KICKSHAWS

DAVE MORICE
Iowa City, Iowa

Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor at drABC26@aol.com. Answers can be found in Answers and solutions at the end of this issue.

Record for Pangrammatic Window Shattered!

One of the great logological quests is the search for the shortest pangrammatic window occurring naturally in a published text. It's such a clear and simple problem: find a string of text that has all the letters of the alphabet in it at least once and that uses the fewest additional letters. It is also a maddening problem, extremely difficult, and it has left in its wake a trial of glassy-eyed logologists babbling and pointing futilely at the pages of open books. However, a few dedicated individuals have achieved success and remained sane. A. Cyril Pearson started this quest by finding a 65-letter window, cited in The Twentieth Century Standard Puzzle Book (1907). A long 95 years later, Mike Keith broke that record when he discovered two 64-letter windows ("New Record Pangrammatic Windows" in Nov 2002 Word Ways). Now, in an incredibly astonishing turn of the page, Dave Moore (a visitor to wordways.com) downloaded a bunch of books from gutenberrg.org and found a 61-letter pangrammatic window, lowering the bar by three letters at once! This choice example is top quality, too: it appears in a novel by a well-known author, it doesn’t contain any proper nouns, and it occurs within a single sentence. It is also remarkable in that it uses only ten words:

The fallen trees, the crushed thicket, the splintered limbs, the rudely torn-up soil, were made hideous by their grotesque juxtaposition with the wrecked fragments of civilization, in empty cans, broken bottles, battered hats, soleless boots, frayed stockings, cast-off rags, and the crowning absurdity of the twisted-wire skeleton of a hooped skirt hanging from a branch. -Bret Harte, Flip: A California Romance (Chapter Two)

Now the big question is, who will break the 60-letter barrier?

First Book Review

"Lederer and Shore’s Comma Sense—bear in mind that it’s their first collaboration—is speckled with humor so lame that it keeps falling on its assonance.” Whoever wrote that callous, brutal comment about Comma Sense must be lacking in their own sense of humor. Oh, wait! That comment was written by Richard Lederer and John Shore. My mistake. Yes, this book is truly unique! If language can be considered a cartoon, then Comma Sense is Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, the Road Runner, Batman, the Far Side, Charlie Brown and Donald Duck all rolled into one. Each chapter is devoted to one of thirteen punctuation marks. These marks have fun, make fun, and are fun! My favorite is the dash, which is compared to Fred Astaire: “The dash emboldens eloquence; Fred Astaire embodies elegance. Plus, they’re both skinny.” Comma Sense spins tales that sound like facts until you realize that they co-exist with punctuation marks in the wild and crazy world of Ledererean lingofantasy. “Little Shirley Temple chirped ‘And most of all, I’d like to thank that most wonderful of punctuation marks, the hyphen, which I personify!’” Seriously, this book has been cited as the clearest source on punctuation ever written. It is necessary for saving the human
race from its dangerous slide into a punctuationless exclamation point of no return. It tells you
everything you wanted to know about punctuation but were afraid to ask. If you want to see pun-
rock, open the pages of this comprehensive, hilarious book. Here is a song you will find in it that
showcases the seven coordinating conjunctions. It is sung to the tune of the Julie Andrews smash
hit “Do Re Mi”. Go ahead and sing it out loud! If your neighbors complain, give them this review
and tell them to buy the book (published by St Martin’s Press in 2005 in hardcover for $22.95).

And, a word, a real small word;
But, it’s spelled with just one T;
Or, a stick we use to row;
Nor, half of a cold countreeee;
Yet, you bet it rhymes with wet;
For, one number more than three;
So a button on your fly
And that brings us back to do, re, mi!

Portmanteaus in the Movies

Three movies have come out in the past few years in which a character adds two words together
to create a hybrid. The first one below, liger, is a real word meaning “the offspring of a lion and a
tiger,” but the scriptwriter may not have realized that. Can you find any other cinematic
portmanteaus to add to this list?

NAPOLEON DYNAMITE lion & tiger = liger
DUMB AND DUMBER bulldog & shih tzu = bullshit
BRUCE ALMIGHTY tulip & daisy = todaisy

Pest Language

In the movie “Pest,” John Leguizamo plays a manic character nicknamed Pest. At one point, Pest
and his friend have a conversation in which they use a spoken code version of English. Each word
is altered by jamming the “b” sound into the middle of the first vowel sound to create two
syllables with the accent on the second syllable. For example, “stop” becomes “stobop.” Their
conversation appears below. They spoke so quickly and fluently that it sounded like they were
actually speaking a foreign language. How fast can you read their conversation out loud?

Friend: Hibis pabarents abare gobone.
Pest: Sobo?
Friend: Poobool pabarty.
Pest: Webel, whyby didbids’t youbou sabay sobo, frebeak?

The Most Popular Poem in English

The poem below limits its vocabulary to the twelve words used most frequently in printed
English. Some of the words appear more than once. The list was published in 1950 by the World
Almanac. The Almanac’s researchers tallied 240,000 words in books, magazines and newspapers.
In descending order of frequency, here are the twelve: THE, OF, AND, TO, A, IN, THAT, IS, I,
IT, FOR, AS. The Guinness Book of Records did a similar study with the same results, but the
American Heritage Word Frequency Book (1971) disagreed with these two powerhouses: THE,
OF, AND, A, TO, IN, IS, YOU, THAT, IT, HE, FOR. I stick with the World Almanac in the
poem below. Following the belief that a poem is greater than the sum of its parts, can there be a poem more popular than this one? What else is special about it?

So that is it, Is it I for I?
The “a” in “and,” Is it so?
As this is it, This to
The “I” of “in.” That is, that to

As this to that This, as in:
Is that to this, Of “I,” the “it.”
So it is I, Is this “as”? And in “a,” the “it.”
For I it is. Is that so?

Self-Referential Words

Many words refer to themselves in many ways. Borgmann presented a bunch of words that were visually distorted to show their meaning. For instance, the word BOMB with the O portrayed as a bomb dropping downward. A German concrete poem titled “Apfel” by Eugene Gomringer contains the word APFEL (apple) printed over and over in the shape of an apple, with a single different word, WURM (worm), within it. Here is a trickier type of self-referentiality: a common two-word phrase composed of words that are self-referential individually and that combine to form a third self-referential entity. Such triads are scarce; can you find any?

SMALL LETTERS: small is a small word, letters are letters, small letters are small letters
BLACK INK black is black, ink is ink, black ink is printed in black ink
PRINTED TEXT printed is printed, text is text, printed text is printed text
SILENT TYPE silent is silent on the page, type is typed, silent type is a silent type of phrase

Gullible

Two similar jokes have made the rounds in high school and junior highs for the past couple of decades. Both involve the word gullible. Some people believe the statements and act accordingly (e.g., they look gullible up in the dictionary or look in a mirror before realizing it’s a joke), but other people figure it out right away. Here are the two jokes: (1) Did you know that the word “gullible” is not in the dictionary? (2) You’ve got “gullible” written on your forehead. Recently a third gullible joke, much more clever and funny than the first two, has appeared on several Internet websites. If you haven’t come across it, turn to Answers and Solutions.

Snellen’s Eye Chart

The last time I went to my eye doctor, he told me I had FELOPZD. I was shocked. Doctors use acronyms to soften the blow of terrible diseases. I asked him what those frightening letters meant.

“Fossilized Eye Lash On Periodic Zone Depletion,” he said. “Nothing to worry about yet. It means you’ve had an eyelash lodged in your left eye for several years and it’s starting to fossilize. If it were in there for another ten or twelve years, you might get LPED from a TOZ.”

“Holy Mother of God! That must be really awful.”
“Well, it’s not very common. Loose Partial Eyeball Disease is usually caused by a Torn Optic Zone. I’ll remove this old eyelash with a tweezers,” he said, and he plucked it out. “Uh-oh! I was afraid of this.”

“What, Doc?” I whispered in a trembling voice, but I was screaming for fear inside.

“You have FDPLTCEO—Fatally Disrupted Pressurized Link To Corneal Eyelash Oxidation.”

“No, not that! Anything but that!” I said in abject fear. “Is it terminally fatal?”

“Just a second. There! You’re a lucky man. I performed a quick PECFD, and that took care of it.”

“Thank God and all the angels in heaven for PECFDs!” I said, exhaling like Lazarus must’ve exhaled. “What exactly is a PECFD?”

“Preliminary Endo-Corneal Fissure Dilation. That means I held your upper and lower eyelids apart so the surface could get some air where the fossilized eyelash formed an indentation. This procedure eliminates the problem you have with LEFODPCT.”

“Jumpin’ Jesus! I didn’t know I had LEFODPCT. That sounds absolutely devastating! You said it’s—it’s gone now?”

“LEFODPCT is simply Lingering Eye Fibrillation Over Dilated Pupil’s Corneal Tip. In its malignant form, the patient eventually succumbs to DEFPOTEK.”

“Oh, heavenly father, no!! Not DEFPOTEK. It’s malignant, Doc? Do I have it? Is it deadly? Malignant means deadly. Don’t cushion the blow.”

“Nope, you’re all better. You had a very close call with the grim reaper, but you don’t have EDFCZP after all. Can you guess what EDFCZP stands for?”

“No, I can’t!” I said. “I have no idea!”


“Okay, okay. Elevated Deposits From-er-Cataract Zone Pressure.”

“Very good!” he said. “And if it isn’t caught in time, the patient suffers from untreatable PEZOLCFTD.”

“Untreatable!” I almost howled like a werewolf on a moonless night. “What is it, Doc?”

“Guess,” he said.

“Alright,” I said, trembling and biting my nails and combing my hair. “Let’s see. Phys-Physical Eye Z-Zone Opto-opto-to-metric Lens Corneal Tissue Fissure--I mean Fissure Tissue Distortion?”

“Disruption,” he corrected me. “And you don’t have it or any of those other nasty acronyms you just hear. Now all you need is an FP for your E. Certainly you know that that means?”
"Fearsome Poison for my Esophagus?"

"No, not at all," he said, laughing. You need a Follow-up Prescription for your Eyes."

I let out a major sigh and said "How do you remember these acronyms, Doc?"

"That poster over there on the wall lists many important acronyms that optometrists need to use," he said. "It was created by a man named Snellen years ago to help him remember optometric terms. The most important terms are at the top, and they are all printed in the largest letters.

"I thought it was an eye chart," I said in surprise. "So, you mean that doesn't test how well a person can see?"

He laughed so hard that tears came to his eyes. "No, not at all! There are really no such things as eye charts, except in the popular imagination. It's like hypnotism. If you believe in an eye chart, it works. After Snellen put the list up in his office, people started asking what it was for. He got tired of explaining all the terms, so he told his patients that it was a new invention—an 'eye chart' for measuring the accuracy of a person's vision, and that they should stand at different distances to read the letters. He was just joking, but since then it's become a ritual, and people believe it. Snellen learned it worked best when he kept a straight face.

"The eye charts swept the country. Soon other optometrists came up with other charts that represented other acronyms. They learned that it doesn't matter what letters are put up there. People respond with trust and belief to any jumble of letters in an optometrist's office. One doctor tested that theory by creating a chart using the seven cusswords forbidden by the FTC, but people read them letter by letter and nobody noticed the words. People don't realize that optometrists simply look in their eyes with a fancy magnifying glass and a cheap flashlight and say 'hmmm' every now and then and ask the patient to read the eye chart. Then they make educated guesses about a person's vision, as they've always done. Ever since Snellen Eye Charts, people's vision has improved dramatically. The eye charts aren't supposed to work, but they do. Heck, bumblebees aren't supposed to fly, but they do."

"People are really suckers for things like that, aren't they?" I said, chuckling. I looked over at the chart on his wall, smirked, and shook my head.

"By the way, when will my new prescription lenses be ready, Doc?"

"They're ready right now," he said, grabbing a pair at random from an antique wooden wine barrel behind the counter.

I put them on, and I could see better than ever. Just to test myself, I looked over at the Snellen Eye Chart. I could read every letter as clearly as possible. Now, thanks to the honesty of my optometrist, I know the medical terms that the acronyms refer to as well. All I need now is a white coat, a soft chair, a few shiny impressive machines, a prescription to Time, People and Eye Monthly, and of course a pretty nurse or two, and then I can hang out my shingle as Dr. D. Morice, Optometrist. My motto? "I use Snellen Eye Charts."

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Mike Morton writes "Tonight I heard Pieter-Dirk Uys on the radio point out that Botha (former South Africa President P.W. Botha) anagrams to Thabo (current president Thabo Mbeki)."
Second Book Review

The Wordplay Café, a $12.95 paperback, is lush. Lush with wordplay. Lush with illustrations. The publisher, Williamson Books, put a lot of care and a lot of coin into this wonderful, refreshing splash of word games for children. Adults will love it, too. Such a presentation is the stuff wordplay dreams are made of! It reflects the high energy, creativity and fun that author/illustrator Michael Kline put into it. The book begins with the “basic rules for the Wordplay Café.” Then it discusses recipes for word games, each of which includes a short description of how to prepare the word game and a list of ingredients. There are many word games, each using a different form or approach to wordplay. Word Ways readers will be delighted to see the bouncy way the book casts a new, bright light on many familiar logological forms: Word Square Snack, Acrostic Appetizers, Palindromic Potluck—let’s look for a moment at that last one. It begins with a definition of palindrome, and it includes several clear, basic examples, such as A Toyota, Tod Sees Dot, Step On No Pets, and others. Then it suggests looking through the newspaper for palindromes, beginning with simple ones such as Mom and Pop. And then it shows the Recipe, which “serves two players,” and it lists the ingredients. A section called Brain Candy gives the etymology and history of palindromes (Sotades is here). A section called Taste Test asks “Can you find two palindromes in the following poem?” and shows a four-line poem. Wonderfully wild watercolor cartoons accompany the text. Some of the other sections/games include Ad a Gram of Anagrams, Homonym Grits, Jabberwock Soup Stock, Mirror Word Macaroni & Cheese, Synonym Rolls, Word Chain Casserole, Spoonerisms You Can Eat With a Fork, and many more. So git on in here! Have a seat at the counter. Take a bite. This book is delicious. De-lush-us. Yum!

A Political Anagram

Alexian Gregory has written this anagram that does double duty as a tongue-twister on its night off: KARL ROVE’S LARK’S OVER.

Instant Classic Pangram

Mike Keith forwarded from Meyran Krause a perfect little pangram that Mey originally posted on a wordplay form on July 2005. The pangram, in which “my kind” means “people like me”, is topical and makes a lot of sense: MY KIND ZAP FOX TV, SQUELCH GWB JR.

Palindromic Town Mascots

“Here is a bit of onomastic logology,” the editor writes, “that I researched after wondering whether there existed palindromes of the form (town name)(animal name in plural), analogous to college mascots such as the Nittany Lions or the Princeton Tigers. I found examples for cats, ewes, rams, rats and deer. All the following have zip codes.” I’d root for Stark Rats!

Stacy Cats in MN NC TX VA
Sewell Ewes in NJ
Smarr Rams in GA; Smartt Rams in TN
Stark Rats in KS KY; Star Rats in ID MS NC TX; Start Rats in LA, Starr Rats in PA SC
Reed Deer in AK OK KY; Reeds Deer in MO; Reedy Deer in WV
Taxicab Words

Alexian Gregory points out that TAXICAB divides into two parts, TAXI and CAB, all three of which are perfect synonyms of each other. Is this a unique occurrence, or are there any other words that work like this? In the Random House Dictionary there’s an entry, SODA POP, which is composed of its synonyms SODA and POP. The first word is actually two words, though, which defeats the purpose of snapping a word in two for its synonyms. Does any dictionary have SODA POP spelled as a single word? On the other hand, NOGGIN is a legitimate word that chops into two parts like TAXICAB. However, NOGGIN, NOG and GIN aren’t synonyms. They are members of a well-known class of intoxicating beverages. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, NOGGIN is “a small quantity of liquor, usually a pint; more specifically, gin, scotch, or whiskey.” Breaking NOGGIN apart gives it NOG, “a strong kind of beer brewed in East Anglia,” and GIN, “an ardent spirit distilled from gain or malt.”

Random Kickshaws

Alexian sends the following selection of kickshaws. The first on the list breaks apart like TAXICAB but with opposite results.

Bridegroom = male; bride = female; groom = male
One, once and ouija are the only words in English where initial 0 is pronounced W
Raspberry is the only common word with SPB combo
Newspaper is the only common word with WSP combo
Newstand is the only common word with WSST combo
Die is unique in that in order to pluralize it you insert a C into the body of the word: dice
Funeral is unique in that in order to make it into an adjective you add an E to the body of the word—funereal
Carmel and caramel are synonyms differing by only one letter
Strengths, screeched, stretched and schlepped are the longest common one-syllable words
Kremlinologist (Russian/Greek), checkmate (Farsi/Arabic) and matador (Arabic/Spanish) are all macaronic—composed of words from two languages

Psychic Wordplay

Ove Michaelsen sends a pair of headlines that are 25 years apart and yet have an eerie closeness in their meanings:

PSYCHIC’S CRYSTAL BALL BURNS DOWN HIS FLAT IN UNFORESEEN BLAZE
(quoted in Randy Cassingham’s weekly online column, This is True, Aug 14 2005)
PSYCHICS CONVENTION POSTPONED DUE TO UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES
(remembered by Ove from 1980 or earlier)

And The Answer Is...

In the last Kickshaws, Rich Lederer and Gary Hallock presented a tricky little word puzzle. So good was it that it needed an answer, but so bad was the Kickshaws editor that no answer was provided. What is a four letter word for a three letter word which has five letters yet is still spelled with three letters, while it has only two and rarely has six and never is spelled with five? To see the answer, capitalize WHAT, FOR, WHICH, YET, IT, RARELY and NEVER. Dang, that’s good, and it gets better every time!
Perfect Tens, Scrabblewise

In the last issue, I asked if any word uses the ten Scrabble tiles that have a value of one. I suggested ULTRANOISE, a coined synonym of ULTRASOUND. Rex Gooch has found three perfect tens, all real: LAURIESTON (in Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland), L’ESTANIOUR (in France, 44°29’N, 6°20’W), and NEOLATIRUS (Nomenclator Zoologicus).

A Broadway Review

Commenting on “Wild Words” in the August Kickshaws, Don Hauptman tells us that back in January 1984 he created what he calls The Broadway Cynic’s Anagram: “CATS” CAST ACTS? SCAT! “Although this doesn’t precisely match the STAR example,” Don observes, “it’s probably untrue to claim that no other word anagrams that way. What’s more, mine makes sense!”

From eBay to Hell and Back

Some people consider EBAY the hottest thing since heaven, but others claim EBAY’s a lot hotter—they say it’s hell-hot! To prove this theory, we must connect EBAY through the power of logology to HELL. A word square is tough, but a word ladder is a horse of a different color: HELL-HELD-HOLD-TOAD-GOAD-GRAD-GRAY-ERAY-EBAY (in optics, an E-ray is something that goes with an O-ray). And here’s a sentence using these words: In Hell, I held and held and told the toad to goad the grad in gray near E-ray in eBay. Or you can use them to form a totally different narrative in the other direction: “On eBay an E-ray looks gray!” the grad screamed. “Goad the toad! I told you! Hold!” I held all Hell until it broke loose.

Selections from Doctor Spooner’s Film Collection

Bill Brandt unearthed some pretty wild spoonerisms: “Since the August issue opened Dan Pora’s Box with the Dr. Spooner library selections, I would like to submit the following from Dr. Spooner’s film collection. Unfortunately since I do not have an illustrator to provide scenes from these movies, I can only provide a one-line synopsis.”

A LOW DOWN SHIRTY DAME story about a poor girl with a heart of gold
A MAN HAULED COARSE western story where a man is hauled through the prairie
BAMBA, THE BUNGLE JOY Bamba has a problem finding happiness
BURST FLOOD about a river getting too big for its bridges
DIG BADDIE former Hell’s angel becomes a jazz musician
FABETTE’S BEAST her pet causes havoc in the neighborhood
FASHION PLOWER haute couture comes to John Deere
FATE STARE plot involves the conflict between the belief in free will and karma
FOR WHOM THE TELL BOWLS about an early European bowling league with William Tell
HEN BUR documentary about fighting chickens
ME AND GUY MAL two fellows on a cross country road trip
MISTER DEEDS TOES TO GOWN cross dresser makes a fashion statement
SUN FOR THE RUN a marathon movie
THE HOUSE OF DYING FLAGGERS documentary about highway construction workers
THE MAST OF THE LOWHICANS life on board the sailing ship S.S. Lowhicans
THE RUN GUNNERS a story centered around track and field races
THE SHAPE OF KINGS TO THUMB story about a royal fitness competition
THE TOES RAT TOO do-it-yourself film on what to do with a dead rat
TO MILL A KNOCKINGBIRD story about a man making metal woodpeckers
TRULLIVER'S GAVELS story about the life and times of Judge Trulliver
UNDER FLU TAGS horror story about a flu epidemic
WAKE OF THE WED RICH wealthy couple goes on a hotel room-smashing spree
WHEN IN MIGHT documentary on predicting earthquakes
WHEEZY EELS documentary about aquatic life in the river

The Bush Clan

The time-honored clerihew, invented by Edmund Clerihew Bentley, has always served as a gentle reminder that even the high and mighty can be made fun of in a simple four-line rhyme. In the clerihew, each line starts with the person to be figuratively drawn and quartered. In the following suite of five clerihews (six counts as an epic, I've heard), the members of a well-known Tejas rancho are doing what they enjoy doing best—sitting down. This is not meant to be a political poem, but is actually a good-natured theater-of-the-absurd rendition of a day in the life of a dynasty of primates (which anagrams to trim apes) interacting in their native habitat.

GEORGE W BUSH / Sat on his tush / And waited for someone / To give him a push
SENIOR GEORGE BUSH / Sat on his tush / And waited to give / George Junior a push
GOVERNOR JEB BUSH / Sat on his tush / And waited to give / Himself a push
THREE MALE BUSHES / Sat on their tushes / And gave each other / Three little pushes
GRANDMA BUSH / Got up from her tush / And knocked them all over / With one grand push

Sleepwriting

When I began working on this kickshaw, I came across something sent to me in an email late the night before, something that made very little sense. A text with a few red herrings to make a mystery soup. Who wrote this? Why did they send it to me? What does it mean? When I checked, I found much to my surprise that I, DrABC26, had sent it to me, DrABC26! What's going on? Was I so sleepy that night that I tapped into my subconscious and let all the stops out? Is this an example of sleepwriting? Is there a term for this experience? Is it a form of madness? (Now that would be exciting!) Have you experienced anything similar? Should I see a psychologist? Should I become a psychologologist? Bear in mind that I don't drink alcoholic beverages, don't use recreational drugs, don't spin around in circles a lot, don't have impure thoughts about nuns, don't talk to myself very much, and don't use bad English unless I'm cornered. Here is what I wrote to me, with all the words spelled, punctuated and capitalized exactly as they appeared in the email from the dark side of my soul. Read on:

From:
Date: Thu, 18 Aug 2005 02:51:11 EDT
Subject: Re: anagram poem and a QUESTION
To: DrABC26@aol.com

Now that's a great idea—writing an article with Teachrew and Writers. It migh make them feelmore in the loop. And they've always paid for new material. $200-$300, depending on how long it is and how it works. Write before you send. I youre really prepared to do what you want to do, then do want when you really went to to want you wanted to do when you thought and talked about doing these exeoing things. i"IVE NEVER noted how a GROUP OF gifted teachers as you could make plans aLL ON YOU R OWN! The secret to getting an egroup lined up aND READY—HOT PEPPERS FLOW BY THE LEAVES OF A CORN judge, and asked him if he could get them, may grandmather and grandfather. I felt so nostaligic I had to write the oil paint off the tip of my eyes, where they credid in purple in the left side of the wall, and Patrciallo, the
debutante from Italia. I want her for my prom date. I want her and Mary Tyler Moor on my prom date. When is that far-in-the-distance date? One two to the google power, or so?????????? So that was THAT AND THAT WAS MUSIC! Let’s end this wonderful window washing before we reache the ruture. I’ve been there ojince, and I’ll got there with youo. Just call me Doc. Did you know anyone who know Doc? YEs, he was Jesse James sidekick. He did killing a whoe lot ma’am. (Suddenly, Rocks dislodge and land in the tran car. If you heavr anything in the mmiddle of the night, fright is your option to fear, and andrenolyn was the gift from the golds to make the victim un incredibly fast.

A few days later, the ushers were told to ush people for smoking in the wrong polaces. the woman who wokr than, they only smokie once. So you don’t kilol them. They’re minding their own business, doing their thing. They enjhoy boy now;

Did you know that my uncle had to go to hospital. He fought against this absurd idea alhtoughf others praised its book as absurd medicines finist hour—esecpially when the payed and everyboyd was finally catching the smilir. Man, that Mother Lovin!! I thought was going to cream the guy conming the other way, put his hands under his coat and broght out a delicious perfectly heavenly merengie pie. My dad was about to accept it when Delaine and I bolted at him and ripped the entiere piece except for the last person, my father, who rolled out of his bed bounded his had on his shows without waking up. He survived. Hitchhikers never lose!...never! They never come badkd, either.

Sleepreading

As an instant follow-up to the previous section, I would like to mention several incidents of sleepreading. When I worked as an assistant librarian at Olin Library, Washington University in St. Louis, I would take a book back with me on my fifteen-minute morning break. Since I was about 18 years old, I was usually catting around the previous evening, and in the morning I was dogtired. So at the library, I would sit on a chair, open the book, rest it on my lap, and close my eyes. A friend would let me know when the break was over. Until then, I would proceed to read the book in a very relaxed state, without opening my eyes at all. This happened many times. In fact, it happened recently while I was waiting to see a doctor. The problem is, in all those sleepreadings, in which it seemed I could see through my eyelids, I could only once remember the first line of the book I was reading: “It was a house, but a very different kind of house...” I looked at the first line of the book in my lap, and it had nothing to do with houses. But with my eyes closed, it seemed I was viewing a well-printed well-written book that made perfectly good sense and was in perfectly good shape. I could feel myself holding it open on my lap! I could move my eyes up and down to read different places. I even promised myself to open my eyes quickly and remember the sentences that I saw. But, just like smoke twisting and turning from a campfire to the sky, the words in my eyes floated back to my brain. Someday I want to write a book beginning “It was a house, but a very different kind of house...”

A Poem For Monday

Last fall, I went for my annual visit to Southeast Junior High, where for a week I taught the fifth and sixth graders of Mary Jo Dane’s class. She emailed the time that I should be there and added “Be of good cheer.” When I replied, I said, “I’ll be there at exactly 8, and so the class won’t have to wait (that rhymed).” She replied jokingly that I didn’t need to explain about rhyming, and she asked me to make it at 8:10. So I decided to hold no punches and retaliate with a rhyming, timing poem. She loved it, and asked me to open her class with it.
8:10 is good. In fact, it's fine.
I might be there at 8:09.
I might be there at 8:08.
I'll do my best to not be late.

I won't rush in at 8:11.
I might be there at 8:07.
It's possible I might arrive
At 8:06 or 8:05.

Or 8:04 or 8:03
Or 8:02. Let's wait and see.
I might be there at 8:01
Or 8 o'clock. That would be fun.

I might make 7:59,
Which, like 8:10, is pretty fine.
And yet I think it would be great
To come at 7:58.

Third Book Review

A Visit From St. Alphabet begins "'Twas the night before X, when all through the Y, not a letter was stirring, not even an I. The S's were hung by the T's with care, in the hopes that St. Alphabet soon would be there." The publisher printed this book so sweetly that it looks like a small box of Whitman Sampler chocolates. It has a deep red dust jacket showing the good St. Alphabet flying through the sky on his A, pulled by his eight tiny B's. Then he flies off to points unknown. Where is he going? Maybe to your house!

I wrote this book in 1972 during a translation workshop at the University of Iowa. I was supposed to be translating Lorca from Spanish to English, but instead I was inspired, through the gift of language, to change St. Nicholas to St. Alphabet. In 1980 the publisher of Toothpaste Press said he would publish it if I could do the drawings in two weeks. I chained myself to my drawing table and drew at least 400,000 strokes in the allotted time, and the first paperback edition was published. Over the years, I have read the poem to well over ten thousand people of all ages. Thus St. Alphabet came to life. In 1986, St. Alphabet flew down the chimney at the editor's house in Morristown while he was getting ready to put out the Christmas season Word Ways. When Ross turned his head away, St. Alphabet landed on a couple of pages, masked as the poem, and hitched a free ride in the mag to true believers around the country.

The book has had its own adventures. A friend of mine was carrying five copies to give to friends in the western part of the US. He stopped at a hotel to spend the night. The next morning several items were stolen from the car, including his radio, his clothes, and all five copies of St. Alphabet. On the other side of the world, a US librarian working in the Mideast was taking two copies back to her library in Saudi Arabia. The border guards saw the "St." in the title and confiscated both copies as religious books. They were never returned. The Coffee House Press edition (hardbound, $9.95) is already in many bookstores around the country. If your bookstore doesn't have it yet, please request that they order a hundred thousand copies. I really need the money to buy Christmas presents. "But I read in the sky, ere he wrote out of sight, 'Happy Alphabet to all, and to all a good write!'"
Saint Edith of Wilton

“Saint Odo the Good festival is celebrated on July 4th, which apparently is celebrated quite widely in your neck of the woods,” Peter Newby writes. “Though Saint Odo is probably the most popular on New Bybwen, the citizens of this unique Mercian town are especially fond of Saint Edith of Wilton, the natural daughter of an ancient Saxon king who spent her short life in a nunnery at Wilton, near Salisbury. Her feast day, the 16th of September, is celebrated by many of the local institutions, all of whom refer to it as EDITHTIDE.”

Snakes and Ladders

A new generation of word ladders is available, courtesy of Peter Newby, by selecting a syllable of a larger word and converting it to a synonym or an example. Animal adjectives are a natural:

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<th>SERPENTINE</th>
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<th>VULPINE</th>
<th>STRIGINE</th>
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<td>BEA</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOA</td>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>OWL</td>
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Simple ladders like these have little appeal for the more extreme wordsmiths, so those who wish to impress may prefer to construct one like the example below (KY is an OED synonym for “cows”). Regular word ladder rules apply. Minimal changes are preferred. Ladders must originate on a discovered word such as ABET in ALPHABET, not LPHA.

BO VINE
BY KINE
KY

Drat!

“The propaganda classic—DRAT SADDAM, A MAD DASTARD—is losing its impact on an almost daily basis,” Peter fears. “Eventually it will be a mere curiosity, a happier fate than that which has befallen a particularly clever riddle which enjoyed a heyday during the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. Question: What was the prime minister’s surname in 1940? Answer: Roberts. Roberts was the maiden name of the great lady in 1940, though most folk fell into the trap of choosing between Chamberlain and Churchill, both of whom held office in that dramatic year. An equally transitory offering is the New Bybwen telegram from the president of Pakistan to a glamorous Hollywood star: FARRAH, SUM XIX. MUSHARRAF. Mind you, some of the Mercian kin’s linguistic purists consider this to be as inferior as such ephemeral offerings as the cheater’s palindrome ‘DEMUF NED, AL, NIB A MASO,’ SAID DI AS OSAMA BIN LADEN FUMED.”

Redefining Ames

“A recent kickshaw of Jay Ames considered alternative definitions for words prefixed CAT- and DOG-,” Peter notes. “However, Jay missed a trick with his CATALAN as a ‘Spanish cat.’ ALAN is also an old word for ‘a large hunting or biting dog introduced in the Middle Ages.’ Surely he could have submitted this as a hybrid? Even, mehaps, a cheetah?”
Cheetah’s Palindrome

And here is a follow-up by Peter to his own follow-up on Jay Ames’s CAT and DOG kickshaw. This is perhaps the world’s first cheetah’s palindrome: HAT? EEHC! A CHEETAH!

A Mardy Drama

“MARDA,” according to Peter, “is a Derbyshire dialect term for ‘timid,’ especially linked to childish cowardice. The above palindrome is descriptive of a woman’s play—a weepy. Following the precedent set by Jay Ames, here are some WEE words, headed by a redefinition of mardy dramas.”

- WEEPIES fairy cakes
- WEEKNIGHTS Sir Tom Thumb
- WEEPING the sound of a derringer being fired
- WEEVIL a Lilliputian hamlet
- WEEPS a postscript from a child
- OUIJIA French small talk [jə is a dialect verb ‘to talk’]

The Famous Mr. Morris

“The immigrant ancestor of our esteemed Kickshaws editor,” Peter writes, “so I understand, revived an obsolete spelling of his surname, MORICE, but, could this have been to distance himself from the famous Mr. Morris, after whom a newly-discovered species of fish was named? Unfortunately, the Morris had a short existence in piscatorial nomenclature—the solitary known specimen turned out to be the aborted young of a longer eel!”

I Am Sofa Kingdom

You’ve heard of the Beast of Eastbay in the Word Circus. Now prepare to meet not just one monster but a whole kingdom of furniture creatures from Davenport, Iowa. What do they look like? What to they do? Who are they? Just read the sentence above out loud. If you understand it, you get a perfect score of 3 and win a couch. If you have to read a second time to understand, you get 2 points and win a loveseat. But if you read it three or more times and still don’t know what it means, you are officially banned from the Kingdom of Sofas. You can’t return until you figure out the secret.

The Foolish Dictionary

The full title of this foolish work is “The FOOLISH DICTIONARY An exhausting work of reference to uncertain English words, their origin, meaning, legitimate and illegitimate, confused by A FEW PICTURES Executed by GIDEON WURDZ, Master of Pholly, Doctor of Loquacious Lunacy, Fellow of the Royal Gibe Society, etc., etc.” It was published by the Robinson, Luce Company, Boston MDCCCCIV. It is dedicated “To MY DOG, Who first heard these lines And didn’t run away MAD, I Reverently Dedicate This Tome.”

A book so foolish has a foolish preface that could easily be applied to our own foolish time, 101 years later. “In this age of the arduous pursuit of peace, prosperity and pleasure, the smallest contribution to the gaiety, if not to the wisdom, of nations can scarcely be unwelcome. With this in mind, the author has prepared The Foolish Dictionary, not in serious emulation of the worthier—and wordier--works of Webster and Worcester, but rather in the playful spirit of the
parodist, who would gladly direct the faint rays from his flickering candle of fun to the shrine of their great memories. With half a million English words to choose from, modesty has been the watchword, and the author has confined himself to the treatment of only about half a thousand. How wise, flippant, sober or stupid this treatment has been, it is for the reader alone to judge. However, if from epigram, derivative or pure absurdity, there be born a single laugh between the lids, the laborer will accredit himself worthy of his hire. In further explanation it should be said that some slight deference has been made to other wits, and the definitions include a few quotations from the great minds of the past and present. As for the rest, the jury will please acknowledge a plea of guilty from...Gideon Wurdz.”.

A sample of 26 words, one for each letter of the alphabet:

AUTOMOBILE: From Eng. ought to, and Lat. moveo, to move. A vehicle which ought to move, but frequently can’t.

BASEBALL: A game in which the young man who bravely strikes out for himself receives no praise for it.

CACHINNATION: The hysterical “Ha-Ha.” Syn. for Carrie Nation.

DUST: Mud with the juice squeezed out.

EAGLE: The national bird of a Christian country (the United States). Presumably chosen on account of its being a bird of pray.

FUN: Joy. FUNCTION: Devoid of joy.

GONDOLA: A pleasure craft which plies in Venice, at World’s Fairs and other popular watering places. From Eng. gone, and Lat. dolor, sadness, or Eng. dollar. Sadness gone; a gone dollar.

HELL: Poverty.

IDIOT: From Eng. Idea, and out. One who is just out of ideas.

JOKE: A form of humor enjoyed by some and misunderstood by most; in England, requiring a diagram, raised letters and a club.

KEEPSAKE: Something given us by someone we’ve forgotten.

LATH: A peculiar contortion of the human countenance, voluntary, or involuntary, superinduced by a concatenation of external circumstances, seen or heard, of a ridiculous, ludicrous, jocose, mirthful, funny, facetious or fanciful nature and accompanied by a cackle, chuckle, chortle, cachinnation, giggle, gurgle, guffaw or roar.

MIND: No matter. MATTER: Never mind.

NOBILITY: A gang of foreign brigands having abducent designs on the American Damsel and the American Dollar.

OATS: England’s horse-feed, America’s breakfast and Scotland’s table-d’hote.

POLYGLOT: A parrot that can swear in several languages.

QUACK: The Duck family’s favorite physician.

REFORMER: One who, when he smells a rat, is eager to let the cat out of the bag.

SINNER: A stupid person who gets found out.

TIPS: Wages we pay other people’s hired help.

UMPIRE: No jeweler, but a high authority on diamonds.

VIRTUE: A quality oftentimes associated with intelligence, but rarely with beauty.

WAR: A wholesale means of making heroes which, if planned in a small way, would produce only murderers.

X-RAYS: Ten dollars from a friend.

YEAR: A period originally including 365 days, now 325, since the other 50 are Lent.

ZEALOT: One who loves morality so well he will commit crime to maintain it.