Terminal Punctuation

For many kids who are learning how to write, the temptation to slap down any end punctuation (without considering how it impacts the sentence) is a strong one. Give your young learner a better feel for terminal punctuation and which of the three main marks with this activity. Shake up a much loved book from a few years prior by mixing and matching punctuation marks to change the author’s original meaning.

What You Need:

- Any beginning reader or large print chapter book
- Access to a copier or scanner
- Brightly colored scrap paper
- Scissors
- Tape
- Pencil

What You Do:

1. Copy a page or two from the story. Choose a selection with a question and an exclamation point if possible.
2. Cut small rectangles and triangles from colored scrap paper and tape these over the terminal punctuation marks on the copies.
3. Show the story to your reader. Can she tell you what mark is used to end each sentence? No peeking!
4. Have her write a question mark at the end of each sentence and then read the altered story. How do these question marks change the meaning of the story?
5. Now repeat the process with exclamation points and read again. What's different this time?
6. Let her continue to experiment mixing and matching periods, question marks and exclamation points. Can she come up with a combination of punctuation marks that make the story funny? What about sad?
7. Finally, challenge her to return the story to normal by figuring out what original punctuation marks ended each sentence.

Invite your child to expand on this activity by playing around with nursery rhymes and punctuation marks. When she comes up with a version of a nursery rhyme that she likes—because it is funny or ironic or just plain strange—have her write it out and illustrate it to create a gallery of punctuation art.