

Hey! When is ‘National Punctuation Day’? Soon.

By **DICK JOHNSON**

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MASON CITY — Back in the Dark Ages, one lucky freshman at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse attended an English composition class taught by the Original Mr. Olde School.

“Welcome to English composition,” he intoned. “I am here to flunk you.”

The heck of it was, he did indeed flunk some of us poor heathens.

This followed the Catholic School Experience, where you obeyed the rules or you got your knuckles knackled by a knun’s mighty ruler.

Actually, it was a good education. We learned the basics of the perplexing English language. And the teachers often read to us, which was sweet.

English is tricky, though.

Quick, spell the name of that big city in Ohio. Cinninnatti? Cincinati? Sinn City? Since Witty?

In winter, do you slide on a toboggan or a toboggan? Could you end up Boggled in Tobago?

And is it the Davis’ house, or the Davises house? Can we just call it the House o’ Davis?

Many of us have trouble with punctuation — particularly with the possessive case, says Jeff Rubin, of Pinole, Calif., who founded National Punctuation Day (the third-annual NPD is Sunday, Sept. 24).

See www.nationalpunctuationday.com for examples:

NO: Blackies Burgers and Chicken. YES: Blackie’s Burgers and Chicken.

NO: “The club will close it’s doors.” YES: “The club will close its doors.”

One of my favorite local examples is Menards. John Menard established the home furnishings business. That was John Menard’s business. So get an apostrophe, Menards!

“I guess people think the apostrophe doesn’t look good in the signage,” Rubin says, “so they’d rather be ignorant than correct.”

The ex-newspaper reporter and editor established NPD out of punctuation frustration and to save his marriage: His wife did not appreciate his cursing as he read the paper every day.

“I had to find another way to channel my anger,” he says, “so I founded a holiday.”

To teach good grammar to kids, Rubin started “Punctuation Playtime,” a fun developmental resource featuring onsite acting performances (see the Web site).

“I think if you can reach them early, you can make an impression,” he says.

Happily, he’s still married, and still bugged by lousy language lapses.

“It still annoys me,” Rubin says. “If it didn’t, I’d be worried. I’ll always care about this.”