Will
Hello, and welcome to today’s Grammar Gameshow! I’m your host, Will! I am rubber, you’re glue. It bounces off me and sticks to you. And of course, let’s not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie
Hello, everyone!

Will
Tonight we’re going to ask you three questions about…

Leslie
Countable and uncountable nouns. Those people, things, and places that tell us what we’re talking about!

Will
OK! Now, let’s meet our contestants!

Bill
Hello, all. My name is Bill.

Will
And contestant number two?

Yun
It’s nice to meet you. I’m Yun.

Will
Nice to see you again Bill. You’re making quite a name for yourself in this show. And welcome Yun. OK, let’s get going, and don’t forget you can play along at home too. Here is our first question. Nouns in English can be divided into countable and uncountable. But, what are the basic differences between them?
Bill
Countable nouns can be counted. Uncountable nouns can’t. Or not can’t, they can… but we don’t usually… I mean who really wants to sit there and count grains of rice?

Will
Leslie?

Leslie
Correct! Countable nouns can be divided into singular and plural. A chair, two chairs, three chairs. Uncountable nouns cannot. With countable nouns we ask how many and use words such as a lot, many and a few. With uncountable nouns, we use how much and words such as a lot, much and a little.

Will
All clear on that? Let’s have an alphabet battle to check. It’s simple. Challenge each other to give examples of countable and uncountable nouns following the order of the alphabet. Yun, you can go first. Ready? Go!

Yun
Uncountable.

Bill
A for Art.

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
Countable.

Yun
B for Beds.

Leslie
Correct!

Yun
Countable.

Bill
C for cars.

Leslie
Correct!
Bill
Uncountable.

Yun
D for danger.

Leslie
Correct!

Yun
Countable.

Bill
Elephants.

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
Uncountable.

Yun
Fish.

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
But, fish is countable!

Yun
wait ... er... fishes?

Bill
Oi!

Will
What was... sorry I was thinking about something else...

Bill
She's cheating!
Will
Cheating! Well, I didn’t see anything. That is a very serious accusation you’re making. Do you have any evidence?

Bill
Roll up her sleeve!

Will
I can’t, I’m afraid! I can no longer touch the contestants after that unfortunate chainsaw-related game show accident in episode 37... but that was such a long time ago. Leslie? Fish?

Leslie
Fish is both countable and uncountable depending on whether you mean the animal – I see three fish – or the food – I eat lots of fish. This is not the only noun like this, so be careful!

Will
Well done! I think Yun did better, so twelve points for you. On to our second round, and this is a double-trouble round of two questions about uncountables. Here we go! Question one. If uncountable nouns cannot be counted, how then can we count them?

Yun
Can’t we use a container to make them countable?

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
She’s doing it again!

Will
Eh? Yes, you’re right! Time for our second uncountable question… now that’s a paradox of words! Fruit is an uncountable noun. How then is this sentence correct? There were at least 12 fruits on offer.

Yun
It’s an irregular plural that refers to the different types of thing in the same category.

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
Will! She’s cheating!
Will
So, you keep saying, but do you have any evidence?

Bill
I literally just filmed it on my phone.

Will
What are you doing there? You could be blog-tubing the answers! Put that away! Tut, tut, tut! Leslie?

Leslie
Tut, tut, tut, Bill! To make an uncountable noun countable we need to use a container. This is an expression commonly using a and of. For example, a piece of cake or a cup of coffee. Secondly, some nouns, such as fruit and fish, have an irregular plural – fruits and fishes. We use these when we are referring to a number of different types of thing from the same category. For example, the shop sells three fruits – apples, bananas and oranges!

Will
Well done, Yun! Another fantastic round and another ten points. OK on to our fi…

Bill
Look! Hang on a minute! Before we go any further… Can you just please keep an eye on her? Please?

Will
Oh, very well. If for no other reason than it's not nice to see a grown man beg… except for Leslie, of course. Round three! Have a look at these sentences and tell me why the noun used in each one is special in some way.

a) The news was reported.

b) The species is extinct.

c) The team play well.

d) The staff are unhappy.

Bill
In A the noun news is uncountable. However, many people may see the 's' at the end, and think that it is a plural. Oh no! There is no singular or plural. News is uncountable!

Leslie
Correct!

Yun
I'm just guessing here, but the noun species in B is unusual because it's singular and has no plural form. So, just to say again – the noun species singular and plural forms are the same.
Leslie
Correct!

Bill
In C the noun team is a collective. This means it can be singular or plural. It depends on the speaker.

Leslie
Correct!

Yun
I’m going to go out on a limb here, but the noun staff in D is singular… just like news. So, just to repeat that. Staff is a collective noun that takes plural verb form.

Leslie
Correct!

Bill
It’s the audience! They’re… no it’s… someone’s coughing!

Will
Bill, sometimes people cough. It’s not illegal. Maybe the stress of four wins is beginning to show. Leslie?

Leslie
Nice! English has some irregular nouns which you need to be careful of! Some nouns, such as species, fish and sheep are the same whether they are singular or plural. Some nouns, such as news and mathematics, always take a singular verb. Some nouns, such as staff and police, are collective, and so are always plural. And finally, there are some collective nouns, such as team, government and family, which can be either singular or plural depending on whether you mean a single unit – it - or a group of individuals - they.

Will
Well done! Three points each! And that brings us to the end of today’s Grammar Gameshow. Let’s count out the points… And the winner is… Yun! Or at least it would be if she hadn’t been blatantly cheating this whole time!

Both
What!?

Will
Don’t you think I don’t see everything that goes on around here? I see all and I hear all. Incidentally Bill, you might want to go to the doctor. Your stomach’s been making some quite … biological noises.
Bill
Why didn’t you say something before?

Will
Well, it’s your stomach Bill… Oh! You mean about the cheating. Well, I’ve got a time slot to fill. Bye bye, Yun. Release the disappointed parents. And Bill? No one likes a snitch. It looks like we’ll need two more contestants. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye, Leslie

Leslie
Sağol, Leslie.

Will
See you next time.