WORD TORTURE

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Readers of Word Ways know that a Beheadment is the removal of the first letter of a word to generate a new word: SWORDMANSHIP - S = WORDMANSHIP. Similarly, a Curtailment is the removal of the last letter: GAMINESS - S = GAININES (defined in Webster’s Third as "tomboys").

As is well known, one may find words such as ASPIRATE which can be beheaded all the way down to a single letter, and ALBERTINES which can be successively curtailed.

The question then arises: are there words that can be dismembered by being either beheaded or curtailed and still yield legitimate words at each step? Clearly, the answer is YES, for YE and ES, as well as Y, E, and S are all words.

Four, five, and six letter words subject to this Word Torture are not too difficult to find. By way of illustration, consider SHADES. By random beheadment or curtailment, one obtains HADES, SHADE; ADES, HADE, SHAD; DES, ADE, HAD, SHA; ES, DE, AD, HA, SH; S, E, D, A, and H. All these are words, given in Webster’s Third.

The seven letter level is considerably more difficult. I have been unable to find an example having all moieties belonging to the category of dictionary words. A trivial dictionary entry is AAAAAAA in the Random House Dictionary, listed as a shoe size. At least there’s no problem with the segments and subsegments, as they are all also shoe sizes!

A better challenge is the word GAMINES mentioned earlier. We must justify AMINES, GAMINE; MINES, AMINE, GAMI; NES, INE, MIN, AMI, GAM; and ES, NE, IN, MI, AM, GA; S, E, N, I, M, A, and G.

Webster’s Third verifies all but INES, GAMI, NES and INE. The Oxford English Dictionary supplies NES and INE. The combination INES is found in Webster’s Second Biographical in the name INES DE CASTRO (see CASTRO). That leaves GAMI. The current telephone directories inform us GAMI is a surname, with at least two members: Jagdish Gami in Baltimore, and Suresh Gami in Chicago.

Anyone for an eight letter example?