

The Case of the Room 116 Blob: Scene 1

Hoang and Tamika walked quickly down the hall, eager to be early for their Life Science class.

Tamika groaned, “I know I got all my homework right, but I’m so nervous about this quiz!”

“Don’t worry,” Hoang replied, “we have eight minutes to sit in the room and study before the quiz starts. We’ll be fine!” Hoang was always calming Tamika down.

They turned the corner and slipped quickly into room 116. They pulled up chairs to a table and were ready to take their books out, when suddenly they encountered a curious, curious sight. Their eyes were wide with surprise. Before them was something they had never, never seen. Neither one said a word, until finally Tamika broke the silence.

“Ew! What is that on the table? Is that some kind of experiment or something someone left out?”

Hoang stared at the unidentifiable white *thing* sitting in a tank, and asked, “Wow, I don’t know but it sure does look interesting... Do you think it’s alive?”

As they inched closer and closer, Tamika said, “Well, it’s not moving. But there’s lots of living stuff that doesn’t move, like coral. If we poke it, we could see what it does.”

“Is it breathing or making any noise?” Hoang asked. She was starting to get nervous. Maybe they weren’t supposed to find this thing. Maybe it would start moving!

Tamika began to reach for the weird white blob, and said, “There’s only one way to find out.”

Hoang cried, “No, Tamika, don’t touch it! You shouldn’t reach for that with your bare hands, what if it stings or is poisonous? What if it is alive?!”

Tamika said, “Oh, I’ll be fine...”

“No, Tamika, don’t!”

The Case of the Room 116 Blob: Scene 2

“What are you girls doing?” Ms. Shizzle asked with a stern tone as she suddenly appeared in the doorway.

Tamika quickly withdrew her hand, and said, “Um, nothing, Ms. Shizzle. We just came in here to study for the quiz, and we saw this strange creature here, and so we thought we should figure out if it’s alive, or if it’s not alive, and...”

Hoang said, “What do you mean ‘we’?! I was trying to tell her not to touch it, since we don’t know what it is, and it could be dangerous.”

Tamika shot her a look. Why was her friend trying to get her in trouble?

Responding, Hoang told her gently, “Tamika, I’m just saying. I don’t want you to get hurt. It could bite you, or be covered in poison, or...”

Tamika said, “Well I think you’re overreacting, Hoang. Ms. Shizzle, didn’t you tell us that hands-on is the best way to do science?”

Ms. Shizzle said, “Ladies, ladies. Look, there’s nothing wrong with trying to explore the unknown, but we do have to go about it in the right way. It’s important to use the proper lab safety equipment. We also have to follow the steps of the scientific method. At first, we pause and ask ourselves what we already know, and what we want to know. Then we can decide what to do next.”

Hoang and Tamika looked at each other, and said, “Well, sorry Ms. Shizzle. But we’re curious...what *is* that thing? Is it alive?”

With a smirk, Ms. Shizzle replied, “Well you tell me. What does it mean for something to be alive?”

<<rrrrriinnnnngggg>> The bell sounded, and Ms. Shizzle stood next to the strange object as the class filed in, staring and pointing at the weird item on the tray.

The Case of the Room 116 Blob: Scene 3

The second bell rang. As everyone took their seats, there was a buzz in the room about what the funky-looking thing in the tank was.

Ms. Shizzle said, “Settle down, please, class. As you know, we do have a quiz today, so let’s get ready to work.” Seeing one of her students had raised his hand, Ms. Shizzle pointed to him and said, “Yes, Pierre?”

Pierre said, “Ms. Shizzle, what is that thing over there in the tank? Is it some sort of fungus? Is it plastic or something?”

Ms. Shizzle replied, “Well, class, several of you seem to have that question. Before we find out, though, why don’t you tell me what you think? What are some of the characteristics of living things?”

Kevin offered, “Well...they have to be breathing, right?”

Nick piped in, “And I think living things have to eat, too.”

Jamil added, “Yeah, and I believe living creatures must also reproduce...you know, like make more of themselves by having babies or seeds.”

Ms. Shizzle was impressed, and exclaimed, “Excellent, you’re all on the right track. There are actually a number of ways we can decide if something is living or nonliving. What else can you come up with?”

As the class volunteered more answers, Ms. Shizzle drew a simple chart on the board titled “Is it Alive?!” and listed their suggestions.

Ms. Shizzle told the class, “This chart will come in handy just in case you run into any other mysterious matter, or some stuff in the back of your refrigerator, or aliens...because really you never know...” She was trying to be serious, but her smile always broke through. The class laughed. Ms. Shizzle was always a little silly.

Ms. Shizzle said, “So now, let’s see about this blob over here in the tray. Is it alive or not?”

Nick replied, “No, I don’t think so. It doesn’t seem to be moving. And it doesn’t really have a mouth to eat.”

Tamika pointed out, “Well, neither do plants.”

Jovan asked, “Aren’t germs alive? My dad is a doctor, and he says that the germs that make us sick are actually alive, and even live inside our bodies!”

Ms. Shizzle replied, “That’s an interesting question, Jovan. There are some microorganisms, such as viruses, that scientists aren’t really sure about!”

Jovan asked, “You mean viruses aren’t alive?”

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Ms. Shizzle replied, “Well, that’s a big debate. When you learn a little more about viruses, you’ll see what I mean. Alright then, class. For the next fifteen minutes, let’s have each group come up with a plan to see if this blob meets the criteria for living things. Then I’ll give each group an opportunity to test it out!”

The class was relieved to see that Ms. Shizzle seemed to be forgetting about the quiz!

“YEAAAAH!” The class erupted. This was so exciting!

Ms. Shizzle added, “And then we’ll have the quiz.”

“Awww, mannnn...” the class sighed, and a few eyes rolled here and there. But intrigued by the weird thing in the tank, they busily got to work.

The Case of the Room 116 Blob: Scene 4

The next day, nearly every student in Ms. Shizzle’s class was early. They were still excited about what they did the day before, determining if the blob was really alive. They still had some questions, though. The bell sounded the beginning of class.

Jamil declared, “Ms. Shizzle, we have a question!”

Ms. Shizzle replied, “Already, eh? Ok, let’s get to it. What’s on your mind?”

Jamil began matter-of-factly, “Well, yesterday, before we found out about the blob, we had to find out about something called the Scientific Method, but we never really got the chance to talk about it. Is it even important, then? I know I’ve heard about it before, but what’s it for?”

Ms. Shizzle responded, “Good questions, Jamil. Let’s start with what you already *do* know.”

The class contributed a few different facts. For instance, Nick said, “The scientific method helps us organize scientific inquiry.”

Hoang asked, “What do you mean by that, Nick?”

“I mean, if we just started asking questions and making guesses everything might just be all sloppy. Science is supposed to be careful, and a process: Step-by-step. You have to make sure your experiment is going to tell you what you’re going to want to know. Otherwise your work won’t be credible.”

“Yes, Nick, great. Actually, all of you have already used the steps of the Scientific Method, even if you haven’t realized it. Take out your notes from yesterday, and I’ll show you.”

There was a rustle of paper as students fished for their notes. Ms. Shizzle showed them how each step of their project was actually part of the Scientific Method. They definitely felt like true scientists now.

Nadia asked, “So Ms. Shizzle, when do we get to do another experiment to test this stuff out?”

Ms. Shizzle replied, “Soon, very soon. But first, let’s talk for a second about this quiz...” Ms. Shizzle put on a very serious, upset face.

Eyes wide, Hoang asked, “Was it that bad?”

Ms. Shizzle held her face stern, then finally, she broke out into a little giggle. “No, you all did fine...but I had you for a moment, hehe...”

Ms. Shizzle's Chart

Is It Alive?!

Criteria	Organism	Example in Action
Living things are made of cells		
Living things react to their environment	Plant	A seed might sprout when it senses sunlight
Living things reproduce	Cat	Female cats have kittens, and those kittens have more kittens...
Living things have DNA		
Living things grow	Mushrooms	Fungus grows and spreads on things that are rotting
Living things consume nutrients/water		
Living things excrete waste		