

Language Arts

Elementary School

1. The phrases *only choice*, *freezer burn*, and *act naturally* are all oxymorons.
2. The question “Do geese see God?” is a palindrome.
3. *Pinocchio* means *pine eye* in Italian.
4. Dav Pilkey created *Captain Underpants* when he was in second grade (Hatty, 2003).
5. In antiquity, people in Asia and Europe threw old shoes at newly married couples instead of rice or confetti (Panati, 1987).

Middle School

1. Even famous writers had humble beginnings: Amy Tan wrote horoscopes, Henry David Thoreau made pencils, Charles Bukowski was a mail carrier, and L. Frank Baum bred chickens (Barrett & Mingo, 2003; Platt, 2006).
2. Ernest Hemingway’s mother dressed him up as a girl when he was young and tried to pass him off as his older sister’s twin. She even called him Ernestine in public (Platt, 2006).
3. Ian Fleming was once in espionage training, but he failed when he lost his nerve and could not bring himself to shoot anyone. Ironic considering he later created the famous character James Bond (Platt, 2006).
4. During the process of trying to publish *War of the Worlds*, H. G. Wells was not met with unanimous approval. One publisher said, “An endless nightmare. I do not believe it would take. . . . I think the verdict would be ‘Oh don’t read that horrid book’” (Barrett & Mingo, 2003).
5. E. B. White was distraught over the death of Charlotte in *Charlotte’s Web*. In fact, while he was recording a reading of the book, he had to read that section nineteen times before he could get through it without crying (Barrett & Mingo, 2003).

High School

1. The phrase “the bends” came from the late 1800s when fashionable ladies wore bustles under their skirts to try to accentuate their backsides. They also walked with their upper bodies tilted forward, and this became known as the “Grecian bends.” Not long after, when the Brooklyn Bridge was being built, men had to scuba dive to build the underwater foundations. They didn’t know about the problem of decompression sickness and when they came out of the water they would lean forward in pain just like the fashionable ladies (Schwarcz, 2003).

2. Anne Sexton once faked her own death to punish a boyfriend for being late for a date; he found her lying in the snow with what looked like blood on her head. They were both hysterical, but only Anne thought it was funny (Platt, 2006).
3. Not every writer admires his peers. In fact, some are known to be quite vicious. T. S. Eliot once said of Henry James, "Henry James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it" (Barrett & Mingo, 2003, p. 65). Even worse, William Faulkner once said of Mark Twain, "Mark Twain was a hack writer who would have been considered fourth rate in Europe, who tried out a few of the old proven 'sure-fire' literary skeletons with sufficient local color to intrigue the superficial and the lazy" (Barrett & Mingo, 2003, p. 61).
4. The FBI was keeping track of Allen Ginsberg. Among other things, they accused him of being "emotionally unstable [and] potentially dangerous" (Barrett & Mingo, 2003).
5. When John Steinbeck entertained guests, he had an unusual way of keeping the beer cold—he kept it at the bottom of the swimming pool (Platt, 2006).

References

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