Punctuation at Work

Notice punctuation choices in a model informational passage.

ELA.9.C.3 "Following Conventions"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each semicolon. Circle each colon and draw a box around each direct quotation to notice how punctuation connects ideas, introduces information, and shows exact spoken words.

The Library Seed Exchange

1 On Saturday mornings, the Eastview Library's lobby smells faintly of soil. Near the entrance, a wooden cabinet holds packets of basil, beans, and marigold seeds. The cabinet is part of the library's seed exchange, a project that lets neighbors borrow seeds, grow plants, and return new seeds after harvest. Librarian Mara Ortiz says the exchange began with a simple goal: make gardening possible for people who lack a yard or money for starter plants. By spring, the cabinet had become a meeting place for experienced gardeners and curious beginners.

2 The project works because its rules are clear. First, visitors may take only what they can plant; this limit prevents a few people from emptying the cabinet. Gardeners do not have to return the same kind of seed. Instead, they save dry seeds from healthy plants and label each packet with the plant's name, variety, and harvest year. The labels matter; without them, the next gardener cannot tell whether a packet contains spicy peppers or mild ones. As a result, the exchange builds a collection suited to local conditions.

3 At the June swap, Ortiz shared advice for first-time growers: start with one small container, place it where it receives enough light, and water the soil when it feels dry. She also warned visitors not to collect seeds from every plant. Some hybrids will not produce plants like their parents, so gardeners should consult a reliable seed guide before saving them. The library plans to add workshops on composting and pollinator gardens next year; however, Ortiz hopes the cabinet remains the project's center. "Seeds give people a reason to share knowledge," she explained.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two complete ideas does the first semicolon in paragraph 2 separate?

2. In the sentence beginning "The labels matter," what word follows the semicolon, and why is it not capitalized?

3. What does the colon after "first-time growers" in paragraph 3 introduce?

4. Which punctuation marks show the beginning and end of Ortiz's exact words in the final sentence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence announcement for a school repair café. Include a colon that introduces a list, a semicolon that joins two related complete sentences, and one correctly punctuated direct quotation.

ANSWER KEY

Punctuation at Work

GRADE 9 · ELA.9.C.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each semicolon. Circle each colon and draw a box around each direct quotation to notice how punctuation connects ideas, introduces information, and shows exact spoken words. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two complete ideas does the first semicolon in paragraph 2 separate?	**Visitors may take only what they can plant. This limit prevents a few people from emptying the cabinet.**
2	In the sentence beginning "The labels matter," what word follows the semicolon, and why is it not capitalized?	**The word is "without." A semicolon joins related independent clauses; the following word normally stays lowercase unless it ordinarily requires capitalization, such as the pronoun I or a proper noun.**
3	What does the colon after "first-time growers" in paragraph 3 introduce?	**A list of three actions for first-time growers: start with a container, place it in enough light, and water the soil when it feels dry.**
4	Which punctuation marks show the beginning and end of Ortiz's exact words in the final sentence?	**Opening and closing quotation marks.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school's repair café needs three supplies: screwdrivers, tape, and replacement buttons. Volunteers can fix small problems; they cannot repair devices with damaged batteries. "Bring an item you want to save," Ms. Chen said.

Accept responses that correctly identify the punctuation and explain its function in the passage. For Part 3, check that the student writes exactly three sentences and uses a colon, semicolon, and direct quotation correctly.