

Punctuation

"For young writers trying to separate sentences and phrases"

Poems Written for Children

English

Entry to the Palanca Awards 2012

Punctuation

“For young writers trying to separate sentences and phrases”

Contents

If the Comma Were a Color

If the Exclamation Point Were a Color

The Hyphen Disappears

The Atmark

The Uses of the Ellipsis

Greedy Punctuation I and II

The Parenthesis (Is Blue)

If a Colon Were a Color

The Parenthesis Twins

If the Period Were a Color

If the Question Mark Were a Color

The Gallant Punctuation

If the Asterisk Were a Color

The Ampersand

Quotation Marks

If the Comma Were a Color

If the comma were a color,

I bet it would be green

Like growing grass,

Or sprouting leaves,

Or rolling hills,

Or the Sierra Madre

Mountain range,

Because commas

Make sentences grow,

And grow,

And grow.

If the Exclamation Point Were a Color

If the exclamation point

Were a color, it would be red!

Blinking an alarm

Warning

Jumping up and down

Screaming, "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

And on red-lettered days

Sure enough, we could use

Some eager exclamation points—

Merry Christmas!

Happy New Year!

And, Happy Birthday to you!!!

The Hyphen Disappears

How sad

The way the hyphen

Is losing its job.

Fig-leaf, pot-belly, pigeon-hole

Have now become

Fig leaf

Pot belly, and

Pigeonhole.

What about tool-box

So-and-so

High-school

Wall-paper

Over-all?

The Atmark

When I see the atmark – the sign @,

I think of a rat

Tangled in its longish tail.

Never did I know others see

Much bigger animals than I.

They call the atmark, a monkey tail

Because they see a monkey

With its arm around its head;

And then, there are those who see

Slow, gray elephants, or at least

An elephant's trunk.

So don't be surprised when you hear

The Swedish call the atmark,

"Snabel-a."

They only mean to say

An "a" with a trunk.

The Uses of the Ellipsis

Among the uses of the ellipsis

Including a pause in speech...

An unfinished thought...

An admission of guilt...

An expression of irritation

Maybe shock, disgust, or dismay...

Trailing off into silence...

My favorite is the implication

Of an unstated alternative...

As when Count Dracula says,

"I never drink...

Wine."

Greedy Punctuation I

I am a greedy little punctuation

I like everything for myself

When letters go a-missing

You can be pretty sure

I've simply gobbled them up

"Cannot" becomes "can't"

As I snatch a "no" for myself

Even though I don't really need it.

Hey, look, I did it again!

I took an "o" from "do not"

Thinking that it was a donut.

Greedy punctuation II

I am a greedy little punctuation

Apostrophe is my name

Possession is my game

I like owning things

Keeping them as my property

But I help my friends, too

Alex wants a car?

I touch it and the car becomes

Alex's car!

Brenda wants a doll?

I give her... Brenda's doll

See how simply I do it

With my touch and an "s"?

If I make so many others own things

Maybe I'm not so greedy after all?

The Parenthesis (Is Blue)

If the brackets pairs
That are called parenthesis
Were a color
I suspect that they would be blue –
Soft as a whisper,
Or deep and dark
Like the hidden parts of the sea.
Because words enclosed
In parenthesis are like
Whispered explanations,
Additional details.
While sentences beside the parenthesis
Are complete on their own
Like people on the beach
(Framed by the sea and sky.)

If a Colon Were a Color

If a colon were a color
It definitely would be purple
To address royalty
And people in authority;
Not to mention the inevitable
Answer to the mystery.
Like magic, anything can follow
A colon: things, places, names,
Ideas, actions, descriptions, and so on
But only great men and women
Can be greeted by a colon
Like kings, and Her Majesty:
His Holiness:, Her Excellency:
Sir:, or Madam:, and, in anticipation,
(Or wise caution) for some great authority
Like a wizard with a purple cloak,
Or a purple fairy with a purplish wand,
We write with a colon to the unknown—
To whom it may concern:

The Parenthesis Twins

We are the parenthesis twins

(Fond of inserted information)

We speak in whispers, not loudly

Just explaining some things to ourselves.

We cup our hands like two brackets

When we softly say an afterthought

About statements that are complete

(Even without the parenthetical us).

If you want to know something more

Read the words we keep, and do not ignore

We are the parenthesis twins

The (extra) details neatly tacked in

Beside self-sufficient lines

Or statements (of complete thought).

If the Period Were a Color

If the smug period
That looks like a dot
Were a color,
It would be not fancy
But formal.
And black.
Like death.
Because it puts a stop
A shot of finality
To all kinds of statements —
Whether they be rumors,
Opinions, or facts.

If the Question Mark Were a Color

If the question mark

Were a color, it would be

A playful kind of orange

That makes you wonder –

Is it more red? Or more yellow?

Is it saffron? Or tangerine?

Carrot orange? Or pumpkin?

What kind of question mark is that?

What kind of question?

Because to ask a question

Is to be engaged in a puzzle,

A guessing game.

Is it true, or is it not?

The Gallant Punctuation

I am a gallant punctuation

In the sense that I am polite

I have elegant manners

Even courtly, you might say

I greet people formally in letters

So in my salutation I say,

Dear Mr. President:

Or else, Dear Sir or Madam:

I often introduce quotations

As when I report what was said

Here, for example, Jose Rizal, I quote:

“The youth is the hope of the fatherland.”

But most of all, I like introductions

Like announcing a list of items:

Ingredients: Flour, sugar, milk, and eggs

Things to do: Eat, sleep, and pray.

My elegant manners are theatrical

In play scripts, I follow the characters' names,

I introduce the lines that each actor says

Because I am a gallant punctuation.

If the Asterisk Were a Color

If the asterisk were a color

I'm pretty sure it would be yellow

Or glowing gold

That calls attention to itself

As if to say, "Hey, look at me!

I'm a star,

I'm a wildcard character!

I can:

* call out a footnote,

* denote pointers,

* strike out portions of a word,

* even become bullets

For things in a list."

The Ampersand

The ampersand – the sign & –

Is a curious mark

Some people believed it got its name

From one Andre-Marie Ampere,

Who used it as the conjunction “and”

Thus, you know, the name “Ampere’s ‘and’?”

And then some say it is a ligature

Of “e” and “t” in “et” –

Two letters conjoined like Siamese twins

& “et” is the Latin word for “and.”

Indeed, if you look closely at the ampersand

You can almost see the smooth curves of “e”

And the funny cross of the “t.”

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are

Two sets of apostrophe twins

Like bookends, they come before, and after

Words of dialogue and direct quotes

Instead of books.

They set off certain titles

Like songs and poems

Essays and short stories.

(But not books and movies

Or TV and radio programs –

For those you use italics!)

With other punctuation

The apostrophe twins become a mess:

Commas and periods, always inside

Semicolons and colons, always outside.

With question marks, exclamation marks, and dashes –

Well, that's another story

Inside, when they are part of the quotation;

Outside, when they are not.

“Do you understand?” I ask.

You exclaim, “I hate this poem called

“Quotation Marks”!”

Nothing follows.