

or less lacking in the inner sanctions of conduct, and reinforced for those the inner sanctions of whose conduct may be in need of that stimulus, enlargement, and support which come only from a subjection to discipline which is self-imposed.

J. R. GEIGER

TEACHING THE APOSTROPHE OF POSSESSION

HAD anyone told me when I first began teaching that some day I would admit that any single matter of form in written composition was hard to teach, I know I should have been greatly humiliated; and had I been told that I would admit that the apostrophe of possession was more than stubborn about getting taught, I think I should have left the teaching ranks at once.

Yet here I am after a number of years of getting oriented in what "is English"; of reconciling minimum essentials; of conducting classes in sight-seeing trips through English and American literature; here I am, making an informal report on how I attempt to teach the apostrophe of possession! "Picking up pins" I should have perhaps termed such work back there a few years.

Had this particular bit of form—spelling, perhaps—not run such a high percentage of error in the numerous studies of recent years of pupil errors in written composition, I might never have known the mark was poorly taught. Then had it not shown up worst in a study of seven formal elements I made of my own teaching, I probably should not have given it any more thought.

But when this elusive will-o'-the-wisp made the worst showing in my own teaching, I analyzed the nature of the mistakes made in its use and discovered that my forty-six sophomores—tenth-grade high school—misused the apostrophe of possession in a series of dictation exercises in which it was one of the problems, accord-

ing to the following distribution of types of errors.

- 57%, omitting the apostrophe
- 15%, placing the apostrophe after the *s* in singular nouns
- 12%, placing the apostrophe after the *s* in irregular plurals
- 8%, placing the apostrophe before the *s* in plural nouns
- 6%, placing the apostrophe before the *s* in singular nouns ending in *s*, as James
- 3%, unnecessary use of the apostrophe
- 2%, confusing the apostrophe with the comma

This bit of analysis caused me to plan a definite method of attack on the apostrophe of possession alone. Twice since, I have done this, each time refining my method; and not yet have I been able to take the improvement, as shown by a closing-up test, beyond a fifty percent improvement. However, I had evidence that attention had been permanently directed to the pestiferous mark. Each time that I have tried the experiment, I have had the individual cooperation of the pupils, who always seem to puzzle as much about the elusive nature of that apostrophe as I do about their slowness to capture it.

There are no less than ten different ways in which a pupil may go wrong in the use of that apostrophe of possession! I did not know it until I began to isolate its uses for the purposes of incorporating them in exercises for dictation. Briefly, these are: (1) Omission of the apostrophe; (2) Its unnecessary use; (3) Placing the apostrophe on top of the *s*; (4) Placing the apostrophe after the *s* when it should be before; (5) Before when it should be after; (6) In irregular plurals; (7) In nouns ending in *s* all the time, as Charles; (8) In joint ownership; (9) Confusing *its* with *it's*; (10) In possessive modifiers of gerunds.

The plan for the experiment is quite simple. It consists of an initial test of forty-five sentences, arranged in cycles of nine; that is, each group of nine sentences occurs in the same order as does the first nine. This test so arranged is for diagnostic purposes, and for comparison with a similar one given at the close of the experiment.

The second part of the experiment consists of a series of dictation exercises, the number given depending upon the judgment of the teacher. So far, I keep around fifteen. These exercises, which should be made beforehand, are short and may be dictated, corrected by the class, and collected, during the first fifteen minutes of the class period. Each exercise is designed to cover each use of the apostrophe; in each exercise the order of the uses should appear at random. A sentence containing no need for the apostrophe of possession should be included in each exercise. The reason is, no doubt, obvious. This is a sample exercise:

Pupil's name Date

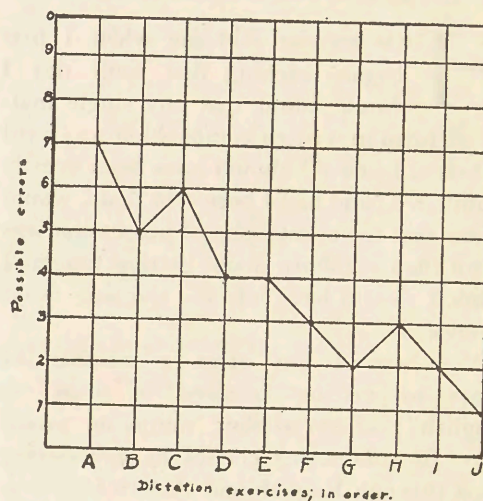
1. He selected his books according to their illustrations.
2. It was not John; he would not rob birds' nests.
3. That boy's chief fault is his hasty tongue.
4. Browning called buttercups the little children's dower.
5. I saw by Charles's reading file that he was growing up.
6. They patronized the old bookstore instead of Payne and Lee's new one.
7. That bird is valued only for its tail feathers.
8. The culprit was further embarrassed by his mother's being there.
9. This is only a part of the story; it's told in full elsewhere.

The dictation will go more smoothly if the teacher has the paper ready to distribute. I find small sheets are easier to handle and to file. After the exercise is dictated, I dictate the correct positions for the apostrophe, having the pupils place a large ring around the word where they make an error; this makes counting up easier. Then the sum of the errors is placed in large numbers at the top center; this is for easy reference later. Pupils are always eager to "check up" their errors.

The third part of the experiment is the closing out, or casting up, or measuring the progress. After the exercises are dictated, which, at the rate of two or three a week, as I give them, brings one out somewhere in the fifth or sixth week, I distribute the exercises and have the pupils see that they are arranged in the order given—first, sec-

ond, and so on. Then I show them how to plot their own charts on paper, which they rule free-hand right there, keeping the squares about one-half inch in size. The small squares of ordinary graph paper render such charts less effective. We use the x-axis for the exercises, represented by capital letters. The possible errors we show on the y-axis.

Progress Chart



Pupils may see from these charts their progress, if any, and the rate of it. The charts, while showing the total number of errors made in each exercise, do not show what is perhaps a more important matter—the type of their particular weakness. This we find by going back over each exercise and tabulating each error according to some order which I have ready written on the blackboard. Each pupil is interested more and more as he sees his weaknesses showing up. Sometimes amusing things occur. One boy, a senior, with an I. Q. of 126 and considerable school success behind him, became quite argumentative and almost angry, when, on the first exercise, he missed every apostrophe. In a short time he "got straightened out," but he frankly admitted that he had never noticed irregular plurals before. Although he had had several whimsical essays published in the school

paper, he couldn't use the apostrophe of possession. Perhaps that is to say that that particular skill is of small consequence. But we are supposed to teach it. Of the one hundred and fifty-one high school pupils, sophomores, juniors, and seniors whom I have carried through a series of drill exercises of this kind, I have found only one who did not need it.

Where one wishes to show up the massed progress of the class as a whole, then before the two processes just described, a final test based on the cycle plan, like the initial test, should be given.

The whole experiment is interesting from start to finish. The only boresome part is making the exercises and tests: so many sentences. One thing is certain; any teacher who tries it once will try it again and again.

The same plan as described here may by slight changes be employed for teaching the run-on sentence, the comma fault, capital letters for sections of the country, for proper adjectives—any of those familiar obstructions in the path of the high school teacher of composition. Working them out as separate problems—briefly, perhaps, as there are so many—at least has the merit of coming nearer to the concrete; it brings tangible results.

BONNIE GILBERT

COMPOSING POETRY IN THE GRADES

FOR the past four years the teaching of real appreciation of poetry has been one of the great aims of our training school and, so far, has proved a successful objective. Most of this success is due to the efforts of Miss Mary E. Cornell, who first took such keen interest in this experiment in the beginning first grade that the other grades realized its importance and soon imitated her enthusiasm.

Beginning in the kindergarten and continuing all through the grades, a great number of appropriate and beautiful poems are

read to and by the children. The kindergarten and first grade groups are led through their love for the Mother Goose rhymes and the Peter Patter rhymes to a keen appreciation of the poems of Rose Fyleman, Elizabeth Knoble, Christina Rossetti, Mary Mapes Dodge, Robert Louis Stevenson, and others. By the time the children reach the fourth and fifth grades they are enjoying the works of Whittier, Longfellow, Tennyson, and a score of others.

Through familiarity with their favorite poems, through group discussions, and through picture studies, the children are often inspired to create good verse themselves. Of course, in the primary grades, most of the original poems are made by the group—one child contributing a thought or line, another a rhyming word, and so on. In the third and fourth grades some of the children can write quite beautiful poems individually, provided the work is given encouragement and stimulation. The reader is referred to the article by Miss Mary E. Cornell, "Poetry in the First Grade," in *THE VIRGINIA TEACHER*, April 1926.

The following are a few examples of the types of poems composed in the various grades in the training school:



ELFIN SWINGS

The fairies go a-swinging on the branches of the trees:
The wind blows softly, and makes a fairy breeze.