

DETECTIVE ACROSTICS

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The Acrostic is an ancient form of verse in which the initial letters of a word, phrase, or line spell a key word. The Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ, served as a secret password for Christians because of its symbolic, acrostic meaning:

Ιησους	Jesus
χριστος	Christ
θεου	Of God
Υιος	Son
σωτηρ	Saviour

The original Hebrew verses of the Psalms consisted of twenty-two lines or stanzas, each stanza beginning with a different letter of the alphabet in order. Although this has not been retained in translation, Psalm cxix is somewhat artificially divided with consecutive letters of the alphabet. Sir John Davies (1570-1626) is the best-known of the early English acrosticians. Queen Victoria is reputed to have created a double acrostic (an acrostic in which both the first and last letters of a poem spell words).

Gyles Brandreth suggests in his book, The World's Best Indoor Games (Pantheon Books: New York, 1981), a game based on the idea of the double acrostic. Choose a word of approximately six to eight letters, write the word down the left side of a sheet of paper and in reverse down the right side of the same sheet of paper, and create the longest possible words related to the subject of the initial acrostic word, using the indicated beginnings and endings. For example:

M	orta	R	- useful for water murders
U	nexcusabl	E	- at least if you're caught
R	e	D	- as in blood
D	efie	R	- if you care to fight back
E	t t	U	- et tu, Brute: Caesar's murderer
R	edru	M	- from <u>The Shining</u>

Brandreth's double acrostics are rather difficult. I suggest instead that the reader choose a writer of detective or mystery fiction, and write his name down the left side of a sheet of paper. The object of the game is to find words associated with this writer which begin in turn with these letters. For example:

J. J. CONNINGTON, the pseudonym of Alfred Walter Steward (1880-1947), British chemist and detective fiction writer

Jack-in-the-Box, the title of a novel he wrote in 1944
 Jealous husband, the man murdered in The Tau Cross Mystery
 Chemist, the author's profession in addition to writing
 Occult, the subject-matter of a number of his novels
 Nemesis at Raynham Parva, one of his novels
 Nordenholt, the main character in Nordenholt's Million
 Inspector Loxton, in Common Sense Is All You Need
 Nordenholt's Millions, the novel mentioned above
 Grim Vengeance, another one of his novels
 Tragedy at Ravensthorpe, yet another novel
 Obscura, the eye (a camera obscura) in The Eye in the Museum
 No Past Is Dead, another novel

Try your hand at Detective Acrostics with RICHARD HULL, OSMINGTON MILLS, or A. CONAN DOYLE.

WORD MASTERY

This 86-page paperback, written by David Miller of the University of Warwick in England, generalizes the century-old concept of the word ladder in various ways. The word ladder, as most Word Ways readers are aware, changes one word into another by single-letter substitutions: WORD-FORD-FORE-FARE-FAME-GAME. Word ladders, of course, cannot connect words of different lengths, and for words of five or more letters it is often impossible to join a given pair. To get around this problem, Miller has devised a variety of solitaire word games which employ other rules for word transformation singly or in combination: insertions and deletions, anagrams, transadditions and transdeletions, splices (join mOVE and Row to form OVER), syzygies (paSTRAmi to STRATEGies, strATEGIES to eLEGIES), and the like. His goal is to find a group of transformation rules which enables a player to move from one word to almost any other word that can be constructed out of its letters (for example, cArpenTeR to ART, or EaGle to EGG) - without making the game too easy. The subtitle of the book, Word Games for Formal Logic, draws attention to a less-than-successful attempt to relate these transformations to various axioms and theorems of mathematical logic; however, the word games can be enjoyed by the non-mathematical reader. The book has been circulated in a preliminary edition of only 101 copies, and it is hoped that a commercial publisher can be found.