

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

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

- a. Read the definition below. Can you think of a time when someone lied to you about something you bought? What happened? What did you do? 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.

charge

mobility scooter

promise

spend

ticketholder

- _____ tell somebody that something will definitely happen
- _____ give money to pay for things
- _____ ask for a certain amount of money for something
- _____ someone who has a ticket for a particular trip or event
- _____ a small vehicle with three or four wheels and an engine for people who cannot walk well

climbing wall

court

disappointing

mannequin

ride

- _____ a machine in an amusement park that people travel in or are moved around by for fun
- _____ a large model of a human, especially one used to show clothes in a shop
- _____ making you feel unhappy because something was not what you hoped or expected
- _____ a fake wall with places to put your hands and feet, used for practising the sport of climbing
- _____ a place where legal cases happen

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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. I don't understand why they've me _____ extra.
2. Today is the new lawyer's first day in _____.
3. How much do you want to _____ on a new car?
4. Look at the beautiful dress on that _____ in the window.
5. The children _____ each other they would stay friends forever.
6. That restaurant had five stars, but my food was _____.

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Stuart Heritage

28 February, 2024

- 1 Willy's Chocolate Experience in Glasgow is the perfect story. Run by a company called House of Illuminati, they promised a lot but gave very little. But they were not the first. So let's look at some other rip-offs.
- 2 At Christmas, people often spend too much money on things they don't need. Sometimes, though, Christmas events can go too far.
- 3 In 2020, the Colonnades Shopping Centre in Adelaide charged \$60 Australian (£31) for Santa's Winter Village. But once they paid, ticketholders went to an empty building with several old Christmas trees, unpainted boxes and a mobility scooter as Santa's sleigh.
- 4 There was also a 2022 event in East Lothian, where ticketholders were charged an extra £15 to meet St Nicholas, but met a mannequin dressed as Santa instead. There were rides here but, they weren't very good. One man said he spent £100 on tickets. He reported that his daughter was left on the bungee ropes for 10 minutes after she was finished because the staff member left.
- 5 In 2019, the Rialto Theatre in Montreal hosted an adult Harry Potter event for 600 people at \$50 Canadian (£29), but it too was disappointing. Ticketholders could make their own wands, which were some chopsticks on a table. Meanwhile, Platform 9 and 3/4 was a blank brick wall.
- 6 The 2018 Mario Kart event in Melbourne promised gamers a chance to dress up as Nintendo characters, race go-karts, play in a games room and more. In reality, the costumes were dirty, the snack was one cupcake and the games room had just two Nintendo Wiis. Tickets cost \$100 US (£51) each.
- 7 At the Fortnite festival held in Norwich in 2019, the company sold 10,000 tickets at between £13.52 and £22.14, but charged extra for other tickets. These included a tiny climbing wall, a small stage where 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. The makers of Fortnite took the company to court, and it was later closed.
- 8 But this all happened in the past. The future of rip-off events is here, thanks to Willy's Chocolate Experience. Prepare yourselves, everyone.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 28/02/2024

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What is the name of the event in Glasgow?
2. Where was it held?
3. What is the House of illuminati?
4. What do people often do at Christmas?
5. How much were tickets to Santa's Winter Village in Adelaide?
6. What was used for Santa's sleigh?
7. At the 2022 event in East Lothian, what was used for St Nicholas?
8. Where was the Harry Potter event held?
9. What did the Mario Kart event in Melbourne promise?
10. How many tickets were sold for the Fortnite festival in 2019?

4 Key language

a. Read the sentences from the article. Identify the correct tense for each underlined verb.

1. They promised a lot but gave very little. **present simple / past simple**
2. People often spend too much money on things they don't need. **present simple / past simple**
3. The games room had just two Nintendo Wiis. **present simple / past simple**
4. The future of rip-off events is here. **present simple / past simple**

b. Ask and answer the following questions in pairs.

1. Did you ever promise to do something and didn't do it?
2. Do you spend money on things you don't need?
3. Did you have a video game console when you were a child?
4. What is your favourite "pop culture" item?

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Before you buy something, research it.”
- “Some people will sell you a dream and give you a nightmare.”

6 In your own words

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

- What are some other ones?
- What did they promise?
- What really happened?
- How can people protect themselves?

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 ...

They promised ..., but ...

One thing you can do is ...

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, ...

It makes me feel ...

In my understanding / opinion, ...

I (dis)agree with ...