

Why Pause? Exploring the Power of Commas

Comma Usage

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Grade Level	7th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	90-125 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	3-4
Course	A.P. Language and Composition		

Essential Question

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

Summary

This lesson on comma usage focuses on equipping students with a solid understanding of comma rules and their practical application in writing. Through interactive activities and examples, students will learn how to use commas to separate items in a list, set off introductory elements, join independent clauses, and indicate nonessential information. Guided practice exercises and group discussions will reinforce comprehension of comma rules, including the Oxford comma and comma splice. Hands-on activities and peer editing sessions will provide opportunities for students to apply comma rules to real-world writing scenarios, fostering confidence and proficiency. By the end of the lesson, students will have gained the skills to incorporate commas effectively into their writing, enhancing clarity and coherence while avoiding common errors.

Snapshot

Engage

Students review comma usage and influence with the strategy Grammatically Correct.

Explore

Students analyze comma usage and intent as they investigate a text through Why-Lighting and develop rules based on their observations.

Explain

Students will compare their observations to the comma rules using I Notice/I Wonder.

Extend

Students create a short story using commas in their text/dialogue.

Evaluate

Students answer lesson compatible ACT questions.

Standards

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

PUN 201: Delete commas that create basic sense problems (e.g., between verb and direct object)
PUN 301: Delete commas that markedly disturb sentence flow (e.g., between modifier and modified element)
PUN 302: Use appropriate punctuation in straightforward situations (e.g., simple items in a series)
PUN 404: Use commas to set off simple parenthetical elements
PUN 601: Use commas to avoid ambiguity when the syntax or language is sophisticated (e.g., to set off a complex series of items)

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.5.W.6: Write using correct comma mechanics.

Attachments

- BBQ Passage—Why Pause - Spanish.docx
- BBQ Passage—Why Pause - Spanish.pdf
- BBQ Passage—Why Pause.docx
- BBQ Passage—Why Pause.pdf
- Cooking Hacks Answer Key—Why Pause.docx
- Cooking Hacks Answer Key—Why Pause.pdf
- Cooking Hacks—Why Pause - Spanish.docx
- Cooking Hacks—Why Pause - Spanish.pdf
- Cooking Hacks—Why Pause.docx
- Cooking Hacks—Why Pause.pdf
- Grammatically Correct Cards—Why Pause - Spanish.docx
- Grammatically Correct Cards—Why Pause - Spanish.pdf
- Grammatically Correct Cards—Why Pause.docx
- Grammatically Correct Cards—Why Pause.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Why Pause.pptx
- What Is a Comma—Why Pause - Spanish.docx
- What Is a Comma—Why Pause - Spanish.pdf
- What Is a Comma—Why Pause.docx
- What Is a Comma—Why Pause.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides
- Pen/Pencil
- Computer
- Highlighters (optional)
- Grammatically Correct Cards handout (attached; class set)
- Cooking Hacks handout (attached; one per student)
- Cooking Hacks Answer Key handout (attached; teacher copy)
- What is a Comma handout (attached; one per student)
- Sandwiched in Between handout (optional; attached; one per student)
- BBQ Passage handout (attached; one per student)

15 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note

We recommend teaching the comma introductory lesson, "Use Your Noodle", prior to this more advanced comma lesson.

Teacher's Note

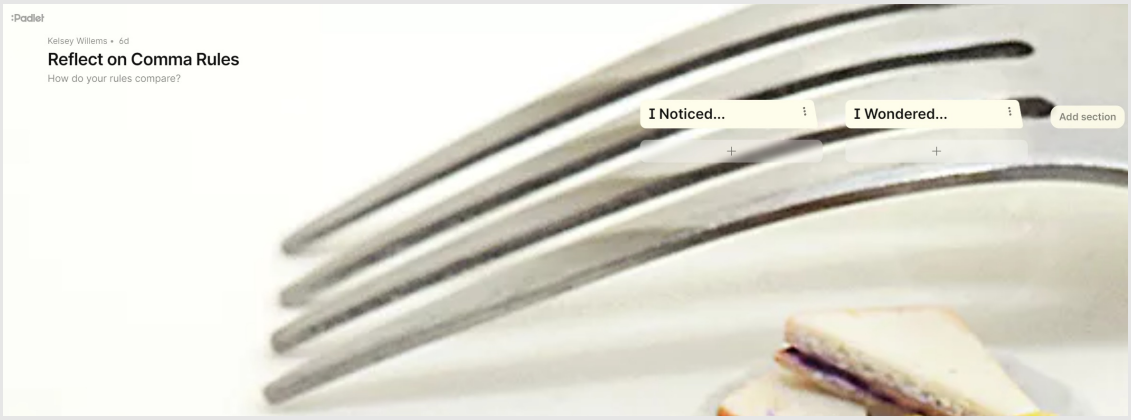
Prior to teaching this lesson, set up a Padlet utilizing one of the following options:

Padlet: Option 1 - Copy Existing

1. Go to padlet.com.
2. Log in to or create a Padlet account.
3. Select the "Reflect on Comma Rules" link.
4. Select "Remake" (second icon on right-hand toolbar) to create a copy of this Padlet on your own account.
5. If you are keeping the same Padlet for all of your class sections, be sure to go to "Settings" > "Layout" > "Sort." Then, under the header "Date Published," select "Newest to Oldest" so that you can see the current class's submissions first.
6. Once you have made all of your selections and set up your Padlet, like the one shown below, click the "Open share settings" arrow. (*Note*: If you are making a new Padlet for each class then repeat step 4 and choose whatever "Layout" setting you want).
7. Click "Get QR code," and either copy the image of the QR code or click "DOWNLOAD."
8. Put your QR code on **slide 18**.

Padlet: Option 2 - Make Your Own

1. Go to padlet.com.
2. Log in to or create a Padlet account.
3. Create a Padlet using the template below. Consider using the "Wall with Sections" format and add the labels as column headings.
4. Repeat steps 5-8 above if using one Padlet for multiple classes.



Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to facilitate the lesson. Begin by displaying **slides 2-4** to present the title, essential questions, and the learning objectives in as much detail as needed.

Distribute the attached **Cooking Hacks** handout to every student. Display **slide 5** and invite students to listen and follow along as you read the text through one time. Transition to **slide 6** and introduce students to the instructional strategy Grammatically Correct to review what students already know about comma rules. Next, pass out one Grammatically Correct card to each student which will assign them a Comma Role (FANBOY, INTRO, or OXFORD). Each card provides information about a comma rule found in the passage you just read as a class. Then, have them reread and reflect on how their comma role is being used and what influence it has over the entire text. Provide a few minutes for students to read their description and develop their character as if they were that comma. Students should assume the role described on their card and talk to each other about how they influenced the text.

Have students get up and move around the classroom to "mingle." Display **slide 7**; review the instructions and start the K20 10 Minute timer. Periodically (we suggest every 2-3 minutes), have students rearrange and talk to a new group of students. Repeat this process until students have had a chance to mingle for ten minutes.

Have students return to their seats and transition to **slide 8** and review the different commas being used (see "speaker notes" at the bottom of the slide for color coding key and the attached **Cooking Hacks Answer Key** handout as an additional reference). Ask for volunteers to share some ways in which commas influenced the purpose of the text. Have a brief class discussion about how the text may be different if there were no commas or another form of punctuation was used. This can be used as an informal formative assessment to address any reteaching needs you may discover.

Teacher's Note: More Scaffolding

If your students need more support for these three comma rules, unhide **slide 9** and review the rules in more detail. Additionally, consider adding your own examples to the slide.

30 minutes

Explore

Transition to **slide 10** and have students access Commonlit.org and search for the short story, "Sandwiched in Between" (or you can assign it on Google Classroom). Students may need to create an account, but it's free.

Teacher's Note: CommonLit Advice and Optional Paper Version

We highly recommend using CommonLit as a way for students to practice annotating online which is seen in high-stakes testing. Students can highlight the text online in CommonLit or take notes on paper as they read. CommonLit also offers the option of playing the story aloud and translating. For more information on building classes and using CommonLit, refer to the **CommonLit Basics: Overview of CommonLit for Teachers**

However, you can print off the pdf version of the story from the website and have students highlight manually instead.

Next, display **slide 11** and introduce the strategy Why-Lighting and ask students to highlight every instance of comma usage using the annotation tool as the class reads the story together. We suggest sharing the story on your screen and model using the annotation tool highlighting the first comma together. Then, read the story as a class. Afterwards, explain to students that they will discuss with a partner what ways the author uses commas and why.

Transition to **slide 12** and have students turn over their Cooking Hacks handout to the side entitled "Your Comma Rules." Have partners create at least three of their own rules for commas based on their observations from the story. Explain that they should include the rule with a thorough description and justification. These rules should be different from the ones seen with the previous reading.

20 minutes

Explain

Pass out a copy of the attached **What is a Comma** handout to every student. Transition through **slides 13-16** and review the rules and other grammar vocabulary in as much detail as you think necessary to clear up any further misconceptions. Have students highlight similarities and/or differences between their rules and the rules on the handout.

Move to **slide 17**. Using the Padlet you created (see Teacher's Note in Engage) and the I Notice, I Wonder strategy, explain to students that they should reflect on what they noticed about the rules on the handout vs. their own rules as well as any questions. Display **slide 18** and have students access the Padlet with either the QR code or typing in the URL. After about five minutes, have the Padlet on your screen and ask for volunteers to share out what they wrote or select a few from the Padlet to read aloud and discuss with the class.

Teacher's Note: Tech Integrated Strategy Support

This lesson uses the Tech Integrated Strategy I Notice, I Wonder with Padlet. While the strategy and tool have been individually linked in the main narrative, more information on how to combine the two can be found at the above link. A Tech Integrated Strategy is another set of resources we provide at the K20 Center that provides tutorials and scenarios for classroom use of some of our popular Instructional Strategies and Tech Tool cards.

40 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 19**. Have students use the Book Creator tech tool by going to bookcreator.com, create a free account, then create a short story about a time where someone is invited to a family meal that might be different from what they are used to at home. The story can be factual or fictional. If time allows, encourage students to find images or create their own illustrations to add to their stories using Book Creator's tools or scanning their own drawings. Using the Comma Rules handout instruct students to include commas from rules 5-8. Instruct students to then highlight the commas they used from the comma rules 5-8 based on this legend:

#5-Red

#6-Blue

#7-Green

#8-Purple

Once the students are finished with their stories, have them share the story with you for assessment. Students can share through Google classroom or save as a PDF file and upload to your LMS. If you use Google classroom, you could essentially make a digital library for your class sharing it with students to showcase their work.

Teacher's Note: Using Book Creator

In Book Creator, open the menu (hamburger icon) to reveal the Teacher Dashboard. There you will find innovative video instructions for teachers to better help students navigate the Book Creator site on the LEARN tab. For example, there is a video called "Creating Books." Check out the "Creating Books" article to learn about the speech to text option, the translation option, adding photos and videos, and much more.

20 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 20**. Pass out the attached **BBQ Passage** handout and instruct students to read the passage independently and answer the questions. Give students approximately nine minutes to complete this task. This timing will support pacing in preparation for the real ACT test day. Use the K20 Center Timer on the slide and allow students to work silently. When the timer goes off, tell students to put their pencils down and stop working even if they haven't finished answering all the questions.

Afterwards, use **slides 21-22** to facilitate class discussion about the correct answers and their experience. Ask the students to identify which of the comma rules apply to each answer. Talk about what struggles students had, what was easy, what they did not know at all. Ask them to reflect silently on what they personally need to work on and how they think they can accomplish it.

Teacher's Note: ACT Prep in Action

To get any true benefit from test prep, teachers should not only practice ACT style questions in class but also review the answers and explain the choices. The passage we have provided focuses questions only on comma usage while on the actual test, students should expect to see a variety of grammar, revision, and style questions. There are also usually 12-15 questions per passage. We chose to structure this ACT-like passage the way we did for the sake of time and for a more focused practice with commas. Research suggests that any sort of practice with ACT test-taking tips within the context of classroom instruction is helpful for students in remembering the subject content and also in becoming familiar and comfortable with the test.

If you would like more guidance on how to incorporate ACT practice in your curriculum, we encourage you to explore our Power-Up: English ACT Prep 10-Week Series.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Book Creator. Tech Tool. Retrieved from https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/610
- K20 Center. (n.d.). CommonLit. Tech Tool. Retrieved from https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2170
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- Smith, E. (2019). Sandwiched in Between. CommonLit. https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/sandwiched-in-between