ETYMOLGY RIDDLES

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With the aid of the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, which contains 46 pages of Indo-European roots, one can discover that words that appear to be completely unrelated are in reality cognates. This information can be used to develop riddles that contain two or more such words. The point of an etymology riddle is that the cognate words share a common semantic element that is not readily apparent because some of the semantic and/or phonological changes that have occurred over the centuries have masked the common origin of the cognates.

Six etymology riddles follow. The answers are found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue, together with relevant etymological information and some (but not necessarily all) other cognates derived from the same Indo-European root. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language is the source of all the information used in constructing these riddles. Both the body of the dictionary and the section containing the Indo-European roots were used.

1. What do a PRECOCIOUS child and an APRICOT have in common?
2. Why would a collar with too much STARCH in it remind you of a STORK?
3. What do the MAYOR of a city, the MAESTRO who leads an orchestra, the MATADOR who fights bulls, a MAJOR in the army, a MASTER of ceremonies, the month of MAY, a MAHARAJAH, and a MEGALOMANIAC have in common with the Greek letter OMEGA?
4. When are PIONEERS PEDESTRIANS?
5. What do a GURU and a GRAVID (i.e., pregnant) woman have in common?
6. Even though the LETTUCE that grows in your garden and the GALAXY that spreads across the vastness of space are light-years apart, they have something in common. What is it?