Will
Hello, and welcome to today’s Grammar Gameshow! I’m your host, Will! To market, to market, to buy a fat pig, then home again, home again, jiggery-jig. 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
Articles! The definite, indefinite and the zero that help us to define our nouns.

Will
OK! Now, let’s meet our contestants! A married couple!

Alfie
How do, all. My name’s Alfie.

Will
And contestant number two?

Clara
It’s nice to meet you. I’m Clara.

Will
Really, Leslie? A married couple? I mean, we must be getting desperate. So, how long have you two been married then?

Alfie
20 years.

Clara
It’s been 24, dear.
Alfie
Oh, yes… 24.

Clara
Happy.

Alfie
Oh, yes. Happy years… under the thumb, as it were, eh?

Clara
Must you?

Alfie
I don’t know Clara, must I?

Will
OK! Well, everything seems hunky-dory here. So, let’s get going and don’t forget, you can play along at home too. Our first round is a closest-gets-it round. How many types of article are there?

Alfie
I’ll say…

Clara
Oi! What happened to ladies first?

Alfie
The key is in the word lady. I’ll say two.

Will
And Clara?

Clara
There are three. A or an, the and a zero article. He would know if he paid attention to something other than football.

Leslie
Correct! About the answer, I mean, not the football.

Alfie
Yeah, well you’d…

Will
Next question! Which of these articles is used with singular countable nouns?
Alfie
After you, my darling.

Clara
Oh, Alfie!

Will
Oh, blimey!

Clara
A or an is used with singular countable nouns. The zero article is used with plural and uncountable nouns, and the definite article is used with shared knowledge.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Leslie?

Leslie
Articles appear before nouns. There are three types: the indefinite article, which is used with singular countable nouns. For example, I see a tree or I see an apple. The zero article, which is used with plural or uncountable nouns. For example, I've got rice. And the definite article, which is used with any noun that is known and understood by both the speaker and listener. For example, I opened a cupboard and the door fell off.

Will
Well done. So, Clara, what do you like most about Alfie?

Clara
Oh, he's just the sweetest man. You know, when he's not being the silent type.

Alfie
The silent type! More like I can't get a word in edgeways, eh? Yack, yack, yackeddy-yack.

Clara
Well, I wouldn't have to if you'd pay me some attention!

Alfie
We sit together watching TV! What else do you…

Will
OK! Sorry I asked… sort of. Let's move on to round two. Complete these sentences using the correct article. I'm afraid you'll have to confer: I can only accept one answer.
   a) It's certainly ____ lovely painting.
   b) John works as ____ engineer.
c) Do you have ___ pen?

Alfie
You spend far too much money on the weekly shopping...

Clara
You never listen to me!

Alfie
I'm not a mind reader, for goodness sake!

Clara
For once I wish you would pick up your socks.

Alfie
Oh, give me a...

Will
OK, time's up! And?

Alfie
The indefinite article! A or an.

Clara
Alfie, that's not what we agreed!

Alfie
I'm right sometimes, you know! A or an.

Will
OK, Leslie?

Leslie
Correct! The indefinite article is either a or an. It is used in front of a noun when we inform a listener about it for the first time. We also use it with a noun being used in a description, such as in sentence A – It's certainly a lovely painting. It's also used with noun being used in classifying or defining, particularly in connection with a job, such as in sentence B – John works as an engineer. And finally, we use it when we talk about a thing but do not wish or need to be specific, such as in sentence C – Do you have a pen?

Alfie
Yes! In your face! Oh, sorry my love. Are you, OK?

Clara
I'm fine! I'm fine!
Will
Well, OK! Not to worry. You’ve got twenty more points each. So, tell me Alfie. How did you two meet?

Alfie
Well, we met at a party at university. It was nothing special. Except… well, our eyes met across a crowded room, and I was drawn to her like a magnet. I knew then that she was the one for me.

Clara
Oh Alfie! I remember it well. He was such an attractive young fellow. We danced all night. Of course, he’s getting on a bit now. Doesn’t have much stamina like he used to.

Alfie
Yeah? Well you’re not exactly a size six any more, are you? Elephant britches.

Clara
My mother told me never to marry you!

Alfie
Yeah? Well, you should have listened to her then!

Clara
I should’ve…

Will
OK! OK! I’m sorry I asked… in a way. Let’s just put this all behind us and move on to our last round. Look at these words and tell me if they take a zero article or a definite article. Ready? Work.

Clara
Zero. He’s always too busy to call me at work.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Home.

Alfie
Zero. I’m not coming home!

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Dinner.
Alfie
Zero. You won’t see me at dinner.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Dog.

Clara
Whose dog?

Will
Your dog.

Clara
Definite article. I’m keeping the dog!

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Bed.

Clara
Zero. You won’t find me in bed tonight.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Superlatives, for example, best.

Alfie
She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Sun.

Clara
He’s like the sun in the sky to me.
Leslie
Correct!

Will
Life.

Alfie
Zero. Life can be hard for some people. She makes mine better.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Last one. University.

Alfie
Zero. We met at university.

Clara
Hang on. Definite article. I'll meet you at the university.

Alfie
Zero! At university!

Clara
Definite. At the university.

Will
OK, OK! Settle down. Allow us. Leslie?

Leslie
Excellent work! Many nouns have specific rules as to which article to use. We usually use the zero article when we talk about our homes, beds and meals, such as dinner. We also use it when talking about things in general, such as life. We use the definite article with unique things, such as the sun, superlatives, and nouns which are known to both speakers. Finally, institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and universities can often be either. If we are in the hospital, it describes the place. But if we are in hospital, we are probably injured.

Will
There you go. So you're both right in a way!

Alfie
No, I'm right!

Clara
No, I'm right!
Will
OK, OK! Enough! Just stop for a second and take some advice. See, I was married once. They were some of the happiest, and saddest years of my life… but that was such a long time ago. Now, take a deep breath. And look into each other’s eyes.

Alfie
Your eyes! I’d forgotten how beautiful they are.

Clara
We were fools to argue. Let’s never argue again!

Alfie
Let’s never say another word!

Clara
Embrace me!

Will
Like a broken record, you are! Enough! For better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. It looks like we’ll need two more contestants. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye Leslie.

Leslie
Tchauzinho, Leslie.

Will
See you next time.