The Punctuators — Teacher Pack

Standards alignment, printing notes, and answer keys for the ten free worksheets.

Print this once and keep it. The student worksheets are a separate file so you never have to print around the keys.

Free to copy for your own classroom. Please do not resell, repost for download, or remove the credit line. Sharing the link is always welcome.

How to print

Every worksheet is exactly two pages — a front and a back — so worksheet number N is always pages 2N−1 and 2N. Print the worksheet file double-sided, flipped on the long edge, and each worksheet lands on its own sheet of paper with nothing to collate.

To run a single worksheet, print just its page range from the table below. Nothing reflows and nothing needs rearranging.

Everything is black and white and sized for a classroom copier. There are no background fills to turn muddy on a photocopy.

#	Worksheet	Skill	Standard	Pages
1	Roundabout's Endless Sentence	Run-on sentences and fragments	L.4.1f	1–2
2	Excla Machine vs. Mr. Murmurer	End marks, tone, interjections	L.3.3a; L.2.2	3–4
3	Todbot's Mirror Test	Word play; line symmetry	L.5.5; math 4.G.A.3	5–6
4	Comma Chameleon	Commas: series, intro, address	L.5.2a–c	7–8
5	Parents of the Seas	Parentheses; parenthetical elements	L.6.2a	9–10
6	Apostrophantom vs. Apostropharaoh	Possessives vs. contractions	L.3.2d; L.2.2c	11–12
7	The Conjunctwins & the Et Pets	Coordinating and correlative conj.	L.3.1h; L.5.1e	13–14
8	Full Stop Ends It	Comma splices; sentence boundaries	L.4.1f	15–16
9	Sergeant Colon & SemiColonel	Colons and semicolons — CHALLENGE	L.9–10.2a, L.9–10.2b	17–18
10	Dr. Jective's Order of Operations	Adjective order; compound adjectives	L.4.1d	19–20

Standards are given in Common Core notation. The 2020 Colorado Academic Standards for Reading, Writing and Communicating cite these same CCSS codes directly in their Writing and Composition evidence outcomes (RW.3.3.4 through RW.H1.3.4), so each sheet aligns to both.

Worksheet 9 is marked CHALLENGE. Colorado places both colons and semicolons at grades 9–10 (RW.H1.3.4), though many middle school programs introduce them earlier. Use it as enrichment rather than core instruction.

Each worksheet runs 20–30 minutes. The early parts work as independent practice; the last part of each sheet works well in pairs or as a share-out.

Before an author visit: worksheets 1 and 2 use the characters from Books One and Two. Running either one in the week beforehand means students walk in already knowing the cast.

Answer keys

1 · Roundabout's Endless Sentence

Part 1 — answers will vary slightly. Accept any correct split. Sample responses:

1. Question Markswoman patrolled the city. She saw Roundabout below. He was talking to a mailbox.
2. The mailbox did not answer. It was a mailbox.
3. Roundabout kept going and going. He said he wasn't finished. Then he said it again.
4. Todbot arrived at noon. He did not knock. The door was already mirrored.
5. Excla Machine shouted a warning. Nobody heard it. Mr. Murmurer had whispered it away.

Part 2

6. F — subordinate clause, no independent clause.
7. C
8. R — four independent clauses strung together.
9. F — participial phrase, no subject or main verb.
10. C — two independent clauses joined correctly by a comma plus “and.”
11. R — two independent clauses with no punctuation between them.

Part 3 — answers will vary. Look for a subject, a verb, and a question mark.

Challenge: the point is the fix, not the run-on. Students who can deliberately build one can usually hear one.

2 · Excla Machine vs. Mr. Murmurer

Part 1

1. ! 2. ? 3. . 4. ! 5. ? 6. . 7. ! 8. ? 9. ! 10. .

Items 4 and 9 could take a period if a student argues for a flat delivery. Accept it if they can explain the choice — that is the skill.

Part 2 — answers will vary. Sample responses:

11. Loud: LOOK OUT — THERE'S A COW! Quiet: Don't turn around, but there's a cow.
12. Loud: GO! NOW! Quiet: We should probably go.

Look for exclamation points and stronger verbs in the loud version; periods, hedges, and softer word choice in the quiet one.

Part 3 — answers will vary. Look for an interjection, a comma or exclamation point after it, and an exclamation point at the end.

Challenge: most students keep the exclamation on the last line or on “It was Mr. Murmurer!” The discussion is the lesson — an exclamation point only lands if the ones around it don't.

3 · Todbot's Mirror Test

Part 1

A, H, I, M, O, T, U, V, W, X, Y — eleven letters.

In most block capitals. If your classroom font has a slanted or serifed letter, accept a student who spots it.

Part 2

1. MOM — PASS
2. DAD — FAIL. Bad letter: D is not symmetrical. (It IS a palindrome.)
3. TOOT — PASS
4. NOON — FAIL. Bad letter: N is not symmetrical.
5. MAXIMUM — FAIL. Every letter is fine, but it is not a palindrome. Backward it reads MUMIXAM.
6. OTTO — PASS
7. BOB — FAIL. Bad letter: B is not symmetrical.
8. AHA — PASS
9. WOW — PASS
10. SIS — FAIL. Bad letter: S is not symmetrical. (It IS a palindrome.)

Challenge

A palindrome only has to read the same backward. A mirror word also needs every letter to survive being flipped, and DAD is spelled the same both ways but the D turns into a shape that isn't a D.

4 · Comma Chameleon

Part 1

1. a toothbrush, a cape, and three sandwiches
2. Before the battle began, SemiColonel…
3. Watch out, Full Stop, that cow…
4. about socks, pancakes, and whether…
5. Yes, she really did…
6. After three hours of shouting, Excla Machine…
7. Quietly and without warning, Apostrophantom…
8. You're coming with us, aren't you?
9. maps, snacks, and a spare twin
10. Well, that explains the cow.
11. In the middle of the night, Todbot…
12. Comma Chameleon, can you hear me?

On 1, 4 and 9: the comma before "and" is the serial (Oxford) comma. Some style guides drop it. Decide as a class which one you use and be consistent — that consistency is the actual standard.

Part 2

13a. The speaker wants to eat QuetzalQuotel. 13b. The speaker is talking TO QuetzalQuotel about eating. The comma marks direct address.

14a. They found a rabbit and a sandwich FOR their sisters. 14b. They found three separate things — their sisters, a rabbit, and a sandwich.

15a. She eats her friends and her enemies. 15b. She enjoys three separate things: eating, her friends, and her enemies.

Part 3 — answers will vary. Look for two commas in the series and one after the introductory phrase.

5 · Parents of the Seas

Part 1

1. Full Stop (who has never once been late) arrived at 6:00 exactly.
2. The Conjunctwins (both of them) refused to answer.
3. SemiColonel's boots (polished twice that morning) were ruined in the first minute.
4. Comma Chameleon (see page 12) can change color when nervous.
5. SemiColonel (who outranks everyone) arrived last.
6. The cow (which was not really a cow) blinked twice.
7. Todbot (see the mirror on page 4) never blinks.
8. Excla Machine (who cannot whisper) tried to whisper.

Part 2

9. ESSENTIAL — it tells you WHICH hero.
10. EXTRA
11. ESSENTIAL — it tells you WHICH sandwich.
12. EXTRA
13. EXTRA
14. ESSENTIAL — it tells you WHICH mark.

Rule of thumb for students: if removing it leaves you asking "which one?", it was essential.

Part 4 — sample responses:

15. Full Stop is always early (he was born at 6:00 exactly).
16. Comma Chameleon is green (she can also turn blue).

Challenge: parentheses read quietest, commas are neutral, dashes are the loudest interruption. There is no wrong answer if they can defend it.

6 · Apostrophantom vs. Apostropharaoh

Part 1

1. P 2. C 3. P 4. C 5. P 6. C 7. P 8. C 9. P 10. C

Part 2

11. Its 12. its 13. You're 14. your 15. Their 16. They're

"It's" is ALWAYS "it is" or "it has." The possessive "its" never takes an apostrophe. This is the single most common apostrophe error in the grade band.

Part 3

17. the hero's cape
18. the heroes' capes
19. SemiColonel's boots
20. the twins' hideout
21. Apostropharaoh's tail
22. Todbot's mirrors

Challenge — sample answers: won't (will not), shan't (shall not), ain't. Also acceptable: o'clock, from "of the clock."

7 · The Conjunctwins & the Et Pets

Part 1 — some items accept more than one answer if the student can justify it.

1. but 2. yet (or but) 3. so 4. or 5. nor 6. for 7. nor 8. for

"For" means "because" here. It is the FANBOYS word students forget exists.

Part 2

9. Neither / nor 10. not only / but also 11. Either / or 12. Both / and

Correlative pairs must join matching parts of speech. “Neither Full Stop nor Comma Chameleon” joins two names — that balance is the standard.

Part 3

13. etc. 14. et al. 15. etc. 16. etc. 17. et al. 18. etc.

Memory hook: Et Al-losaurus carries the “al.” in his own name, and al. is for people. EtceteRabbit takes everything else.

Part 4 — answers will vary. Sample: The cow appeared, and nobody moved. / The cow appeared, so nobody moved. / The cow appeared, but nobody moved.

Discuss how “so” adds cause and “but” adds surprise.

8 · Full Stop Ends It

Part 1

1. S 2. OK 3. S 4. OK 5. S 6. OK 7. S 8. OK 9. S 10. OK

The test: cover the comma. If both halves could stand alone as sentences and there is no conjunction, it's a splice.

Part 2 — sample responses:

11. The lights went out. Nobody screamed.
12. The lights went out, but nobody screamed.
13. When the lights went out, nobody screamed.

A semicolon is also correct here — see the SemiColonel challenge sheet.

Part 3 — answers will vary. The count is the self-check: four sentences means four end marks.

9 · Sergeant Colon & SemiColonel

Part 1

1. Pack three things: a cape, a mask, and a sandwich.
2. No colon. “included” is a verb — never put a colon between a verb and its object.
3. There was only one problem: the cow.
4. He finally understood: punctuation is a superpower.
5. SemiColonel had one rule: never end a sentence early.
6. The list was short: cape, boots, sandwich.
7. No colon. “brought” is a verb, and its objects follow it directly.

The rule that catches most students: whatever comes BEFORE a colon must be a complete sentence on its own.

Part 2

8. Roundabout never stopped talking; nobody could get a word in.
9. Excla Machine grew louder; Mr. Murmurer grew quieter.

Why not a period: the two halves are a matched pair. A period files them as separate thoughts; a semicolon says “these belong together.” Item 9 especially — the contrast IS the sentence.

Part 3

10. The meeting was attended by Full Stop, the punctual one; Comma Chameleon, who arrived in green; and SemiColonel, who outranked everyone.

Part 4 — answers will vary. Check that the text before the colon, and both halves around the semicolon, are independent clauses.

10 · Dr. Jective's Order of Operations

Order: opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, purpose.

Part 1

1. a terrifying enormous metal cow (opinion, size, material)
2. an ancient purple silk cape (age, color, material)
3. a small green plastic mask (size, color, material)
4. a heavy gold Egyptian bracelet — or a heavy Egyptian gold bracelet. Both are defensible; “heavy” leads either way.
5. an enormous Japanese paper fan (size, origin, material)
6. a comfortable old cotton cape (opinion, age, material)
7. a tiny square silver button (size, shape, material)

Part 2

8. an old round table — age before shape.
9. a tall scary robot — but opinion normally precedes size, so “a scary tall robot” is also correct and arguably better. Accept either with a reason. This one is worth arguing about in class.
10. a lovely wooden box — opinion before material.

Part 3

11. a well-known villain
12. a three-headed snake
13. The villain is well known. — NO hyphen. It comes after the noun, so Ms. Hyphen stays home.
14. a punctuation-loving robot
15. a long-winded villain
16. a five-minute warning
17. The robot is punctuation loving. — NO hyphen, for the same reason as 13.

Part 4 — answers will vary. Reading both aloud is the point; students hear the error before they can explain it.