, and to not leave the wrong items together while transporting the third in his boat. He cannot leave the bird with the bag of seed, and ideally cannot leave the cat with the bird.
3. **Identify potential solutions**
   1. In order to reach his sub-goals, the man would need to first transport the bird to the other side. Once on the other side, he would return for the cat. He would then leave the cat on the opposite side and take the bird on the return trip. He would switch out the bird for the bag of seed, and drop it off with the cat. He would return once more for the bird and transport it to the other side, where the cat and bag of seed await. Taking the items in any other order would result in unwanted consequences.
4. **Evaluate each potential solution**
   1. This solution meets the goals of this scenario. By first taking the bird, the cat is left with the seed. By bringing the cat over second, and taking the bird back with him to fetch the seed, he avoids leaving the cat and the bird together. By dropping off the bird and taking the seed, he will once again pair the cat and seed, and finally return for the bird. All three items will have made it safely to the other side of the riverbank.
5. **Choose a solution and develop a plan to implement it**