Program Description
Learn about capital letters when the evil Dark Marker steals them. Students undertake a road trip through the American West as they chase the thief.

Onscreen Questions
• What is capitalization?
• Why do we use capitalization?
• When do we use capitalization?

Lesson Plan
Student Objectives
• Identify capitalization
• Categorize the various uses of capitalization

Materials
• Go West, Young Pens: Capitalization video
• Paper, pencils, and markers
• Passages from Mark Twain’s Roughing It or Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House on the Prairie
• Print resources

Procedures
1. After viewing the video, reinforce the video’s concepts by presenting materials from books about capitalization listed under Print Resources.
2. Review the uses of capitalization. Ask students to provide examples of capitalization (in sentences, with proper nouns, and in letters).
3. Write a list of all the uses of capital letters on the board.
4. Discuss the importance of using capital letters. Select and read a short passage from *Roughing It* or *Little House on the Prairie* that demonstrates life in the nineteenth century. Write a few sentences from the text on the board. Ask students to comment on the use of capitals in the passage. Draw attention to the placement of capitals at the beginning of each sentence. Also note the use of capitals with proper nouns. After demonstrating the need for capital letters, begin the lesson.

5. Review the setting of *Go West, Young Pens: Capitalization* and the places and characteristics of the American West in the video. The Pony Express, which operated from 1860 to 1861, was the first nationwide mail system in which riders carried letters and packages by horseback relays. Mail traveled from the East Coast to the West Coast in about 10 days. Eventually replaced by the transcontinental telegraph and trains, the Pony Express has become part of the myth of the American West. It represents the American spirit of determination.

6. Ask students to write a letter for the Pony Express using proper capitalization. Encourage students to write this letter to a person their own age, describing their daily lives to someone in the nineteenth-century American West. Encourage a discussion of favorite foods, sports, interests, friends, family life, and other features that would be similar to or different from those of a person living in that location and time period.

7. On the board, model capitalization as used in the first word of a sentence, with proper nouns, with titles (e.g., Dr., Ms., President), and in the parts of a letter (heading, greeting, and closing). Tell students that their letters should include plenty of details in addition to proper capitalization.

8. When students have completed their letters, have them explain their uses of capitalization to the class. Have students discuss the grammatical reasons for the necessary capitalization.

9. Display student letters on a classroom bulletin board.

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students clearly identified the uses of capitalization presented in the lesson (at the beginning of a sentence, with proper nouns and titles, and in letters); constructed a Pony Express letter full of details and demonstrating the different uses of proper capitalization.

- **2 points:** Students identified the uses of capitalization presented in the lesson (at the beginning of a sentence, with proper nouns, and in letters); constructed a Pony Express letter with some details and some uses of proper capitalization.

- **1 point:** Students were unable to identify the uses of capitalization presented in the lesson (at the beginning of a sentence, with proper nouns and titles, and in letters); failed to construct a Pony Express letter with details or any use of proper capitalization.
**Vocabulary**

**capitalization**
*Definition:* Uppercase letters used at the beginning of a sentence, with proper nouns and titles, and in the greeting and closing sections of letters

*Context:* We use capitalization to show when a sentence begins and to show the names of people and places.

**closing**
*Definition:* The ending section of a letter

*Context:* When finishing a letter, be sure to include a friendly closing like “Sincerely yours.”

**greeting**
*Definition:* The opening section of a letter, sometimes known as a salutation

*Context:* A respectful greeting at the beginning of a letter puts your reader at ease.

**proper noun**
*Definition:* A noun that signifies a person or place, such as “Jamie” or “New York City”

*Context:* It’s important to capitalize proper nouns so that readers can tell that they refer to people and places.

**Print Resources**

- Greenberg, Dan. *Comic-Strip Grammar*. Scholastic, 2000. This book uses reproducible humorous cartoons to explain the concept of capitalization to students and give them the opportunity to practice their skills. Grades 4–8.


- Thurston, Cheryl Miller. *Capitalization: Teaching Correct Capitalization to Kids Who Aren’t Crazy About Writing in the First Place*. Cottonwood Press, 2000. Presents an explanation of capitalization, practice sentences, and an opportunity for students to correct their own writing.
Academic Standards

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts: Writing—Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions (e.g., titles of people; proper nouns [names of towns, cities, counties, and states; days of the week; months of the year; names of streets; names of countries; holidays]); the first words of direct quotations; headings, salutations, and closings of letters)
- Language Arts: Writing—Editing and Publishing: Uses strategies to edit and publish written work (e.g., edits for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling); selects presentation format according to purpose

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How to Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.
**Video Index**—Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

**Standards Link**—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

**Teacher Resources**—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

**Video Index**

I. A Capital Problem (8 min.)

*Description*
Dark Marker steals *The Point’s* capital letters in an attempt to remake national landmarks in his own image. The team fixes the letters in his clue to determine his whereabouts.

*Pre-viewing question*
Q: Why are capital letters important?
A: Capital letters set off proper nouns and begin sentences.

*Post-viewing question*
Q: What words need capital letters?
A: Proper nouns, titles, and words that begin sentences need capital letters.

II. Capital Mistakes: Greetings, Closings, Months, and Days (4 min.)

*Description*
Dark Marker sends the team a clue filled with capitalization mistakes. Penny explains to the team that greetings, closings, months, and days should always be capitalized.

*Pre-viewing question*
Q: What happens when you do not capitalize words that begin sentences, proper nouns, and names?
A: People will not know that a new sentence is beginning or that a noun is special.
Post-viewing question
Q: What days should be capitalized?
A: The days of the week and the names of holidays should be capitalized.

III. Places (5 min.)

Description
The team finds an improperly capitalized note from Dark Marker. Penny explains that place names, such as those on the note, should be capitalized.

Pre-viewing question
Q: Which place names need capital letters?
A: The names of states, streets, towns, countries, parks, buildings, and stores need capital letters.

Post-viewing questions
Q: What place names do not need capital letters?
A: Common nouns, such as “house,” “store,” and “school,” do not need capital letters.

IV. Capitalization Review (5 min.)

Description
Before battling Dark Marker, Penny leads the team in a quick review of capitalization. They defeat Dark Marker using properly capitalized words.

Pre-viewing question
Q: When should a word be capitalized?
A: A word should be capitalized when it is a proper noun, a title, a letter opening and closing, or a word that begins a sentence.

Post-viewing question
Q: What other words should be capitalized?
A: Other words that should be capitalized include abbreviated titles, such as Mr. and Ms., and the pronoun “I.”