

MARCH

Tip

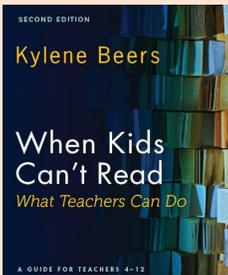
of the Month

JOYcabulary

The Case of the Puzzling Pronoun!

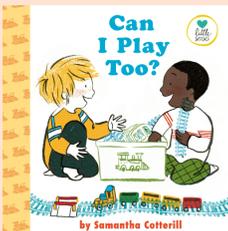
He. She. It. They. Such easy words, right? Turns out pronouns are some of the most tricky words for readers. Even high school readers. In a recent test prep session on mossflower.com, data specialist and staff developer Janet Steinburg stated that pronouns are the **second-most cause of errors** on English Language Arts **state exams** ([vocabulary is #1!](#)). Students just don't understand WHO is talking - especially when pronouns transition from part-to-part of a text.

Help Readers NOT to Lose Track of Pronouns



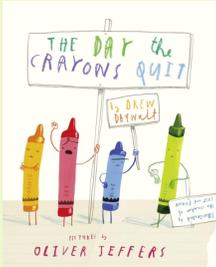
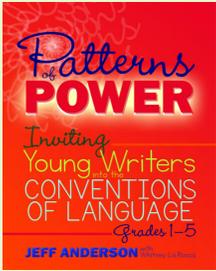
Kylene Beers, author of *When Kids Can't Read, What Can Teachers Do?* (2023), concurs with Ms. Steinburg. She contends this confusion is especially prevalent for *cataphoric pronouns* - when the pronoun appears first and the referent later. If the cataphoric pronoun appears *several* sentences before the referent, it requires the reader to hold on to it until they finally get to the referent. She states: "*This stretches the short term memory of some readers, especially those expending limited cognitive energy on decoding or fluency.*" (p. 59) She uses this example:

Dr. Smith was surprised by them. She had arrived at the hospital expecting a normal day. No one had told her that anything out of the ordinary would happen. There they were, though, all the babies she had delivered that past year, in their parents' arms, ready to celebrate her birthday.



In her example, the pronoun *them* in the first sentence isn't revealed until the fourth sentence. Even in a simple book such as *Can I Play Too?* By Samantha Cotterill, readers can lose track of the pronoun *I*.

The How: Read Aloud



Jeff Anderson, author of *Patterns of Power Grades 1-5* and Whitney LaRocca, author of *Patterns of Wonder PreK-1*, both provide lessons for pronoun work - ranging from simple replacement to what Beers calls 'syntax surgery.' See Anderson's example below from *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt:

Hey Duncan,

It's me, Red Crayon. We need to talk. You make me work harder than any of the other crayons.

To do *syntax surgery*, circle the pronouns *me*, *we*, and *you*. Draw an arrow from the pronoun to its corresponding antecedent.

Pronouns are even tricky when students write. Our young writers can quickly lose the pronoun-antecedent linkage along with the agreement in number and person.

How can you make these pronouns less puzzling? During read aloud, pause to check for understanding of the pronouns, even when it seems evident to us.

Case solved.

Welcome March! We wish you a month filled with peace, luck, & JOY!

Spread the Word. Spread the Joy.

The logo for 'JOYcabulary' features the word 'JOY' in large, colorful, outlined letters (J is blue, O is green, Y is yellow) followed by 'cabulary' in a smaller, red, sans-serif font. To the left of 'JOY' is a small graphic of three vertical bars of increasing height (blue, green, red).