

Stenhouse Close-Ups

Teaching Apostrophes



JEFF ANDERSON

WORKSHOP GUIDE

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Teaching Apostrophes

Workshop Overview

1. Distribute copies of “The Apostrophe-thon” (page 4) and visual scaffolds (page 5).
2. View the video and discuss (see “Questions for Discussion” on page 6).
3. Ask participants to try an “Apostrophe-thon” in their classrooms and return to a follow-up session to discuss how it went (see “Workshop Suggestion” on page 6).

The “Apostrophe-thon”

by Jeff Anderson (adapted from Mechanically Inclined)

One of the best ways to teach apostrophes is for students to see the use of the apostrophe in a high-quality mentor text and also to look for apostrophes in their own writing. I developed the “apostrophe-thon” as a quick way to help students move between mentor texts and their own writing in learning the rules for apostrophes.

When using a mentor text in an apostrophe-thon, we discuss how we can look for any words that use apostrophes. Then, in small groups, individually, or as a whole class, we highlight words that use apostrophes in a short section of a mentor text (three to five pages). Once students have found the words with apostrophes, we categorize them on a chart as a visual scaffold. I model reading through the sentences, asking students to help me categorize and analyze the apostrophes used. Then I show them how contractions work, often flagging unusual contractions like *o'clock* for discussion by the whole class.

Of course, throughout the apostrophe-thon, I meander around the room, listening in, asking guiding questions, correcting misconceptions, and collecting information for the later debriefing of the activity. Kids get excited when they see a double possessive like *his mother's voice*. When the first group or student spots a double possessive, I walk the class through it, having them share how to add the information to our anchor chart. If anything is off track with more than one group, I stop and reinstruct the whole class, checking the first few. Rich discussion about contractions and possessives and the apostrophe occur during this contextualized experience of pulling out the apostrophes from real texts, categorizing them, and ultimately internalizing the patterns.

Visual Scaffold

Apostrophe-thon

I model how to fill out this chart by categorizing the first few possessives or contractions used in the text, whether or not they have apostrophes. In groups, students complete the chart.

Apostrophe-thon			
Possessives (Ownership)		Contractions (Squished words)	
Possessive	Object of Possessive	Contraction	Words Unsquished
<i>his</i>	<i>clock</i>	<i>they'd</i>	<i>they had</i>
<i>computer's</i>	<i>screen</i>		

Apostrophe Wall Chart

In each class, students share their own examples. Later, I combine them into one wall chart, with each quadrant “showing” the patterns of possessives and contractions with models.

Possessives	Contractions
Simmy's house principal's crash Jordan's skateboard car's wheel Askari's folder Jericha's book Josh's necklace Vanessa's pens clock's hands Arianna's bike	The apostrophe acts as a squish mark to show where letters were pushed out. do not becomes don't I don't eat breakfast. doesn't haven't didn't couldn't shouldn't can't won't wouldn't isn't
Pronouns	
Possessive Pronouns NEVER use an apostrophe his necklace her brush my behavior their grades	She's smart. He's intelligent. We'll succeed. (we will) they're = they are she's = she is it's = it is

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you find most challenging about teaching apostrophes to students?
2. Which types of contractions or apostrophe uses are most difficult to master for your students? Why do you think these particular examples are a problem?
3. What works best about the ways you teach apostrophes now? How might you adapt these techniques, based upon what you've seen in the video?

Workshop Suggestion

Ask participants to try an apostrophe-thon with their own students in the coming week. You might give participants samples of mentor texts you've selected in advance to help in their preparation—brief high-quality children's or young adult literature that includes many apostrophes over just a few pages. Talk through different ways of integrating the anchor chart development into the lesson. Schedule a follow-up session in a week or two to talk through the experience of testing out new ways of teaching apostrophes to students.

Professional Resources by Jeff Anderson

Books

Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer's Workshop. 2005. Stenhouse.

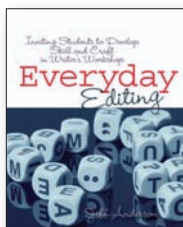
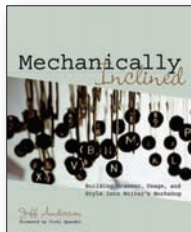
Everyday Editing: Inviting Students to Develop Skill and Craft in Writer's Workshop. 2007. Stenhouse.

Videos

The Craft of Grammar: Integrated Instruction in Writer's Workshop. DVD (60 minutes). 2007. Stenhouse.

Editing Invitations. Stenhouse Close-Up. DVD (15 minutes). 2008. Stenhouse.

Books and Videos by Jeff Anderson



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