

SHELLING PEAS WITH GRAMPS

PETER NEWBY

Chesterfield, England

My elder son, the Hollywood film and television actor Maxwell Caulfield, responded in delightful fashion to my appeal for material for my new book Pears Word Games (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). His happy childhood memories of shelling peas with my father (whom he called Gramps) inspired the invention of two games based upon the concept of transaddition: Shelling Peas and Gramps.

Shelling Peas is intended as a challenge to a group of people to produce the greatest number of valid words within a given period of time. It has been played in the United Kingdom not only by gatherings of word game enthusiasts, but also as a BBC radio contest for its listeners. In New Zealand it has been played as a solitaire challenge, the format presented in this article.

The game is simplicity itself. A word such as LOY is the base, and the letter P is transadded to this one or more times. For every P one can "shell" to LOY, one scores a point. For example, PLOY scores an obvious point. POLYP is more difficult to discover, but adds a further two points to the total. LOPPY brings the score to five points. Does PLOPPY exist? If it does, then one has scored a total of eight points. But, if PLOPPY cannot be found within the covers of any acceptable reference work, not only does one fail to score, but its three Ps are deducted from the existing total and the score is reduced to a mere two points.

For fun, face the following challenge. Nine base words are given below; without referring to any dictionary, see what you can score in an honestly-timed fifteen-minute period. You will be in direct competition with expert wordsmiths in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Their scores are given at the end of this article; will you have outperformed them? These are the nine words which other logical enthusiasts have faced:

IT, AT, TO, AY, ALE, TOE, DEAL, EDITOR, STEREO

If you wish to compete, delay any further reading beyond the next paragraph.

In a companion article, Jeff Grant supplies the definitive solution based upon words found in, or logically inferred from, any dictionary in his extensive library, and discusses the whole subject at large. He stays within the validity limits established by Maxwell Caulfield which, in essence, permit obsolete and dialect words but reject modern inferences for words of Middle English or earlier forms of the language and archaic grammar for modern words unless such can prove to exist or have existed. Hyphenated

or other broken forms are equally unacceptable, and capitalized or foreign examples are not allowed. The hyphenation restriction has a particular relevance to one of the words in the above challenge, as it has an unbroken "shelled" form in only a few dictionaries, the majority either treating the construction as two words or as a hyphenated compound. That base word will be revealed in due course, but competitors should now begin the challenge.

* * *

The game of Gramps defines base words exactly as Shelling Peas did, but allows the player to transadd any letter; it is intended as a two-person face-to-face game. The first player selects a base word, and the second player (in ignorance of the first player's choice) selects the letter to be transadded. A simple method of doing this is for each player to write his choice on a slip of paper and then reveal both slips simultaneously. There is skill in the clever choice of both base word and transadded letter. Consider the potential of the base word AA (a cindery substance based on cooled melted lava) and the highly-unpromising letter K. AA + K has the potential of scoring 13 points:

- AAK an old spelling of OAK, still extant in dialect
- AKA any of several species of New Zealand woody vines
- AKKA the Egyptian piastre, a small coin which circulated in the Ottoman Empire (sometimes spelt ACKER, it is British slang)
- KAA now found only in dialect, it is an alternative spelling of KA in its senses as a verb; meanings include "of a partridge, to utter its cry"
- KAAK an obsolete verb of a crow, to utter its cry
- KAKA a New Zealand olive-brown coloured parrot
- KAKKAK a species of bittern on the island of Guam

Naturally, more than one dictionary was consulted to produce this list and, in normal face-to-face play, one would expect fewer than 13 points. AA is quite a prolific source of points, going well with most letter of the alphabet. As a face-to-face game Gramps is fun; as the base for a logological investigation it can amaze you.

What about the results of the basic Shelling Peas contest? If, after checking with the allowable words given in Jeff Grant's article, you scored more than 26 points net, you have beaten the United Kingdom Scrabble champion in a competition organised by the Pears Word Games Society. If you scored more than 33 points, you have beaten the lady who won a similar competition run by a British newspaper and hosted by a celebrated film actress. This particular winner is the only one to have found PEPPERPOTS from the base word STEREO. It occurs unbroken in Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary, and in one of the quotes in the OED. If you scored more than 51 points, you have established a new world record and taken the crown from former New Zealand Scrabble champion Glennis Hale, who competed in similar circumstances. Should you be able to claim such an achievement, I would be pleased to know the full details.

Strict copyright in the commercial exploitation of *Shelling Peas* and of *Gramps* is retained by Maxwell Caulfield, but *Word Ways* has been granted permission to discuss any aspect of it that it deems fit. Any other interested parties can contact the copyright holder via me at 195 Derby Road, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 2ET, England.

BRITISH WORD-GAMING

British word buffs love to play word games, judging from the large number of books by British authors on this topic: David Miller's *Word Mastery* (University of Warwick, 1985), David Parlett's *Botticelli and Beyond* (Pantheon, 1981), and Gyles Brandreth's *Word Games* (Harper & Row, 1986). Peter Newby joins this distinguished company with his new book, *Pears Word Games*, published by Pelham Books in 1990 (not available in the US; have your local bookstore contact Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1220 Nicholson Road, Newmarket, Ontario Canada L3Y 7V1).

The book contains approximately 150 word games, classified in various ways: games suitable for children, for slightly inebriated adults, or for cutthroat competitors; verbal games and pencil-and-paper games; solitaire games, two-person games and classroom games. Most of the old standbys such as *Hangman*, *Ghost*, *Guggenheim* and *Crash* are present, but Newby has developed a number of original games as well. These are often patterned on existing non-word games such as *Tic-Tac-Toe*, *Snakes and Ladders*, and *Battleships*, or on sports such as bowling, golf, cricket and soccer. Some are quite elaborate in structure, rivaling *Scrabble* in complexity and strategic nuance; his piece de resistance is undoubtedly *The War Game*, which has various stages relating to the assembling of one's forces, the battle itself, and negotiation afterwards. Wisely, Newby has use-tested this and other original games on a panel of word-gaming friends. One game, *Shelling Peas* (see accompanying *Word Ways* article), was use-tested in an eight-person round robin tournament held at a local hotel; the winner earned a trophy sponsored by the *Chesterfield Gazette*.

Would you like a word game especially designed to your specifications? The publicity material on Peter Newby states that he is available as a games consultant. Or, like Poe, he offers to break any code (presumably a cipher) submitted by readers .

To sum up: if you like matching wits and word-knowledge against other word enthusiasts, this book is for you.