



How Come We Must Dot An **i**?

The Jovial King

The alphabet, with its twenty-six letters, quickly spread across the world. Over the centuries, the shapes of the letters changed very little.

All except one—the letter **i**.

In the early days of writing, **i** was a simple, straight stick. Today, as you know, it's a much bigger bother to write.

“Remember to dot your **i**'s,” teachers say. “The word is spelled wrong if you don't dot your **i**'s.”

From its humble beginnings, the letter **i** has gone through many changes. The first came when the alphabet reached the Kingdom of Smiley, ruled by the cheerful and

jovial King Fruity-Juice.

King Fruity-Juice enjoyed having fun. Each day, his kingdom buzzed with dodgeball tournaments, capture-the flag meets, kick-the-can championships, musical-chairs matches, and relay races that wound through the village streets.

But more than anything King Juicy-Fruit loved holding silly contests. Every evening, Briar, the town crier, rang his bell and announced a brand-new competition.

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" Briar cried one evening. "Whoever can guess the number of beans in the royal cooking pot will win a pot of jelly beans!"

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" he called the next night. "The winner of the Smiley Cupcake Eating Contest will win a year supply of cupcakes."

Then came the Whistle-While-You-Juggle Showdown, the Left-Footed Hop-a-Thon, and the famous Royal Spaghetti Slurp-Off, where the loudest slurper won a crown of noodles.

When King Fruity-Juice heard about the alphabet, he learned to read. He even learned to sign his name, using Sir Cursive's fancy new handwriting.

Soon afterward, he summoned Sir Toot, the royal teacher, to his chambers to disgust his next contest.

"I want all my subjects to learn to read," he said.

“Excellent, your Excellency,” said Sir Toot.

“And to make the learning more fun, I shall hold a grand reading and writing contest!” King Fruity-Juice said.

“Excellent, your Excellency. And I shall be honored to serve as the royal reading teacher”

“Ha! Ha! This contest will be a hoot, Sir Toot,” the king laughed. “I’ll be waiting to in my throne room to test the first readers myself.”

That evening, Briar, the Crier, rang his bell in the village square and made the royal announcement.

“Hear ye! Hear ye! Any citizen of Smiley who learns to read and passes a reading quiz will win a big prize.”

By morning, hundreds of people signed up for reading lessons with Sir Toot. And for the next month the Kingdom of Smiley grew quiet as everyone studied.

Leer, the Reader

Six months later, a young boy name Leer rode his donkey through the palace gates

“Ha! Ha!” King Juicy-Fruit said. “My first contestant.”

Timidly, Leer stepped into the throne room. He removed his felt hat and bowed. “I learned to read, sire sir,” he said. “I wish to win the big prize.”

“Hee! Haa!” went the donkey out in the yard.

The king handed the boy a sheet of paper. Printed

on it was a single sentence and beneath it, the king's signature.

“Ha! Ha! Read this and the prize is yours, my boy.”

Leer studied the paper and paused. “Are you sure, sire sir,” he said, “Do you really want me to read these words aloud?”

“Come! Come, my boy,” said the king. “Have you learned to read or not? Read exactly what is on that paper.”

I can read this, so I win a big prize.

Have fun,

King Fruity-Juice

Leer held the paper with both hands. He double-checked the handwriting, took a deep breath, and read aloud: “I can read this, so I win a big prize. Have fun *King Fruity-Juice!*”

“Hee! Haaaaw!” went the donkey out in the yard.

King Fruity-Juice's smile fell. “What did you say? Are you mocking my name? How dare you. I enjoy having fun, not being made fun of.”

Leer felt faint. “But...but...,” he stammered. “That's what it says on the paper, sire sir.”

King Fruity-Juice snatched the paper from Leer's hands. He read it and read it again. After a long moment, the grin returned to his face.

“Ha! Ha! So it does, my boy,” he said. “Now I see it. The **u** and **i** in my name appear as a **w**. *King Frwity-Jwice*. Ha! Ha! That’s what you read. Ha! Ha! Because that’s exactly how it looks.”

He chuckled some more and waved the paper in the air. “The fault isn't yours...it's Sir Cursive’s handwriting. You've won the big prize, my boy! It shall be delivered to your home within the week!”

“Hee! Haaaaw!” the donkey repeated.

The Smiley **i**

That evening, King Fruity-Juice called a meeting with Sir Toot and Sir Cursive.

“Ha! Ha! A clever boy named Leer uncovered a flaw in cursive writing,” the king said, holding up the reading quiz. “When you write a **u** and **i** side-by-side, it looks like a **w**. Ha! So, when I sign my name, it reads King Frwity-Jwice. Not very regal.”

Sir Toot studied the king’s signature and nodded. “This would happen in other words too...like squirrel, quick, build, and guide.”

Sir Cursive groaned. “I’m ruined,” he said. “Or *ruined* if written in cursive.”

“But I have a solution to the **i** problem,” King Fruity-Juice said. “Ha! From now on, whenever someone writes the letter **i**, they shall place a tiny mark above it.”

“Excellent, your Excellency,” said Sir Toot. “And

what shall the mark look like?”

“I’ve given this great thought,” the king said. “From this day forth, every citizen of Smiley shall add our royal symbol above the lowercase **i**. Ha! Ha! A tiny smiley face!”

So it became official. For the first time, the **i** changed. Although it was trickier to write, it was easier to read. From that moment on, the small **i** looked like this:



And what about the big prize King Juicy-Fruit promised young Leer for learning to read? Sir Toot bought it to Leer's farm a week later. It stood about nine inches tall and an inch thick. It had a hard front and back cover with many sheets of paper bound in between.

"It's my new invention," Sir Toot said. "The world's very first *book*."

Leer read the title on the front cover.

1000 Jokes From the
Kingdom of Smiley
by
King Juicy-Fruit

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Leer.

"Hee! Haaw!" brayed his donkey.

The Changing **i**

After centuries of fun and laughter in the Kingdom of Smiley, trouble arrived. Pirates invaded the island. The pirate captain spotted the letter **i** and growled, “Garr! That smiley face must go. Aye! From now on, the mark about the **i** shall be a skull and crossbones.”



Fortunately, the pirates soon left Smiley to pillage elsewhere, and the land became peaceful again. The people elected a president who declared, “All small **i**’s shall have a peace symbol floating over them.”



Unfortunately, a few years later, an army general took control of the country. He ordered that the mark above the **i** be changed to a tiny star.



Not long after, a traveler sailed from Smiley. In every note he wrote and letter he sent, he replaced the tiny star above his **i**’s with a little heart. From land to land, wherever he wandered, he shared his hearted-**i** idea,

until it caught on and became common in nearly every country around the world.



The letter **i** stayed that way for many years. Until one day, not long ago, a third-grade girl named Mimi Mississippi sat at her desk practicing handwriting. The teacher had assigned the class to write their names ten times.

“And don’t forget to heart your **i**’s,” the teacher said.

Mimi began writing. With great care, she drew a tiny heart above all five **i**’s in Mimi Mississippi. But halfway through the third name, she slammed her pencil on her desktop.

“Drawing all these hearts is a waste of time and pencil lead,” she said

“I’m sorry, Mimi,” said the teacher. “But that’s how we write our **i**’s in school.”

“How come?” asked Mimi. “Adults are always making things more complicated than they need to be.”

She jabbed her pencil above the last **i** in her name. It left a small mark.”

“There. Much simpler.”

The teacher stared. “A dot?” she said. “Why not? I guess no one ever thought of that before.”

"Dot, dot, dot," said Mimi. "From now on I'm dotting all the i's in my name."

i

Mimi's teacher hung her handwriting paper in the hall, where the school principal spotted it.

"Dotted **i**'s," he said. "What a brilliant idea!"

The principal showed the paper to the town mayor who showed it to the state governor, who claimed the idea was his all along. The governor showed it to a senator who brought it to Congress. Belong long a law was passed a law declaring all small i's must have a dot above them. That law still stands today.

"Remember to dot your **i**'s, students," teachers still say.

As for the future of the letter **i**? Who knows? It's changed before and it'll likely change again.

But for now, unless you have a better idea...be wise and dot your **i**'s.