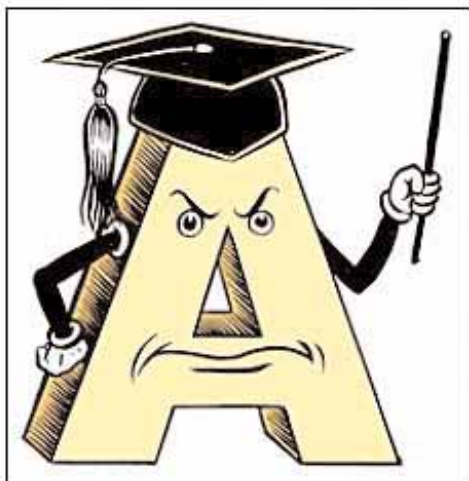


## National Embarrassment

By Jeffrey Barg



### National Embarrassment

Joke: A font walks into a bar. The bartender says, "Hey, we don't serve your type here," and he called the Serif.

The season of charity and kindness is upon us—when people the world 'round put aside their petty differences and come together in the spirit of unity and peace. You thought it was in December? You were wrong.

Because this week, Sept. 24, is the fifth annual National Punctuation Day, O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant about the wonders of punctuation!

"The first National Punctuation Day was a quiet affair," says Jeff Rubin, my sometimes-arch nemesis, more commonly known as National Punctuation Day founder Punctuation Man. "Now I'm being interviewed by major, major media people like you."

Punctuation Man and I have had our differences over time—he still hasn't dropped his sadly misguided pro-serial-comma crusade—but we put those differences (and commas) aside in the spirit of the season. "It has not been a great year," says Punctuation Man of the state of grammar since last year's punctuation celebration. "It's been a steady decline. I see mistakes now in almost every book I read. It's very discouraging." But, he says, there's a glimmer of hope coming from the most unlikely of places.

"Of all states, the Texas state school board voted to scrap 'whole language,'" Punctuation Man says. "Whole language is that system that has corrupted our young people's minds for the last 30 years. They teach children to write 'creatively,' to 'express themselves,'" paying no mind to spelling, grammar or punctuation. Those old chestnuts!

It's not hard to see how this can lead to illiterate Texans ... who then become president. But things are turning around. With any luck, by the time the next National Punctuation Day rolls around, we'll have a president who can actually speak the language.

But don't think that just getting George W. Bush out of there will do the trick. As Punctuation Man points out, until recently, the McCain campaign was selling on its official website—no joke—pens that read, "STUDENT'S FOR MCCAIN."

Just one, Senator? Betcha anything he's a student from Texas.  
Hear the entire Punctuation Man interview at [www.theangrygrammarians.com](http://www.theangrygrammarians.com)