Riddles of the Alphabet

If someone were to ask you, "What is the happiest of the vowels?", the proper reply for you to make would go like this: "The letter I, for it is always in happiness, and in the midst of bliss, where as E is in hell and all the rest are in purgatory."

What we have just quoted is an example of a riddle based on the alphabet. There are many such riddles. Collected here are another 20 examples. How many of them can you figure out? Don't let it bother you if you are stumped by a good many of them—you can get even with us by springing them on your unsuspecting friends!

(1) What is always invisible, and yet never out of sight?
(2) Which of our States is a physician?
(3) Why is the letter G like the sun?
(4) What is the longest word in the English language?
(5) What are the three strongest letters in the alphabet?
(6) Which of our States is an exhortation to cleanliness?
(7) Which is the father of all our States?
(8) What word of only 3 syllables contains 26 letters?
(9) What 7 letters of the alphabet did the old woman say when she looked into the empty flour barrel?
(10) When were there only two vowels?
(11) Why is the letter A like a honeysuckle?
(12) Why is Paris like the letter F?
(13) Which of our States is naturally pious?
(14) What is it that occurs twice in a moment but not once in a thousand years?
(15) Why is O the noisiest of the vowels?
(16) What is the center of gravity?
(17) What is that which is seen twice in every day, and four times in every week, but only once in a year?
(18) To what question must one always answer YES?
(19) When did Chicago begin with a C and end with an E?
(20) There is a word in the English language containing more than two letters, of which LA is the middle, is the beginning, and is the end, although there is but one A and one L in the word. What is that word?

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WORD WAYS
Simplicissimi

The Word Watchers' Test

Words do not need to be unusual, or even particularly long, to be interesting. All that is required is an ability to recognize remarkable words as they are encountered. Thus, RAVEL is noteworthy as a word possessing two diametrically opposite meanings (to entangle, to disentangle); W is the shortest English word pronounced in three syllables (du-bə-lə-yoo); and MUUMUU is an extremely short word using four U's.

How good are you as a word watcher? Listed below, in alphabetical order, are 25 very interesting words. Can you tell us what it is about each word that qualifies it for inclusion in the list?

Score yourself as follows: 10 or more, good; 15 or more, excellent; 20 or more, superior. Good luck!

1. ABSTEMIOUSLY 9. DELIVER 18. NEGLECTING
2. ANIMATIVE 10. DERMATOGLYPHICS 19. QUEENSPORT
3. ARCHSAINT 11. DUOLITERAL 20. ROTATOR
4. AWING 12. EQUATION 21. SHOULDER-STRAP
5. BACCALAUREATE 13. INTESTINES 22. SPARKLINGS
6. BLOODGUILT 14. LACERATED 23. SPOON-FEED
7. CAUSAL 15. INDIANANS 24. SWEET-TOOTHED
8. DECIMAL 16. MCKNIGHTS 25. YOU
9. Miaoued

Vowel Extravaganza

Darryl H. Francis, of Hounslow, Middlesex, England, has pointed out to us that the male cicada uses its sounding membrane to produce a noise officially described by the United States Department of Agriculture as TSH-EE-EEE-E-OU, loud enough to be heard at a distance of a quarter of a mile. The word is interesting, in that it uses 9 vowels consecutively.

Alan L. Wachtel, of New Haven, Connecticut, improves on this by noting that the Associated Press has reported Tarzan's yell as AAAAEEEYYYYYIII, the word consisting of 17 vowels. Mr. Wachtel immediately tops this record-breaking word by citing a moan given on Page 217 of Joseph Heller's Catch-22 that is spelled with 21 vowels in a row: OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH.

Comes now Leo Spira, of Chicago, Illinois, to tell us of a husband and wife operating a partnership under the name and style of AAAAAAAAAAAAAA-AAAAAAAAAA, a 23-vowel name. The partnership applied for a listing in the directory of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, but was refused. The partnership then incorporated under the name of AAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-AAAAAAAAAAA, Inc., and again applied for directory listing, only to be turned down a second time. The case was taken to court and eventually ruled upon by the Supreme Court of Oklahoma (373 P 2d 31).