

How to Do a "Caught'ya for Two" (or Three or Four)

By Jane Bell Kiester, author of the *Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle* series

While I was debating whether to devote a chapter to parents in the second Caught'ya book, I was asked to speak at a convention of Florida parents who homeschool their children. Almost all of the parents who attended my session liked the idea of the Caught'ya method and were enthusiastic about using it with their children. Spurred on by their enthusiasm and remembering what I had done with my own three sons to supplement what they were learning in school, I came up with a few modifications. These few changes make Caught'yas as effective at home as they are in a larger classroom. So, I invite you to abandon that traditional grammar text and enjoy a giggle or two as your children write and laugh their way to good English.

Before you go any further, you will want to read the "**Ten Easy Steps to a Successful Caught'ya**" chapter in one of the Caught'ya books to become acquainted with implementing Caught'yas in a classroom. You might want to keep that chapter handy for reference as you read the rest of this article. It only explains the modifications without reiterating all the directions in each step.

NOTE: In the books for grades one, two, and three, this how-to section is on the CD.

Please know that the steps in *Caught'ya!* and *Caught'ya Again!* will be slightly different. You should not have any trouble recognizing the changes. When I wrote those first two books, I assumed that teachers and parents would want to write their own Caught'ya story. The steps included that process. When I realized that only a handful of teachers, both at home and in school, wanted to write their own story, I changed the steps and eliminated some of the wording in subsequent books. The basic steps below, before modifications, are taken from the middle-school book, *Giggles in the Middle: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for Middle School*. If your child is in first through third grade, you will first want to teach him/her about editing and response journals before beginning **Step 1**. This information is included in the steps in the Caught'ya books for those levels.

Before reading the following modifications, don't forget to familiarize yourself with the TEN STEPS in the book.

Step 1: Choose a Caught'ya book and story.

To choose the correct Caught'ya book for use with your child, you will need to know the plots of the stories in each Caught'ya book. Except for the middle-school book's story (which is specifically for that age group) and the first-grade book (which uses the CLOZE technique), any of the Caught'ya stories will be effective to teach your children all the grammar, mechanics, and usage they need to learn. Please note that the high-school book, *The Chortling Bard*, includes more complex skills and literary devices. Nonetheless, I used this book very successfully with more advanced eighth graders.

Because you don't have to worry about what book teachers are using in preceding grades, you do not have to stick so closely to the suggested grade level for each story or book. This gives you more flexibility. And, you can choose a more difficult book or story because you can give your children that individual attention to help them handle the advanced level of difficulty, something teachers in larger classrooms cannot always do.

The key is that you can make the Caught'yas simpler or more difficult, depending on your children's skill levels and attention spans. If you have several children who are fairly close in age, you CAN use the same story. You simply demand more or less, according to the age and skill level of each child. How to do this is discussed in **Steps 2 and 5**.

After you choose the story you want to use and buy the appropriate book, read through the corrected Caught'yas in the two original books or the complete, uninterrupted story included in a separate chapter in all the other books. In this way, you will know how the story progresses and what your children are going to be reading (in two- or three-sentence increments) over the course of the year.

In addition to the suggested modifications for a homeschool environment, you will want to change the names of the characters to those of your children and their friends. Children love hearing fictional and fanciful adventures about themselves.

Pick a story from the list on the following page.

To aid you in your selection, I have made a few notes after each synopsis, suggesting grade levels as well as possible modifications.



Summary of Caught'ya Books and Stories

1. NOTE: These three individual books use grade-appropriate Dolch sight-word lists.

→ ***Eggbert, the Ball, Bounces by Himself: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for First Grade.*** In this whimsical story, Eggbert, a ball that thinks for himself and sighs through his valve comes to the classroom (your home), gets in all kinds of trouble, and makes new friends. This can easily be changed to a homeschool setting.

→ ***Putrescent Petra Finds Friends: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for Second Grade (grades three or four also).*** Petra, the skunk, adopts a class (or moves under your house!), and students learn all about skunks.

→ ***Juan and Marie Join the Class: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for Third Grade (also works for any grade if grade-level references are changed).*** A Mexican boy and a French girl join an American class. Language barriers cause hilarious problems while students learn about different cultures. This story is good if your children are learning French or Spanish. You can have Juan and Marie visit your home.

2. Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle

→ ***"The Magic Purple Umbrella"* (suggested for grades three-six).** An old lady gifts your class with a magic umbrella that can take your children anywhere. It does not work for miscreants or when unaccompanied by an adult. You can easily move this story to your home and reduce the number of students in the story. Kids learn the value of cooperation.

→ ***"Hairy Beast and Friends"* (suggested for grades four-seven).** In this soap opera, Hairy Beast finds love, gets rejected, commiserates with his animal buddies (like Bertha Boa), and discovers that friends are most important. No changes needed.

→ ***"Revised Romeo and Juliet"* (suggested for grades five-nine).** Romeo and Juliet in modern times visit the Verona Mall. No deaths occur in this revised tale that parallels Shakespeare's tragedy. Good for struggling ninth graders, but the Caught'yas are easy enough for lower levels. No changes needed unless you want to eliminate the kisses.

3. Caught'ya Again! More Grammar with a Giggle

→ ***"The Meanest Teacher in the World"* (suggested for grades three-six).** Mrs. Obnoxious comes to the classroom and makes everyone cry. Students first try to out-nasty her but then shower her with "niceness" with amazing results. Teachers from grades two to six have used this story very successfully. I'd suggest keeping this one in the classroom setting.

→ ***"Tales of a Four-eyed Weirdo"* (suggested for grades five-eight).** Harold is an African-American boy with zits, a corpulent body, and a "perfect" brother. He and his Caucasian counterpart, Gnarly Nerd, are snubbed by the girls and tormented by the bullies. When the two heroes save the day, everyone becomes their friend. Even Conan, the bully, reforms and (with help from Harold and Gnarly) gets good grades. You can change school to your home or a rec center.

→ ***"Charlie Excess Does It Again!"* (suggested for grades nine-twelve).** Charlie goes from excessive studying to sports to hedonism. Grounded for life, he learns (from a wise guidance counselor—you could make this a grandma) that moderation is the key. If used with eighth graders, a few references to high school will need to be changed. This can easily move to a homeschool setting.

4. Giggles in the Middle: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for Middle School

→ ***"The Bizarre Mystery of Horribly Hard Middle School."*** Most of the real teachers at HHMS have been replaced by robots. These nasty instructors (especially Ms. Grammar Grouch) smoke from the ears and do other strange things when students (who resemble yours) recite poetry. This long story spans all three grade levels. Students finally discover the mystery of the bizarre teachers in eighth grade. Poems in the story are by grade level: limerick in sixth grade, cinquain in seventh grade, and Haiku in eighth grade. You'll need to keep this one in a school as many teachers are necessary for the story progression.

5. The Chortling Bard: Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle for High School (Shakespeare in condensed form).

→ ***"Much Ado about Everything"***

→ ***"A Midsummer's Nightmare"***

→ ***"Twelfth Night of Mischief" or "What You Will, Doubled"***

Step 2: Decide on skills and level of difficulty.

Now that you have your book and have chosen the Caught'ya story you want to use, it is time to get to work. The day before, look at the Caught'ya you will be teaching the next day. Look at the skills that are included in that Caught'ya. The skills in the Caught'ya are listed to the left or above the sentences. You can choose to teach any or all of these skills, depending on the needs and proficiency level of your children. In other words, if your children are not yet at the developmental stage to write a complex sentence, simply mention it and model the comma with an explanation so that, when they are ready to learn the concept, your children will find it familiar.

Also, if your child has a short attention span, you will want to teach only the basic skills you know he/she can master. You do not want your child to lose interest or find doing Caught'yas an onerous task. Doing Caught'yas is supposed to be fun!

If you have more than one child, you can make a small lesson plan, writing down what skills you want to teach each child. It is not difficult to write your notes beside the list of skills in the book. Then, using the same Caught'ya, you could, for example, require that a younger child only write one of the sentences. You can then quietly go to that child as he/she writes the Caught'ya and write in the corrections you think are too difficult for that child. Your older children can copy and correct the full Caught'ya as written.

I've mentioned skills many times so far. Please know that each grammar, mechanics, and usage point is explained in the appendix, "Everything You Never Wanted to Know about Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage, but I'm Going to Tell You Anyway." This guide helps the teacher understand each skill as it reduces it to its simplest form. All skills listed beside or above a Caught'ya are explained in the guide with an example of that skill in a sentence that concerns my now deceased (but still much loved) dogs and cat. In the books for first, second, and third grades and middle school, you will find the appendix on the CD. In all the others, except *Caught'ya! Grammar with a Giggle*, this helpful appendix is in the book. There is no appendix in that first book, but if you bought that one, you can get the appendix emailed to you by contacting Maupin House (www.maupinhouse.com or 800-524-0634).

Step 3: Post the day's Caught'ya and suggest a journal topic.

You have several options here. First, make a copy of the day's Caught'ya from the student Caught'yas on the CD. In the case of *Caught'ya!*, *Caught'ya Again!*, or *The Chortling Bard*, which do not come with CDs, you can email caughtya@maupinhouse.com to get the student Caught'yas emailed to you in Word. You will want to keep this copy of the student Caught'ya sentences for reference.

You will need to write the Caught'ya on a whiteboard, blackboard, or any surface on which you or your child can write corrections. Some teachers project the sentences directly from the computer with an LCD projector, but however you present the Caught'yas, you also will want a copy for yourself on which to take notes (more later). Unless your child has vision problems, I urge that you NOT hand him/her a copy of the uncorrected student sentences on a piece of paper. **It is imperative that the children WRITE the Caught'ya as correctly as they can. DO NOT simply hand them the printed copy and ask them to write in corrections. Doing that will make the Caught'yas much less successful.**

I say this emphatically because in every case when a teacher tells me that Caught'yas don't work for her and her students still make a lot of errors when they write, I ask if she is making her students copy the Caught'ya. They respond that, no, they give their students a copy of the uncorrected student Caught'yas and ask them to write in corrections only on that paper. Somehow, when students write the sentences with their own hands, it seems to transfer the skills to their own writing.

The rest of this step, including the journal topic suggestion, is the same as in the book.

Step 4: Read the Caught'ya dramatically; review the vocabulary words; discuss the need for a paragraph; and warn of a difficult skill.

There are no suggested modifications for this step except that you can require that your child (or one of your children if you have several—they can take turns) look up the vocabulary word (s) and report the meaning without reading the definition verbatim. There should be no writing at this point. This is all oral.

Step 5: Students enter the vocabulary word into their vocabulary notebooks, write an entry in their journals, and write the Caught'ya as correctly as they can.

Vocabulary. Please do not require that your child use the vocabulary words in a sentence in their vocabulary notebooks. They invariably get it wrong. You can model a sentence orally and THEN ask your child to make up another sentence using the word and say the sentence out loud. You could make it a game with your child. Writing sentences for vocabulary words tends to turn “fun” vocabulary into just another school assignment. You want learning excellent vocabulary to be as amusing and pleasant as possible so that your children WANT to use the words when they speak and write.

In addition to listing the word and the meaning in the vocabulary notebook, I also suggest that you or your child make a flash card for each word on a 3” x 5” card. This way, you will have them for future reference and fun vocabulary games. (See step four of *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test* [Maupin House, 2006] for suggestions.)

Flash cards. Besides the games, flash cards of previously learned vocabulary words can be used in a seemingly annoying (to the child) but funny way that children enjoy. I know my own sons did. Keep the week’s flash cards for the Caught’ya vocabulary with you at all times. You can give a twenty-second vocabulary drill at any given moment. Do this at the most unexpected times to make it even more fun.

I did this for years with my oldest son, John, for his spelling problem, but it would have worked the same with vocabulary. Since John is slightly dyslexic and since his teachers used more traditional methods of teaching, I had to do something. He was not retaining any of the words that he learned in school. He and I made flash cards for a handful of words a week. I then drilled him at every opportunity. (I’ve put “meaning of the word” below, but with John it was “spell.”)

“John, before you take a bite of dinner, tell me the meaning of _____.”

“John, this car doesn’t start until you tell me the word that means _____”

“John, before I kiss you goodnight, please give me the meaning of _____”

Of course, John rolled his eyeballs each time, but by his grin, I knew he enjoyed the game. It soon became an integral part of our lives. He maintains to this day (and he is in his forties) that he never would have made it through college if I had not done this. As a proud

mother, I must brag. John graduated from the University of Florida with excellent grades and two degrees and is now an RN at a major hospital.

Journal entry: Same as in the Caught'ya book you have chosen.

Children write the Caught'ya as correctly as they can: Two or more children of different ages or grade levels still can use only one Caught'ya sentence. A Seventh Day Adventist teacher in central Florida who used the first Caught'ya book told me how she managed with one Caught'ya sentence for students ranging from grades one through four in the same classroom! This teacher had planned to do Caught'yas only with her third and fourth graders. The younger children felt left out. She simply went around to the younger children and, on their papers, wrote the corrections that she knew they couldn't understand.

First graders, for example, can probably work only on beginning a sentence with a capital letter and using end punctuation, but there is no reason that they can't learn this from the Caught'yas and feel good in the process as long as those are the only errors they have to correct. You can model the rest.

With only one or two children in the class, a parent easily can lean over the younger child and supply commas or whatever the younger child is not old enough to grasp. The younger child then feels included, and the parent does not have to work with two stories and two Caught'yas. Most importantly, each child can experience success.

Step 6: Walk around the room, giving feedback and commenting on the Caught'ya.

Hang over your child like a hungry vulture. Drive him/her crazy. Make a big deal of correct answers. Unless you see the frustration level rise too much, do not supply any of the answers. Just tease and challenge. If you have one of the earlier books, you might want to go to a library to read about the "Victor Borge Technique" I recommend using with this step. Torment verbally in an amusing way when a mistake is made. I am known for my raucous, annoying cackle. If your child is the type who likes to work in privacy, then sit like a cat, a little distance from him/her. Keep your imaginary tail swishing and look as if you are ready to attack

your prey. When your child announces that he/she has completed the Caught'ya, pounce with all humor unsheathed.

Step 7: Go to the board to correct the Caught'ya with your students.

There is only one modification in this step. If you have one student, you can have your child go to the board and make the changes. Ask him/her to do so WITHOUT copying from the paper where he/she completed the Caught'ya. This forces your student to remember the corrections for a few brief minutes, increasing the probability of retention of the skills.

If you have more than one student, have them take turns going to the board with the corrections. Because you have looked at their work, you know what they got correct and can call on them accordingly, asking only for the corrections you know that they found. Ask the younger children the more obvious things like a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence, a period at the end, the correct spelling of the day of the week., etc. Again, you want your children to experience success. Success is the cornerstone of learning.

You teach any skills missed by your children. (Use the appendix for help.) Then go over all the corrections so that your children can do **Step 8**.

Step 8: Students mark mistakes and take notes.

This is a step that does not require modification.

Step 9: Students count and indicate the number of errors.

No modifications needed.

Step 10: Collect the Caught'ya paper at the end of week.

The grading of the Caught'yas is the same as explained in the Caught'ya book you have chosen. In addition, it might be a good idea to make your child keep a notebook or folder exclusively for English work and writings in progress. They can have a section for vocabulary,

a section for papers they write, perhaps a section for the journal, and a section for Caught'yas. Keeping such a notebook helps students learn organization. Of course, your younger children cannot do this. You can keep their work in separate folders.

At the end of each week or after five completed Caught'yas, collect the Caught'ya paper and grade it. In grading the Caught'yas, a slightly different approach from that of the classroom teacher might work better. Reduce the amount taken off per error to five instead of ten and grade all the Caught'ya sentences for the week. Then follow the same procedure for evaluation described in your Caught'ya book.

I also suggest that you use a highlighter pen to highlight the skills your children miss. You can do this on the copy of each student Caught'ya that you made or, even easier, in the skill list that accompanies each Caught'ya in the book. This will give you an easy-to-see reminder as to which errors your children had trouble correcting (or missed). You can then emphasize a missed skill in a subsequent Caught'ya or add a sentence to a Caught'ya to include that particular skill. Below, I've included a few examples to give you some ideas.

A few examples of how to use Caught'yas to reinforce skills

- 1) If your child has real difficulty with correctly punctuating a quote, you can easily add to conversations in future Caught'yas to give him/her more practice. You do not have to make the additional quote long or complicated.
- 2) My own students had a particular problem with putting an apostrophe before the "s" in a plural noun or a possessive pronoun. They wrote, for example, "The dog dug up **it's** bone" instead of the correct "The dog dug up **its** bone." Similarly, they wrote, "The **dog's** played in the yard." This, sentence, of course, should be written "The **dogs** played in the yard." It is a plural, not a possessive. To correct this problem. I simply put apostrophes before EVERY "s" in all the Caught'yas for the next month to force my students to think about plurals vs. possessives and to give them more practice. It worked.
- 3) Another very common error that many children (and adults) persist in making is what I call "verb ping pong." They switch back and forth from present tense to past when they write. A quick cure for this problem is to change every other verb to present tense to make them have to think of which tense they want to use.

An extra step: Post results in a public place.

Because homeschools lack peer response, parents have to provide it. You can post “A+” papers in a prominent place at home or on a blog where friends can see them. I delighted in reading limericks from two middle-school girls whose mother had posted on her blog. They are using the middle-school Caught’ya book, *Giggles in the Middle*. You can also use the graphing skills you teach in math to create a bar graph in vivid colors of your child’s progress with the Caught’ya sentences. Make it colorful, and post it in a prominent place where visitors might see it and ask about it.

Good luck and good writing! The rest of the time you have allotted for English can be spent writing and reading. See your Caught’ya book for suggestions for mini-lessons and writing ideas.