Language Reflects Changing Times

- Post Reprint: “It’s okay to forget this lesson from English class”
- Post PR Blog Reprint: “The Washington Post announces writing style changes for racial and ethnic identifiers”
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Words Reflect Current Culture

Taking time to study words and sentence structures of the past and current usage can be fascinating. Linguists study tweets, letters and official documents. They seek opportunities to observe and record the estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the globe. They research the early dictionaries and surviving works of the past as well as the current spoken word.

Language expresses a culture in expression and word choice as well as the commonality of emotions and structure. It relates its biases and its outlook. It changes to communicate values it holds or rejects for new beliefs. Among the 150 new entries in the French Larousse is “ambassadrice,” for example. It is not a new word, but a change in definition from the wife of an ambassador to meaning a female ambassador. Clearly reflecting a shift in that country’s attitude toward women’s roles in leadership and employment.

Media must discuss and form guidelines on how it can be most fair and balanced in its coverage. In 2020 different media leaders, including those of The Washington Post, held extensive meetings about capitalization of Black “to identify the many groups that make up the African diaspora in America and elsewhere.” Read the WashPost PR blog about the reasons behind this immediate Black and White style change.

Read the articles we have included in this resource to stimulate discussion and further exploration of the words that reflect current culture.
Nothing brings me more existential pain than hearing from former students of tyrannical English teachers, the ones who seem to think that knowing how to diagram a sentence is more important than learning how to communicate.

The first skill is about following rules. The second is about being human.

Here’s how you know if you’re a former student of a tyrannical English teacher: You are the kind of person who reads four paragraphs of an article before stumbling upon a single misplaced comma that makes you decide the entire story is crud. You are someone who not only knows but also abides by certain rules: Paragraphs should contain at least three sentences. Never begin a sentence with “But.”

But lately, some grammarians have focused their fervor over one particular bugaboo — the use, or alleged misuse, of the pronoun “they.” Their argument goes that “they” and “their” are always plural and must never refer to a single individual.

Elizabeth is running = she is running.
Elizabeth and Bernie are running = they are running.

We know this less as an actual grammar rule than we do as a habit of natural speech, one that most of us absorb quickly by late toddlerhood. Eventually, we just follow it because it feels right. Eventually, much of life is learned through the osmosis of what feels right — patterns that become ingrained in our brains and hard to change.

The singular “they” has recently been causing consternation. An increasing number of individuals now publicly identify as non-binary, meaning that they don’t classify themselves as male or female. The singer Sam Smith came out earlier this year as non-binary; “Billions” star Asia Kate Dillon also identifies that way. And the pronoun that these and many other non-binary folks prefer to use is “they.”

When is Sam arriving? Oh, they’ll be here at 8.

Asia got a new dog, Lady Barkalot, and they are obsessed with her.

If the above sentences make you hyperventilate — well, you aren’t entirely alone. I once had coffee with a mother whose college-age child had recently come out as non-binary. The mom’s first concern, after her kid’s safety and how to tell the grandparents, was that she’d never get the hang of “they.” It was just too weird-sounding. Surely, she told me, her kid would forgive her for that.

For a subset of the crowd bothered by the singular “they,” this isn’t really a grammatical issue. I know this because when they write me, their correspondence is littered with misuses of “your” vs. “you’re,” and modifiers dangling off cliffs. And yet they want to tell me that using “they” for non-binary individuals somehow signifies the literal coming of the apocalypse.

For them, the grammar excuse seems to be a convenient fig leaf, and what it’s covering is these letter writers’ own prejudice.

Others, however, seem to experience genuine, acute pain at the concept of betraying the lessons of Mrs. Pemberlay from Roosevelt Middle School. The pull of long-ago English teachers is incredibly strong. And so is the pull of, “But this is how I learned it. But this is how I thought the world worked. This is how I thought things were organized, and now things are changing.”

Grammar isn’t much, but for some of its disciples, at least it’s a way to keep the world tidy. At least it’s a way to understand the rules. If the news is a mess, at least the commas can be right.

This week, Merriam-Webster dictionary announced that it was expanding the definition of “they” to specifically include usage for non-binary individuals. Editors released the news with a link to the new acceptable definition: “Used to refer to a single person whose gender identity is non-binary.”

In an accompanying article, the dictionary’s editors noted that the
addition was not as “newfangled” as it seemed: “We have evidence in our files of the non-binary ‘they’ dating back to 1950, and it’s likely that there are earlier uses of the non-binary pronoun ‘they’ out there.”

No doubt, this etymological transition will still be difficult for some. No doubt, newcomers to the term will occasionally mess up and feel silly and vulnerable.

But I hope these folks can take comfort in the idea that their vulnerability in using unfamiliar terminology is nothing compared with the vulnerability of the other person, the “they” in question who is asking them to use it.

After all, they’re essentially asking how much you care about them. Do you care enough to learn something new? Do you care enough to allow life to feel a bit complicated?

We’re not really talking about grammar. We’re talking about the willingness for all of us to feel a little uncomfortable on our universal, bumbling quest toward compassion and humanity.

No doubt, some of you would still prefer to hear this from an English teacher.

So, I wrote to one: my dad.

He is — and he would never say this, but I will — not only an English teacher, but a highly esteemed one. He directs a university writing program. He is a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English, a 25,000-member organization comprised of instructors from elementary school through college.

And he writes grammar textbooks: “The Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers” by Lynn Troyka and Douglas Hesse is used in classrooms all over the country.

My dad emailed me with a long, thoughtful commentary. He outlined the historical debate on whether dictionaries should be “prescriptive,” i.e. dictating the way things ought to be, or “descriptive,” i.e. merely documenting the way things are. He cited Samuel Johnson’s 1755 dictionary, and a great Webster’s dictionary battle from 1961.

He wrote about how language changes. How it’s always changed. How we’ve always changed. How we always will.

He also wrote, “I think the official recognition of singular they is a terrific thing. It’s great news for non-binary folks and, actually, everyone.”

Fellow lovers of language, and former English students, I hope that helps.

Monica Hesse is a columnist for The Washington Post’s Style section, who frequently writes about gender and its impact on society. She’s the author of several novels, most recently, “They Went Left.”

After reading the column by Monica Hesse, respond to these questions.

1. What cultural shift is influencing the use of the third person plural pronoun?

2. What is the news peg for this column? Summarize the reasoning provided by its editors.

3. Hesse brings in another authority to comment on this shift in usage.
   A. Who is he? Why is he a particularly reliable source?
   B. What is his reaction to the shift and his explanation?

4. Hesse presents the point of view that this shift is more than a grammatical one. Explain.

5. Why is this a natural topic for Hesse to write about in her column?
WashPost PR Blog

The Washington Post announces writing style changes for racial and ethnic identifiers

The Post to capitalize Black to identify groups that make up the African diaspora.

BY WashPostPR
July 29, 2020 at 8:59 a.m. EDT

Announcement from Multiplatform Editing Chief Jesse Lewis, Deputy Multiplatform Editor Courtney Rukan and Multiplatform Editor Brian Cleveland:

Beginning immediately, The Washington Post will uppercase the B in Black to identify the many groups that make up the African diaspora in America and elsewhere. This decision comes after extensive discussions with members of our own news organization, consultations with editors in other newsrooms nationwide and evaluations of commentary and analyses by numerous thought leaders and organizations of influence in the Black community. The use of Black is a recognition and acknowledgment not only of the cultural bonds and historical experiences shared by people of African heritage, but also the shared struggles of the descendants of enslaved people, families who immigrated generations ago and more recent immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean and other corners of the world.

In addition to the use of the uppercase B for Black, Post coverage recognizes there are individuals who prefer not to confine themselves to identity based solely on the color of their skin. Just as the U.S. Census asks individuals to categorize themselves by race, ethnicity and nationality, in our journalism, people will have the opportunity to identify as Black, African American and biracial, or something more ethnically specific, such as Afro-Latino, Ethiopian American or other national identifiers, a reflection of the many cultures and backgrounds that constitute this vast community.

This style change also prompts the question of how America’s largest racial community should be identified. Stories involving race show that White also represents a distinct cultural identity in the United States. In American history, many White Europeans who entered the country during times of mass migration were the targets of racial and ethnic discrimination. These diverse ethnicities were eventually assimilated into the collective group that has had its own cultural and historical impact on the nation. As such, White should be represented with a capital W. In accordance with our style change, people who do not want to be recognized as a color also have the choice of representing themselves by their cultural background, as they currently do, identifying as German American, Irish American, Italian American or other representations of national heritage.

Separately, we will limit the uppercase version of the racial categorization Brown to direct quotations and use it sparingly in other instances. Although the term has gained general acceptance, the designation is seen by many
as a catchall to describe people of color of vastly diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are not Black.

In the three above cases, our style guidance recognizes these racial demographics have been inexorably linked when analyzing America’s development and treatment of its citizens. As such, they should be treated similarly in terms of capitalization. However, other colors as racial identifiers have not been commonly adopted by members of the ethnic groups they are often used to portray, as many consider the terms insults or slurs.

Those identifiers will remain lowercase.

In general, racial identification and ethnic background should not be mentioned unless they are clearly relevant, such as in stories about civil rights, problems or achievements of people of color, cultural history and similar topics.

Separately, political terms used to promote racist ideologies or to advocate ethnic superiority or separation should remain lowercase (i.e. white supremacist, black nationalist). And in crime stories, where cultural and historical identity aren’t key to a suspect’s actions, use the lowercase versions of black, white and brown as race descriptors.

The Post will use other racial and ethnic identifiers as follows:

**American Indian, Native American or Alaska Native** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

**Asian American** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Hispanic or Latino** – Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish and/or are descended from Spanish-speaking populations. Latino and Latina refer to people who are from or descended from people from Latin America. Use the gender neutral Latinx if someone identifies that way. This category includes Spaniard, Chicano and Puerto Rican, as well as other national identifiers.

**Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples** – Both are uppercase when referring to the original peoples of other nations.

**Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
Nuance and Labels Make a Difference

Slight distinctions in meaning make word choice very important in covering sensitive topics. Deciding what to call a group and how to describe its actions get reactions, especially if the connotations have high emotional value. Read and consider the meaning in the terms used by reporters and the reactions of readers.

Has the reporter remained fair and balanced in the first paragraphs of the article?

Why would a reporter not follow the suggestion of the reader?

Bellicose pre-election rhetoric and surging guns sales drive anxiety

by Marc Fisher

This weekend, several dozen people will arrive at secret locations in West Virginia and Colorado to ride out the election and its aftermath. If Tuesday’s vote sparks unrest, Drew Miller’s customers at Fortitude Ranch will be secure behind walls patrol by armed guards.

“Could the election devolve into civil war? Unlikely,” mused Miller, the founder of a budding network of members-only survivalist camps. “But look at World War I: Some worthless, low-level gangsters get assassinated and things escalate out of control. I’ve got people who are concerned that all it would take is a close election and some cheating.”

In Portland, Ore., where a right-wing armed group plans to show up at ballot drop-off sites on Tuesday with weapons in plain view, some extreme right-wing organizations are preparing to be there as well.

“The right is not going to give up their power unless they feel threatened,” said Olivia Klab, a co-chair of the Democrat-See Election Fears on A12

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) was absolutely right when she said “words matter” [“13 charged in plot to seize Mich. governor,” front page Oct. 9]. Because they matter, would The Post please start referring to groups of armed White men plotting crimes to disrupt our government for what they are: gangs — not terrorist gangs. To call them “militias” is to give them an air of legitimacy they do not deserve.

The racial bias of labeling armed groups can’t be overlooked. White men are reported to be in a “militia” while Black and Latino men are in a “gang.” Wolverine Watchmen, Proud Boys — whatever they fancifully call themselves — are violent gangs. They should be named (and prosecuted) as such.

Laurie Genevro Cole, Vienna
Disinformation or Misinformation?

No matter who wins the election, disinformation will still poison our democracy

By Nina Jankowicz, October 28, 2020

Disinformation’s skeptics and defenders always have the same shtick. In 2017, I interviewed a man who spent months spreading falsehoods about Ukraine. “Fake news might be a new term,” he told me, “but it has been there all the time, throughout history.” By way of evidence, he cited the fabricated U.S. intelligence about “Weapons of Mass Destruction” during the Iraq War. More recently, exasperated cynics have reminded me of the early 20th century’s yellow journalism and even Homer’s Trojan Horse as evidence that we needn’t be so concerned about modern disinformation. Everyone survived then, and we’ll survive now, they say, presumably forgetting what happened to those who were fooled by the Greeks’ equine hoax.

But it’s clear that online disinformation is dismantling our democracy. This year, replete with coronavirus conspiracies and misleading claims about mail-in ballots, has demonstrated that disinformation has downstream effects on ordinary people, and that our ailing information ecosystem will not be healed by a change in administration alone. It is affecting public safety, public health and the functioning of our democratic institutions themselves. And to make matters worse, disinformation is here to stay. If Joe Biden is elected, Russia will not suddenly shut down the Internet Research Agency; copycat adversaries won’t cancel their efforts; and neo-Nazi forums will not immediately go dark. The widespread harm that flows from such outlets will keep on seeping into our lives and undermining our institutions. …

Two things Facebook still needs to do to reduce the spread of misinformation

By Samantha Power, October 23, 2020

As a reporter years ago in Bosnia, I witnessed malicious actors spreading lies on TV that stoked fear and fomented mass violence. In Rwanda, they used radio broadcasts. Over the past decade, this pattern has repeated on a new medium, with even greater reach. In Brazil, Hungary, Myanmar, the Philippines and elsewhere, those aiming to justify human rights abuses, steal elections, or target ethnic and religious minorities have relied on Facebook.

In the United States, Facebook’s weaponization has been well documented. Despite having been overrun by foreign disinformation in 2016, and vowing to combat falsehoods this election cycle, the platform is still not doing enough to stem their spread. Since 2016, user engagement with content from outlets known to continually publish verifiably false information has more than doubled. Disinformation and conspiracy theories — whether smears of political candidates, phony images of discarded ballots or claims that “the left” deliberately infected President Trump with the coronavirus — are being used to deepen polarization, suppress voter turnout and delegitimize the election. Alarmingly, these falsehoods could also fuel civil unrest, ultimately threatening the fabric of American democracy. …
Facebook has the technical know-how and staff capacity to notify people who have interacted with misinformation before it is labeled “false information.” In April, Facebook announced it would begin providing links to a World Health Organization myth-debunking website to users who had interacted with harmful pandemic falsehoods (such as claims that drinking bleach “cures” the virus or that social distancing is ineffective) before Facebook acted on the content itself. Yet this is not enough: Facebook urgently needs to provide relevant corrected information to all users who have unwittingly been exposed to election or other health falsehoods. Misinformation is famously “sticky.” People who see a correction will not be able to “unsee” a falsehood. Nonetheless, a notification that both explains why something is false and offers true information can help unstick misinformation. “The Debunking Handbook,” updated this month by 22 academics from MIT, Cambridge and other institutions, confirms this. Facebook’s efforts to get WHO alerts to previously misinformed users shows that it recognizes that providing links to accurate information can reduce harm. …

**Nuance and Labels Make a Difference continued**

After reading “No matter who wins the election, disinformation will still poison our democracy” and “Two things Facebook still needs to do to reduce the spread of misinformation,” respond to the following questions.

1. The writers of the opinion pieces and the headline writers use the words “disinformation” and “misinformation.”
   A. What do you think is the distinction between the two words?
   B. Samantha Power ties disinformation to outside dissemination: “Despite having been overrun by foreign disinformation in 2016 ….” What does this connection indicate about the meaning of disinformation?

2. Jankowicz makes a strong claim: “But it’s clear that online disinformation is dismantling our democracy.”
   A. What examples are given in the third paragraph to support this point of view?
   B. Do you think these are strong examples?

3. Power presents the concept of “sticky misinformation.” What does this mean?

4. What is the antidote to sticky misinformation?

5. Have you developed ways to identify misinformation?
   A. Do you pay attention to the Facebook labels?
   B. Are you able to identify certain websites and other sources of conspiracy theories?
   C. How easy is it to “unstick” misinformation?
   D. What advice would you give users of social media to get accurate information?
Falsehoods, Claims or Lies?

The central feature of Trump’s presidency: False claims and disinformation

By Glenn Kessler, Salvadore Rizzo and Meg Kelly, June 2, 2020

For weeks, as the coronavirus silently spread through the United States, President Trump belittled the threat and repeatedly praised China for “transparency” and the World Health Organization for its handling of the outbreak. But when the death toll mounted and the scope of the public health crisis became too difficult to ignore, Trump reversed course.

…

The president’s technique — refined over half a century in public life — is relentless and unforgiving: Never admit any error, constantly repeat falsehoods, and have no shame about your tactics.

From the start of Trump’s presidency, The Fact Checker team has catalogued every false or misleading statement he has made. As of May 29, the count stood at 19,127. That works out to about 15 claims per day. But the pace of deception has quickened enormously. He averaged about six claims a day in 2017, nearly 16 a day in 2018, and more than 22 a day in 2019 and 2020 so far. Indeed, the president made more false or misleading claims in 2019 than he did in 2017 and 2018 combined.

The pace and frequency of Trump’s falsehoods can feel mind-numbing — and many Americans appear to have tuned out the torrent of presidential misstatements.

…

There are certainly signs that Trumpism is beginning to influence politics in the United States more broadly. Trump’s aides frequently suggest there is no such thing as absolute, verifiable truth. Kellyanne Conway, the counselor to the president, who advises Trump on policy and communications strategy, coined the phrase “alternative facts” to defend the White House’s false claims about attendance at Trump’s inauguration.

Trump’s personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, argued that the president should avoid testifying before special counsel Robert Mueller because he could be trapped in a lie that would lead to perjury charges. “Truth isn’t truth,” Giuliani argued, explaining that everyone has their own version of the truth.

At the same time, Trump’s aides have insisted the president does not lie. Stephanie Grisham, Trump’s third press secretary, told The Washington Post in 2019 that Trump doesn’t lie, though sometimes he’s “just kidding or was speaking in hypotheticals … he loves this country and he’s not going to lie to this country.” Kayleigh McEnany, Trump’s current press secretary, in a 2019 CNN interview also said firmly and repeatedly that Trump “doesn’t lie. The press lies.”
Despite what some might think, journalism is full of rules. We have rules for sourcing, attribution, recording conversations and even rules about buying our own lunch. In writing, most of us defer to the AP Stylebook, an alphabetical catalogue of how-tos: when and how to use titles, state abbreviations, numbers vs. numerals, quotations and the like.

Punctuation rules are what they’ve always been, with slight variations from age to era. The exclamation point has fallen in and out of favor for good reason. Children are suckers for them: “I do not like green eggs and ham!” Journalists are taught to use them sparingly, if at all. This is because the exclamation point signifies shouting, which obviously can be overdone, and quickly loses its oomph. The exclamation point can also suggest a sort of debutante breathlessness.

Oh, Scarlett! I just love that drapery-dress you stitched together!! Why, how on earth did you ever conceive such a thing!!!!!!? The South is still largely populated with the overly excited. On any given day, upon running into a friend or acquaintance, it is highly probable that I’ll hear something like: “Heeeeyyyyy!!!! How ARE you???? Oh, my gosh, you look amaaaaazng!!!!” (Hugging is also very likely.)

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I don’t mind this much, though if you’re in a room full of such women, you’ll need an exclamation deflector to soften the assault on your eardrums, not to mention your self-respect.

Writing is altogether different, of course, and no good writer, Southern or otherwise, would think of overusing exclamations. It just isn’t done. To exclaim is to seem silly, shallow and self-absorbed, or, conversely, sarcastic, snarky or sneering. Usage is sometimes tricky, which is why: sparingly.

Something has shifted lately, however, and exclamation points suddenly are popping up everywhere! We might as well blame social media since most regrettable trends can be traced back to that which celebrates the silly, the shallow and the self-absorbed, not to mention sarcasm, snark and sneer. Did anyone in particular come thundering to mind?

Bingo! The exclaimer in chief’s Twitter feed is rife with exclamationary pronouncements. “Witch hunt!” “Enemy of the People!” “No collusion!” Of course this president would love exclamationary punctuation, connoting as it does loudness, boldness or, say, a booming voice before a cheering crowd. WINNING! The exclamation point, twin of the UPPERCASE, befits the narcissist who cloaks himself in a veil of superlatives.

It is exhausting and, apparently, infectious. Without pride, I confess that I, too, have begun exclaiming over absolutely nothing for pure effect, mostly to “sound” happy. Admit it: You have, too. And it does seem connected to social media and, perhaps...
especially, to texting.

As everyone eventually learns, a text can be easily misunderstood. Sometimes this may be a function of a rushed thought carelessly conveyed without attention to tone or mutual context. You know the drill: The recipient of your text completely misinterprets your intent, feelings are hurt, contracts are ripped apart, dates are broken, hearts are rent asunder.

I love texting for the same reasons you do. It’s quick and easy. To pick up the phone and call another human being requires, comparatively, a vast array of resources: a smiling voice, niceties, feigned interest in chit-chat and the expenditure of finite reserves of psychic energy. Thus, rather than speak person-to-person, we’ve begun resorting to the exclamation point to serve as our happy-face ambassador.

“Hi!” immediately connotes friendliness and a smile, whereas “Hi” is a mere door-opener, as utilitarian and dour as the messenger who arrives to serve your divorce summons.

This faux friendliness surely portends an insidious trend of trading human communion for convenience and efficiency. Isn’t this, after all, the purpose of all modern technology — and ain’t it great? Between headphones and handheld computers capable of blocking even the periphery of others’ lives, we spin our personal cocoons ever more snugly. Heaven forbid we should make eye contact.

In such a world, insularity is our default mode and the exclamation point our fashionable foil. How long can we sustain this pas de deux of self-inflicted loneliness? Not forever, I suspect. The pendulum eventually reverses course, and soon we’ll be hankering for face-to-face time over FaceTime, a conversation rather than a text, and mayhap a return to saner punctuation.

After all, to exclaim is human. But to end a sentence with a period is divine.
Kathleen Parker’s Allusions, Examples and Usage

Kathleen Parker writes a twice-weekly column on politics and culture. In this column she takes on our use of the emphatic exclamation point.

1. Review the definitions of the following words and phrases before reading Post columnist Kathleen Parker’s “Stand athwart the exclamation point. And stop.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athwart</th>
<th>Insularity</th>
<th>Rend asunder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debutante</td>
<td>Mutual context</td>
<td>Sarcastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effusive</td>
<td>Narcissist</td>
<td>Self-absorbed</td>
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<td>Foil</td>
<td>Numeral</td>
<td>Snarky</td>
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<td>Hanker</td>
<td>Pas de deux</td>
<td>Sparingly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insidious</td>
<td>Periphery</td>
<td>Tone</td>
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Respond on your own paper to the following prompts after reading Parker’s “Stand athwart the exclamation point. And stop.”

2. In her column, Parker uses several allusions. What is an allusion?

3. For each of these allusions, explain its source AND tell what it adds to the tone and theme of her column.
   A. Debutante breathlessness

   B. Oh Scarlett! I just love that drapery-dress you stitched together!! Why, how on earth did you ever conceive such a thing!!!!!!

4. She also uses examples of effusive expressions. Select one of them. In what way does it support her theme?

5. Parker repeats two descriptive groupings of three adjectives each.
   A. Explain how successful this use of repetition, definition of the adjectives and alliteration is to the flow of the commentary.
   B. What purpose does the repetition serve in its second use?

6. She uses phrases such as “rend asunder,” “serve a divorce summons” and “portends an insidious trend.” What level of language or tone do they convey?

7. Parker then inserts a question: “Isn’t this, after all, the purpose of all modern technology — and ain’t it great?” and uses “hankering.” What is the effect of the contrast in word choice — formal and informal?
8. Parker ends with a familiar quotation that she has modified to fit her column’s theme.
   A. What is the original quotation?
   B. When you compare the two aphorisms, why do you think Parker chose Alexander Pope’s
terse statement?

9. Summarize the theme of Kathleen Parker’s column.

10. Write a short personal essay on the use of punctuation in social media. You choose which punctuation
    mark(s) and which social media.
PLANET WORD and VISUAL MODIFIERS
In Word Worlds, one of the exhibits at Planet Word, visitors digitally “paint” over a panoramic image using a brush to select adjectives to change the visual images. Visual Modifiers activity is a take-off on that idea.

The 40 adjectives on 40 “cards” could be cut and put in a box from which students in class select one to use. If distance learning, students could select an adjective (“middle column, third word”) or teachers could assign an adjective. Students could also draw their scene (see page one of the activity) and then be given an adjective by a classmate to change the image.

When students share their images, they could discuss how the adjective modified their choice of details, colors and emotional connection.

HOW DO YOU SAY … ?
This activity gives students who study a language to be grouped to fill in the blanks. Native speakers might have an advantage or help the group accomplish their goals to fill in all the blanks correctly. The language of your own choice will also give native speakers and those who study another language an opportunity to share their knowledge.

Students might be asked to
• Share connections of the words through their etymology
• Look for anglicized words
• Add variations on the same expression
• Add phrases and words to the list

ETYMOLOGY — NEOLOGISMS, MODIFICATIONS and OTHER ADDITIONS
Many of the Post curriculum guides include Word Study activities in which the etymology of terms related to each guide’s theme is presented. A review of the INDEX 2001-2019 (https://nie.washingtonpost.com/node/473) will provide a list of terms to use with students for their vocabulary development. These are accessible to students of many ages.

Older students might be challenged to learn more about international languages. There are many groupings and categories of languages. The Free Dictionary online (https://www.thefreedictionary.com/language) lists many examples of languages — from academese, Americanism and anagrammatism to Yankeeism, Yiddishism and Yorkshireism. Linguistic and language academies in other countries have a web presence to communicate with their
own citizens and the world. For example, the Accademia della Crusca in Italy in the 1600s has published since 1990 a biannual *La Cursca per voi* for schools and individuals who have an interest in the Italian language (https://accademiadellacrusca.it/en/contenuti/la-crusca-per-voi/7504).

**THINK LIKE A REPORTER**
It may help to introduce students to Aristotle and his ideas about classical rhetoric. An awareness of ethos, logos and pathos could strengthen their persuasive writing. But this activity can be done without an in-depth knowledge of political, legal and ceremonial rhetoric.

After the discussion questions have been completed, students could be asked to find uses of “rhetoric” in media. What definition of “rhetoric” is being used?

Teachers could go the other direction and use “Trump’s rhetoric about the election channels a dark episode from our past.” Read and discuss the power of word and image.

Teachers may wish to ask students to focus just on the historic events in North Carolina and the measures that can be taken to prevent voter intimidation today.

**TOM TOLES AND RETORICAL MODES**
Tom Toles caught his readers by surprise with the Sunday, October 30, 2020, “Final TOLES Cartoon,” in which he announced his retirement (“get back to playing, at last”) and said farewell.

Readers responded in letters to the editor: “I am so sorry to hear … he captured the political issues of the day with his combination of art and pithy commentary.” “Oh, no! Kudos to him for unfailingly capturing the zeitgeist for so many years and for making me laugh through the tears.” “Thanks for giving Tom the canvas, and a huge thanks to Tom for painting on it for us.”

We have taken a different approach by looking at his work through the lens of rhetorical modes. Rather than provide questions to discuss Toles’ use of word play, allusion, symbols and other devices, we have given a brief explanation of the rhetorical modes to guide students’ exploration of his visual commentary. Dates will help with context of the few older editorial cartoons included.

The first example of NARRATION may not be as distinct, but have students look at the words on the Scrabble board. What story or part of the story do they tell? As the GOP explains to Uncle Sam what he could make, what flaw or false claim adds to the story Toles comments on? And his alter ego overhears more of the story in the lower right corner.