

It's a case for
Detective Sergeant Factual

"The facts ma'am, just the facts"

Read the following little story to the class, then ask the questions at the end.

Today we find Sgt. Factual taking a break, sitting on a bench in the park, eating a pretzel, and watching the pigeons. Lying on the ground beside the bench we see a medium size mongrel dog.

A stranger approaches and says to Sgt. Factual, "Does your dog bite?" Sgt. Factual answers, "No my dog does not bite." With that, the stranger bends down to pet the dog. The dog promptly growls and snaps at the stranger.

The stranger jumps back and exclaims, "You said your dog did not bite!" To which Sgt. Factual replies, "He is not my dog. I left my dog at home and he does not bite."

When the stranger asked Sgt. Factual if his dog would bite, what had he done? (Wait for student answers) He assumed the dog was Sgt. Factual's.

If you were the stranger, would you have assumed the dog belonged to Sgt. Factual? Where might you have placed your assumption on the assumption and inference scale? (Wait for student answers)

Was this a reasonable assumption? It probably was. Even reasonable assumptions can some times get us into trouble.

What other question might the stranger have asked to prevent the mix-up?

"Is this your dog?"

*When Sgt. Factual told the man that his dog did not bite, was he factual? Unfortunately not! Perhaps his dog had never bitten anyone, and Sgt. Factual **assumed** it would not bite anyone in the future. Where would you place such an assumption on the scale?*

When Sgt. Factual said, "I left my dog at home" he was making a **factual** statement. From that statement, we might **infer** that his dog was still at home.

If Sgt. Factual had paid more attention to the stranger, he might have realized that the stranger was making an assumption, and told the stranger immediately that the dog was not his.

What can we learn from this? First of all, we do well to be aware of our assumptions

If Sgt. Factual had said, "My dog is at home", what would he have done? (Wait for answers). He assumed his dog was still there.

To get around this problem, he could have qualified his statement by saying, "To the best of my knowledge, my dog is at home."

This is a good rule to learn. When you make a statement of which you are relatively sure, start it with a qualifier such as "To the best of my knowledge." or "In my opinion..." or "It appears to me...". Etc.

And to make a happier world, we would do well to also be aware of possible assumptions people around us are making. In fact, it would be a good idea to ask people what they are assuming--in a nice way.

Teacher: After this session obtain the "Avoid Putting Your Foot in Your Mouth" poster (page 14-02) from the manual and post it for a prolonged period of time. Encourage the use of qualifiers in writing and speaking.