In memory of

James Hooker, Rabbi Louis Josephs, and Dora Wolf Josephs.

They would be so proud.
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Foreword

How many times have you cringed when spotting grammatical or usage errors on signs, menus, billboards or advertisements?

In Getting Grammar, authors Donna Hooker Topping and Sandra Josephs Hoffman, turn these mundane mistakes into classroom conversations by asking students to photograph and create a collage of their discoveries. Likewise, such surprising texts as knock jokes, nursery rhymes and newspaper headlines become grist for the grammar mill, as Donna and Sandy share myriad ways to joyfully study parts of speech, correct usage, syntactic elements, and common errors.

Yes, Getting Grammar is a book chock full of inviting ways to share grammar information with students. But it is so much more.

It is a book that reminds educators that all instruction should be assessment-driven. The authors wrote this book in response to the felt needs of the student teachers in their university classrooms, many of whom were asked to teach grammar in their student-teaching assignments.

It is a book that offers educators historical background on the teaching of grammar, encouraging educators to not be afraid of controversial topics and compelling readers to ask themselves, “Where do I stand on the grammar wars?”

It is a book that encourages educators to maintain their role as decision-makers, asking themselves, “Which of these classroom activities make sense for my students, in my school, in my district?”

It is a book that helps educators support English Language Learners and helps them understand the grammatical misunderstandings of these students. After all, in Japanese, the typical word order is subject-object-verb. In Farsi, adjectives follow nouns, verbs are at the end of the sentence, and pronouns are omitted if they are understood. In Spanish, verbs indicate tense and number.

It is a book that reminds educators what Grammar 101 was all about, complete with definitions of terms. Are your students’ writing folders filled with a rich array of declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences? Can you spot dangling participles and misplaced modifiers?

It is a book that gives educators permission to carve out time for good old-fashioned fun and games amid all those ever-growing, somber, and serious assignments and assessments. When was the last time your students played MadLibs, Charades, or Musical Chairs?
It is a book that reminds educators to keep up with children’s literature, studding each chapter with ample bibliographies and offering many ways to delight in the grammatical constructions of favorite authors. Audrey Wood’s *The Napping House* has tantalizing verbs. Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* has intriguing sentence constructions. Judith Viorst’s *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day* clearly illustrates how strings of adjectives can be used for emphasis.

It is a book that demonstrates how to weave content studies into the Language Arts arena, learning content and grammar through crossword puzzles, riddles and even by playing Truth or Dare.

It is a book that honors the arts in education, demonstrating how grammatical elements can be taught through art, movement, music, and drama. Have you ever thought to study the preponderance of pronouns in patriotic songs?

It is a book that fills readers with surprising facts. *The House that Jack Built* is modeled after a sixteenth-century Hebrew chant. *Over the River and through the Wood* was written by one of the earliest American women to make a living as a writer. Irregular verbs used to be called strong verbs and regular verbs were known as weak ones.

*Getting Grammar* is also a book with big ideas running through it, ideas that run through many student-centered reading and writing workshops. Throughout, the authors remind us that...

Decision-making must rest with those whose practice will be affected by those decisions.

*Description of teaching practice is different from prescription of practice.*

The teaching of grammar should be part of a program that is rich in reading and writing.

Put authentic writing and reading ahead of everything else.

Read aloud to students every single day.

Share your own writing with your students.

Build student’s ownership and joy about their language through real reading and writing, through dramatics, art, and music.

Take your cues from your students’ writing and from their curiosities about language.

No doubt, readers of this book will discover ways to engage students in grammar study, become motivated to invent their own unique ways to do likewise, become self-conscious about their own grammar and usage demons, and most of all be inspired to ask at their next faculty meeting, “So what do we think about the study of grammar?”

—Shelley Harwayne
March, 2006
Our students at Millersville University are the next generation of teachers, and they give us great hope for the future. Already, they are steeped in the habit of reflective teaching. Not only do they reflect on what they know and don’t know, but they actively seek to fill any gaps they have. Truly, it was they who led us to this book. We are grateful to all of them, particularly to Brian Bogart and Katie Jones, who were the first to look us in the eye and tell us we needed to do more with grammar. These students have watched the development of this book, eager for every detail of our writerly lives. They helped us hone our skills as we developed theirs.

Several of our students—Jenine Melo, Erin Squibb, Renee Buchanan, Jessica Kennedy, Erin Freneaux, Na Park, Jamie Witmer, Marlaina Collins, Dagny Heidig, and Kerianne Kotsur—graciously posed for the pictures found in this book. We thank them for being good sports. Our graduate assistants, Kristi Klunk and Katie Holland, were masters at keeping track of details and helping out in so many ways. We are so fortunate to be surrounded by all of these teachers of tomorrow.

We are grateful to the wonderful folks at Heinemann. Editors Kate Montgomery and Kerry Herlihy gave us the most insightful comments on our manuscript and never ceased to cheer us on. Sonja Chapman and Doria Turner masterfully shepherded us through the production process. Working with them has been our pleasure, and writing for Heinemann has been an honor.

Our friends and professional colleagues Pat Wendell, Teresa Pica, Roberta McManus, and Jean Bender were never more than a phone call or an email away when we had questions or needed help. We thank them for being there.

Finally, we so appreciate our devoted families. Kathryne Hooker, Donna’s real mother and Sandy’s “adopted” mother, supported us with love and pride throughout every step of developing this manuscript. Donna’s children, Allyson and Ed Stallman and Brad Topping, answered all of our technology questions and brought levity to even the most intense writing sessions. Sandy’s daughter Sharon and son, David, both accomplished writers, willingly shared their expertise. Her daughter Alisa, son-in-law Dan, and granddaughters, Dori and Kate, provided long-distance encouragement and enthusiasm throughout the process. And, as always, Sandy’s husband, Jerry, provided regular and continual support. We thank all of them for being in our lives, for navigating the cascading piles of manuscripts in our homes, and for enduring our constant grammatical corrections!
What would writing and reading be without the whos, whats, and wheres? That’s what nouns and pronouns do for us. They let us know the subjects and objects of what’s going on in the sentence. They are common and proper, singular, plural, and collective, and often are indicated by articles like a, an, and the. A skillful writer knows that strong nouns will anchor the reader in the who, what, and where of the action he is trying to convey.

You may be thinking, Yeah, yeah, yeah. A noun is the name of a person, place, or thing. A pronoun replaces a noun. I memorized this in first grade, and second, and third, and tenth. But do I really know it? Do I know how to teach it? Take heart! Here’s a quick review and a host of activities to make nouns and pronouns come alive in your classroom.

Quick Review of Nouns for Teachers

Nouns tell the name of a person (woman, women), place (school, schools), thing (desk, desks), or idea (love, hate).

Types of Nouns

Common Nouns: everyday terms; sometimes indicated by an article like a, an, the.
Ex. a woman, an anteater, the school

Proper Nouns: specific names and titles of people, places, and things; are capitalized.
Ex. Dr. Sharon Louis, Los Angeles, California, Honda.

Collective Nouns: multiple people, places, or things that represent one unit; require a singular verb.
Ex. team (has), family (goes), group (cheers), crew (races), cache (holds)

Regular Plurals: formed by adding -s or -es.
Ex. schools, boxes

Irregular Plurals: formed by different word forms.
Ex. children, women, oxen

(Goldstein, Waugh, and Linsky 2004, 205–6; Brandon 2006, 104)
Playing with Nouns

Noun Books to Share

Because read-aloud is an integral part of what we believe to be a well-balanced literacy program, we suggest that you share these books with your students. Each is beautifully written. The playfulness with language will trip off your tongue as you explore the world of nouns.


Name My Noun

Imagine pretending to be a chair, or the teacher, or the wind. That’s exactly what happens in Name My Noun. Students choose nouns from their writing or a current text and act them out while other students have three guesses to name the correct noun. For the previous examples, you just might find children guessing sitting, teaching, or whistling—verbs that describe action. But no! Instead, they must focus on what a noun is—the person, place, or thing that is being represented.

**Materials needed:** current texts or pieces of writing

Touch Nouns!

Especially useful on those days when it is too wet, snowy, or hot to be outside, Touch Nouns! is a variation on the old game, Statues. Students move around the room until the teacher calls, “Touch nouns!” Students immediately touch a person, place, or thing and freeze. When the teacher says, “Name nouns!” they shout out the name of the noun they are touching.

**Materials needed:** none

Stand Up for Proper Nouns!

Tell students that proper nouns deserve our respect. When one of them enters the room, we should stand! Read a mixed list of common and proper nouns. When stu-
When students hear a proper noun, they should stand; when they hear a common noun, they should sit. A bit of activity for times when the wiggles set in!

**Materials needed:** list of common and proper nouns from current texts

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**People, Places, and Things**

Hand out a sheet of eleven-by-eighteen-inch paper to each student. Ask students to fold their paper into thirds and label each third with either “People,” “Places,” or “Things.” Using old magazines and newspapers, students cut out pictures and place them in the appropriate columns, collage style.

**Materials needed:** eleven-by-eighteen-inch paper, old magazines and newspapers, glue, scissors, pencils

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**Super S Saves the Day**

Designate one child Super S and give him or her a card with a lowercase s printed on it. An old Superman cape (or any piece of capelike material on which you have printed a big S) will help add excitement to this child’s role. With a container of popcorn at the ready, have two or more girls at a time come to the front of the room. Place cards with the words *Give the girl some popcorn* in your pocket chart. Have students discuss what you should do (give popcorn to only one girl). Have the girls call, “Not fair, not fair! We need your help, Super S!” The child portraying Super S sweeps boldly to the front of the room, wielding his or her s card and placing it in the pocket chart so that girl now says girls. Read the sentence again, then give popcorn to the girls standing up front. Repeat with the word cards *Give the boy some popcorn*. Repeat until all girls and boys have received their share of popcorn. There is quite an impetus for understanding the importance of singular and plural when it means getting popcorn or not!

**Materials needed:** cards, pocket chart, Superman cape, popcorn, markers

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**Alphabetica**

Alphabetica is an opportunity for your students to uncover how they use nouns in their writing while prompting them to think of possibilities for future pieces of writing as well. Give students a long piece of paper with the letters of the alphabet listed in order down the left side. Have them look through the drafts in their writing folder and list the nouns they have used next to the appropriate beginning letter. Which letter has the most nouns? The least? What kind of pieces might they write that would include nouns beginning with the missing letters? Does that give them any ideas for future pieces?

**Materials needed:** long pieces of paper with alphabet listed down the side, markers, pencils, students’ writing.
Name This Book!

Divide students into small groups. Each group privately identifies a book (or story) that the class has read. The group lists and illustrates significant nouns from that book or story on a piece of poster board labeled “Name This Book!” Number each poster and hang it in the hallway outside the classroom. Give each group an opportunity to go to the hallway to view the posters and complete a Name This Book! answer sheet. After the class has completed the activity, have each group fold a piece of construction paper in half and write the title of the book and the author on the inside. Attach these beneath the posters so that other students in the school can play Name This Book! and check their answers.

Materials needed: authentic texts, poster board, construction paper, crayons or markers

Crazy Compound Nouns

Using three-by-five-inch cards, write half of a compound word on each. Shuffle them and have students each draw a card. Without showing their cards, they line up in two lines facing each other. At a signal from you, they walk straight across and meet a partner. The partners then put their two compound halves together to form a crazy compound. Each pair then goes to the board, writes their crazy compound word, and sketches a picture of what it would be. (See Figure 3–1.) Not enough board space? Just use paper instead. Halves of real compound words such as moonlight, sunshine, cowboy, doorbell, cupcake, spaceship, and rainfall recombine in interesting ways. A cow-light, for example, might be a battery-powered light that cows wear around their necks so the farmer can see them at night. Doorshine might be a special wax meant especially...
for making doors look welcoming to visitors. And astronauts certainly could use space-cups that attached to their spacesuits so their drinks wouldn’t float away. While this activity may seem silly, something bigger is at hand. It requires thinking outside the box, a skill that will be sorely needed as today’s children grow up in an increasingly complex world. And who knows? The seed of an invention might even plant itself in one of your young minds.

**Materials needed:** three-by-five-inch cards, markers, chalkboard and chalk

**Numbered Nouns**

Numbered Nouns is a variation of the childhood favorite Mad Libs. Students number the nouns in their latest piece of writing, then copy them onto a separate piece of paper (e.g., “I gave my dog a bath last night and got water all over the floor” would yield the list 1. dog, 2. bath, 3. night, 4. water, 5. floor). Next, they exchange lists with a partner and read their piece aloud, substituting their partner’s numbered nouns for their own. Hilarity ensues when a sentence like “Seven people came to my party last Saturday and we ate a lot of pizza and cupcakes” becomes “Seven dog[s] came to my bath last night and we ate a lot of water and floor[s]”!

**Materials needed:** students’ writing, paper and pencils

**Making the Common Uncommonly Good**

Have students identify a common noun in a piece of their writing and write it, and the sentence in which it occurred, at the top of a piece of paper. On a signal from you, they pass their paper to the student next to them. The next child reads the sentence and writes a more specific noun that might replace the common noun on the paper. Signal again to pass the paper to the next child, who will do the same. Continue as long as interest is high and productive nouns are being generated. Students may use thesauri, dictionaries, classroom word charts, or any other source if needed. The common word car, for example, might generate a list that would include Ford, Saturn, vehicle, wheels, and so forth. The writer, of course, has the ultimate say in what noun she will use, but she’ll have several options from which to choose.

**Materials needed:** students’ writing, paper and pencils, thesauri, dictionaries, classroom word charts

**Nine Notable Nouns**

Use a current piece of fiction or nonfiction text that students are reading or writing and have students each choose the nine notable nouns that are central to this piece, share them with a partner, and justify why they chose them. This activity not only underscores nouns but also requires students to think carefully about the meaning of the text they are reading. The result? Noun knowledge and critical comprehension.

**Materials needed:** current texts, paper and pencils
Opposites Attract

Nouns that represent qualities or ideas are the most difficult to recognize because they are abstract. Thinking about them in pairs helps. Prepare cards with abstract nouns on them, making sure that you have a card for each noun’s opposite as well. For example, you might use words like war/peace, love/hate, truth/lie, slavery/freedom, hope/despair, happiness/sadness, cleanliness/dirtiness, beauty/ugliness, and height/depth, tragedy/comedy, length/width, obesity/gauntness, formality/casualness, admission/denial, praise/criticism, illness/health. Distribute one card to each student. Holding their card in front of them, students silently walk around the room looking for their opposite. When opposites think they have found each other, they confirm their choice by looking in a dictionary or a dictionary of antonyms.

Materials needed: cards, marker, dictionaries

Abstract Acting

If you already have made the cards for the Opposites Attract activity described above, you have another activity ready to go with no further effort on your part. Divide students into pairs and give each a pair of opposite abstract nouns. Whispering together so that the rest of the class can’t hear, they plan how they will act out their pair of words. When it’s showtime, each pair performs and the rest of the class guesses their abstract noun pair.

Materials needed: cards from Opposites Attract

Names for Things and How They Got That Way

Cupboard, closet, armoire, cabinet, chiffonier, chifforobe, and wardrobe all are names for places where we store things. Challenge your students to find the languages of origin for these synonyms and others. Invite them to interview people to find out what they call such commonplace items as sofas, eyeglasses, faucets, toilets, baby carriages, and so forth. Then they can report their findings to the class. This activity also encourages your ELL students to add their language to the whole class’ understanding of nouns.

Materials needed: paper and pencils, dictionaries

A Collection of Collectives

Collective nouns like class, team, and family are quite familiar, but they are just a few of the many interesting and unusual terms in use. Collective terms originated with hunters, who needed to have a way to describe their quarries of field and game animals. This helps explain why animals have specific nouns that name their groups—a down of hares, a bevy of quail, a brace of grouse, for example. Appendix C contains a list of collective terms. Challenge your students to use dictionaries and other references to figure out what the collective nouns refer to. Choose the most common, or give them the entire list to work on over a period of weeks.

Materials needed: list of collective nouns, reference materials
Walking in Authors’ Footsteps: Proper Nouns

Authors use proper nouns for more than naming people and places. For example, Ray (1999) notes how proper nouns give Cynthia Rylant’s Missing May (1992) so much more sensory power in this passage: “My eyes went over May’s wildly colorful cabinets, and I was free again. I saw Oreos and Ruffles and big bags of Snickers” (4). Yes, she could have written the common nouns cookies, chips, and candy bars, but not with the same impact. Share this sentence from Missing May and ask students to name the common nouns that Oreos, Ruffles, and Snickers represent. Compare two versions of that sentence—one using common nouns, the other using proper nouns. Share one of your drafts in which you replace common nouns with proper nouns in order to heighten the reader’s vision of what you have written. Have students choose a draft from their writing folder and find a sentence that could be made stronger by substituting proper for common nouns. Share and discuss these sentences. In your discussion, you may find that proper nouns do not always improve a sentence, and that’s fine. The value of this activity is the discussion that takes place—one that presents a craft strategy that might be useful in future writing while simultaneously reinforcing the grammar you are studying.

Materials needed: authentic texts, teacher’s writing, students’ writing

Mommy Hugs

Have your upper-grade students prepare to read and share Mommy Hugs (Gutman and Hallensleben 2003) with younger children. Your colleagues who teach the younger ones might just welcome a visit from your students, and if your students are starting to baby-sit, their young charges will love hearing this sweet tale. Mommy Hugs is a story of mother-child love, with a simplistic text that will take your students back to an earlier time in their lives. It tells of mommies (cat, parrot, polar bear, elephant, swan, monkey) who hug their babies (kitten, chick, cub, calf, cygnet, baby) in special ways (with a nuzzle, with a nibble, with a tickle, with a squeeze, with a cuddle, with a pat). Revisit this story with your class and have the students help you make a chart with three columns of nouns, labeled “Mommies,” “Babies,” and “With a ______.” The nouns in the first column function as subjects. In the second column, the nouns are objects. In the third, they are objects in prepositional phrases. The text is simplistic, but the concepts about nouns are not. Ostensibly, your students will be preparing to share a book, but they will be reviewing rather sophisticated noun understandings at the same time.

Materials needed: several copies of Mommy Hugs, chart paper, marker

Quick Review of Pronouns for Teachers

Pronouns take the place of nouns to keep the author from using the same noun over and over. Ex. Allyson works very hard. She is known for her dedication. Her work is an example for all.
Pronoun Case

Subjective or Nominative: pronouns used as the subject.

Ex. She went to the store. They couldn’t wait.

Objective: pronouns used as the object. Ex. Give the guitar to him.

Possessive: pronouns that indicate possession.

Ex. His name is on the envelope. The house is theirs.

Singular and Plural Pronouns

Singular pronouns replace singular nouns. Plural pronouns replace plural nouns. Here’s how they work:

First Person Subjective: I (singular), we (plural)
First Person Objective: me (singular), us (plural)
First Person Possessive: my, mine (singular), our, ours (plural)
Second Person Subjective: you (the same for both singular and plural)
Second Person Objective: you (the same for both singular and plural)
Second Person Possessive: your, yours (the same for both singular and plural)
Third Person Subjective: he, she, it (singular), they (plural)
Third Person Objective: him, her, it (singular), them (plural)
Third Person Possessive: his, her, hers, its (singular), their, theirs (plural)

Types of Pronouns

Personal: I, my, mine, me (singular), we, our, ours, us (plural)
you, your, yours (singular and plural)
he, his, him, she, her, hers, it, its (singular), they, their, theirs, them (plural)

Interrogative: who, whose, whom, which, what

Relative: who, whose, whom, which, what, that, whoever, whomever, whichever, whatever

Demonstrative: this, that, these, those

Indefinite: another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something (singular)
both, few, many, others, several (plural)
all, any, more, most, none, some, such (singular or plural)

Reciprocal: each other, one another (plural)

Reflexive and Intensive: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves, yourselves (plural)

**Pronouns as Appositives**

Intensive pronouns often are used as appositives for emphasis. Ex. I, myself, am responsible for the mishap.

(Ellsworth and Higgins 2004, 13)

■ Playing with Pronouns

**Pronoun Books to Share**

You will hear your students yell, “We love these books. They are great!” when you read them.


**Politeness Only, Please**

“Put others first,” said our mothers, and so it is with pronouns. It’s Howie and I would like a drink, not Me and Howie or I and Howie. It’s Give the cookies to Linda and me, not to me and Linda or to I and Linda. Think of the times during the day when your students need to request things of you. Stopping for a drink? Have pairs say, “Kathy and I would like a drink,” in order to get your permission to step up to the fountain. Passing out papers? Have pairs say, “Please give the papers to Bill and me.” Use every minute of your day to practice politeness and pronouns.

**Materials needed:** none

**Hey, Pronouns, Stand Up!**

Pronouns stand in for nouns. In this activity, that’s exactly what your students will do. Tell them that they are all pronouns. Have them listen while you read a passage from a current text out loud. Whenever they hear a pronoun, they should stand.

**Materials needed:** current text
In, Out, and In Again

Whether you’re in or out in this game is just the luck of the draw, but it really reinforces nominative and objective pronoun cases. Play is very simple. Students stand in a circle and pass a container filled with sentence cards on which you have written correctly and incorrectly used pronouns. When the container comes to a student, he draws a card and reads it aloud. If his card is correct, he remains standing; if his card is incorrect, he sits. After reading a card, the student returns it to the container. Keep playing until there is only one student standing. Then reverse the game, so that when someone draws a correct card, she can stand up. Play until everyone is standing up again. Following are sentence suggestions for this game.

Doug and I like to read books.
Fred and I had lunch.
He and I thought it was sad.
She and I like to shop.
Give the job to Gloria and me.
I picked out a gift for him and her.
Everyone likes him and me.
Those pears are not ripe.
They went home.
Pass the papers to her and me.
When it’s raining, I like to stay inside.
Mike played soccer with them and me.
We the people of the United States . . .
Give them a chance.
Me and Sammy are going swimming.
Jeff and me played catch.
Run quickly with Fido and she.
Trade places with her and I.
Patty and them threw a party for us.
Us kids don’t like tests.
Them people aren’t coming.
Them and her started to laugh.
Six candy bars aren’t enough for they and I.
Meet he and I at six o’clock.

Materials needed: sentence cards, marker, container
Interactive Pronoun Practice

This is the type of practice exercise that many of us remember, but with an interactive, self-checking twist. Write the following sentences on sentence strips and place them in a pocket chart. Next to each one, place cards with the possible choices for filling in the blank. Place a ☺ on the back of the correct choice and an X on the back of the incorrect choices. Students read each sentence and select the card they believe to be correct, then self-check by turning it over.

1. Dori touched the turtle on ______ shell. (it’s, its, its’)
2. The first prize went to Roberto and ______. (I, me)
3. Dr. Josephs gave us—_______—the best grade. (Amanda and me, Amanda and I)
4. Only ______ Philadelphians know about the ups and downs of football. (us, we)
5. ______ bookbags are clear plastic. (They're, Their, There)
6. Pat was bothered by ______ coughing. (his, him)
7. To ______ does this test belong? (who, whom)
8. Invite ______ you want to Barbara’s party. (whoever, whomever)
9. ______ is my desk. (This/That, These/Those)
10. Dennis did the project by ______. (hisself, himself)
11. It is ______. (I, me)

Materials needed: sentence strips, pocket chart, cards, marker

Silent Pronoun Auction

You can get double duty from the Interactive Pronoun Practice activity by having a Silent Pronoun Auction after everyone has had a turn at the pocket chart. In silent auctions, which often occur at fund-raising events, you purchase tickets and place them in boxes located in front of various prizes. At the end of the evening the master of ceremonies draws a ticket from each box to see who has won the silent auction for that prize. Instead of a box, place an envelope at the beginning of each sentence. Instead of tickets, give each student a small slip of paper for each sentence. Independently, students write the correct word for each sentence (along with their name) on a slip of paper and then deposit the slips in the appropriate envelopes. After all students have entered their words, you check each envelope and leave the correct responses inside. With fanfare, then, you reach into each envelope and pull a slip of paper to see which student will win a small prize (one per sentence). This activity also allows you to see who has not contributed the appropriate words and needs further instruction.

Materials needed: Interactive Pronoun Practice sentence strips, pocket chart, envelopes, slips of paper, pencils
Whom Do You Mean?

Authors get into trouble when they don’t use the proper pronoun reference. This confuses readers because they don’t know who or what is being talked about. Consider this sentence: Dan gave the baby his drink. What did the baby drink—Dan’s scotch and soda, or the baby’s formula? To whom does the pronoun his refer? Have students take a draft from their writing folders and underline the pronouns, then exchange papers with a partner. Over each pronoun, in pencil, each student writes the noun she thinks her partner meant. When the owners receive their papers back, they check to see if they have been understood the way they intended. In the example sentence, the partner might pencil in Dan over the pronoun his, causing the author to say, “No, I meant the baby!” Such ahas provide authentic motivation to revise the construction of an entire sentence to make the meaning clear. Without a reader, though, the poor author might never know.

Materials needed: students’ writing, pencils

What If There Were No Pronouns?

Pronouns serve the writer and protect the ears of the reader from an assault of repeated nouns. Look at two versions of the same passage:

Version 1
Sandy asked Donna if she would like to go shopping with her. Donna said she would love to, but first she would have to go to her bank. Sandy chuckled and said to herself, “She had better withdraw a lot of money because I know how she likes to shop.”

Version 2
Sandy asked Donna if Donna would like to go shopping with Sandy. Donna said Donna would love to, but first Donna would have to go to Donna’s bank. Sandy chuckled and said to Sandy, “Donna had better withdraw a lot of money because Sandy knows how Donna likes to shop.”

Version 1 was much simpler, and more natural, to write and to read. For that, we thank pronouns. Tell students that today they will see what a world without pronouns would be like. Use a short passage from a current text and model two versions of it, one with pronouns and one without. Give students another sentence from the text that contains pronouns and have them rewrite it without pronouns. Then have them choose a sentence or two from their writing to play with in the same fashion. Along the way, they just might clarify their pronoun reference as well.

Materials needed: current text, students’ writing, paper and pencils

Walking in Authors’ Footsteps: Pronouns

Vague pronoun reference can be a problem. However, sometimes authors use this vagueness on purpose. Ray (1999) notes, for example, that Cynthia Rylant consistently avoids using a possessive pronoun in front of the word relatives in *The Relatives*
Came (1985a). They are not our relatives or her or his relatives, but the relatives, adding to the this-could-be-anyone’s-story universal appeal of her book. Likewise, Rylant is intentionally vague when she writes, “They are floating like feathers in a sky” (n.p.) in The Whales (1985b). Why? Is she suggesting that there could be more than one sky? Is she purposefully comparing the sea and the sky? Questions such as these certainly will lead to rich discussions with your class, and a deeper understanding of pronouns as well. Present these sentences, and others from your current texts, to your students. Ask them to speculate why the authors chose to use intentional vagueness. In what situations might this work and not work? Share sentences from your own writing, and invite your students to do the same. Compare what would happen if they used a vague pronoun versus a specific term. What effect would it have on the reader?

**Materials needed:** authentic texts, teacher’s writing, students’ writing

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**It’s at the End**

What’s at the end? Anything you want. You see, it is whatever is at the end of the path on this board game. Have pairs of students each make a board game on an open file folder. Together, they decide the theme. The object of the game will be to get to the end of the path, where perhaps a pot of gold awaits, or a candy house, or a jet. They illustrate their board game according to the theme, drawing whatever it is at the end of the path. Make small cards on which you have written sentences or phrases that contain correct and incorrect usage of the singular pronoun it, the possessive pronoun its, and the often misused contraction it’s. When each pair has a set of cards, go over the phrases with the class to indicate which are correctly written and which are not. Students write yes on the back of each correctly written card and no on the back of the incorrectly written cards. Each pair places the playing cards sentence side–up. Rolling a die or spinning a spinner, players take turns moving forward along the path. Before they can move, however, they must pick up a card and tell whether the sentence is correct as written or not, confirming by looking on the back of the card. If they confirm that they were right, they move ahead; if not, they stay where they are. The first one to reach it at the end of the path wins that round of the game. Store the cards in resealable food storage bags so that the games can be played again, traded with other pairs, or taken home to play with the family.

**Materials needed:** file-folder game boards, cards, markers, spinners (or dice), playing pieces, resealable food storage bags

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**I Me My Mine**

Susan Van Zile contributed this great idea to Instructor in an article called “Grammar That’ll Move You” (2003). To the tune of “YMCA,” substitute pronouns with motions that point to the referent. What ones shall you group together? Edgar Schuster (2003, 23–26) suggests displaying a personal pronoun chart in the classroom, a chart that he hypothesizes is close to the one that “hangs somewhere in the human brain” (26). We have included it in Figure 3–2. At a glance, it lists the
A Personal Pronoun Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____ saw the cats.</td>
<td>The cats saw _____</td>
<td>_____ snack was good.</td>
<td>The snack is _____</td>
<td>(self/selves)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>mine</td>
<td>myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>yours</td>
<td>yourself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>hers</td>
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<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>his</td>
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<td>himself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>its</td>
<td>its</td>
<td>itself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>our</td>
<td>ours</td>
<td>ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>yours</td>
<td>yourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>their</td>
<td>theirs</td>
<td>themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


FIG. 3–2 Edgar Schuster’s Personal Pronoun Chart

Singing across the rows or down the columns would constructively fill the two minutes here and the three minutes there while you wait for the clock to signal time for lunch, time to go to art class, and so forth.

Materials needed: pronoun chart

Jack and His House of Relative Pronouns

Raise your students’ understanding of relative pronouns by sharing the book This Is the House That Jack Built (Taback 2002). The text evolves as a cumulative tale with
a repetitive structure that goes like this: “This is the rat that ate the cheese that lay in the house that Jack built” (n.p.). Modeled after a sixteenth-century Hebrew chant, This Is the House That Jack Built was first published in 1755 and was later illustrated by none other than Randolph Caldecott in 1878. After you read this story just for the fun of hearing it again, your students can revisit its use of the relative pronouns such as that and who. Explain what a relative pronoun is, then examine how that and who were used in this particular text. Have students create their own cumulative tales involving themselves, titled The ______ That [Name] ______. (“This is the cat that Richard adopted.” “This is Barbara, whose mother, Marie, married her father, John, who built the treehouse.”)

**Materials needed:** authentic text, paper and pencils, pronoun list

**Patriotic Pronouns**

The social studies curriculum in the upper-elementary and middle school grades often focuses on American history and government. This is a perfect time to sing some patriotic songs, past and present, and practice pronouns as well. If you examine the lyrics of “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” “This Land Is Your Land,” “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” and many others, you will find a treasure of pronouns— I, my, me, thee, him, our and more. Look at the lyrics and identify the types of pronouns. Talk about old forms of pronouns, such as thee and thou.

**Materials needed:** song lyrics

**English Language Learners, Nouns, and Pronouns**

English is a polyglot language, having borrowed words from the native languages of all who came to and interacted with the English-speaking world. Names for persons, places, and things in English really reflect multiple languages and give us interchangeable names for the same thing. For example, sofa, divan, davenport, loveseat, futon, settee, and couch all indicate that article of furniture found in most living rooms. These multiple names for items can pose difficulty for ELL students whose native languages do not display such variety. In addition, many languages use pronouns much differently than English does, particularly in matters of gender and number.

**In Spanish,** nouns have gender that is indicated by an article, either la (feminine) or el (masculine). Therefore, your ELL authors may add articles in their writing that are not needed (going to the skiing rather than going skiing). The word for people is la gente, and it is singular. Therefore, your ELL authors may use a singular verb with people (The people is having fun). Subject personal pronouns are not used because the verb ending indicates the person and number. Therefore, your ELL authors may write Sandy is not Hungarian. Is American. instead of Sandy is not Hungarian. She is American. There is no equivalent for the contraction It’s + pronoun. Therefore, your ELL authors may write Am I instead of It’s I (or me). That, which, and who all are
equivalent to the Spanish que. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *The boy which threw the ball.*

**In Vietnamese,** there is no article before the name of a profession. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *He is professor.*

**In Japanese,** pronouns do not have to match their nouns in terms of singular and plural. Therefore, your ELL authors may need instruction in how to use plurals such as *we,* *they,* and *them.*

**In Japanese and Cantonese,** there are no articles or inflections for person and number. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *Student miss two class.*

**In Swahili,** speakers do not distinguish between masculine and feminine pronoun forms. Therefore, your ELL authors may confuse *he* and *she,* *him* and *her* when they write. In addition, a pronoun often is used after a noun, seeming redundant. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *The girls they kick the ball* instead of *The girls kick the ball.*

**In Korean,** pronouns do not have gender. Therefore, your ELL authors may write the neutral pronoun *it* to refer to both males and females.

**In Chinese,** speakers drop pronouns that are understood. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *I sang the song before took the bow* instead of *I sang the song before I took the bow.*

**In Portuguese,** speakers frequently drop subjective pronouns. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *Don’t want to go* instead of *I don’t want to go.* Objective pronouns may be omitted if they are understood through context. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *Marlene and Warren can dance.* *I’ve seen,* instead of *Marlene and Warren can dance. I’ve seen them.* In addition, the impersonal pronoun *it* does not exist. Therefore, your ELL authors may write *When Bonnie laughs, it is hard to stop her* instead of *When Bonnie laughs, is hard to stop her.*

**In Farsi,** a single pronoun is used for both *he* and *she.* Therefore, your ELL authors may write *Audrey is an artist. He works in oils.*

(Swan and Smith 2001, 105, 124, 189, 272, 319; Haussaman 2003, 52–5)
Check It Out!

Identify the type of noun represented by the underlined words in this student-written letter.

Dear Zelig,
I heard that you were thinking of going back to school to study Chinese. Will you be studying Mandarin or Cantonese? Many people enjoy the study of languages. I know that it will come easily to you because you know several languages already. Let me wish you the best of luck. Please keep me posted and let me know about your progress.
Sincerely,
Pam

Identify the underlined pronouns in this student-written journal entry:

Journal Entry for November 11
1. Today I attended my first Veterans' Day celebration. 2. I was moved to hear the Veterans of several wars talk about their experiences. 3. It was not just a ceremony where they laid wreaths on tombs. 4. These men talked and talked about their feelings. The Vietnam Vets were especially interesting. 5. While I was not alive to witness the happenings, it is clear that these men were not treated fairly. 6. I wanted to hug them and tell them, “Thank you,” but I was too embarrassed to do that. 7. Who would deserve an award more than these veterans? 8. Everyone that was there would agree with me. 9. For myself, let me just say that I really felt appreciation after I heard the men speak.