

Semicolons in Wonderland: Pigs, Pepper, & Punctuation

Exploring Semicolon Rules and the Ways They Enhance Writing Style

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Grade Level	9th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	125
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	2-3 class periods
Course	A.P. Language and Composition, A.P. Literature and Composition, Composition, Creative Writing		

Essential Question

How does grammar enhance your writing? How can you use this punctuation in your own writing?

Summary

In this lesson, students explore the rules of semicolons and the ways they can be used to enhance their writing styles. They begin the lesson by identifying (non) examples of semicolon use to hypothesize about the grammatical rules being displayed. Using AI (Artificial Intelligence), students critique the AI text to confirm or complicate their previous hypothesis. Next, they extend their knowledge by looking at how semicolons are used to personalize one's writing style by reading an excerpt from Lewis Carroll's "The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland." To demonstrate their understanding, students write a narrative essay while using semicolons to enhance their own writing style.

Snapshot

Engage

Students identify examples and non-examples of semicolon usage.

Explore

Students examine and critique how AI uses semicolons in writing.

Explain

Students review and discuss the rules of semicolons through completing a worksheet.

Extend

Students read an excerpt from Lewis Caroll's *The Adventures of Alice In Wonderland* to examine semicolon use in fiction before writing a narrative essay incorporating semicolons to enhance their own writing style.

Evaluate

Students practice answering an ACT-style question about semicolons.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - English (6-12)

PUN 502: Recognize and correct inappropriate uses of colons and semicolons
PUN 604: Use a semicolon to link closely related independent clauses

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.5.W.11: Write using correct semicolon mechanics.

Attachments

- Adventures of Alice in Wonderland full chapter—Semicolons in Wonderland.pdf
- Excerpt from Alice in Wonderland -Pigs and Semicolons—Semicolons in Wonderland - Spanish.docx
- Excerpt from Alice in Wonderland -Pigs and Semicolons—Semicolons in Wonderland - Spanish.pdf
- Excerpt from Alice in Wonderland -Pigs and Semicolons—Semicolons in Wonderland.pdf
- Excerpt from Alice in Wonderland-Pigs and Semicolons-Semicolons in Wonderland.docx
- Lesson Slides—Semicolons in Wonderland.pptx
- This or That Key—Semicolons in Wonderland.docx
- This or That Key—Semicolons in Wonderland.pdf
- This or That—Semicolons in Wonderland - Spanish.docx
- This or That—Semicolons in Wonderland - Spanish.pdf
- This or That—Semicolons in Wonderland.docx
- This or That—Semicolons in Wonderland.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* full chapter (optional; attached)
- This or That handout (attached; one per student)
- Highlighters
- Pens/Pencils
- Notebook Paper
- Projector Access
- Internet Access
- Whiteboard Access
- iPads, Chromebooks, laptops, or other electronic devices
- Large Post-Its (optional)
- Chart Markers (optional)
- Dry Erase Markers (optional)

15 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to facilitate the lesson. Review the title slide, lesson objectives, and essential question on **slides 2-4** in as much detail as you feel necessary.

Transition to **slide 5** to review the Example/Non-Example strategy.

Explain to students that they will view several sentences using semicolons correctly and incorrectly and that they will need to identify them as either "Yes" for correct examples or "No" for non-examples. Transition to **slide 6** and allow students time to guess. Then reveal **slide 7** and facilitate a brief discussion about what makes it a "Yes" or a "No." Consider using the following questions:

- Why do you think this is an example/non-example?
- What do you notice about the sentence?
- Are these two complete thoughts?
- Could other punctuation be used in place of the semicolon?
- Would it be better to use a coordinating conjunction and/or a comma?
- Does the semicolon make it easier to read or harder?

Repeat the process for **slides 8-23** asking if the sentence is a "Yes" example or "No" non-example and then discussing why or why not.

Teacher's Note: Optional Movement

When facilitating the Example/Non-Example strategy, instead of having students remain seated and make a guess, they can move to one side of the room for either "yes or no." After they move, they can discuss with their group why they chose that answer. Follow the rest of the instructions as normal.

15 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 24** and introduce the Critique the Bot strategy, which has students practice giving peer review to a bot while also identifying semicolon usage. Have students work individually or with a partner. Move to **slide 25** and invite students to use an electronic device (iPads, Chromebooks, cell phones) and go to the Chat GPT website: https://chat.openai.com/ or other AI chatbot platform. Next, instruct students to type in the following prompt:

Create a paragraph about _____ that uses semicolons.

They can choose from the topics that are listed on the slide or an appropriate topic of their choosing.

Once they have their paragraph, ask them to make observations about how the semicolons are used. Consider using the guided questions previously mentioned in the Engage portion.

Transition to **slide 26,** and as a class, discuss what students noticed using the guiding questions on the slide; then instruct students to create a list of what they think the semicolons rules are. Write the rules on the whiteboard or large post-it, so it can be viewed by the entire class.

Also, use this as an opportunity to discuss the flaws in AI (artificial intelligence). Move to **slide 27** and facilitate a discussion on the efficacy of AI using some of the guiding questions below and on the slide.

- Did the ChatGPT paragraph use semicolons correctly?
- Were the way semicolons used similar to how they were used in the examples we previously reviewed?
- Are the semicolons used by the chatbot similar to some of the examples we had looked at earlier?

20 minutes

Explain

Move to **slide 28** and review the semicolon rules. Facilitate a brief classroom discussion using the following guided questions:

- Were any of the rules you previously guessed correct?
- After looking at the actual rules, what questions do you have?
- Are there words or terms in the semicolons rules that are new or unfamiliar?

Next, transition to **slide 29** and distribute the attached **This or That** handout to each student and explain the directions on the handout. Then, instruct students to work with partner or by themselves to complete the handout.

Allot 10-12 minutes for students to complete the handout or adjust time as needed.

Move to **slide 30** and review the worksheet as a class while facilitating a brief discussion using the following guiding questions:

- Which rule is most confusing to understand?
- Which rule is easiest to understand?
- What rules are we still questioning?

Teacher's Note: Hidden Slides

If students are unfamiliar with conjunctive adverbs or transitional expressions, take time to review what these are and what they can look like. Use hidden **slides 31-34** to review these terms in as much detail as you feel necessary. Note that this review will add more time to this part of the lesson.

70 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 35** and distribute the attached **Pigs and Semicolons excerpt** handout and one highlighter to each student. Consider reading the passage aloud so that students can hear the pauses and inflections that semicolons can cause in a text; however, use whatever classroom norm you use for reading a text. As students read the text, have them highlight where semicolons are used. Have students pause at the Cheshire Cat icon (seen below) and use the Stop and Jot strategy to allow students time to reflect on how semicolons are being used before proceeding further with the text.



After reading the passage, transition to **slide 36**. Invite students to look at how the semicolons are used and facilitate a brief discussion using the following guiding questions:

- What rules are the semicolons following?
- How does the use of semicolons affect the style of the text? What about the readability or rhythm?
- If the semicolon were replaced with a conjunction/comma/period, how would it affect the readability of rhythm of the text?
- What was the author trying to accomplish by using semicolons instead of other forms of punctuation?

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Conversation

Make sure students understand that in fiction some of the grammar rules are bent to the will or intent of the author. For example, in *Alice in Wonderland,* we see in paragraph three how Carroll uses a semicolon to keep the scene's action constant within the sentence: "Even the Duchess sneezed occasionally; and as for the baby, it was sneezing and howling alternately without a moment's pause." It seems as if Carroll is using the semicolon rule of connecting two independent thoughts; and in doing so, there is a connection that the Duchess and baby characters are thought of as one unit, while the cook and Alice are thought of as others. Semicolons are used to portray visually and phonetically the chaos of the kitchen scene. Since the story is meant to be a dream, Carroll uses punctuation to present us a back-and-forth controlled chaos from each character's perspective. Explain to students that when teachers talk about voice and style of a text, the use of punctuation may be part of what they are referring to.

Transition to **slide 37** and review the directions for the writing assignment. Invite students to take out a piece of paper and write a 5-paragraph narrative essay describing a memory where they cooked or watched someone cook their favorite dish. Encourage them to incorporate semicolons in their writing. Explain that they should attempt to have at least one example for each rule.

If students are completing the assignment in class, they should receive no more than one full class period to write their essay. However, consider adjusting the parameters of this assignment based on your students' level of understanding and how much time they will be given to complete the task.

5 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 38** and review the ACT question. Instruct students to use the same sheet of notebook paper used for their essay to answer the question. Encourage them to use the This or That handout to review the rules. Allow 1-2 minutes for students to answer the question; mention to students that during the ACT, they will only have one minute per question to answer the 75 questions for the English subject test or else they will not be able to finish the section. Start the timer provided on the slide and let students work. Next, move to **slide 39** and facilitate a brief discussion about what the correct answer is and which rule it is following.

Have students submit their essay for a grade at the end of the period.

Resources

- Carroll, L. (1869). Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. [Excerpt]. MacMillan and Co. http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/590306858.pdf
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Critique the bot. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/3491
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Examples and non-examples. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/163
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Stop and jot. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f5077921