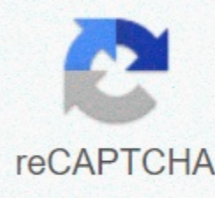




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## Eats shoots and leaves panda joke

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Falling standards in the teaching of history may explain a great deal of our contemporary woes (Brexit, British empire, Last Night of the Proms etc), but surely we’ve hit bottom when Father Christmas gets treated as a historical figure (Back to the Roo-ture? Reconstructed face of medieval monk looks familiar, 7 September)?Dr Peter PurtonSouthall, London In your report (Robots to be used in UK care homes to help reduce loneliness, 7 September) you say researchers “said the trial was not intended to explore replacing human carers with robots, but to help fill periods when, because of a stretched social care system, staff did not have time to keep residents company”. That is a perfect example of doublespeak.Gareth ReevesDurham I spent my teenage years risking life and limb by exiting the cinema in Belfast before the rendition of the English national anthem (Letters, 6 September). One never knew which “loyalist” contingent would be waiting outside to identify those of the opposite persuasion, nor what the consequences would be.Dominica JewellBazoches-au-Houlme, France Lynne Truss, in writing about her bestseller Eats, Shoots and Leaves (‘Who knew people wanted a funny book on punctuation?’, 5 September), reminded me of my US trip in 2014 when, in a bookshop in Yosemite national park, I came across a copy in the botany section.Rosy LeighLondon Your readers’ letters on ID cards (7 September) don’t convince me, so I hope they’ll respect my civil liberty to refuse to have one.Peter CollinsLondon Join the conversation – email guardian.letters@theguardian.com Read more Guardian letters – click here to visit gu.com/letters NPR’s sites use cookies, similar tracking and storage technologies, and information about the device you use to access our sites (together, “cookies”) to enhance your viewing, listening and user experience, personalize content, personalize messages from NPR’s sponsors, provide social media features, and analyze NPR’s traffic. This information is shared with social media, sponsorship, analytics, and other vendors or service providers. See details. You may click on “Your Choices” below to learn about and use cookie management tools to limit use of cookies when you visit NPR’s sites. You can adjust your cookie choices in those tools at any time. If you click “Agree and Continue” below, you acknowledge that your cookie choices in those tools will be respected and that you otherwise agree to the use of cookies on NPR’s sites. YOUR CHOICES Something went wrong. Wait a moment and try again. These examples come from Eats, shoots and leaves which is itself an example of how punctuation can change the meaning of a written text. The title of the book is the punch line of a joke about a panda in a bar. Work out the difference in meaning between: and and Adding the comma can not only change the meaning but clarifies which meaning is intended by the writer. Similarly consider the following: Woman, without her man, is nothing, and Woman, without her, man is nothing. Punctuate the following letter in two ways such that there are two completely opposed meanings: one says that Jack is the love of Jill’s life; the other says that Jack is the last person that Jill would ever want to meet again. dear jack I want a man who knows what love is you are kind generous thoughtful people who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior you have ruined me for other men I yearn for you I have no feelings whatsoever when we’re apart I can be forever happy will you let me be yours jill Then: work out how many sentences there are in this text — this will lead you to think about what a sentence is. work out how you decided where to put the punctuation in the text — which in turn will have informed your decision on where to put the sentence breaks — which in turn will help you work out what is a sentence. on what grounds have you decided that each sentence is a sentence? work out how many words there are in this text. Then see if you can write another sequence of words that can similarly be changed in meaning, simply by changing the punctuation. Before you leave this page, consider the title ‘Punctuation Matters’, which is syntactically ambiguous. Identify the two syntactic structures, either of which (or both) could be understood by the reader and either (or both) of which could have been intended by the writer. Reference Truss, L. (2003) Eats, shoots & leaves, London: Profile Books. Skip to navigation Skip to content There is a well-known book on punctuation called Eats, Shoots and Leaves, the title of which is based on a joke which goes as follows:A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.“Why?” asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.“I’m a panda,” he says at the door. “Look it up.”The waiter turns to the relevant entry in the manual and, sure enough, finds an explanation.“Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots, & leaves.” Eats, Shoots and Leaves written by Lynne Truss was followed by Eats, Roots and Leaves by Nicholas Waters who set out to criticise people he described as ‘grammar fascists’. It occurred to me, slightly late in the day, that it is only Australians and New Zealanders who would have found this a slightly salacious joke title. This is because we have the meaning of root which is labelled coarse in the OED, that is, ‘to have sexual intercourse’. In British English to root is what pigs do when they dig up the ground searching for truffles. It is not, as you might intuitively think, related to root meaning ‘to dig out by the roots’, but to a Germanic word meaning ‘to plough’. What the pig does to the soil with its snout is akin to what the plough does. This sense of root extends from pigs to some other animals that dig up the soil, and to humans who rummage around trying to find something. The only other meaning that British English offers is from schoolboy slang and is ‘to kick in the backside’. The Americans added root for meaning to support a team or an individual and the British picked that up as well. I think that Australians prefer to barrack for their teams. The OED links this meaning without explanation to the rooting of the pigs, but American Heritage suggests that it might be from the British dialect word rout meaning ‘to bellow or roar’. And then there is the coarse slang of the Australians and New Zealanders, which leads us, almost unwillingly because we don’t like to encourage Americanisms, to adopt the pronunciation [raʊt] for route so as to avoid the taboo colouring of root. As a flow-on from the British English use we also talk about pig-rooting the land when we mean that we are digging it up in a fairly haphazard fashion as a pig does. And we talk about a horse pig-rooting when it kicks its back legs up because, it is suggested, it looks rather like a pig rooting for underground delicacies. “A panda walks into a bar. The bartender says “hey, we don’t serve pandas here.” But the panda says “Just give me something to eat, and then I’ll go.” The bartender says “Oh, all right.” So the panda eats the food that the bartender gives him. So the bartender says, “OK, now you have to leave.” But the panda says “Oh no I don’t.” and he pulls out a gun!!! and pow! pow! shoots up the bar. The Panda starts to leave. The bartender says “Hey! you can’t just leave after shooting at us!” the panda says “Oh, yes I can. Look me up in the dictionary.” So the panda leaves and the bartender gets out a dictionary and looks up panda. It says: “Panda – eats shoots and leaves.” ”

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