

Punctuation gets high marks on holiday

By Catherine E. Sholchet, CNN

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Jeff Rubin and Norma Martinez-Rubin visit schoolchildren for a punctuation workshop.

(CNN) -- Appreciate the apostrophe, salute the semicolon and exalt the exclamation point Friday. It's National Punctuation Day!

The holiday started when Jeff Rubin, a newsletter publisher and former reporter, grew increasingly frustrated as he spotted errors in the newspaper.

"I would sit at the kitchen table with my red Sharpie ... screaming obscenities, which would upset my wife," says Rubin, 60. "She encouraged me to find another outlet for my aggravation."

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- National Punctuation Day is September 24
- A former newspaper reporter says he created the day to help educators
- People have celebrated by baking punctuation-shaped cookies and writing haiku

In 2004, he secured a listing for the day in the "Chase's Calendar of Events" reference book, and National Punctuation Day was born. This year marks its seventh official celebration.

"The first two years it was on August 22, because that's my birthday," Rubin says. "I figured if you're going to start a holiday, you should have it on a day you can remember."

But he moved the festivities to September 24 in 2006, placing it squarely in the school year and honoring the number of his favorite baseball hero, Willie Mays.

The day isn't just for people who get cranky over misplaced commas or hyperventilate over errant hyphens.

Rubin says he wanted to help educators remind students that punctuation still matters, even in an age of rapid-fire tweets and text messages.

"We are graduating children from high schools now who cannot read and cannot write," he says. "When these kids get out into the real world, they're going to be unemployable."

Rubin says thousands of parents, teachers, attorneys and human resources managers have signed up for his newsletter, "The Exclamation Point!"

He's not alone in his push for punctuation.

"'Let's eat Grandma!' or, 'Let's eat, Grandma!' Punctuation saves lives," proclaims a Facebook group that has more than 800,000 followers.

And in her book, "Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation," British author Lynne Truss describes a panda entering a cafe, eating a sandwich, firing a gun and walking out -- all because of a poorly punctuated wildlife manual.

Rubin, who lives in a suburb of San Francisco, California, also takes an irreverent approach. His website features photos of prominent punctuation gaffes and a recipe for meatloaf that can be sculpted to look like exclamation points and semicolons.

Last year, a baking contest inspired schools to celebrate with pepperoni bread shaped like parentheses and cookies shaped like question marks, Rubin says. This year, a teacher in Illinois has asked her students to write haiku.

For people outside the classroom, this Friday offers another excuse to practice proper punctuation: it's also Love Note Day.