

# Punctuation "Theater"

*a kinetic approach to learning punctuation*

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## Introduction:

This little mini-unit is a fun way to learn or review punctuation-- a subject which can be tedious and boring. These activities are fun for everyone and can be used in a mixed group with students of varying levels. (One of my groups had a non-reader sitting right next to a profoundly gifted reader and both students had a great time and didn't complain a bit.) This approach to punctuation works especially well with audio learners and kinetic learners, for whom it is often difficult to find resources.

**NOTE: Please do not rely on this unit as your sole curriculum! This is intended to be a supplement, not a complete curriculum.**

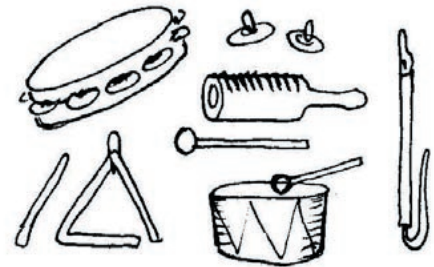
## Content:

This unit deals with just the punctuation marks that are used between words, not within them. I don't cover hyphens or apostrophes. The marks covered in this unit are:

- period
- question mark
- exclamation point
- comma
- colon
- semicolon
- dash

## What you will need:

The punctuation marks will be represented by sounds. You will need to provide simple rhythm instruments of some kind, either purchased or homemade. A basic, inexpensive rhythm instrument set is fine. The only "extra" I recommend is a good-quality slide whistle (to represent the exclamation point and question mark). (Sterilize the slide whistle with rubbing alcohol and a tissue between users.)



You may also need some photocopies or sentences printed onto poster board for a few of the activities. Your particular situation will dictate what you need.

## What I used for each mark:

*Period: one drum beat (drum was made from an oatmeal can)*

*Comma: "guiro" (the instrument that looks like a cylinder with notches on the top, and makes a "ratchet" sound)*

*Exclamation point: slide whistle (going down), then a drum beat for the dot at the bottom*

*Question mark: slide whistle (going up), then a drum beat for the dot at the bottom*

*Colon: bongo drum turned vertical to look like a colon*

*Semicolon: just one bongo (the top one), followed by drum beat (the "period" drum)*

*Dash: either shake of tambourine, or blow of "siren" whistle (different from slide whistle)*

You don't need to use what I used; you can use whatever is convenient and appropriate for your group.



## LESSON ONE: How to end a sentence

In this lesson, the students will learn (or review) the following:

- 1) A sentence is a complete thought. A sentence needs some kind of action and a person or thing who is doing the action. (In the case of simple comparisons, such as, "The ball is blue," you can say the ball is being blue.)
- 2) A group of words that is not a complete thought is called a fragment. You can't use ending punctuation with a fragment.
- 3) The three marks that end a sentence are the period, the exclamation point, and the question mark.
- 4) You can use an exclamation point with a question mark to indicate a question that is said very loudly.

▶ **READ FOLK TALE #1** (The folk tales are at the end of this booklet.) (Yes, do all the voices and make it interesting and funny!)

▶ **READ (or paraphrase) THIS INFORMATION TO THE STUDENTS:**

A sentence is a group of words that makes a complete thought. To have a complete thought, you must have two things: an action, and someone or something who is doing the action. A group of words that is missing one of these parts isn't a complete thought and therefore isn't a sentence. We call these incomplete thoughts "fragments." You don't want to use fragments in your writing because it confuses your readers. You need to give your readers complete thoughts.

At the end of your complete thought, you need to put a punctuation mark to tell your readers you are done with your thought. There are only three marks to choose from: a period, an exclamation point, and a question mark. Each one tells your reader how to say the sentence. What kind of sentence ends with a period? (*pause for students to give answers*) What about an exclamation point? And a question mark? What would it mean if you saw a question mark followed by an exclamation point?

### Activity #1 Identifying sentences and sentence fragments

Tell the students to listen carefully to each group of words below. If it is a complete thought, stomp your foot at the end. If it is a fragment, don't stomp.

- 1) The lion roared. (STOMP)
- 2) Flies buzz. (STOMP)
- 3) The zebra is grazing out on the savannah. (STOMP)
- 4) The bear cub in the den (Did what?)
- 5) Getting a drink by the well (Who was drinking?)
- 6) The skunk crossed the street. (STOMP)
- 7) Outside after dark in the cold rain (Then what happened?)
- 8) because she was getting sick of it (What did she do because she was getting sick of it?)
- 9) The centipede, afraid of being eaten, hid under a log. (STOMP)
- 10) Madagascar, being the largest island off the east coast of Africa (Madagascar is or does what?)
- 11) not long after the barn caught on fire and the cows got out (What happened not long after?)
- 12) Instead of raining, it snowed. (STOMP)

Suggestion: Go around the group and have each student make up a complete sentence and a sentence fragment. Thinking up a fragment will be surprisingly difficult for younger students.

►► **MORE INFORMATION FOR THE STUDENTS:**

Sometimes sentences with exclamation points seem to have no one doing the action. In this case, the doer of the action is assumed to be “you,” meaning the person being spoken to. The technical term for a sentence like this is an “imperative.” Here are some examples:

*Stay back!      Wake up!      Don't bother me!*

Sometimes it sounds okay to put a punctuation mark on just one or two words and treat them as if they were a sentence, even though they aren't. Here are some examples:

*Why not?      Really?      Weird!      No!*

Activity #2 A group activity about periods, exclamation points, and question marks

For this activity you will need to divide your group in half. One half will start out being the readers while the other half plays the instruments. Halfway through the activity they'll switch. The size of your group will determine how much sharing of the instruments will be necessary. You may assign one person to do all the “dots” (the period and the dots at the bottom of the exclamation point and question mark) or you may want to have three people doing the dots, one for each mark. (See the list at the beginning of the book for suggestions about which instruments should be used for each mark.)

The readers need to read their sentences in such a way that the instrumentalists will be able to discern the correct punctuation. Those punctuation marks are there for a reason!

You can either photocopy this page and give a copy to each reader, or you may want to copy the sentences onto separate index cards to be distributed to the readers.

- 1) The giraffe at the zoo stretched its neck to reach the tree branches.
- 2) How do you feel about spiders?
- 3) Who let the dogs out?
- 4) Don't shake that soda bottle!
- 5) The dog's barking is driving me crazy!
- 6) It's milking time at the dairy farm.
- 7) The skunk was crossing the road.
- 8) This video game is awesome!
- 9) The cannon fired and missed.
- 10) Who was the first man on the moon?
- 11) The sun is 93 million miles away.
- 12) The sun is 93 million miles away?
- 13) The sun is 93 million miles away!
- 14) Little green men came out of the space ship.
- 15) Little green men came out of the space ship!
- 16) Little green men came out of the space ship?
- 17) Beware of the one-legged man!
- 18) People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
- 19) The chef made green eggs and ham.
- 20) The chef made green eggs and ham?
- 21) Really?
- 22) Really!

Feel free to add more sentences of your own!

## LESSON TWO: Commas

In this lesson, the students will learn (or review):

- 1) How to use commas to separate things in a series.
- 2) How to use commas with geography words such as cities, states, and countries.
- 3) How to use commas before and after names in a sentence when the name is used as a term of address.
- 4) How to use commas after opening phrases.
- 5) How to use commas before and after parenthetical phrases in the middle or at the end of a sentence.

### ► READ (or paraphrase) THIS INFORMATION TO THE STUDENTS:

If a sentence contains a list of three or more things, put a comma between them to keep them separated. When you are reading a sentence out loud and you come to a comma, your voice should pause just for a second so your listener can hear the comma.

Sometimes writers prefer to leave out the comma after the next-to-last item in the series. This is also considered to be correct. In this booklet, we'll keep that comma in place so it's easier to punctuate the sentence by listening.

### Activity #3 Listening for commas

You may want to do this activity as a group, with the students clapping for commas and stomping for periods, or you may want to do it the same way you did activity #2, with students doing the reading and playing the instruments. Or you may want to skip this activity if it is too easy for your particular group. If the students read the sentences, make sure they over-emphasize the pauses for the commas.

- 1) The monster had a large horn, terrible eyes, and bad breath.
- 2) The dresser drawer contained red socks, blue pajamas, pink shorts, and yellow underwear.
- 3) We saw three lions, a herd of zebras, ten elephants, a leopard, and some flamingoes.
- 4) For this job you will need a hammer, a saw, a screwdriver, a pair of pliers, a measuring tape, and safety goggles.
- 5) I know a funny game where you rub your nose, run in place, waggle your head, jump up and down, blink your eyes, and say the alphabet all at the same time.
- 6) The foods I really dislike are spinach, beets, pickled eggs, brussels sprouts, liver, and lima beans.
- 7) The sailors who sailed with Magellan were from Italy, Spain, France, England, North Africa, and Asia.
- 8) By the time we came home from vacation, we had been to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Kentucky.
- 9) The zoo had recently acquired a white tiger, a white rhino, a white alligator, and a white boa.
- 10) The spy was carrying a briefcase that contained a handgun, night vision goggles, a tiny camera, false identity papers, a radio transmitter, and a listening device.

OPTION: Have students make up sentences of their own.

► **MORE INFORMATION FOR THE STUDENTS:**

Commas are used whenever you say two place names that are connected, such as a city and state, or a city and country. You use a comma after each one, except if the state is the last word in the sentence, in which case you use one of the three ending marks.

Commas are also used when you address someone by name, such as “Marcy, it’s nice to see you!” or “Don’t take too long, Ryan.” You put a comma between the name and the rest of the sentence. So if the name is at the beginning, you put a comma after the name. If it’s at the end, you put a comma before the name; and if it’s in the middle you put a comma both before and after the name. It’s like you’re “insulating” the name from the rest of the sentence. Be careful, though-- not all names in sentences get commas around them. If you are just talking *about* someone, not *to* them, you don’t use a comma (unless the name is part of a phrase that gets a comma for a totally different reason).

Activity #4 More commas

Here are more sentences to “perform.” This time you will need instrumentalists for four punctuation marks: the period, the comma, the exclamation point, and the question mark. Again, remind the readers to emphasize the punctuation with their voice so that the instrumentalists will know when to make their sound.

- 1) I used to live in Denver, Colorado.
- 2) Arthur, did you get new glasses?
- 3) Arthur isn’t here today.
- 4) Watch out, Arthur!
- 5) Last summer I went to visit relatives in Boise, Idaho, and Fargo, North Dakota.
- 6) Thanks anyway, Aunt Ellen, but I’d rather not try the purple pickles.
- 7) Paris, France, is where the Eiffel Tower is located.
- 8) My uncle just flew in from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and boy are his arms tired!
- 9) Would you rather go to Tampa, Florida, or Los Angeles, California?
- 10) I’ve never been to Lima, Peru, or Quito, Ecuador, or Bogata, Columbia.
- 11) I saw a tornado outside of Topeka, Kansas!
- 12) The art students traveled to Rome, Italy, to study famous paintings.
- 13) Can you give me directions to Montreal, Canada?
- 14) The boat for Antarctica leaves from Tierra Del Fuego, Argentina.
- 15) Jack and Jill, don’t go up the hill!
- 16) Bruce, have you ever been to Tulsa, Oklahoma?
- 17) Mrs. Fizzlebot, please come in.
- 18) The winning couples in the contest were Jack and Jill, Bob and Betty, and Clark and Clara.
- 19) Superman, your cape is stuck!
- 20) Dad, I really want to go to Sydney, Australia.

► **MORE INFORMATION FOR THE STUDENTS:**

Commas are often used after opening phrases such as “Meanwhile,” or “Not surprisingly,” or “A short time later.” The comma means you should pause for a split second before going on with the rest of the sentence. Phrases like this are also sometimes stuck into the middle of a sentence, in which case you need to surround them with commas.

Commas are also used when you want to add more information about someone or something. That extra information has to be surrounded by punctuation marks.

*Our best player, the kid in the yellow jacket, is from Tennessee.  
Bessie the cow, the nicest animal on the farm, has gone missing.  
Jack Sprat, who could eat no fat, was much healthier than his wife.*

In each case, you could take out that middle phrase and still have a fine sentence.

*Our best player is from Tennessee.  
Bessie the cow has gone missing.  
Jack Sprat was much healthier than his wife.*

Adding the extra phrases just gives you some extra information. That extra information must be “insulated” from the rest of the sentence by commas.

Activity #5 Opening phrases and “extra” phrases

- 1) Just in case you want to know, there’s a monster under your bed!
- 2) Being the foul creature it was, the dragon ate all the sailors in one gulp.
- 3) Beginning with the things that you are most interested in, tell me about your trip.
- 4) In the summer, when everyone is on vacation, I work on my tree fort.
- 5) When the cat finally got off the chair, it was covered with cat hair.
- 6) Do you remember Mr. and Mrs. Fizzlebot, our old neighbors?
- 7) I strolled through the park, not the zoo, and found it much less smelly.
- 8) After walking all night through the hot desert, the coyote finally found water.
- 9) From the very beginning to the very end, the actors played their parts brilliantly.
- 10) Created from nothing but junk, the monster looked pretty scrappy.

Activity #6 Create silly sentences that use opening phrases

To prepare for the “performance,” have your students write parts of sentences on separate cards. One set of cards will have only opening phrases, one set will have just subjects (a cute baby, a hairy spider, a monkey in a tree, etc.) and the third set will be actions (takes a bath, will need to go home, got on an airplane, etc.). Have the students do their cards separately, so they are not forming complete sentences. The elements on the cards should be random in nature so that when they are combined they will create funny sentences. Provide three boxes or containers for the three types of cards.

To “perform” the sentences, have at least five students participate at a time. The first student will pull out an opening phrase card and read it. The second student will make the comma sound. (If the sentence happens to have more than one comma, that comma person is responsible for those commas, too.) The third student will pull out a subject card and read it, and the fourth student will pull out an action card and read it. The last student will make the appropriate ending punctuation sound. (You may want to have three students on standby for the ending marks, one for each mark.)

## LESSON THREE: Quotation Marks

In this lesson, the students will learn (or review):

- 1) When to use quotation marks.
- 2) How to place quotation marks in combination with other punctuation marks.

### ▶▶ READ FOLK TALE #2

### ▶▶ READ (or paraphrase) THIS INFORMATION TO THE STUDENTS:

Whenever you write down exactly what someone said, you need to put quotation marks before and after their words. Punctuation marks go before the final quote mark, not after it. For example:

*“Please don’t throw marshmallows into the bear cage,” said the zoo tour guide.*

*“Why is there a frog in my sleeping bag?” asked the camp counselor.*

*“Yikes!” said the hiker as he barely missed stepping on a snake.*

If you break a sentence in half, you need to put quotes around each half. Put a comma after the part in the middle. For example:

*“Do you want to stop here,” asked the driver, “or do you want to continue on?”*

### Activity #7 Performing sentences with quotes

Perform each sentence below using instruments for the period, comma, quotes, exclamation point and question mark. (A separate performer can be used for each ending mark, or the same person can do all three, alternating for each sentence.) Write the sentences, one at a time, in large letters on a whiteboard or chalkboard so that all the performers can easily see them. Also assign two readers: one for the speaker and one for the narrator. Remind the students to watch for the different uses of commas: lists, terms of address, and opening phrases.

- 1) “Take me to your leader,” said the little green man from Mars.
- 2) The girl came running in the door and said, “Mom, the circus is coming to town!”
- 3) The zoo guide held out the huge snake and said, “Do you want to hold Hercules?”
- 4) “I’m not so sure I like this camp site,” he said, as the bear, the raccoon, and the possum scurried off.
- 5) “Argh,” said the pirate, “methinks you’ll be walking the plank, matey!”
- 6) The little dog laughed to see such a sight, and the dish said, “The spoon and I are outta here!”
- 7) The king foolishly announced, “From now on, I decree that the sun shall not set.”
- 8) The soldier broke ranks and ran into enemy territory yelling, “I surrender!”
- 9) “Do you have any bubble gum,” said the boy, “so that I can fix a leak in my bicycle tire?”
- 10) “I’ve just come from Paris, France,” said my friend, “and believe it or not, they’ve painted the Eiffel Tower red, white, and blue.”
- 11) The baker was surprised at the complaints and said, “Just think of the rat toes as extra protein.”
- 12) “In ancient Egypt,” joked the history teacher, “even boys could grow up to be mummies.”
- 13) “You know,” said the scientist, as she looked through her microscope, “these protozoa are actually kind of cute!”
- 14) The baby looked at the camera and said, “Goo goo ga ga.”
- 15) “When will you ever learn?” said the ant to his friend who was stuck in the jar of peanut butter.



## Activity #8 Impromptu sentences

Impromptu means “on the spot.” In an impromptu performance, you make up your lines right there on the stage. You just say the best thing you can think of right at that moment. Some actors get very good at impromptu acting-- so good, in fact, that you can hardly believe they are just making it up on the spot. But talent aside, this is a fun way to encourage creativity and fast thinking.

Your performers will take turns being the narrator, the impromptu speaker, and the instrumentalists. Make the ending punctuation match the tone of the speaker. (Periods are used in the sentences below, just so as not to leave the ending off altogether.)

Remember to reassure the actors that there are no wrong answers here! (But the punctuation must be correct!) With older kids who like to “one-up” each other, you could do the same sentence several times, giving the punch line to a different person each time. They might build on each other’s idea and come up with something very funny!

You don’t need to use these sentences in order. You don’t even need to use all of them. Choose the ones you like best, or even make up some of your own.

- 1) The little boy looked at the stuffed crab on his plate, and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 2) As we were leaving the jungle, I thought I heard a voice saying, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 3) When the fisherman saw what was hanging on the end of his line, he said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 4) The two insects were having a nice chat until one of them said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 5) When the astronaut’s feet touched the surface of the moon, he said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 6) The robot rolled silently into the room, beeped a few times, and then said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 7) When the time machine finally came to a stop, the scientist opened the door and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 8) After looking over the menu for half an hour, I finally told the waiter, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 9) When the chicken had successfully crossed the road, it looked back over its shoulder and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 10) The dinosaur with the biggest tail began to bully the others and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 11) When Peter Pan saw Tinkerbell for the first time, he said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 12) The baker looked at the finished cake with pride and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 13) When the guests had all arrived, the hostess made her announcement and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 14) Because she was the youngest person ever to receive this award, the ballerina said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 15) As the afternoon sun began to heat the desert sand, the cowboy said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 16) When the apple fell on his head, Isaac Newton said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 17) The chemist sniffed the steam coming from his test tube and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 18) The ugly monster jumped out of the closet and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 19) The bride looked at the groom and said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 20) As the shark swam closer to the beach, it said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 21) As the alien wrapped its sticky tentacles around my head, I said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 22) When I went to eat my sandwich and discovered there was already a big bite out of it, I said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 23) As the early bird plucked the worm out of its hole, the worm said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 24) The journey to the center of the earth came to an abrupt end when our leader said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- 25) As the boat floated closer and closer to the whirlpool, the captain said, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

## LESSON FOUR: Colons, semicolons and dashes

In this lesson, the students will learn (or review):

- 1) The difference between a colon and a semicolon, and how to use each one.
- 2) When you can use a dash.

### ▶▶ READ FOLK TALE #3

### ▶▶ READ (or paraphrase) THIS INFORMATION TO THE STUDENTS:

A colon looks like a period above a period. You use a colon when you have a list of things at the end of your sentence, or when you are giving an example. The part before the colon MUST be a complete thought and sound grammatically correct without the items after the colon. For example, you might write, "The kids were told to bring these items to camp: a sleeping bag, a change of clothes, and a toothbrush." The first part sounds all right without the list. "The kids were told to bring these items to camp." If the sentence had said only "The kids were told to bring" before the colon, it wouldn't be correct because "The kids were told to bring" doesn't sound like a complete thought.

A semicolon is a dot above a comma. The semicolon is most often used as a way to put two sentences back to back without using words like "and" or "but" in between. Why would you want to do this? Well, some writers just like the way it looks and sounds. If the semicolon didn't exist, the writers would simply write two sentences. (If you were listening to sentences being read out loud, you might not even be able to tell which ones had a semicolon and which ones were separate.) Another way you can use semicolons is when you have a list that consists of items that have commas in them. For example, if you have a list of cities and capitals that all have commas between them, it could get confusing.

*I went to Dublin, Ireland, Ellesmere Island, Canada, Auckland, New Zealand, and Montreal, Quebec.*

Is this a list of eight places or only four? You can't tell judging by the commas. So you can use semicolons between the items:

*I went to Dublin, Ireland; Ellesmere Island, Canada; Auckland, New Zealand; and Montreal, Quebec.*

The dash can be used any time you want to make a very short but dramatic pause in the middle of a sentence. You can use the dash in places where you might use a semicolon.

*The army general was surprised-- he hadn't expected the invasion to happen so soon.*

You can use a dash in places where you might use a comma.

*I bought the biggest lollipop in the store-- the one with the red and blue stripes.*

*Why isn't Pluto a planet any more-- do you know?*

*Please don't mind me-- I'm just snooping around your house.*

You can also use the dash at the end of a sentence where someone gets cut off right in the middle of what they are saying.

*"Watson, if we aren't careful, we're going to fall right into a--"*

## Activity #9 “One-man Band”

In this activity, each student will be given a turn to function as a “one-man band,” performing all the punctuation marks in the sentence. (Or, you may want to adapt to “two-man bands,” if it fits your situation better.) You can write these sentences out on a whiteboard or blackboard, or you may want to photocopy this sheet and cut apart the sentences, giving one to each student (or pair of students).

- 1) The train engineer leaned out and yelled, “All aboard for the following cities: Albany, New York; Providence, Rhode Island; and Boston, Massachusetts!”
- 2) The zoo guide explained to her audience, “We have some new animals this season: monkeys from Singapore, sea lions from California, and everyone’s top favorite-- snakes from Brazil.”
- 3) As she went down the aisle at the grocery store, Mrs. Zingledot said to herself, “I have cucumbers, peppers, onions, carrots, broccoli, and-- what happened to the asparagus I put in the cart?”
- 4) Mr. Marple, the history teacher, told the class, “The army general was surprised-- he hadn’t expected the Huns to invade.”
- 5) The expert explorer explained to the hikers, “There are five things to avoid in this jungle: snakes with red and black stripes, cats with large spots, and frogs that are bright yellow.”
- 6) The professor told his students, “Until 1890, the goblin shark-- considered to be the ugliest shark species-- was thought to be extinct; until that year, it had only been known from fossils.”
- 7) The spy, after promising not to reveal the source of his information, said, “The enemy will begin moving at midnight; they are already in position-- a position that will give them the advantage.”
- 8) “Mrs. Hopperdoodle,” said the mailman, “I have letters for you from Siberia, Russia; Nome, Alaska; and Baffin Island, Canada.”
- 9) The singer ended the song with these words: “Oh, oh, oh, I love the snow, snow, snow; do, do, do you love it too, too, too?”
- 10) The guide at the museum said, “After crossing the Sahara Desert, traveling to Timbuktu, and swimming across the Niger River, Harold gave up exploring-- or at least that’s what he told his crew.”
- 11) The sky diver-- the same person that had crashlanded last time-- leaped out the door of the airplane and yelled, “Geronimo!”
- 12) The scuba diver, after he had caught his breath again, told everyone, “I saw many creatures in this ocean reef: fish, small sharks, eels, crabs, and even an octopus.”
- 13) Rembrandt told his apprentice, “Before I can finish this painting, I will need you to buy these colors for me: crimson red, golden yellow, sky blue, and pure white-- but not the kind with lead in it.”
- 14) After the rip in the fabric of the Universe had been mended, the time traveler said, “Let’s hope that doesn’t happen again-- we were really lucky this time!”
- 15) “The best thing about our trip to Antarctica,” said the student to her class, “was when we were finally able to see the animals we had read so much about: the killer whale, the leopard seal, and the king penguin.”

## LESSON FIVE: Review and performance

In this final lesson, students will “perform” some of Aesop’s fables.

First, do some review. Ask your students the names of each punctuation mark and when they should be used. If you find gaps in their knowledge, review the information they need.

►► **READ FOLK TALE #3** before beginning to perform the Aesop fables. The students may want to imagine they are the royal performers in King Tok-tok’s court.

### Activity #10 Performing some of Aesop’s fables

You will need to write out each folk tale on a piece of poster board, making the letters about an inch high (2.5 cm). If you want to make the punctuation marks stand out, write them in red.

You will need a group of 5 to 7 students to perform each tale. One student should be assigned the role of either King Tok-tok or Queen Kwotee. (You can even make a crown out of a strip of poster board.) The other students will each be assigned to an instrument and its corresponding punctuation mark.

In my class I had one student for the comma, one for the period, one for the opening quotes, one for the closing quotes (I had two sets of finger cymbals), one for the question/exclamation line (slide whistle-- down for exclamation, up for question-- which would then be followed by a boom from the person doing the period), one for the colon (a bongo because it looks like a colon) and one for the dash. (I didn’t have anyone assigned to the semicolon. It was accomplished with one beat on the “colon bongo” followed by the comma sound.)

Pin or tape the poster board to the wall, or to some other vertical surface, so that all the students can see it and can follow along as the “king” or “queen” reads. Each student must be responsible to play his or her instrument at the appropriate moment.

### Activity #11 Have your students adapt their own Aesop fable for “performance”

For an advanced writing assignment, have each student take one of Aesop’s fables and write it in their own words, making sure to use each type of punctuation at least once.

<http://www.aesopfables.com/aesopsel.html>

### Activity #12 Watch a famous performance of punctuation

Victor Borge was a Danish-American comedian who played the piano and did comedy routines from the 1930s until the year 2000 (when he died at the age of 91). One of his famous routines was called “Phonetic Punctuation,” in which he made funny sounds with his mouth for each of the punctuation marks. There are several versions (different performances) posted on YouTube. Just use the key words “Victor Borge Phonetic Punctuation.”

## AESOP FABLES TO “PERFORM”

### The Ant and the Dove

One day, an ant went down to the river to get a drink and accidentally fell in. The swift river current swept the ant downstream.

“Help! Help!” shouted the ant. “I am going to drown!”

A dove on a nearby branch heard the ant screaming. It did two things that saved the ant’s life: it plucked a leaf from the branch, then it dropped the leaf into the river. The ant climbed onto the leaf and floated safely to the river bank.

Later in the day, a bird hunter came into the woods; he spotted the dove. The hunter got out his bow and arrow and was just about to shoot the dove when the ant ran over and stung him on the foot.

“Ow! What was that?” yelled the hunter, obviously in great pain. “I’m getting out of here-- it’s dangerous!”

The hunter left the forest and the dove was safe.

### The Ant and the Grasshopper

One summer day a grasshopper was sitting in a field enjoying the sunshine. He saw an ant going by, carrying a kernel of corn on its back.

“Why are you working on such a fine summer day?” asked the grasshopper. “Why don’t you just sit with me and enjoy this fine weather?”

The ant replied, “Some day I will be glad that I spent this day gathering food. Beware-- winter is coming!”

“Winter is a long time away, “ said the grasshopper. “I’ll worry about winter when it comes. Right now I just want to enjoy life!”

Soon summer was over; autumn came and the weather grew cold. The grasshopper began to have trouble finding enough food to eat. He happened to pass by the ant’s house, and peeked inside. The ant was enjoying a huge meal and had huge sacks of food piled all around him. The grasshopper then realized that it is wise to prepare for days of necessity.

### The Bee and Jupiter

One day a bee went to Mount Olympus to present a gift of honey to Jupiter, the king of the gods. Jupiter was very pleased with the honey.

“Ask of me anything you wish,” said Jupiter to the bee. “I will give you anything your heart desires as a reward for such delicious honey. What would you like?”

The bee could think only of protecting its precious honey. “I pray thee, O Jupiter,” said the bee, “to give me a stinger, so that I may kill anyone who approaches my honey to steal it.”

Jupiter was sad; this request displeased him, for he was fond of mortals and could imagine how many of them would be stung by the bee. However, he had to keep his promise.

“I will grant you the stinger,” said Jupiter, “but only at the peril of your own life! For when you use your stinger, it shall remain in the wound, thus causing mortal injury to your body. Be warned-- when you sting, you die!”

Hopefully, the bee learned this lesson: your evil wishes may eventually cause harm to you!

## The Cat and Venus

A cat fell in love with a handsome young man and asked Venus to change her shape into a human so she could marry him. Venus obliged, and changed the cat into a beautiful woman. When the young man saw her, he fell in love immediately.

The young man exclaimed, "Wow! You are the most beautiful woman I've ever met! Will you marry me?"

The cat, now a woman, consented, of course, and the two were married. One evening while they were sitting by the fire, a mouse ran across the floor. The woman jumped up and ran after the mouse. When the mouse disappeared into a hole in the wall, the woman sat next to the hole all night waiting for the mouse to come out-- she stared at the hole with the intensity of a cat. The young man was horrified at this strange behavior.

"Honey, stop sitting by the mouse hole-- it's time for bed!" pleaded the young man.

Venus was watching this whole scene, and she could see that the cat, though it looked like a woman, was still a cat inside. Venus knew this had been a bad idea and she changed the woman back into a cat.

This story teaches us a lesson: we will always be what we were created to be.

## The Crow and the Pitcher

One day a very thirsty crow came across a pitcher sitting by the side of the road. The pitcher had a little bit of water in the bottom of it-- enough water to quench the crow's thirst. The problem was that the pitcher was very tall and very narrow; it was not possible for the crow to get down to the water. The crow was so very, very thirsty that it had to think of a way to get that water.

"I will get that water!" thought the crow. "But how can I reach it? Oh, if only the water would come up to me!?"

Then, suddenly, the crow began collecting pebbles and dropping them into the pitcher, one by one. As the pebbles dropped down, the water level began to come up. Finally, the water level reached the top and the crow could drink the water.

This story illustrates the following principle: necessity is the mother of invention.

## The Hare and the Tortoise

One day, a hare began boasting in front of all the other animals. "I am faster than any other animal in the forest. No one can beat me! Who is willing to race against me?"

A tortoise came up quietly behind him and said, "Hare, I challenge you to a race."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the hare. "That's a good joke! I could dance circles around you all the way! Very funny, Tortoise!"

"Save your boasting until you've won the race," said the tortoise.

Most of the animals in the forest showed up for the race; they could hardly believe the tortoise was foolish enough to race against the hare. The hare was out of sight a second after the race started. The tortoise began plodding along; he was slow but determined. Soon the hare stopped running-- he wasn't a bit worried about the race. He sat down in a comfortable patch of grass to wait for the turtle. While he was sitting there, he fell asleep. When he awoke, the tortoise was nowhere in sight. The hare decided to finish the race but when he got to the finish line and saw the tortoise crossing it ahead of him, he realized he had overslept. The tortoise had won the race! Hopefully, the hare learned this lesson: slow and steady can win the race!

## The Punctuation “Folk Tales”





## Punctuation Folk Tale #1

Once upon a time in a kingdom on one of the seven continents, there was a king named Tok-tok. Like most kings, he was very self-centered and thought more of himself than anyone else. But it was in his best interest to keep his kingdom running smoothly, so one day he called in his royal scribes and asked them to bring out the official scrolls in which were written the records of all the goings-on in the kingdom during the past year. The king began to read from the scrolls:

“On the first day of the tenth year of the king’s reign tribute was brought in the king of the east sent many camels horses cows and donkeys in the following days two loads of silver were put in the royal treasury on top of the throne there was installed a new decoration when the men of the west came they traded rare furs for silver following after the customs the royal subjects brought gold rain poured down during the festival in the middle of the market square...”

“This is difficult to understand,” said the king. “It sounds like the silver from the treasury was put on top of the throne, and it rained gold during the festival. That can’t be right.”

The scribes answered the king, “Your royal highness, this heavy-duty scroll paper is very costly, so we thought you would be pleased that we have conserved it so well. We have set the words side by side so as not to waste even the tiniest space on a page.”

The king was more puzzled than angry. “But what good is saving space if I can’t understand what the words mean?”

The scribes had a ready answer. “O king, you needn’t worry. Any time you need to know what they mean, you can just ask us. We are always here to serve you.”

“Maybe,” replied King Tok-tok, “but what if I want to read it myself, without any help?”

“Why would his royal highness want to do that?” asked the scribes.

“Well... maybe I would want to read very late at night after you all were in bed. And what about after you are gone? Will the next scribes be able to read your writing?”

“Your highness is very wise,” said the scribes, “we will bring this matter up at our next council meeting.”

“Why don’t you just think of a solution right now?” said the king. “Better yet, I’ll think of a solution! Hmmm..... I know! Why don’t you put in some little marks that tell the reader when you’ve finished one thought and are about to go on to another one? It could be just a little tiny mark, a little dot that wouldn’t take up much space at all. It wouldn’t waste any paper.”

The scribes had no choice but to admit that the king did have a good idea. They set to work at once putting little dots at the end of each idea.

“Now, “ said the king, “let’s start over. I’ll pause every time I come to a dot. ‘On the first day of the tenth year of the king’s reign, tribute was brought. *(pause)* The king of the east sent many camels, horses, cows, and donkeys. *(pause)* In the following days, two loads of silver were put into the royal treasury.’ *(pause)* You see? That’s much better! ‘On top of the throne there was installed a new decoration. *(pause)* When the men of the west came they traded rare furs for silver. *(pause)* Following after the customs, the royal subjects brought gold. *(pause)* Rain poured down during the festival.’ Aha! I knew it hadn’t rained gold! Wonderful weather that would be, of course, but I don’t remember that happening recently. You see, we’ve cleared up some terrible misconceptions. I’ll go on. ‘In the middle of the market square

was installed a new fountain. *(pause)* The king said where should the fountain be placed. *(pause)* Across from the tower the builder said, 'Wait a minute-- that didn't sound quite right. Shouldn't it sound like I asked a question?'

The scribes agreed. "Yes, you did ask that question. We remember you asking it."

"Well, why don't you think of another mark you could add to the dot so I know to read it likes it's a question?"

"We'll have the artisans begin thinking of designs right away. Perhaps in a month or..."

"We don't need the artists for this! Just make a little squiggle or something."

"Like this?" said one of the scribes as he made a curly shape in the air with his pen.

"That'll do nicely," said the king. "And while you're at it, why don't you think of some little marks you can use in the middle of a thought-- before you get to the end. You might want to have the reader pause, without stopping him altogether. But they can all be very tiny marks. I do appreciate your efforts to prevent waste."

"The king's word is our command. We shall put many such tiny marks onto the scrolls so that the king may have the pleasure of reading them without confusion."

"Good. Now on to other things. Bring in the mathematicians."

And so from that time on, the official scrolls of the kingdom could be read by anyone. Visiting scribes from other kingdoms began learning about these little marks, and soon all the kingdoms of the entire unspecified continent were using these little marks in their writing. This was the dawning of a new era-- the Age of... Punctuation!

## Punctuation Folk Tale #2

Once upon another time in King Tok-tok's kingdom, the king began to wish that his everyday life was more grand. Sure, everything in his palace was covered with gold and his servants bowed as they came and went, but he still dreamed of something more. Like most kings, King Tok-tok thought everything he said was brilliant and deserved the undivided attention of all his subjects. One day he hit upon what he thought was a fantastic idea. He announced his idea to his royal council.

"From now on," said the king, "I declare that no one may speak while I am speaking. Not even a whisper. You shall know when I am about to speak because it will be announced by my heralds. I shall have two heralds by my side at all times-- one to announce when I am about to speak, and one to announce when I have finished. Most kings have trumpeting heralds, but I shall be different-- my heralds shall have cymbals!"

The next day when the king came out to greet his subjects, he had two heralds, one on each side of him, each carrying a set of cymbals. He pointed to the herald on his right and the herald gave his cymbals a huge crash.

CLASH!

"My loyal subjects," said the king, "my entire kingdom shall go silent when I speak. You shall know when I am about to speak when you hear the crash of the cymbals. When I am finished, you shall hear another cymbal."

CLASH!

"Wait a minute-- that's not grand enough. Give me two clashes. I want two clashes."

CLASH CLASH "That's better. Now let's try this out. Royal Treasurer, how many bags of silver are still in the treasury?" CLASH CLASH

"Seventy-six, your highness."

CLASH CLASH "That's good news. I thought we only had sixty-something. How is the tax collecting going?" CLASH CLASH

"Very well, your highness," said the treasurer.

CLASH CLASH I shall be retiring to my chambers now. CLASH CLASH

Back in his royal council chambers, King Tok-tok called in his royal scribes.

CLASH CLASH "Scribes, I demand that in our royal records, my words be given proper respect. I want you to put special symbols around my words when you write them down. CLASH CLASH.

"You mean symbols S-Y-M-B-O-L-S to represent cymbals C-Y-M-B-A-L-S?" said one of the scribes.

CLASH CLASH "Exactly," CLASH CLASH said the king.

"We will begin working on it right away, your majesty," said the scribe.

The next day, two important things happened. First, the scribes discovered a clever way to put the king's cymbals C-Y-M-B-A-L-S onto paper as symbols S-Y-M-B-O-L-S. They used two tiny curvy lines right before and after everything the king said. The second important event was that the king's wife, Queen Kwotee, decided that since she was the second-most-important person in the kingdom, she deserved to have her speeches announced as well. However, she knew that she couldn't have cymbals C-Y-M-B-A-L-S as loud as the king's.

(clash, clash) “No one is allowed to speak while I am speaking, either,” (clash, clash) said Queen Kwotee. (clash, clash) And by the way, isn’t my new magenta gown just gorgeous?” (clash, clash)

Now Queen Kwotee was a trend-setter in the kingdom. Whatever Queen Kwotee wore or did or said was admired and imitated by all the citizens, especially the women, of course. Soon all the women were buying magenta fabric to make their own magenta gowns. Her cymbals did not go unnoticed, either. Not only were women buying magenta fabric, they were also trying to figure out a way to imitate the queen’s new quirk without posing any threat to her royal authority. Artisans saw a new market opening up and they began making very small cymbals, so small that you could wear them on two fingers of one hand. They called their new product “quotes” after Queen Kwotee, of course. Soon almost all the women of the kingdom were heralding their own words with their finger quotes. Market day became very interesting.

(ding ding) “Fresh bread for sale! Fresh bread!” (ding ding)

(ding ding) “I’ll take two loaves.” (ding ding)

(ding ding) “Woven rugs, two for the price of one!” (ding ding)

(ding ding) “Vegetables fresh from the fields!” (ding ding)

(ding ding) “I’ll take three bunches of asparagus!” (ding ding)

Back in the royal residence, King Tok-tok still wasn’t satisfied with the royal scribes. CLASH CLASH “It’s still not good enough,” CLASH CLASH said the king. CLASH CLASH “I want more respect in royal records. From now on, when you write down my words, not only will you put in those cymbal symbols, but you will also start on a new line. I don’t anyone else to be on my line.” CLASH CLASH

“But your majesty, that will waste paper!”

CLASH CLASH “That’s okay, because I discovered that we have seventy-six bags of silver instead of sixty-something. We’ll budget those extra bags to the extra paper.” CLASH CLASH

Well, of course, when Queen Kwotee found out that her husband not only got special marks around his words but that he also got to have his own lines in the official court history records, she wanted the same. She went to the scribes and demanded that she, also, be given her own lines when her words were recorded.

It wasn’t long before other court officials were coming to the scribes and offering all sorts of bribes to have their own lines, as well. Finally the scribes got fed up.

“That’s it!” they said. “From now on, everyone will have their own lines. Every single time we record what someone said, we’ll just start a new line.”

And thus began a new tradition that carries on to this day. So when you write down what people say, don’t forget to do what the scribes did, and go to a new line each and every time someone new starts to speak!

### Punctuation Folk Tale #3

Once upon yet another time in King Tok-tok's kingdom, the king's royal scribes decided that putting punctuation dots in their manuscripts was not only helpful, but a lot of fun. They found all sorts of ways to use the little curvy marks they now called commas. (And Prince Komma was flattered to have something so important named after him.) Then the scribes went beyond the king's suggestions and started inventing marks of their own.

"I have just invented a new mark," said one of the scribes one day. "This mark is for when you want to announce something in your sentence, especially if what you are announcing is a list of things. For example, if I say, 'The king of the east brought the following gifts: donkeys, sheep, camels and oxen.' Right after the words 'gifts,' I put two little dots, one on top of the other."

"Like two balls in a stack?" asked another scribe, not sure he had understood.

"No, not touching each other," said the first scribe. "The upper dot doesn't touch the lower one. If they touched, they might look too much like a tiny snowman. The top dot sort of floats over the lower one."

"Okay, I like it," said the second scribe. "Let's see if I can use your mark correctly. Hmm... How about this sentence. The king was guilty of two things (dot, dot): greed and pride."

All the scribes in the room gasped and dropped their pens. "What did you say?" said the head scribe to the one who had uttered this dangerous sentence.

The second scribe explained. "I had just come to this place in the manuscript where the king of the east had come for a visit and made unreasonable demands. It was that king I was referring to, of course."

All the scribes breathed a sigh of relief and picked up their pens. A third scribe spoke up. "Here's a new mark I've invented. Sometimes when I am putting in those little dots that separate one idea from the next, I come across two thoughts that are so similar that I am tempted not to put in a dot at all. The two ideas are so connected that it almost doesn't seem fair to separate them. But a comma doesn't seem right, either. So I started putting a dot and a comma together because I want more than a comma pause, but less than a dot stop. So I get something in the middle. For example, I might use it between these two ideas. 'The bread was five days old; it was hard as a rock.' "

"But couldn't you just use the word 'and' between those ideas?" asked a fourth scribe. "The bread was five days old AND it was hard as a rock."

"Yes, but I like to have options," said the third scribe. "I'm not one for using too many 'ands.' I like my dramatic dot-comma pause better. But I must warn all of you-- you can't use this new mark with partial ideas. It only goes between two complete ideas."

"I don't know," said the head scribe. "It doesn't sound like a mark that I, personally, will use very much. I think I'd rather have a more all-purpose kind of mark that could be used for all kinds of strange and unusual connections."

"I've come up with exactly that," piped up a fifth scribe. "I've invented a real sizzler! It's a straight line stretching between two words, like a rope stretched tightly between two buildings. You can use it to connect two complete ideas, or a complete idea and a partial idea, or even one or two words."

“That sounds useful,” said the head scribe. “Let me try it out.”

The fifth scribe handed a manuscript to the head scribe. “Here, you can read these out loud. Just make a sweeping gesture with your arm and say the sound “ffsh” when you come to my new mark.”

“Sounds like a very dramatic mark,” said the head scribe.

“Yes,” said the fifth scribe. “It’s kind of a dramatic pause, like you’re holding your breath in suspense for just a fraction of an instant. You can make it sound very theatrical. Go ahead and try it.”

“Ahem,” said the head scribe, starting to read. “ ‘Gold rain poured down--” ffsh”-- enough gold to fill the pockets of every citizen in the kingdom!’ Wait a minute. I thought we already decided that gold rain had NOT poured down during the festival.”

“I know,” said the fifth scribe. “But gold rain sounds like so much fun. Keep reading -- ffsh-- there’s more!”

The head scribe continued. “ ‘Gold-- (ffsh)-- liquid gold-- (ffsh)-- began to pour out of everyone’s faucets.’ Couldn’t you have just used a comma there?”

“Yes, but I don’t think commas are much fun. I like this new mark better.”

“What do you call this new mark?” asked the head scribe.

“I don’t have a name for it yet,” said the fifth scribe. “Does anyone have any suggestions?”

“It needs a name that sounds fast and exciting,” said a scribe. “What about DASH?”

“Works for me,” said the fifth scribe.

And so this busy day drew to a close. Three new punctuation marks were ready for use in the royal scrolls! They all hoped the king would be pleased.

## **Punctuation Folk Tale #4**

King Tok-tok loved to be entertained. His subjects would put on plays and concerts and elaborate sporting events. He began to notice, however, that it seemed always to be the same people running the entertainment. He thought this wasn't quite fair-- the responsibility should be shared around a bit. So he decided that all his subjects should take turns providing the daily entertainment. It wasn't long until the responsibility came to rest on the shoulders of his scribes.

The scribes panicked. They were great at grammar and punctuation but when it came to entertainment, they weren't the most interesting performers in the kingdom, to put it mildly. They held an emergency meeting one day in the scriptorium.

The head scribe announced, "The king has commanded that we entertain him." And then in a terrified voice he added, "Does anyone have any ideas?"

Fortunately, one of the younger scribes had not been in the scriptorium long enough to have forgotten his childhood creativity. "I have an idea," he said. "You know how the king has recently taken such an interest in the marking of our official scrolls with all kinds of dots and dashes to make them more readable. Why don't we perform some stories that use all those marks? We could use a special sound for each mark. Each scribe could play a punctuation mark as the story is read."

The head scribe thought it was a brilliant idea. "That's it! Even if it's not thrilling entertainment, it certainly will be something new. The king loves to see and hear new things."

So it was agreed. The scribes assigned sounds and instruments to each mark. Then they found some very old stories that were short, funny, and had a nice moral ending. The king would like these stories.

Then another scribe spoke up. "Why don't we ask the king and the queen if they would like to participate in our story? Perhaps they could take turns being the reader?"

"Marvelous idea!" said the head scribe. "Now I am sure we'll be a success. Someone go to the king and tell him we are ready!"

