Definite and Indefinite Articles

The English definite article is *the*. It is used to identify a *particular* person or thing. If you are speaking about someone or something you are already familiar with, you use *the* with the noun. Look at these examples:

I already know *the man.*  
She met *the women* who won the lottery.  
This is *the book* that I told you about.

The indefinite article is used to describe someone or something that is unfamiliar to you or about which you are speaking *in general*. There are two forms: *a* and *an*. Use *a* before a word beginning with a consonant. Use *an* before a word beginning with a vowel. Look at these examples:

He sees *a stranger* on the corner.  
Did you buy *an apple* or *an orange*? Is the woman *a good lawyer*?  
She has *an idea*.

Compare the difference between the definite and indefinite article by using these sentences:

I want *an apple*. (I do not see an apple. But I feel hungry for one.)  
I want *the apple*. (I am choosing between the apple and the orange that I see before me.)

The definite article for plural nouns is also *the*. But there is no indefinite article for plural nouns. The plural articles are used in the same way as the singular articles.
Exercise 2-1

Fill in the blank with either the definite or indefinite article, whichever makes the best sense.

1. Did you buy a Ford or _________ Chevy?

2. Does he know _________ man on the corner?

3. She has _________ secret to tell you.

4. What time does _________ train leave?

5. We need _________ hot dogs and a bottle of Coke.

6. Did you see _________ accident?

7. He met _________ guests as they arrived.

8. _________ teacher is angry with us.

9. I can't find _________ keys.

10. Is that ______ snake in that tree?

Exercise 2-2

Rewrite each sentence, changing the singular nouns in each sentence to plural nouns. Make any changes to the articles and verbs that are necessary.

1. They gave us an orange.

2. I like the book very much.

3. Do you often visit the farm there?
4. A rabbit is hiding behind it.

5. Katrina likes to play with the kitten.

Follow the same directions, but change the plural nouns to singular.

6. Montel has dogs and cats.

7. I want to buy the roses.

8. There are gifts for you.

9. Can you hear the babies crying?

10. Do you have brothers or sisters?