

# KNOW THYSELF!

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The September 1973 issue of the Reader's Digest challenged its readers to name ten parts of the body spelled with three letters each. The magazine predicted that few readers would be able to think of more than seven three-letter parts. The ten names it had in mind, as I recall, were ARM, EAR, EYE, GUM, HIP, JAW, LEG, LIP, RIB, and TOE.

In some way, the Reader's Digest item eventually came both to my attention and to that of the late David L. Silverman, the Kickshaws Editor of *Word Ways*. Although I don't remember just how, the two of us collaborated and the February 1975 Kickshaws presented a list of 33 three-letter body parts - excluding slang terms such as DOG, GAM, PAW, and PIN, and diseases or diseased conditions such as FLU, PUS, STY, and WEN.

A decade has passed, and I have continued collecting body parts - figuratively, let it be understood. My collection now numbers 66 of the three-letter variety, doubling the set presented by Silverman. It is, accordingly, fit that I release the enhanced list to what must surely be an eagerly-awaiting world. The ten names listed above are self-evident and require no further comment. The remaining 56 names follow, annotated as I have deemed suitable.

AlR. A mixture of gases present at all times in the lungs of any living human being, and essential to the continued life of such a being. It therefore qualifies as a part of the organism considered in its entirety.

ALA. The armpit (the axilla or maschale).

AN1. The genitive (possessive) form of ANUS, shown in boldface type in the 1966 Edition of Stedman's Medical Dictionary.

ARC. The neural arc or sensorimotor arc is a series of four or more neurons constituting the pathway for neural reactions.

BAG. The testicular bag is another name for the scrotum, in the 1965 Edition of Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary.

BAR. Mercier's bar, or the interureteric bar, is a transverse ridge joining the openings of the ureters on the inner surface of the bladder (Blakiston's New Gould Medical Dictionary, 1956 Edition).

BED. The nail bed, or matrix unguis, is the vascular tissue in which a fingernail or toenail rests.

BOW. The eyebrow. Although this meaning of the word is labeled

"obsolete" by The Oxford English Dictionary, it is supported by an illustrative and unobsolete quotation in Webster's Third Edition (which, on the other hand, declines to give the word the specific meaning cited here).

BOX. The voice box is another name for the larynx.

BUD. The taste bud, also known as the taste bulb or taste goblet (Webster's Third Edition).

BUN. A knot or coil in a woman's long hair.

BUR. The earlobe (Gould's Medical Dictionary, 1941 Edition).

CAP. The kneecap, patella, kneepan, or rotula. For an esoteric synonym, try ACROMYLE, in Gould's.

COD. The scrotum (Webster's Third Edition).

COR. The heart.

CUP. The socket in which the hipbone turns (Webster's Third Edition).

DUG. A nipple (Webster's Second Edition).

EGG. An ovum - a temporary presence in a female human body.

FAT. The body's adipose tissue, furnishing a reserve supply of energy (Dorland's).

FUR. A layer of epithelium, mucus, and debris on the tongue. Its relation to underlying disease or disturbance of the alimentary canal is not proved (Stedman's).

GEN. An alternative spelling of GENE (Blakiston's).

GUT. The intestine (Gould's).

HAM. The popliteal space (the part of the leg behind the knee).

LAC. Milk - a temporary presence in the lactating human female.

LAP. The front of the body, from the waist to the knees, when the individual in question is sitting - a temporary body part.

LID. The eyelid, palpebra, or blepharon.

MAW. The stomach; also, the throat, gullet, or jaws (Webster's Second Edition).

MOP. A thick, often unruly, mass of hair (Webster's Third Edition).

NEB. A person's mouth or nose (Webster's Third Edition).

OIL. The sebum secreted by the sebaceous glands of a human being (Stedman's).

ORA. The plural of OS (mouth), shown in boldface type in Dorland's. The uterus has two mouths - an external and an internal one.

ORB. The eye (Webster's Third Edition).

OVA. The plural of OVUM, shown in boldface type in Dorland's. Ova are a temporary presence in the adult human female.

PAD. The ball of the thumb: the thenar eminence (Webster's Third Edition).

PAN. The cranium (Webster's Third Edition), also known as the brainpan.

PAP. A nipple (The Century Dictionary, 1889-1891).

PES. The pes anserinus, or goose's foot, is the radiate branching of the facial nerve after its exit located at the side of the face (Gould's).

PIA. The vascular membrane enveloping the surface of the brain and spinal cord (Blakiston's).

PIT. The pit of the stomach is the depression below the lower end of the breastbone (Webster's Second Edition).

RED. An object of the color red (Webster's Second Edition), such as a red blood corpuscle.

REN. The kidney (Dorland's).

RIM. The peritoneum, or membrane enclosing the intestines: a term used only locally or regionally (Century; Oxford).

ROD: One of the rod-shaped sensory bodies in the retina.

SAC. A baglike organ or structure, such as the heart sac or pericardium (Dorland's).

SEX. The genitals (Webster's Third Edition, 1981 Addenda; Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1980 Edition).

TAG. A stray lock of hair (Webster's Second Edition).

TIE. A knot of hair (Webster's Second Edition).

TIP. The pointed or rounded extremity of the finger (Webster's Third Edition).

TIT. A nipple (all five current collegiate dictionaries).

TOP. The head or top of the head (Webster's Third Edition).

ULA. The gums or gingivae: used only in the plural (Webster's Second and Third Editions). Medical dictionaries present quite a different picture. For Stedman's, the word does not exist. Blakiston's makes it a variant spelling of the obsolete word OULA, treated as a synonym of the singular word GUM. Dorland's equates the word with the singular GUM. Gould's agrees with Webster's, but also lists the singular form, ULON, equating it with the plural GUMS just as it does the plural form ULA. I gather that no one knows what the word really means!

VAS. A duct or canal of the body conveying a liquid such as blood, lymph, chyle, or semen (Stedman's).

WAX. Earwax or cerumen (Webster's Third Edition).

WEB. The skin and underlying tissue between the bases of fingers or toes (Blakiston's).

WYE. The letter Y (Webster's Second and Third Editions), which is an informal short form of the term Y CHROMOSOME, a sex chromosome found only in the male zygote (Webster's Third Edition).

ZOA. The plural of ZOON, which is a synonym of the word ZOOID - a motile sperm cell (Webster's Third Edition).

I believe that I have done a creditable job of listing three-letter body parts. However, since you know your own body better than I do, you may be able to contribute to the foregoing list. By all means, please do!

### DICTIONARY OF COLLECTIVE NOUNS AND GROUP TERMS

*This is the title of the second edition of a Gale Research Company book edited by Ivan G. Sparkes, containing more than 1800 entries, from ancient phrases like a shrewdness of apes to modern jokes like a flourish of strumpets. Definitions, citations (principally from the Oxford English Dictionary) and usage examples are included; a reverse dictionary (alphabetized for apes, strumpets, etc.) is also provided. Readers of James Lipton's classic An Exaltation of Larks will recognize many old friends, but this book has a considerably larger scope. Many collective words use characteristic suffixes such as -age (frondage, kippage), -(e)ry (heathenry, nabobery), -dom (Christendom, gipsydom), -ocracy (cosmocracy, aristocracy), and -hood (sisterhood, anthood). Furthermore, the book includes many general terms of quantity or capacity that can apply to a wide variety of objects: flock, herd, house, generation, corpus, galaxy, army, reservoir, etc. Although not cheap (\$65), this is a fun book to browse in, and deserves serious consideration by the well-heeled word-lover.*