

BOWDLERIZED ALPHABET SOUP

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The socially most significant article in the May 1985 *Word Ways* is one by Don Laycock, discussing the obscene properties of alphabet soup. Since this food is frequently consumed by young children, it is of the utmost importance to avoid corrupting their impressionable minds by the accidental formation of off-color words. As a public service to soup purveyors, I offer the following nine solutions to this vexing problem:

1. Fill the soup with letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Most soup eaters are unacquainted with Sanskrit. The handfuls of fuddy-duddy scholars fluent in Sanskrit probably don't know any objectionable words in that language. As for the exceptional individual conversant with obscene Sanskrit, it serves him right for concerning himself with a dead language if he spies a Sanskrit obscenity in his soup!

2. Form the letters of the soup out of dough which dissolves upon being heated, vanishing without a trace. Only the person opening the can of soup will then risk seeing objectionable words in the soup; its eaters will be spared such an indignity.

3. Have the soup manufacturer sell each can with a blindfold. The soup eater offended by obscenities in his soup can then don the blindfold before approaching his bowl of soup, sparing him any possible embarrassment. To make this option even more attractive, let the soup manufacturer fabricate the blindfold out of dough or some other edible substance. After the eater has finished his soup, he removes the blindfold and eats it, either as his entrée or for dessert. Think of all the extra profits - obscene profits, if you will - that the soup manufacturer can make that way!

4. Make the soup more healthful by increasing its iron content. Then, magnetize the alphabetic letters in it. Make certain that letters appearing adjacent in objectionable words have identical polarization so that they repel each other in the soup. That will make it impossible for "bad" words to form in the soup.

5. Encase each letter in an opaque but edible jacket of some sort. No one, including the soup preparer and the soup eater, is going to know what words, if any, form in the soup.

6. Have the soup manufacturer prepare each letter in the form of a blank Scrabble tile. This tactic will permit each eater to assign whatever alphabetic value he likes to each tile in his soup, forming whatever words he likes. This option gives devotees of

obscenity the opportunity to fill their soup bowls with objectionable words while saving all other soup eaters from obscenity. The option is analogous to showing R-rated and X-rated movies on cable television: only those who wish to see such movies need turn the cable TV channels on.

7. The soup problem can also be addressed on the legislative level. The United States Congress, the British Parliament, and the legislatures of other English-speaking nations could pass legislation officially changing the meaning of each objectionable English word to an innocuous, inoffensive one. With obscene words legislated out of existence, nothing in alphabet soup could possibly offend its consumers!

8. An even more radical solution would be for national legislatures to declare that the offending words no longer exist. What does not exist cannot offend anyone.

9. Along the same lines, laws could be passed declaring that the existing objectionable words, with their present meanings, are now a part of standard English, and that they are on a par with the finest language appearing in scientific and literary writing. The laws could, moreover, make it mandatory for all speakers of English to use each of these words at least once a day, with severe penalties for documented failure to use them. With the words transformed into English of the highest quality and with their use obligatory, it would actually be illegal for soup manufacturers to produce and market soups in which these words did not spontaneously form. No self-respecting consumer of the product would want to eat illicitly-marketed alphabet soup.