

Before Wonka: the original rip-off events that left children in tears

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Read the definition below. Have you ever been ripped off? What happened? Discuss.

rip-off (*n*) something that is not worth what you pay for it

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

abandoned cancel claim expectation experience festive
gamer locals mannequin miserable reality unofficial

- _____ the way that something happens and how it makes you feel
- _____ a belief about how something should happen or how someone will behave
- _____ very unhappy or uncomfortable
- _____ things as they are, not as they are imagined to be
- _____ having or producing happy and enjoyable feelings because of a festival, holiday or other special occasion
- _____ people who live in the particular small area that you are talking about
- _____ left alone in a particular place or condition, usually forever
- _____ a large model of a human, used to show clothes in stores
- _____ a person who likes playing video games
- _____ something that does not have permission or approval from somebody in authority
- _____ decide that an event will not happen
- _____ a request to a court, government or company for something such as money or property that you believe you have a legal right to

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. With all the rain, our walking tour of the city was _____.
2. Have you seen that 3D film? It's quite an _____!
3. Right now, they're _____ buildings, but in a few years, they'll be new flats.
4. The _____ waited outside the shop for the new game to be released.
5. My sister's flight was _____, so she has to reschedule her trip.
6. The manager told the new employee her _____.
7. When visiting a new place, try to go where the _____ go.
8. When towns and cities are decorated for Christmas, they have such a _____ feel.

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- 1 Willy's Chocolate Experience in Glasgow is the perfect story. You've got high expectations versus miserable reality, an organiser who is an expert at getting money from people, the fact that he runs a company called House of Illuminati, police involvement, and things going viral on TikTok. Best of all, you've got a website that promises nonsense using nonsense words.
- 2 To be this awful, House of Illuminati had to build on the work of others. So let's reflect on some other rip-off experiences.
- 3 Obviously, most will be festive in nature. Christmas often forces people to spend more money than they'd like on things they'll never need. When it comes to Christmas events, it is very easy to over-promise and then leave town before the locals start complaining. Sometimes, though, organisers can go too far.
- 4 In 2020, the Colannades Shopping Centre in Adelaide charged \$60 Australian (£31) for Santa's Winter Village, which promised a "snowy trail through an enchanted forest", "Santa's workshop" and a "polar express train". However, once their money was taken, ticketholders were led to an abandoned building containing several old Christmas trees, unpainted cardboard boxes with visible shipping stickers and, best of all, a mobility scooter as Santa's sleigh. "The Santa they had was so poorly dressed that my six-year-old began questioning if he was Santa," said one guest.
- 5 There was also a 2022 event in East Lothian, where ticketholders were charged an extra £15 to meet St Nicholas, only to meet a shop mannequin in a Santa outfit. There were rides here but they weren't very good. One man who claimed to have spent £100 on tickets reported, "My daughter went on the bungee ropes and the staff member in charge of the area disappeared and was gone for 10 minutes. When she came back my daughter was just standing there wanting off."
- 6 In 2019, the Rialto Theatre in Montreal hosted an adult Harry Potter-themed event for 600 people at \$50 Canadian (£29). The event promised "boozy butterbeer", "Luna Love's pudding", a "cornhole snitch toss" and "cobblestone alley". The reality, however, was disappointing. Ticketholders could decorate their own wands, which were some chopsticks on a table. Meanwhile, Platform 9 and 3/4 was a blank brick wall.
- 7 The 2018 Mario Kart event in Melbourne offered gamers a chance to dress up as their favourite Nintendo characters and race go-karts. It promised "costume hire, snacks, CBD pick up and drop off, up to 20 laps, DJ and after party and games room activities and more." In reality, the costumes were dirty, the snack was one cupcake and the games room consisted of two Nintendo Wiis. Tickets cost \$100 US (£51) each.
- 8 At the unofficial Fortnite festival held in Norwich in 2019, the organisers sold 10,000 tickets at between £13.52 and £22.14, but would charge extra for further attractions. These included a climbing wall that could only accommodate three people at a time, an "ultimate Fortnite battle royale!" which turned out to be small stage upon which children could floss, and a "cave experience", described as "a tunnel through a trailer with a slide". The first event was so bad that the rest were cancelled, and the company that organised it was closed after the makers of Fortnite brought a claim against them in the high court.
- 9 But this all happened in the past. Willy's Chocolate Experience has set a new level of terrible. The future of rip-off events is here. Prepare yourselves, everyone.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where was Willy's Chocolate Experience?
2. What is the name of the company behind the event?
3. What does the article say that Christmas often forces people to do?
4. At Santa's Winter Village in 2020, what was used for Santa's sleigh?
5. At the 2022 event in East Lothian, how much were people charged to meet St Nicholas and what did it turn out to be?
6. Where was the Harry Potter-themed event held?
7. What did the Mario Kart event in Melbourne promise, and how was the reality different?
8. How many tickets were sold for the unofficial Fortnite festival in 2019?
9. What two things happened after the first unofficial Fortnite event?
10. What does the author think Willy's Chocolate Experience has done for rip-off events?

4 Key language

a. Read the sentences from the article. Identify the tenses of the underlined verbs.

present simple past simple future simple present perfect

1. Most will be festive in nature. _____
2. When it comes to Christmas events, it is very easy. _____
3. The Rialto Theatre in Montreal hosted an adult Harry Potter-themed event.

4. Willy's Chocolate Experience has set an incredible new level of terrible. _____

b. Write four sentences. Use the verb tense in the brackets.

1. (present simple) _____
2. (past simple) _____
3. (future simple) _____
4. (present perfect) _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”
- “Some people will sell you a dream and deliver a nightmare.”
- “Sorting fact from fiction on the internet is getting harder.”

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about other recent scams or rip-offs.

- What are some common ones?
- How do they usually contact people or advertise to them?
- Who do they usually target?
- How can people protect themselves and their loved ones?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you when you discuss facts.

According to my research, ...

One example is ...

Some ways to do this are ...

One law / initiative that is in place aims to ...

Another thing people / governments can do is ...

Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

I think (that) ...

From what I know / have read, ...

From my perspective, ...

In my understanding / opinion, ...

I (dis)agree with ...