



Finally, punctuation has its day!

BY NANCY KAFFER

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If you're passionate about the hyphen and enamored of the semi-colon, you'll be happy to learn that today is National Punctuation Day.

National Punctuation Day joined the ranks of holidays such as Talk Like A Pirate Day (Sept. 19), Monkey Day (Dec. 14) and National Tooth Fairy Day (Aug. 22) in 2003, when creator Jeff Rubin realized he'd reached his tolerance level for poorly used punctuation.

Tired of seeing errors on signs, in books and newspapers, Pinole, Calif., resident Rubin was often perplexed by the frequent misuse of even common punctuation marks.

"I don't know if it's ignorance, laziness or incompetence or what," he said. "I used to sit at the kitchen table with a red marking pen, read the paper and circle all the errors. By the time I was done, I'd look like I'd popped a vein. I'd be cursing, and my wife would be asking me not to use such language at the table ... so to save my marriage, I said, 'I have to find a more positive way to channel this frustration.'"

And channel he has.

You may not have heard of National Punctuation Day, but it's gaining some popularity - in recent years, Rubin has appeared in newspapers and on television and radio news shows across the country. The day appears in *Chase's Calendar of Events*, and Rubin's web site (www.nationalpunctuationday.com) features photos sent in by numerous readers of apostrophe abuse and misplaced commas, among other punctuating sins.

Rubin said he welcomes such photos.

"I invite all your readers to drive around Hattiesburg, take pictures of signs that are incorrectly punctuated or misspelled and e-mail them to me," he said.

On Friday, students in Lucia Davis' sixth-grade class at Hattiesburg's Thames Elementary School were studying the parts of speech and breaking down sentences' structures — including the use of appropriate punctuation marks.

Though basic punctuation is covered in the lower grades, sixth-graders will learn the use of advanced punctuation like the hyphen, the ellipsis and the semi-colon later in the year, Davis said.

Knowing how to punctuate a sentence, students agreed, is important.

"It helps you with grammar," said 11-year-old Mertis Washington, whose favorite punctuation mark is the dash. "And your ability to write in complete sentences."

Classmate Bruna Bezerra, 12, agreed.

"It helps people understand what you mean," she said.

Tevell Fair, 11, noted that incorrect punctuation could lead to a run-on sentence.

“A run-on sentence doesn’t sound right,” he said.

None of the students had heard of National Punctuation Day, but all seemed to think it was a fine idea.

“I think it could help people write correctly,” Bezerra said.

And that’s all Rubin is hoping for.

“I hope that people become a little more aware of what they put on paper, and how they write. Maybe re-read what they’ve written before they send it, especially with e-mails,” he said.

“For the kids, I believe that punctuation along with grammar and spelling contribute to good reading skills, and all the statistics I’ve seen indicate that kids who read well do better in school, get into better colleges, end up with better jobs and if you take that a step further, have more satisfying lives.

“I just hope to do my little part, rather than being a person who sits at the table and curses a lot.”