

How the Grinch Stole Grammar!

(With apologies to Dr Seuss)

<https://stroppyeditor.wordpress.com/2014/03/04/how-the-grinch-stole-grammar/>

By Tom Freeman, on March 4, 2014

Every Who down in Who-ville liked English a lot
But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville, did NOT!
Whenever he thought of the language, he'd languish
In horrified anger and furious anguish!
But the funny thing was that beneath all this hate
He somehow believed, well, that English was great.
But it wasn't the English the Whos wrote and spoke –
No! THAT made him scowl! Made him fume! Made him choke!
Made him choke!
Made him choke!
Made him CHOKE! CHOKE! CHOKE! CHOKE!

So what on earth was it the innocent Whos
Were doing so wrong with the language they'd use?
If you were to walk into Who-ville one day
You'd see lots of people with fine things to say.
They'd joke and exclaim and they'd promise and sing,
They'd chat and debate – yes, they'd do anything
That this wonderfully versatile language can do,
And all would be happy – except you-know-who!

The Grinch couldn't stand it! It just wasn't RIGHT!
He'd wince at the sound and recoil at the sight
Of the writing and speech that prevailed in the town,
That were dragging the standards of English right down.
“They're lazy and loose in the use of our tongue,”
He muttered one day, when he felt highly strung.
“With their texts and their tweets and their ignorant yammer
They vandalise words and they ruin good grammar!
They break half the rules, and the others they bend;
If all this continues, then where will it end?”
With that, he resolved that it HAD to be stopped
So he got on his horse and he clipped and he clopped
And he rode into Who-ville, and reached the town square
And he gruffly addressed the large crowd he found there.

“My friends!” the Grinch cried, “You are all in great need
Of grammatical guidance. I beg you to heed
My advice about language before it's too late
To return English back to its orderly state!”

At this, all the Whos were completely confused;
They'd had no idea that their words were misused
But they gazed at the Grinch, who seemed so agitated,
And waited,
Breath bated,
To hear what he hated.

He hated a lot! As he harshly explained:
"In matters linguistic, you're hopelessly trained.
Allow me to show you some AWFUL mistakes
That I fear almost every last one of you makes!
Each time you use 'they' to refer to one person
Your standards of speech irreversibly worsen
And when you pair 'none' not with 'is' but with 'are'
You inflict upon English a hideous scar.
Whenever you make an infinitive split
You make yourself look a definitive twit!
One common misdeed that extremely disturbs
Is when verbs become nouns or when nouns become verbs.
Another thing – which, I assure you, is banned –
Is when you begin a new sentence with 'and'!
What's worse, without showing a speck of contrition,
You'll end the next one with a foul PREPOSITION!
'Between you and I',
'Different than',
Even 'ain't'
Are giving your language a horrible taint.
I could go on all day, listing errors syntactical
But there are so many... it wouldn't be practical."

He stopped and he waited and puffed out his chest.
He furrowed his brow – and the Whos were impressed!
For surely a Grinch who was such a stern sight
And acting so confident HAD to be right.
Right?

They cast their eyes downwards, their faces went red
Then finally, slowly, the Mayor stood and said:
"How awful that we've been so grossly in breach
Of the rules that define what's acceptable speech
And on paper and screen we've been writing and typing
Grammatical howlers that merit your griping.
We hadn't known how wrong we've been all this time
So PLEASE, can you stop our syntactical crime?"
The crowd, young and old, mostly nodded and pleaded
In search of the help they'd been told that they needed.

The Grinch then replied: "I can help you, of course!
I have here a Rule-Book that you can enforce
Just take my prescriptions – you'll soon all get better
At using words well, if you stick to the letter.
So there could be nothing else fitter, you see
Than to let me save you from illiteracy!"

The Whos weren't all sure, but they didn't quite dare
To argue when faced with the Grinch's firm stare
But one, little Cindy-Lou Who, gave a yelp:
"We already speak English – we don't need no help!"
"AHA!" cried the Grinch, for his trap had now sprung:
"I'm glad of a student so keen and so young,
For if you don't need NO help, that means you need SOME!"
Now Cindy-Lou frowned, as this seemed a bit dumb
And she didn't recall that her words had concurred
And her friends didn't think that was what they had heard.
But the Grinch was determined: he KNEW he could win
So he grinned his Grinch-grin and politely leaned in:
"If you meant what you said, then you DO want my rules
And if you did NOT, then you're one of those fools
Who tragically cannot use words the right way,
And people will not understand what you say."

Well, now those poor Whos were persuaded to follow
Wherever he led – what he fed them they'd swallow.
A few still had doubts, but they nodded along
Because nobody, NOBODY, dared to be wrong!

So it then was agreed that the teachers would teach
From the Grinch's Great Rule-Book of Grammar and Speech.
The newspaper chief would make every reporter
Obey, or their prose would be sent out for slaughter.
And in the town hall, every typist and clerk
Would Grinchify every report and remark.

The Grinch was delighted! "Such excellent news!
I'm sure this will rescue the language you use.
Just one thing remains that's still making me frown
And that, Mr Mayor, is the NAME of the town!
Now, 'Who-ville' is all very well when it's doing,
But when it is done to, that old name needs shooing.
As 'who' becomes 'whom' when the object of action,
The town must be 'Whom-ville' for my satisfaction!"
The Mayor was struck dumb for a moment or two.

He hadn't the faintest idea what to do.
But then he felt stupid, and then felt ashamed
So he said: "Very well... let the town be renamed!"

The Grinch, in his triumph, smiled, and hopped
Back onto his horse, and he clipped and he clopped
Back off to the north to his desolate home,
And the Whos were all left to digest his great tome.

Time passed for the Whos (or the Whoms, I should say)
Then after a year and a month and a day
The Grinch came again, to see how things were going
And maybe – who knows? – to indulge in some crowing.
He rode through the town, and his face slowly fell
Because things...
To his horror...
Were NOT going well!
He watched and he listened, and felt quite deranged
To find that the Whos' grammar hardly had changed!
A few grumpy wannabe Grinches, he saw,
Were stubbornly waging their minuscule war
But most of the people still spoke as they had
And appeared not to know they'd been told it was bad!
Their language resisted his rules, more or less
And despite this, they seemed not to suffer distress –
Except, on occasion, whenever they met
Those mean grammar-Grinches, who loved to upset
Any poor individual who didn't conform
To the rules that they somehow believed were the norm.

Now faced with his failure, the Grinch faced a choice:
To carry on fighting and raising his voice
To endlessly, heartlessly, pointlessly hammer
The Whos who ignored all the rules of Grinch grammar –
Or else to accept that the Whos were OK
That they spoke well enough, in a non-Grinchy way,
And that English would thrive without being controlled
By his rules (which had possibly been oversold).

So which did he do? Did he kick up more stink?
Or did he see sense?
Well...
What do you think?