

still very much a problem today. Although there have been improvements over the past forty years, segregation is still a concern for public schools.

Questions

1. How has Tyler drawn connections to James Baldwin's essay? Examine places where he refers specifically to Baldwin's essay. Should Tyler have added more explicit references, perhaps even quotations? Explain.
2. Assuming that the third sentence ("If I were to give a talk to teachers today . . .") is Tyler's thesis, would you recommend eliminating the following three sentences? If so, why? If not, what do you think they add to the introductory paragraph?
3. Are the specific details in this essay one of its strengths or weaknesses? Explain.
4. Try rewriting a paragraph of this essay in the third person. Do you think Tyler's decision to write in the first person is more effective, or would the distance achieved by the third person have given his position greater weight?
5. Tyler opens his final paragraph with the statement, "Segregation is the core problem that exists in public high schools today." How well do you think he has prepared for and supported this conclusion?

Grammar as Rhetoric and Style

Appositives

An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that tells you more about a nearby noun or pronoun. In each sentence below, the appositive is bracketed. The arrow shows the noun or pronoun that the appositive describes.

It turned out that one of the top students, **Denny Davies**, had learned of this rule.

—MARGARET TALBOT

Kennedy, **a wiry fifty-nine-year-old who has a stern buzz cut**, was in 1997 the principal of Sarasota High School.

—MARGARET TALBOT

In 1981, two professors . . . began following the lives of eighty-one high-school valedictorians — **forty-six women and thirty-five men from Illinois**.

—MARGARET TALBOT

Japanese people have to make many of the big decisions of their lives —

whom to marry, what company to join — without detailed information.

— KYOKO MORI

We were given plenty of instruction about the specifics of writing: word

choice, description, style.

— KYOKO MORI

When my cousin Kazumi studied *ikebana*, she was disillusioned by the unfair judgments her teachers made every year.

— KYOKO MORI

Punctuation and Appositives

The last example given does not use punctuation to set off the appositive from the rest of the sentence, but the others do. Here's why: If the appositive is not essential to the meaning of the sentence but is more of an aside or parenthetical remark, then the writer uses punctuation to set off the appositive. If the appositive *is* essential to the meaning of the sentence, then the writer does *not* set off the appositive with punctuation marks. Include what is essential; exclude what is not. In the second example given, the description of the principal is a minor detail, so Margaret Talbot sets off the appositive with commas. In the final sentence, Kyoko Mori thought it essential that she personalize the anecdote by telling the reader *which* cousin she is describing, so she does not punctuate the appositive.

Choosing Punctuation

If your appositive needs punctuation, you can set off the appositive in one of three ways. First, you can use one or two commas.

The principal of Sarasota High School in 1997 was Daniel Kennedy, a wiry fifty-nine-year-old who has a stern buzz cut.

Kennedy, a wiry fifty-nine-year-old who has a stern buzz cut, was in 1997 the principal of Sarasota High School.

— MARGARET TALBOT

Second, you can use one or two dashes.

In 1981, two professors . . . began following the lives of eighty-one high-school valedictorians — forty-six women and thirty-five men from Illinois.

— MARGARET TALBOT

Japanese people have to make many of the big decisions of their lives—**whom to marry, what company to join**—without detailed information.

—KYOKO MORI

Third, you can use a colon.

We were given plenty of instruction about the specifics of writing: **word choice, description, style**.

—KYOKO MORI

Dashes emphasize the appositive more than commas do. Furthermore, if an appositive contains its own internal commas, then one dash, two dashes, or a colon makes it easier to read the complete sentence.

Position of Appositive: Before or after the Noun?

All the examples so far in this lesson have shown an appositive coming *after* the noun or pronoun it details. Although that is the most common use of an appositive, it can come before the noun or pronoun as well.

A wiry fifty-nine-year-old who has a stern buzz cut, Daniel Kennedy was the principal of Sarasota High School in 1997.

Whether you put the appositive before or after the noun it details is a stylistic choice. If in doubt, read the sentence aloud with several surrounding sentences to determine which placement sounds better.

Rhetorical and Stylistic Strategy

An appositive serves two rhetorical and stylistic functions:

- First, an appositive can *clarify* a term by providing a proper noun or a synonym for the term, by defining or explaining the term, or by getting more specific.

PROPER NOUN Its hero is Scout's father, **the saintly Atticus Finch**.

—FRANCINE PROSE

SYNONYM . . . an automaton, **a machine**, can be made to keep a school so.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

- LONGER DEFINITION** First published in 1970, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is what we have since learned to recognize as a “survivor” memoir, a first-person narrative of victimization and recovery.
—FRANCINE PROSE
- EXPLANATION** [O]ne might suppose that teenagers might enjoy the transformative science-fiction aspects of *The Metamorphosis*, a story about a young man so alienated from his “dysfunctional” family that he turns . . . into a giant beetle.
—FRANCINE PROSE
- SPECIFICITY** Yet in other genres—fiction and memoir—the news is far more upsetting.
—FRANCINE PROSE

- Second, an appositive can *smooth* choppy writing. Note how stilted each of the following items is compared with the preceding versions.

Its hero is Scout’s father. His name is Atticus Finch. He is saintly.

An automaton is a machine. An automaton can be made to keep a school so.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings was first published in 1970. It is what we have since learned to recognize as a “survivor” memoir. A “survivor” memoir is a first-person narrative. The narrative deals with victimization and recovery.

[O]ne might suppose that teenagers might enjoy the transformative science-fiction aspects of *The Metamorphosis*. *The Metamorphosis* is a story about a young man.

Yet in other genres the news is far more upsetting. Other genres are fiction and memoir.

• EXERCISE 1 •

Identify the appositive in each of the following sentences and the word or phrase it details.

1. My father, a truly exceptional man, worked at an ordinary job and was unknown outside the small town where he lived.
2. His rage passes description—the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted.

—J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

3. [W. E. B.] DuBois saw the grandeur and degradation in a single unifying thought—slavery was the West’s tragic flaw; yet it was tragic precisely because of the greatness of the civilization that encompassed it.
—Dinesh D’Souza, “Equality and the Classics”
4. The eruptions in the early part of our century—the time of world wars and emergent modernity—were premonitions of a sort.
—Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*
5. Evidently I need this starting point—the world as it appeared before people bent it to their myriad plans—from which to begin dreaming up my own myriad, imaginary hominid agendas.
—Barbara Kingsolver, “Knowing Our Place”
6. The war America waged in Vietnam, the first to be witnessed day after day by television cameras, introduced the home front to new tele-intimacy with death and destruction.
—Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
7. The restaurant’s signature dish, a tantalizing fish taco, is also one of the least expensive entrees on the menu.

• EXERCISE 2 •

Provide the correct punctuation for each of the following sentences by using a dash, comma, or colon to separate the appositive from the rest of the sentence. Or, if a sentence does not need punctuation around the appositive, for that sentence write “NP” for “no punctuation.” Be ready to explain why your choice of punctuation is the most effective in each case.

1. Several West African countries Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Cameroon, and Togo were at some time in their history under colonial rule.
2. The mayoral candidate’s rally opened to throngs of people an unusually large turnout for a cold, rainy day.
3. The British parliamentary system has two branches the House of Lords and the House of Commons.
4. The fifth canon of rhetoric style includes a writer’s choices of diction and syntax.
5. One of our most popular poets Billy Collins is also one of our most gifted.
6. The surgeons reconstructed his hand the most damaged part of his body.
7. The rewards of hard work both physical and mental are often intangible.

8. Nadine Gordimer a white South African author won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991 when the country was still under the rule of apartheid.
9. Don't you think that businesses should close on July 4 the birthday of our country?

• EXERCISE 3 •

Combine each of the following pairs of sentences into one more fluent and coherent sentence by using an appositive. Be sure to punctuate correctly.

1. The *Times* is a world-renowned newspaper. It is delivered to my house every day.
2. Dolores Cunningham is the first mayor in our town's history to increase jobs during her four-year term. She is an advocate of the supply-side theory of economics.
3. A major health problem for teenagers is bulimia. Bulimia is a potentially life-threatening eating disorder.
4. My car is in the parking lot. It's an old blue station wagon with a dent in the fender.
5. That call was from Bridget. She's the top student in my calculus class.
6. The Edwardsville Tigers are the only baseball team ever to lose a series that it had led three games to none. They will be forever remembered for this colossal choke.
7. Warren G. Harding defeated James Cox in the 1920 presidential election by 26 percentage points. This was the biggest landslide victory in the history of U.S. presidential elections.
8. The service opened to the choir's rendition of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." That performance was a smashing success.

• EXERCISE 4 •

Identify the appositives in the following sentences from "I Know Why the Caged Bird Can't Read," and explain their effect. Note that all are direct quotations.

1. Traditionally, the love of reading has been born and nurtured in high school English class—the last time many students will find themselves in a roomful of people who have all read the same text and are, in theory, prepared to discuss it.
2. The intense loyalty adults harbor for books first encountered in youth is one probable reason for the otherwise baffling longevity of vintage

mediocre novels, books that teachers may themselves have read in adolescence. . . .

3. My older son spent the first several weeks of sophomore English discussing the class's summer assignment, *Ordinary People*, a weeper and former bestseller by Judith Guest about a "dysfunctional" family recovering from a teenage son's suicide attempt.
4. Yet in other genres—fiction and memoir—the news is far more upsetting.
5. First published in 1970, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is what we have since learned to recognize as a "survivor" memoir, a first-person narrative of victimization and recovery.
6. Its hero is Scout's father, the saintly Atticus Finch, a lawyer who represents everything we cherish about justice and democracy and the American Way.
7. The novel has a shadow hero, too, the descriptively named Boo Radley, a gooney recluse who becomes the occasion for yet another lesson in tolerance and compassion.
8. To read the novel is, for most, an exercise in wish-fulfillment and self-congratulation, a chance to consider thorny issues of race and prejudice from a safe distance and with the comfortable certainty that the reader would *never* harbor the racist attitudes espoused by the lowlifes in the novel.
9. The question is no longer what the writer has written but rather who the writer is—specifically, what ethnic group or gender identity an author represents.
10. Meanwhile, aesthetic beauty—felicitous or accurate language, images, rhythm, wit, the satisfaction of recognizing something in fiction that seems fresh and true—is simply too frivolous, suspect, and elitist even to mention.

• EXERCISE 5 •

Each of the following sentences includes one or more appositives. Identify the appositives, explain their effect, and then write a sentence of your own using that sentence as a model.

1. And on the basis of the evidence—the moral and political evidence—one is compelled to say that this is a backward society.
—James Baldwin, *A Talk to Teachers*

2. So to regard the young child, the young man, requires, no doubt, rare patience: a patience that nothing but faith in the medial forces of the soul can give. —Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Education*
3. In their classes, we wrote essays about our families, friends, hobbies, future dreams—personal subjects we had not written about at school since third grade. —Kyoko Mori, *School*
4. I am also other selves: a late starter, a casualty of the culture wars of the 1960s, an alienated adolescent sopping up pop culture and dreaming of escape, an American kid growing up in the 1950s, playing touch football and watching *I Love Lucy*. —Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*
5. Mr. Somervell—a most delightful man, to whom my debt is great—was charged with the duty of teaching the stupidest boys the most regarded thing—namely, to write mere English. —Winston Churchill, *A Roving Commission: My Early Life*

Suggestions for Writing

Education

Now that you have examined a number of readings and other texts that focus on education, explore this topic yourself by synthesizing your own ideas and the readings. You might want to do more research or use readings from other classes as you write.

1. Many see standardized testing as the answer to improving public education in the United States. Thus, students face district- and state-mandated tests as well as national ones. What do you think? Write an essay discussing whether standardized testing is an effective way to improve instruction and performance. Be sure to research the topic, and broaden the scope of your essay beyond your own experience.
2. Homeschooling has become a popular alternative to public or private school for an increasing number of students in the United States. Research this trend by consulting print and electronic resources and, if possible, by interviewing someone involved with homeschooling. Would Ralph Waldo Emerson (p. 189) or Horace Mann (p. 248) support or oppose this method of education? Write an essay exploring both the benefits and the liabilities of homeschooling.
3. Many people believe that children should be required to attend at least one year of school prior to kindergarten. Write an essay explaining why tax dol-