Whose Is It? Using Apostrophes to Show Ownership in Year 2 Writing

In Year 2, children learn to use an apostrophe and 's' to show that something belongs to someone—such as 'the dog's bone' or 'Amir's coat'. This is different from apostrophes in words like 'don't' (contractions). Parents can help by spotting examples at home and using a simple test: asking 'who does it belong to?' before adding the apostrophe.

What it is

An apostrophe is a small punctuation mark, and in Year 2 your child learns to use it with an 's' to show that something belongs to someone. For example: 'the dog's bone', 'Amir's coat', 'the teacher's desk'. The apostrophe goes before the 's'. This skill is called 'showing possession', which just means showing who something belongs to.

It's easy to mix this up with the apostrophe in words like 'don't' or 'can't', which show that a word has been shortened (this is called a contraction). But they work in different ways. Here's the key difference: if you can ask 'who does it belong to?' then you probably need an apostrophe for ownership. If you're shortening a word, you're using an apostrophe for a contraction instead.

What happens

In Year 2 English lessons, children learn this as part of their spelling and punctuation teaching. Teachers show examples like 'Mia's pencil' or 'the cat's whiskers', explain the rule, and let children practise with sentences and their own writing.

As your child practises, they'll start using apostrophes in their independent writing—in stories, labels, captions and sentences. You might see them write things like 'the princess's crown' or 'Jack's book'. They'll also learn to spot apostrophes for ownership when reading books together with their teacher or at home.

This happens gradually over the year. Some children grasp it quickly; others need more practice and reminders. Both are completely normal.

What it means for your child

Learning to use apostrophes shows that your child is beginning to understand how grammar works and how punctuation helps readers understand writing. It means they can show more clearly who things belong to, which makes their writing more precise and easier to follow.

This is a small but real step towards more mature writing. It builds confidence and shows your child they can use punctuation marks for different reasons. There's no need to worry if they make mistakes or forget the rule—apostrophes trip up many young writers, and that's part of learning. What matters is that they keep practising and start to spot the pattern. Over time, using apostrophes correctly will become automatic, just like many other writing skills.

How you can help at home

You don't need to do anything formal—just weave it into everyday life. Point out possessive apostrophes when you see them: 'Look, that sign says the shop's name' or 'That's Grandma's chair'. Play spotting games while reading together: 'Can you find who owns something in this sentence?'

When your child writes at home—labels, shopping lists, birthday cards—you can ask gently, 'Who does that belong to?' and let them add the apostrophe themselves. Keep it playful and light; there's no need to correct every mistake. Instead, model the correct way by writing simple examples together or noticing apostrophes in books and signs.

Most importantly, celebrate when they remember to use an apostrophe correctly in their writing. Short, natural conversations are far more helpful than drilling or endless correction.

Questions parents often ask

Why do we need apostrophes? They help readers spot who owns something quickly, without needing extra words. Instead of 'the coat that belongs to Maya', you can write 'Maya's coat'.

Should I correct my child every time they forget? No—gentle reminders work better than constant correction. Young learners need time and repeated examples to make the rule stick. Praise the effort.

What about 'its' and 'it's'? In Year 2, children focus on possessive apostrophes with people's names and singular nouns ('the dog's bone'). 'Its' and 'it's' are trickier and come later—don't worry about this now.

Can I point out apostrophes in the books we read? Absolutely. Spotting them in real stories helps children see why we use them, but keep it casual: 'Oh, Elmer's favourite food is in here. Did you notice the apostrophe?'

What if my child writes 'dogs'' when they mean more than one dog? That's a common confusion. For now, just model the correct way in your own writing.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Key Stages 1 and 2 — English Programmes of Study, Spelling and punctuation
- GOV.UK, Primary curriculum