

Name:

Date:

**AUTHOR'S CRAFT** COLONS, SEMICOLONS, AND DASHES

Read this long, complicated sentence:

*Ayanna made a promise to herself that she would train every day no matter what even if a hurricane blew in or aliens landed in her town she was determined to improve her speed.*

It's hard to understand, isn't it? Now read it with punctuation:

*Ayanna made a promise to herself that she would train every day; no matter what—even if a hurricane blew in or aliens landed in her town—she was determined to improve her speed.*

Writers use punctuation marks—such as colons, semicolons, and dashes—to help readers understand the flow of ideas.

Punctuation	Purpose	Example Sentence
colon (:)	introduces a list, a restatement, or an explanation	She loved only three things: her mother, her cat, and running.
semicolon (;)	joins two closely related independent clauses	Other kids watched TV or played with friends; Ayanna trained.
dash (—)	creates emphasis or suggests an interruption in thought	She sighed as she gazed at her ruined shoes—her only pair.

These punctuation marks can also help convey a character's mental state, build suspense, link ideas, and even create a mood. For instance, in the following sentence the use of dashes helps show the character's excitement:

*There were only four more days—four—FOUR—until the big race.*

**DIRECTIONS:** Read and then rewrite each sentence, inserting the punctuation in parentheses to help make the flow of ideas clear.

1. (colon) Here's the thing about running it's not always fun. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. (semicolon) Sometimes Ayanna felt like she was flying other times she felt like she had weights in her shoes. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. (dash) There was nothing that could keep her from her daily run or so she thought. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**A. DIRECTIONS:** In this excerpt from “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” by Rudyard Kipling, Rikki-tikki—a mongoose—has stolen the snake Nagaina’s egg and uses it to distract her from biting Teddy, a young boy. Earlier in the story, Rikki-tikki had killed Nagaina’s husband, Nag. Read the excerpt. Then, answer the questions.

- 1** Rikki-tikki put his paws one on each side of the egg, and his eyes were blood-red. 'What price for a snake's egg? For a young cobra? For a young king-cobra? For the last—the very last of the brood? The ants are eating all the others down by the melon-bed.'
- 2** Nagaina spun clear round, forgetting everything for the sake of the one egg; and Rikki-tikki saw Teddy's father shoot out a big hand, catch Teddy by the shoulder, and drag him across the little table with the tea-cups, safe and out of reach of Nagaina.
- 3** 'Tricked! Tricked! Tricked! *Rikk-tck-tck!*' chuckled Rikki-tikki. 'The boy is safe, and it was I—I—I that caught Nag by the hood last night in the bath-room.' Then he began to jump up and down, all four feet together, his head close to the floor. 'He threw me to and fro, but he could not shake me off. He was dead before the big man blew him in two. I did it. *Rikki-tikki-tck-tck!* Come then, Nagaina. Come and fight with me. You shall not be a widow long.'

- 1.** \_\_\_\_ In paragraph 1, why does the author use a dash?
- to show an interruption in Rikki-tikki’s thoughts
  - to emphasize that the egg is the only one left
- 2.** \_\_\_\_ In paragraph 2, for what effect does the author use a semicolon?
- to connect the snake’s action with the father’s
  - to show that Rikki-tikki is focused on the egg rather than on Teddy
- 3.** In paragraph 3, what do the dashes tell you about how Rikki-tikki is feeling? Why do you think so? \_\_\_\_\_

**B. DIRECTIONS:** Read each sentence. Then, describe the effects created by the punctuation.

SENTENCE	EFFECT OF PUNCTUATION
I looked at the dark house—the broken windows—the dead ivy—the crumbling chimney—and felt a deep sense of unease.	Dashes: _____
The old woman knew this about her son: he was an honest man.	Colon: _____
That group of girls ruled the school; they were the undisputed queens of Central High.	Semicolon: _____