

Name _____ Period _____

The Pearl **Chapters One and Two**

Language Focus: Semicolons and Colons

L.9-10.2a

I have grown fond of semicolons in recent years. . . . It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a period. The period tells you that that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, anyway you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.
- Lewis Thomas, American scientist and poet

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A **semicolon** (pictured above on the right) can be used to connect two related independent clauses, as in the following example:

- *For some reason, I was suddenly very drowsy; all I wanted was to get into my toasty warm bed.*

Semicolons are also used to separate items in a series if a comma is part of the series. For example:

- We found shoes, socks, and an old sandwich under Clyde's bed; books, paper, and plastic cars in his closet; and spiders, dust, and broken pencils in his desk.

The semicolon separates the list of items found under Clyde's bed, in his closet, and in his desk. Using the semicolon helps the reader understand that several items were found in each place.

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A **colon** (pictured at the left) looks similar, but is used differently. Use a colon to introduce something: a list, a series of directions, or examples. (Did you notice the use of the colon in the prior sentences?) A colon helps the reader recognize that important information or clarification is coming in the sentence.

Directions: Create original sentences using the items below. Write one sentence using a semicolon and one using a colon. You do not have to use all the words on the list.

Part A

1. beach, pearl, sand, sun, waves, water, rocks, fish, boat, wind

Semicolon—

Colon—

Name _____ Period _____

The Pearl

2. moon, darkness, eyes, fire, clouds, sea, peace, storm

Semicolon—

Colon—

Part B

Just as important as learning how to use a semicolon is understanding *why* a writer might choose to use one, or, for that matter, choose not to. A semicolon, while not seen in writing nearly as often as a period or comma, is a useful and powerful grammatical tool that, when used correctly, can make a reader take notice. Semicolons imply a relationship between ideas without necessarily stating it directly for readers.

Directions: Take a look at the passage below from the text as Steinbeck wrote it. Answer the questions that follow to decide if you think the semicolon enhances the text in your opinion.

“Kino hovered; he was helpless, he was in the way.” (6)

1. Why might Steinbeck have chosen to use both a semicolon and a comma here?

“The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted; so that sea and land had the sharp clarities and the vagueness of a dream. Thus it might be that the people of the Gulf trust things of the spirit and things of the imagination, but they do not trust their eyes to show them distance or clear outline or any optical exactness.” (14)

2. In this passage, only one semicolon appears among a large description. Why do you think Steinbeck placed the semicolon where he did?

3. What might happen if you added in more semicolons?

Name _____ Period _____

The Pearl

Part C

Directions: Now, read the next passage where Steinbeck DID NOT choose to use a semicolon. Answer the questions to decide why Steinbeck may have NOT used a semicolon.

“Kino and Juana came slowly down to the beach and to Kino’s canoe, which was the one thing of value he owned in the world. It was very old. Kino’s grandfather had brought it from Nayarit, and he had given it to Kino’s father, and so it had come to Kino. It was at once property and source of food, for a man with a boat can guarantee a woman that she will eat something. It is the bulwark against starvation. And every year Kino refinished his canoe with the hard shell-like plaster by the secret method that had also come to him from his father. Now he came to the canoe and touched the bow tenderly as he always did. He laid his diving rock and his basket and the two ropes in the sand by the canoe. And he folded his blanket and laid it in the bow.” (14-15)

1. Why do you think Steinbeck chose NOT to include a semicolon in the passage above? What do periods and commas do for Steinbeck here that a semicolon could not?

2. Where would you have added semicolons in this paragraph? Why?
