Who Did It? Shifting the Spotlight with Passive

Teacher		**Class**	Year 6
Subject	English	**Topic**	The passive voice
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Pupils learn how passive verbs move focus from doer to event. They compare versions and rewrite active sentences as passive.

Curriculum links

- Use the passive to affect the presentation of information in a sentence [2]

Learning objectives

- Students will explain how passive moves focus from doer to what happened.
- Students will change active sentences into passive without changing the tense.

Success criteria

- I can spot who is in the spotlight in active and passive.
- I can rewrite an active sentence as passive with be + past participle.
- I can choose passive to hide the doer or sound formal.

What students already know

Ask: In ‘A student broke the window’, who did it and what got broken? Listen for doer first, then what received it.

Key words

active voice	when the front person or thing does the action [3]
passive voice	when the front person or thing has the action done to it [3]
subject	the person or thing doing the main verb in an active sentence [10]
object	the person or thing that receives the action of the verb [10]
past participle	verb form like broken, taken or collected used with be [1]
by-phrase	optional group starting with by that names the doer [1]

Materials

- whiteboard
- whiteboard pen
- Slides 1-7 and 10-12
- Video clip 1 (0:00–4:44)
- mini-whiteboards and pens
- Worksheet Task B cards

Before the lesson

- Test Video clip 1 (0:00–4:44) on Slide 6 for picture and sound
- Write on whiteboard: I broke the window in the greenhouse and The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me)
- Print Worksheet Task B cards for pairs and check Slide 1-7 and 10-12 display

Lesson outline

0–10 min **Starter** 10 min · Whole class

To hook pupils and surface how word order changes blame.

YOU DO

1. Say the hook and show Slide 1: Who Did It?
2. Show Slide 2 with the mystery: The window was broken - we do not know who did it!
3. Ask pairs to discuss what happened and who did it.
4. Take a vote on which sentence admits blame and which focuses on the window.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen and vote with hands up.
2. Discuss with a partner what happened and who is hidden.
3. Say both versions aloud and vote which focuses on the window.

Say: Hands up — would you rather say this or that? ‘I broke the window’ or ‘The window got broken’? Which one gets you in less trouble? Today we learn how the passive moves the spotlight from the doer to what happened.

Ask: Which version tells us who did it? (I broke the window in the greenhouse, the active version.) · What is different about The window was broken? (The window comes first and the doer is hidden.)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can point to the doer in each sentence; if unsure, repeat both with stress on first word.

Support: Point to the first word of each sentence and ask: is this the doer or the damaged thing? **Stretch:** Ask pupils to add (by me) aloud and say how blame returns.

Use: Slides 1-2

10–20 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

To explain active and passive patterns clearly with a worked model.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 big idea: Passive moves the spotlight from the doer to what happened.
2. Show Slide 4 bullets: Active: subject does the action, Passive: subject has action done to it.
3. Model the build: passive is made of the right form of be + past participle [5].
4. Compare I broke the window in the greenhouse versus The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me) [2].

STUDENTS DO

1. Repeat the pattern be + past participle with broken, taken, collected.
2. Label subject, verb and object in the active with teacher.
3. Choral read both versions and point to the new front word.

Say: In the active the subject does the action [3]. In the passive the subject has the action done to it [3]. The object of the active becomes the subject of the passive, and the old subject can become an optional phrase with by [1].

Worked example: I broke the window in the greenhouse -> The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me). Step 1: find subject I, verb broke, object the window in the greenhouse. Step 2: move object to front. Step 3: change verb to was + broken, be + past participle [5]. Step 4: add or drop (by me).

Ask: How do we spot a passive verb? (A form of be such as was plus a past participle such as broken [1].) · What happened to the object? (The normal object turned into the subject [1].)

Check understanding: Mini-whiteboards: write be + past participle for was broken; reteach was/were + taken, broken, collected if wrong.

Support: Keep the two sentences side by side with arrows from object to new subject. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to explain why dropping by me sounds less blaming.

Use: Slides 3-4

20–35 min **Guided practice** 15 min · Pairs

To practise flipping active to passive together without changing tense.

YOU DO

1. Play Video clip 1 (0:00–4:44) on Slide 6 and ask pupils to listen for which word moves to the front.
2. Show Slide 7 fact: 'Glass is classified as a solid' is passive.
3. Model The teacher collected the books -> The books were collected by the teacher [3].
4. Lead pairs to match Worksheet Task B cards to show the spotlight move.

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch, then say which word moved to the front.
2. Flip sentences on mini-whiteboards with a partner.
3. Match Worksheet Task B cards to show the spotlight move.

Say: We keep the same time, we only change the shape. The active is often shorter and more direct [3]. Find the doer, action and receiver, then put the receiver first and use was or were plus the past participle.

Worked example: The teacher collected the books -> The books were collected by the teacher. Step 1: object = The books. Step 2: be in past plural = were to match was collected time. Step 3: past participle = collected. Active has 5 words, passive has 7 words and is less direct [3].

Ask: Why does science say Glass is classified as a solid? (Science writing puts glass first because the material matters more than who classifies it.) · Which be word keeps past tense for The books? (were, then collected: were collected.)

Check understanding: Hold up whiteboards; check correct be form and past participle, remodel with helper strip is/are/was/were if needed.

Support: Give be helper strip with is/are/was/were/have been and participle list taken, broken, collected, eaten [1]. **Stretch:** Challenge with has been cleaned and will be locked, made with be plus past participle [12].

Use: Slides 6-7, Video clip 1 (0:00–4:44), Worksheet Task B

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35–50 min **Main activity** 15 min · Pairs

To explain how passive can hide the doer and change blame.

YOU DO

1. Keep the whiteboard pair on show for The Broken Greenhouse Window.
2. Show Slide 5 question: Which hides the doer: A student broke the window or The window was broken?
3. Ask pairs to say both aloud, then vote which focuses on the window and which admits blame.
4. Show Slide 10 bullets about when to choose passive for unknown doer and formal reports.

STUDENTS DO

1. Say both versions aloud and decide which hides the doer.
2. Vote and explain which sentence focuses on the window.
3. Sort two rewrites: one hiding the doer, one owning up with by-phrase.

Say: In the active the subject does the action, in the passive the subject is acted on by the verb [3]. The normal subject can become an optional phrase with by that we can drop [1]. Talk with your partner about why the second version sounds less blaming.

Worked example: A student broke the window -> The window was broken -> The window was broken by a student. Dropping the by-phrase leaves the doer unknown, which can be vague about who is responsible [3]. Keeping by a student puts some spotlight back on the doer.

Ask: When would we leave out the doer? (When we do not know who did it, as in The store was robbed last night [9], or it is not important.) · How does adding by change the effect? (It names the doer again, so it sounds more blaming and more honest.)

Check understanding: Each pair says both versions and states where the spotlight is; if mixed, point to front word and ask doer or receiver.

Support: Give a frame with the by-part in brackets that can be dropped: The window was broken (by me), to show the doer can be left out [1]. **Stretch:** Pupils rewrite the sentence two ways: one that hides the doer completely, and one that keeps by me to own up, then explain the different effect on the reader.

Use: Slides 5, 10

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50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

To choose the best voice for purpose and check learning.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 vote with The class baked cakes - shows bakers, Cakes were baked - shows cakes, Cakes were baked by the class - shows both.
2. Ask pairs to choose a poster headline and justify fair or sneaky effect.
3. Show Slide 12 quick quiz on The window was broken and The books were collected by the teacher.
4. Link back to success criteria and set homework.

STUDENTS DO

1. Vote for a headline and say why it is fairer.
2. Answer quiz on mini-whiteboards.
3. Self-check against I can statements.

Say: Passive is used to show interest in the person or thing that experiences the action rather than the performer [5]. If we want to say who did it we use by, but when the doer matters it is often better to switch to active [5]. Choose the headline that puts the right thing in the spotlight.

Ask: Which headline shows the cakes, not the bakers? (Cakes were baked.) · Why can passive sound evasive, like mistakes were made? (It can be vague about who is responsible and avoids saying we made some mistakes [18].)

Check understanding: Mini-whiteboard quiz: 1) Which is passive? Reteach be + past participle if less than most correct.

Support: Offer decision prompt: Do we know who? Does it matter? If no to either, cut the by-phrase. **Stretch:** Ask pupils to rewrite a formal sentence to hide an obvious doer and say if it is clearer or sneakier.

Use: Slides 11-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Thinking any be verb means passive, e.g. The book was heavy.	Pupil underlines was heavy as passive.	Check subject receives action, as in The book was dropped, not The book was heavy [17].
Using past tense not participle, e.g. was broke.	Verb after was looks like simple past.	Swap to be + past participle like was broken, were taken [1].

Support

- Frame with droppable by-part: The window was broken (by me) [1].
- Be helper strip and participle bank: taken, broken, collected, eaten.

Stretch

- Rewrite hiding doer versus owning up with by me and explain effect.
- Try present perfect and future passives has been cleaned and will be locked [12].

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with target pairs in guided and main parts; prompt find doer-action-receiver, point to be word and participle, use frames.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
Which is passive: A student broke the window or The window was broken?	The window was broken.
Make passive: The teacher collected the books.	The books were collected by the teacher.
When would you choose passive?	When doer unknown or not important, to focus on result or sound formal.

Homework

Write one active sentence owning up to a mess and one passive hiding the doer.

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