

## 5.1 Apostrophes in Plurals

**key words:** punctuation, apostrophes, plural, writing errors

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1b Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/1/b>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2d Form and use possessives. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/2/d>

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We know that apostrophes mark possession (also see 5.1a on possessive apostrophe variation), as in the *dog's bowl*, and contraction or deletion of letters, as in *don't* from *do not*. Can apostrophes ever be used before a plural -s? They certainly used to be. The plural of *potato* was spelled *potato's* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And the great dictionary writer Samuel Johnson offers *grotto's* and *innuendo's* as the plurals of those words in his 1755 dictionary (Crystal, p. 88).

As for how to do it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Well, the jury is out on some words. You find variations, and even grammar and usage guides differ on the recommendations. It used to be the case that an apostrophe was used in plurals when it attached to abbreviations, acronyms, numbers, or letters, so you find examples like the following:

Please bring all your old **CD's** to the yard sale.

I got 3 **A's** on my report card!

The **1960's** was an important decade for equal rights.

This practice of using the apostrophe in such plurals is less common than it used to be, however, so all of the examples above are also ok, and maybe now even preferred, without the apostrophes:

Please bring all your old **CDs** to the yard sale.

I got 3 **As** on my report card!

The **1960s** was an important decade for equal rights.

Because we do see apostrophes to mark certain plurals, some other apostrophes slip in where they are not "supposed" to be because, well, some words look odd without a separation of the word from its suffix. We find these especially with words that end in vowels, like *skis* or *menus*.



Go on an apostrophe treasure hunt, collecting examples from your school, your town, your grocery store. Bring in examples of apostrophes that you think may be examples of errors or an example of a variation (where there is more than one correct possibility).