

KICKSHAWS

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Readers are encouraged to send their own favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws Editor (new address: 618 8th Avenue, Coralville IA 52241). All answers appear in the Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue. Guest editors will appear occasionally.

The Knave's English

The King's English, as spoken by educated, knowledgable people, is a snap compared to The Knave's English. The latter is composed almost entirely of slang - dig it? How much of this story are you hip to, dude? You can translate using The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang (compiled by Wentworth & Flexner, New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1967), or you can turn to Answers and Solutions.

The potato-head cut a rusty on the borax gee-gee, but the kittle-cattle didn't have the oof to carry a lot of weight. The dust-dust with neon ribbons yammered, "I've seen kiwis become eagles with Dutch courage until they prang."

"That's all yuk-yuk!" The honey man gobbled yum-yum with his snarky, mellow-back chi-chi oozing next to him.

"What's the foofooraw, sofa lizard?" The fly-boy snapped his cap, ready for a hooper-doooper niff-naw with the zoot on a toot in Highbrowville.

"Just some fair hell scattting to a box of teeth under the oliver."

"Yatata yatata! Who's your raggle? She's the gnat's whistle."

"Snub out the quirley, and she'll shake a wicked calf till early bright for a brown Abe."

The wuzzy had a hissy: "But if you're hoosiering up about your soap-grease, stoopnagel, I'll hook your blowed-in-the-glass soup-and-fish and massage you with my gunboats. No soft, no hog-wrestle!"

"My beaujeeful phlug has more pazaza in her reach-me-downs than you have in your ball stand," the shoe diddlybopped; "but I don't boogerboo she's a frame-dame."

"Fuff!" the Broadway boy jibber-jabbered, "my whistle bait does bush patrol with prunefaces for happy cabbage. I presquawk prom-trotters on four and one. If you've got the tlac for nanny-goat sweat, let's hustle to a slop-chute. My beaut has zowie for Simple Simons."

"I parley-voo, you ding-fizzled mush-faker. Anyhoo, Bricktop's dream box is shampoo to my mince pies. Her china, her load of hay, her dink, her cootie garages, her nozzle, even her googs - how cher!"

"With that eyewash, you must be a finger-wringer. She's got more spizerintum than a fizz job, more zazzle than an oomph girl," the flash-sport facked. "She's yours for a handsome ransom."

The three shook a leg to a nitery to get damaged. A scraunched kinker

with too much panther sweat made a rootin'-tootin' kick-up with Irish confetti by the whiffle-board. A yoot with a clothesline broke him.

"What a cheap dive!" the fly guy yammered. "Maybe we ought to cut ass before some geek clonks my brag-rags."

"Nix out, sissy pants?" the mackman jawed. "Don't bop the panic rack. Let's click! Let's pick 'em up and lay 'em down to the gobble-pipe! Ain't my little piece of furniture a bonzer peach?"

"Sensaysh, but is she foxing me with gay deceivers from her wish book?"

"Go fly a wind-wagon! My poundcake ain't no purp looking for prog. She's got blip big browneyes."

"Blip, eh? Mixologist, more fire-water. I'm a high pillow on a high lonesome with a high hig. Oka, general, how about a free show from the cheese?"

"Phedinkus! You don't have the do-re-mi for a do-se-do, Joe Sad!" The paper-belly was slurping King Kong with sizz-water. "Mox nix, jack-eroo. No bouncy-bouncy!"

"You beat your gums, ho-dad, but where are the French post cards? Neighbo, it's all bibble-babble."

After chug-a-lugging the torpedo juice, he snurged.

Cryptarithmic Calendar

Lee Sallows has created an amazing gematric transformation for the months. Set the 21 letters that spell the 12 months' names (note the palindromic number pair) to values from -10 to +10 in just the right combination, and the sums of each month's letters equal its position in the year. There are six answers altogether, including the one below. Can you figure out any of the other five?

-10	-9	-8	-7	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
B	J	F	G	S	D	N	R	M	L	A	T	P	H	O	C	I	Y	V	E	U
	J	A	N	U	A	R	Y													
	F	E	B	R	U	A	R	Y												
	M	A	R	C	H															
	A	P	R	I	L															
	M	A	Y																	
	J	U	N	E																
	J	U	L	Y																
	A	U	G	U	S	T														
	S	E	P	T	E	M	B	E	R											
	O	C	T	O	B	E	R													
	N	O	V	E	M	B	E	R												
	D	E	C	E	M	B	E	R												

I asked Lee if this could be done with the names of the days of the week using the integers from -7 to +7. He found 664 ways! One of them appears in Answers and Solutions. He has also tried the Zodiac names, the Greek letter names, and the natural element names, but no assignment of any integers is possible.

Dreaming of Anagrams

Lee has written an intricate pair of sentences about that curse of the waking class - snoring. Notice how the anagrams roll around restlessly from one to the other:

THE EYES, they see; THIS EAR, it hears; YOUR NOSE, you snore!
 THIS EYE, THE EARS, YOUR NOSE: you see, they hear it snores

My!

Maxey Brooke came up with the first example of a trilingual synonymic anagram: MINE (Engl.) to MIEN (Fr.) to MEIN (Ger.). MINE and MEIN are also homophonic. Note that each has 1 'N' ME in it, too. Webster's Second lists all three words, but MEIN is not related to the German word cited above, and one of the listings for MIEN says "var. of MEIN." What is this other meaning?

The Anagram Connection

Four countries from different parts of the world are inextricably bound in a logological treaty that unites them through a single anagram. The Spanish word for France, *francia*, is an anagram of the English word African.

The Thief of Words

English, being a multicultural language, steals shamelessly from other languages - even when the pilfered word isn't really needed to describe something new. Exhibit 1: the best example of such looting in Webster's Second is a set of five words, all referring to a celebration. So close are they in spelling, they can be linked by logological means: FIESTA (Sp.) transdeletes to FEAST, which anagrams to FESTA (It.), which curtails to FEST (Ger.), which substitute-letter transposes to FETE (Fr.). All exist in their original languages today. Nor does it stop there. Exhibit 2: there are four more synonyms, slightly longer - FESTIVAL (Old Fr.), FESTIVITY (Old Fr.), FESTINE, FESTINO (It.). The last is also currently used in Italian. English, you thief of words, does your beauty lie in your booty?

Herman, Meet Hermanette

Oren Dalton of El Paso, Texas sent a passel of Hermans (like Tom Swifties, but formed by a sentence concluding with a punning name) and a pair of Hermanettes (a variation that depends on the speaker's name to complete an overlapping thought). The first 24 are Hermans, the last two Hermanettes:

"We just had a baby boy!" cried Addison
 "We climbed those steep rocks and waded the river," said Clifford
 "Top of the morning," said Don
 "My tooth hurts so much I've got to see a dentist," moaned Aiken
 "I've burnt my mark into those steers," said Brandon
 "He gave me a beautiful red jewel," glowed Ruby
 "What do you call a six-sided wrench?" asked Allen
 "I'll mow the grass," said Lon
 "I just got up," said Rose
 "Point the arrow at the target," instructed Amès
 "Which is the safe side of the ship?" asked Lee
 "Those are the Northern Lights," said Aurora
 "The moon is declining," said Wayne

"I burned it all up," said Ashe
 "I was the winner," exulted Victor
 "I can't help but wobble in these shoes," said Lucille
 "He's inherited my traits," said Gene
 "I'll bring the beer," said Aleman
 "I understand," said Ken
 "On Hallowe'en, we'll dive for apples," said Bob
 "The Mayans invented corn," said Maisie
 "What did Tolstoy write?" asked Warren Peace
 "There's a and the, but what's the other article?" asked Anne
 "Testing...testing," said Mike
 "Out there it's a jungle," Jim said
 "Hickory Dickory," Doc said

Perfection Test

This story is a "perfection test". If you fill in all the blanks correctly, your score is 100, but if you get one wrong, it's 0. At each blank, you must make your choice of word without looking ahead at the next one. My Latin teacher, a Jesuit priest, gave perfection tests on vocabulary, and we learned the words quickly. Although this test is easy, you'll probably get 0. Nobody's perfect.

Heed her in the hall.

"Hey, I've got an extra to the football game," he said.

"I think I'll, " she said.

So he made a at her. Sheed out. When she awoke, words between them.

"Don't judgment on me yet," he said.

"I'd rather sentence," she replied.

"We can take my car through the and get to the game before the first, " he said. "Or don't I the test?"

"Oh, alright, you muster."

"I'll have to the hat to get some gas money."

"Boy, that'sing the buck. You'll probably a bad check."

He let that one by. Out in the car, she remarked ining "My cated away last week."

"Yesterday my doged on," he cried.

Sheed him a Kleenex, and heed a truck.

"I hope I'm not just aing fancy," she said.

"No," he replied. "Ied over you before, but this time when youed my way, I decided I wouldn't up the chance."

And so theyed a lot of time with each other.

Crossword Ways

"District attorney versus primitive instincts of man," began a letter from Peter Newby. For a moment I thought he was writing about the Scopes Monkey Trial, but no, it was a British crossword clue for my first name: DA v id. Peter sent five more such descriptions of the first and last names of recent **Word Ways** contributors. The numbers in parentheses indicate the amount of letters in the names. Can you solve them? Remember: the name you find may be your own.

1. French first person very loud (4) King George, worker (5)
2. Noel goes back to a short road (7) Go right, professor (6)
3. Curiously rich cardinal (5) One hundred - ole! (4)
4. Returns gold to Nazi organisation (4) Twisted clerk conceals the end (6)
5. Peculiar lady conceals Rolls Royce (6) Is after French coin (7)

Pangram for the Guinness Book of World Records

How do you define a perfect pangram? It has all the letters of the alphabet, once each. Its words are listed in a single dictionary. It makes sense. If those are the requirements, then Peter Newby has found one. All words are listed in the OED. The 26-letter wonder: QWYK BITCH VOX JUMPS GLAZ'D FERN (a VOX is a fox). Even more incredibly, its words can be rearranged to form a parody of the "Quick brown fox..." exercise notorious to typists. GLAZ'D is listed as a synonym for brown, and FERN is defined in its former adjectival sense as ancient. The parody pangram: QWYK GLAZ'D VOX JUMPS FERN BITCH. Translation: Quick brown fox jumps ancient female dog.

Operating on Browning

The first two lines of the following poem are from "De Gustibus" by Robert Browning.

Open my heart, and you will see,
Graved inside of it, "Italy."
Open my liver, and you will glance
At how I used to misspell "France."
Open my bladder, and you will find
That "Germany" is underlined.
Open my head and look at my brain,
Where once I neatly printed, "Spain."
Open my lungs, for there I've written
"Great" in the left, in the right one "Britain."

Historical Errors

B. Marck Rabbitbasket caught two errors in "Unquotes" from the last Kickshaws. He writes "Somehow you mistook Patrick Henry for Nathan Hale and John Glenn for Neil Armstrong. The latter confusion is understandable, for what is as colorless as an astronaut? But a slap on the wrist for the first confusion." Ow!

He offers a conundrum: what is the numeric progression of A HAND?

Lettershift Reversals

In the Year of the Palindrome, it seems appropriate to try to find words that lettershift to other words spelled backwards. Move each letter in THEM 10 steps along the alphabet (crossing from Z to A) and you get DROW, reversing to WORD. A few 4- and 5-letter examples of common words from my tin-can calculator (Word Ways, May 1988) follow. Numbers give shift values (a zero means no shift - the words are reversals).

ervy(9)hewn(4)rail(0)liar	balk(3)node	silt(9)curb
dank(1)lobe(3)hero	bark(3)nude	bees(10)cool
hear(4)veil(18)dawn	palm(3)Pods	deer(10)boon
vase(8)maid(6)jogs	main(6)togs	fees(10)coop
hide(11)pots(0)stop	loin(6)tour	jeer(10)boot
tape(11)pale(3)hods	dash(8)pail	them(10)word
sleep(0)peels(9)bunny	fawn(8)vein	pack(12)womb
spots(0)stops(11)dazed	lack(8)skit	alloy(3)brood
dunk(1)love	hack(8)skip	open(4)writs
rank(1)lobs	last(8)bait	false(8)matin
rang(1)hobs	lush(8)pact	ghost(12)feats
calm(2)once	bird(9)mark	ebony(13)labor

Substitute Lettershift Words

Substitute lettershift words add a freedom that pure lettershift words lack. Shift to any of the 25 other strings and replace any letter in the new string to form a word. For example, CHEER-jolly-HOLLY or CHEER-jolly-JELLY. Substitute lettershift ladders can be built connecting meaningful words in the same manner as Lewis Carroll's doublets. DOG shifts 23 steps to ALD; ALD changes to ALE; ALE shifts to PAT; PAT changes to CAT; and so on. A substitution must be made, even when shifting alone results in a word. In these ladders, the original letter appears below the substitute, but the shift values have been omitted. Five-letter examples are difficult to construct. All words are in Webster's Second. With an unabridged dictionary, it is likely that any two 3-letter words can be connected by only one other word (and almost certainly by two other words). Can you find an example to disprove this?

EAR-GAT-EYE	ONE-LOB-TWO-BEG-SIX-PAU-TEN
C R	K J W V F Y
DOG-ALE-CAT-HEX-RAT	BORN-REED-NOON-DIED
D P G D	H B E
GOOD-ADDS-LOON-BEAD-JAIL-DUCK-EVIL	
V D E M F D	
TREE-CANT-SNAG-WEEK-GOOD-BEET-WOOD	
N P R U W L	
CROOK-FURRY-STEEL-GALLS-MARRY-GULPS-CRIMP-LARVA-CRIME	
N H Z G L D Y R	

Using the above technique, pangrammatic ladders can be constructed. With 3-letter words, the shortest possible would be 9 words (27 letters) in length. The best I could find in Webster's Seventh Collegiate has 33 letters. Can you shorten it? What about 4- or 5-letter words?

BAG-QUA-CWM-NIX-JOT-VAN-ZED-LIP-FRY-BAH-SKY
V G H E F R Q U O R

Palindromes: One-liners and Two Haiku

From Michael Helsem, more reversible thoughts -- Emanate: get a name / Elapsed odes pale / Won king is a sign I know / Late

pall, appall a petal / No garden if a fine dragon / Fresh Caesar
 as each serf / Stark siren, one risk: rats! / Hero-murder cast
 sacred rumor, eh? / Gnostic: a tacit song ? Wolf, I am a llama - I
 flow / Allude my wedded dewy medulla / No omen urn, I say, so
 rosy as in rune moon / A neb revels in Aegean isle verbena /
 DNA-lyre, I felt senses nestle fiery land / Revenge buoys telepath:
 tape lets you beg never. And the haiku:

Sir Bedlam I name,	Maiden made us. Sing
get artsy by strategem:	I, lame-gam image, malign
animal debris	issue? Damned I am!

Elle's Belles!

Elle, an international women's magazine published in New York, has perhaps the only palindromic title in journalism. Curiously, the titles of its articles use a lot of wordplay, too. One kind appears with a frenetic frequency - initial letter doubling. Out of 35 articles in the June 1988 issue, 14 have it: Strength of Stretch, Back to Bare, Live-in Linens, Stars in Stripes, The Shorts Story, The World's War on Wrinkles, Serious Screen Queen, Beauty and the Beast, Wicked Wickets, For the Love of Lakes, Mighty Morels, Tasteful Testings, Design and Dissent, Feature Face. Even the photo captions use that format - for example PIAZZA PLZZAZZ. With 6 Z's out of 13 letters, it should be awarded the Pulitzer Prize (which has only 2 Z's out of 13). What's more, the letters that the two words have in common spell out the word PLZZA. The captioneer must've been asleep at the switch to pass up the title PIZZA PIAZZA PIZZAZZ.

Double-Letter Abbreviations

In the last Kickshaws, pp was cited as the plural of p, the abbreviation for PAGES. Joyce Holland found 4 other abbreviations in Webster's Seventh Collegiate that form the plural by doubling a single letter. The plurals: nn (NOTES), qq (QUESTIONS), ss (SE-MIS), and vv (VERSES). VERSE can also be abbreviated vs and pluralized to vss. Joyce discovered 2 one-letter abbreviations that form their superlatives by doubling. What are they?

ODC 2 RKDA

In the epic rebus below, most letter and number units stand for single words: NML is ANIMAL, X is ASK. Some, however, join to make two words: MN is A MAN. A few letters are pronounced differently depending on the context: S can mean HAS, HIS, IS or YES. Though some letters may not sound quite like their whole word counterparts, the story's an EZ read.

MN, LX N N NML, IV, KM 2 RKDA, A 4N CT, 2 C S XLNC, NRE. NRE
 S N ODS 1. LX S MN F NRG N XEN, N IV S S BUTS NML. 8 PM: D 2
 R N A DVS REA F D CT, REN 2 D NCDS KSL F NRE.

IV: "R E N D USA?"

LX: "D USA? O, O, O! U R A CLE NML, IV! U N I R N RKDA,
 N IL N D OCN. C D CNRE? S IC N D CT, N S XLNC S MN F RR."

IV: "O, LX, I 1 2 B OM N IOA CT, IOA."
 LX N IV KM 2 D KSL. S MNNC, NRE, D SN9 1, CZ D 2.
 LX: "LO, XLNC! I 1 2 C U F I KN."
 NRE: "U R A 4NR, N NME F D CT. N U F N NML."
 LX: "S, D NML S A BUT, S N C?"
 NRE: "C S NDD! Y R U N D IL, -LEN?"
 LX: "I M N MSRE F D USA."
 NRE: "N D NML?"
 LX: "IV S N MSRE F D SPCA."
 NRE: "Y R U N RKDA?"
 LX: "2 VZ D CT. D NML N I R CN D VU."
 S XLNC S NVS F LX. S BD I S N IV.
 NRE: "I F A DL 4 U. IV S A QT, N I 1 2 F R. I F A RC 4 U. I
 S Q, KN I F R 4 D RC?"
 LX: "SRE, NRE. C N I R--"
 NRE: "C S 4 S XLNC! F U 1 2 B N JL, LX, U KN. SRE 2 U, 2."
 IV: "I M D NML F LX! E S A DUT 2 B A DR 1 2 IV. LX S A--"
 LX: "IV S 4 U, NRE, G, IV, I M SRE. XPDNC S Y I F 2--"
 IV: "LX! I M 4 U!"
 NRE: "E! E! U R N RKDA, IV, N I ON U, VL N L. D RC N D KSL
 S 4 LX. UL C R."
 LX: "B4 U N I F A DL, I 1 2 C D JL."
 NRE: "D JL? Y?"
 LX: "I M QES, S L."
 D JL S MNS, N IV S A TR N R I. LX CZ D TR.
 LX: "UR MNNC, D NML N I 1 2 B LON 4 AYL."
 NRE: "OK, LX. IL B N D REA. N IL F D NML, S?"
 LX: "S. A DL S A DL."
 YL IV N LX R LON, E TLZ NML E S A KG IDA.
 LX: "I F TNT. D U C?"
 IV: "I C, LX. O, U R DVS, 2. RE! S XLNC S N D--"
 D 2 C NRE. E S D RC.
 NRE: "D RC S 4 LX."
 LX: "N D TNT S 4 U, U BST XQS 4 MN! D RC N D NML R 4 LX.
 F U 1 2 B N FN..."
 NRE: "I 1 2 B AL N RT. O, U R EVL, LX."
 LX: "OK, NRE: N D JL! B CN U, U SOB."
 NRE S N JL, N LX N IV R SKPN N D RC 2 D OCN.
 IV: "O, LX, S XLNC S A PTS DMN, N U R MN F IDLSM."
 LX: "L, IV, A DL S IDL!"

Beri-beri Pie

Wacky Medical Terms for the Layman is a cure-ious column by Peter H. Gott, M.D., appearing in the Lakeville (Ct.) Journal. Allen Walker Read sent in the third annual selection of terms that Gott got from his pun-minded medical readers. Here is a dose injected with many cc's of humor:

ANTABUSE stepping on an anthill
 ANTACIDS something produced by ants when they're stepped on
 ATROPHY something won by the bowling team
 BERI-BERI pie filling
 BRIGHT'S DISEASE illness that affects geniuses

CARDIOGRAM telegram for a heart patient
 DILATOR beats dying sooner
 CLAUSTROPHOBIA fear of Santa
 ENEMA someone who is not your friend
 FIBULA a little white lie
 HAY FEVER a sick crop
 HICCUP what a yokel drinks from
 HIP JOINT popular bar
 HYMEN greeting to an all-male club
 INTERN waiting in line
 NEUROLOGICAL replacing old logic
 PROTEIN someone who favors adolescents
 SCROTUM a small planet near Uranus
 URINALYSIS different from my analysis
 UTERUS a gift from your family to our family

The House

Recently we moved into a new (to us) house. At first it seemed like we were just visitors in an inanimate structure, but as we arranged our stuff, the house began to acquire its own life. This poem shows a house becoming a home:

You have windows.	You have peelings.
You have doors.	You have sores.
You have ceilings.	You have feelings.
You have floors.	You have pores.

Return to Sender

I met the mailman as he was delivering mail the other day. He held up an envelope and said, "This one's marked 'D. Morice or Occupant.' Are you D. Morice?" "Yes," I said. "Are you the occupant?" "Yes." "In that case," he said, "I can't deliver it. It says just one or the other."

Revolutionary Logology

Michael Ravnitsky came across an article with logological implications that appeared in the Wall Street Journal a few months ago. After an American couple moved to London, Merrill Lynch sent their Individual Retirement Account information to them. The envelope was marked IRA. In England, those initials spell trouble. The postal authorities thought the Irish Republican Army was involved, so they dispatched a bobby to hand-deliver the letter. The couple explained the initials, and the embarrassed bobby apologized. Merrill Lynch in London said it might be a good idea to remove the IRA label from all British correspondence. The Irish Republican Army had no comment.

My Palabama

The names of all 50 states appear in the following paragraph. If you substitute their postal abbreviations, which appear in alphabetical order, you'll "translate" it. But first try reading it as

it stands to see if you can make out the text. Careful! Some of the state names join two or three words together, and one word has two state names in it (which one)? In a strange way, it's a mnemonic.

Talaskae my palabama, Carkansasl: the crarizonay californiat coloradouldn't aconnecticut delawarecent! He floridaung the georgiarbage hawaiigh, a triowal bidaho to fillinoisl indiana sac-kansas. The luckentucky louisianad massachusettsnaged to seemarylandoomained to michiganx a minnesotaemissourinic. He cramississippithemontanao bunorthcarolinahes anorthdakota nebraskaver evenewhampshireates it whenewJerseyanewmexicoakes tenevadaery tinewyork eggs. Johion tooklahoma them, oregon my pennsylvanial drhodeisland-psouthcarolinarumbsouthdakotaown thatennesseeose, buteXasavier putah virginiaats where Bevermonthrewashington wisconsinsh, nowest-virginiaast yet snowying.

I'm the Guy

Two old-fashioned cigarette brands, The Perfection Cigarettes and Quality Tokio Cigarette, issued buttons (pin-backs) carrying slogans that followed a special format beginning "I'm the Guy that Put..." and concluding with a word-within-wordplay:

PERFECTION: Bells in Belgium...The Beams in Moonbeams...The Cough in Coffee...The Rats in the Rathskeller...Gin in Virginia.

TOKIO: The Sham in Shampoo...The Slip in Slippery...The Paste in Pastry...The Sand in Sandwich...The Liver in Liverpool...The Mew in Music...The Imp in Shrimp...The Pea in Peaches...Damn in Adam.

But who is being quoted? With a speaker cited, the lines take on more concrete meanings. Here are a few Guys - with "guy" meaning any living creature, male or female, human or otherwise. You're welcome to send your own examples.

MUSICIAN I'm the Guy that Put the Bone in Trombone

NOAH I'm the Guy that Put the Ark in Arkansas

BARTENDER I'm the Guy that Put Teeny in the Martini

BARTENDER I'm the Guy that Put the Ice in Twice

BULLY I'm the Guy that Put the Mean in Demeanor

ALLEY CAT I'm the Guy that Put the Ow in Meow

CHEF I'm the Guy that Put the Ick in Pickle

SHIP'S CAPTAIN I'm the Guy that Put the Sea in Nausea

COLLIE DOG I'm the Guy that Put the Fur in Furniture

Collinear Words Revisited

In the November 1984 Kickshaws, Charles Bostick discussed 3-letter collinear words, which can be plotted on a straight line in space when their letters are converted to alphapositional values. One example he cited is GYP-HUM-iqj-jmg-KID-LEA. The differences, or shift values, between the corresponding letters in each pair of adjacent trigrams is the same: 1,22,23.

He mentioned Robert L. Ward's claim that there are only 31 chains of four collinear 3-letter words, such as GYP-HUM-KID-LEA, and that there are no sets of five words in Webster's Second Unabridged. Curious, I took a few stabs and found these 2 five-word chains: BAD-COG-JIB-POT-SEC (1,14,8 shifts), and DIM-FUN-ROT-TAU-LED (2,12,1). Are there more chains of five words or longer? Are there any chains of 4-letter words or higher?

Leonard Gordon provided the answer to the first question. He found 2 six-word chains in Webster's Second: INN-TAV-END-PAL-ANT-LAB (11,13,8) and SKY-VUG-YEO-BOW-EYE-HIM (3,10,8). And he discovered an eight-word chain with one word, KER, capitalized: ARE-KER-URE-EER-ORE-YER-IRE-SER (10,13,13). Going to his own list of 3-letter words, mostly from the OED, he found 18 seven-word chains! ACE-NUR-AME-NER-AWE-NOR-AGE, BAH-ONE-BAB-ONY-BAV-ONS-BAP, HAR-WNE-LAR-ANE-PAR-ENE-TAR, NED-ARK-NER-ARY-NEF-ARM-NET, OKK-HOU-ASE-TWO-MAY-FEI-YIS, RAA-ENG-RAM-ENS-RAY-ENE-RAK, and a dozen others. What's especially surprising about all of his chains is that there are no "meaningless" trigrams between any of the words.

A Sign of the Dimes

A few years back, my wife and I set up a table at a flea market. I arranged the items, and she made the signs with the prices. One customer, about 10 years old, picked through a basket of kick-shaws and selected five of them. He held up one and paid me a dime; then he held up another and paid a dime; and so on for the last three.

"Why didn't you buy them all at once?" I asked.

"To save money," the kid replied. "Your sign says 'Ten cents each, two for a quarter.'"

Backward Alphabet Songs

Can you recite the alphabet quickly from Z to A? Michael Aaron Weinberg of Los Angeles says it's easy if you learn the ZYX's to a familiar tune. The problem is fitting the backward alphabet to the right song. W is the clinker. Michael suggests the theme song from the old Addams Family TV show, and it works. I tried the opening bars of Mozart's Symphony No. 21, but the notes don't coordinate with the letters at the beginning of the alphabet. Any other musical suggestions? Folk rock, heavy metal, country & western, blues, jazz, or maybe something patriotic? For instance, picture Rosanna Barr singing the alphabet backward to the National Anthem. On second thought, don't picture it.

Close Encounters

The closest two words can get is one letter step apart (LIME-MIME), but usually they have no meaningful relationship. In some cases, they do relate, as in these names of living creatures. BAT-CAT changes the first letter by one step. LOUSE-MOUSE does, too, and it retains the quality in the plural, LICE-MICE. GNAT-GOAT

is a rare breed, with an internal change. Any others?

Poetic Popeye

"Iamb what iamb!" Popeye said to Olive Oyl.

"Anapest is a pest," Olive whispered as Wimpy approached. "He's gonna mooch a hamburger again. I hope he doesn't make an assonance of himself."

"They oughta lock him up in jail and trochee away."

"Hello, dear friends," Wimpy said. "I hear there is a fine play showing at the Amphibracher this enchanted eve. Would the two of you care to attend with me and my sweetie?"

"Didn't you just break up with that city girl, Villanelle?" Olive asked.

"Alas!" Wimpy sighed, "Nelle always burnt the burgers, but I met a lovely lady who fries like an expert. Her name is Choriamb."

"Isn't she married to Rondeau?"

"Not any more. Uh-oh, here comes Chori now, and I'm terribly allergic to her perfume. Ah... ahhh... HAIKU!"

"Bless you," Olive said.

"Tanka," Wimpy sniffled. "She's divorced now, and she's got three daughters and two sonnets."

"What could be verse?" Popeye said.

"Chori, I'd like to introduce you to Popeye and Olive Oyl."

"Pleased to meter," Popeye said.

"Likewise, I'm sure," Olive said.

"My dear," Wimpy said, "I've brought you a bouquet of triolets."

"You darling," Chori said. "Sorry I'm late, but the quatrain wasn't on time."

"That's okay," Wimpy said. "I'd stanza here and wait for you till dawn."

"Oh, Popeye, don't they make a cute couplet?"

"Yeah, they're real prose alright."

Rare Letter Conundrums

In the last issue, the editor presented a collection of letter conundrums that he and Will Shortz gathered from publications spanning the 1850s to the 1920s. The article concluded with a request for examples of the letter-deletion variety using J, Q, X, and Z:

Why is J like a wild pitch? It makes the ump jump

Why is J like a child taunting a monkey? It makes the ape jape

Why is Q like a stopwatch? Coming before you, it can be made to quit

Why is Q harmless to a bird alone in the wilderness? Without you, it can't make an ill quill

Why is X the movie censor's letter? It changes whatever he sees to sexes

Why is X the warlock's letter? He can't begin a hex without it

Why is Z like a city building ordinance? It makes one a zone

Why is Z the least sexy letter? It changes Eros to zeros