

One last word on words

Written by By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 29 March 2024 00:00



Well, folks, this is it. Today marks my final Grammar Guy column. After seven years, I've decided to hang up the typewriter and retire from the lucrative freelance newspaper column side hustle.

To leave you with one last “word nerd” lesson, I'd like to talk about the power of words (for better or for worse). In *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams' character Mr. Keating tells his students, “No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world.” This quote causes me to “sound my barbaric yawp,” as Walt Whitman writes.

Words have the power of life or death. It seems as though — in the age of social media algorithms and always-on partisan news — we only take in the words that reaffirm our already entrenched beliefs and opinions. This causes us to dig in our heels and move even further into the depths of partisanship. This is cultural poison, and we are getting more than a few daily doses of it.

It's easy to tear someone apart in the comments section of a post or story in all caps. It doesn't take courage to sit at a keyboard and spew verbal bullets at each other. And, because our echo chambers have built thick, impenetrable walls, it doesn't even matter if what we are reading is true. We can be well-informed by a wealth of fake news (although this fine newspaper only prints the facts, of course).

Whoa, that's pretty heavy, Grammar Guy.

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Over the years I've had the privilege to quip about the English language in around 400 words per clip. I'm thankful to my editors and publishers for the space to influence readers on how good grammar and a healthy grasp of language can improve our lives. That's precisely why today's final lesson is pertinent.

In a major election year where it seems our candidates and electorate are as polarized as ever, we'll receive oversized postcards and hear stump speeches full of words. These messages contain promises, threats, half-truths and carefully targeted buzzwords whose aims are to win your votes. It's your job to comb through these messages and consider what kind of future you want to see.

Hold on a minute; I'm not going to let you off the hook quite yet. You have a role to play in this, too. We can only hold others to a higher standard of worthy word usage if we embrace this priority for ourselves. In the words of Mr. Rogers, "Imagine what our neighborhoods would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person."

Your words impact your family and affect your community. You can make the world around you better by communicating honest, life-giving words.

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