

SOME MEN ENJOY OYSTERS

A. ROSS ECKLER

Morristown, New Jersey

On October 30, 1994, puzzlemaster Will Shortz of the Weekend Edition on National Public Radio challenged his listeners to construct chain-link sentences, ones in which the last two letters of each word are repeated as the first two letters of the succeeding word. He gave his audience extra time, allowing them two weeks in which to send in answers before announcing the winner on November 13. The winner, followed by the four runners-up, was

Can an anteater erase several almost stonelike Kenyan anthills? (Jeff Monasch)

Broadcast station once certified educates estimable legions (Brett Coty)
 Head administrator organized education on online networks (Herb Harris)
 Those sensitive Verdi divas assail illiterate tenors (Kathleen Mears)
 Rush showed editorial alarmism, smeared educational alliance ceaselessly
 (Dale E. Yeo)

Certain letter-pairs are frequently encountered as endings but offer limited possibilities for starts; the entries contained more than their share of LLAMAS, of ICICLES and ICHTHYOLOGISTS, or of EDIBLE LEGUMES. A HEAD ADMINISTRATOR organized (or orchestrated) EDUCATION. Worthies such as CLAUDE DEBUSSY, GEORGE GERSHWIN or SETH THOMAS took their bows. On the other hand, common words like AND, HAD or YOU were nonexistent, as were most words ending -ING (those that did so inevitably led to Asian-Americans surnamed NG).

Most sentences started strong but soon degenerated into random walks of meaning, much like palindromes. Consider the various solutions found for the promising start TWO WOMEN:

Two women enter erotic icehouse, seduce celibate tenor (John Ebert)
 Two women engineer erratic icicle levitation (Alice Hartsuyker)
 Two women enticed Edwin into township Ipswich church (Mary Coats)
 Two women engineer erotic icon on one newel (Herb Hayes)
 Two women entertain international allies (Jennie Mitnick)
 Two women enjoy oysters (Dorothy & Pridie Priail)
 Two women enjoyed edible legumes, essential although ghastly (Linda Wal-lauer)

Three readers worked current events into their chains:

Ito to tolerate television onlookers (Peter O. Gaylord)
 Quayle learned 'edible' lesson once certain inaudible letter eradicated
 (Toby Gotfried)

Clinton, once certain in invincible lead, admonishes essential allies
'estop opponents!' (Paul Blue)

A few listeners raised the ante, looking for three-letter overlaps:

The thespians answered "Redeliver verbal ballads" (Richard D. Cannon)
Each achievement entangles lesser service (Penny S. Larson)
Guerrilla llamas massacre crepuscular larva (Phil Bornemeier)
The theatrical calendar dared Redford ordinarily (Louise Oliver)

One chain-link sentence was constructed in Spanish. Another listener noted that the Latin sentence TE TERO, ROMA, MANU NUDA; DATE TELA, LATE TE (I am pulverizing you, Rome, with my bare hands; give up [your] weapons, conceal yourself), supposedly uttered by Alaric the Visigoth in 410, used every letter in an overlap. A few were logical:

Scrabble least stymies esteemed educators (Stacia Wyman)
Tina's Aswan anagram amazed Eddie (Mary Rose)
Can an anagram amuse senile lexicographers? (Veena B. Mendiratta)
Incisive verbiage generates estimable lexicons (Rona Schneider)

Finally, a collection of chain-link sentences notable for their imagery:

Elsa sat at attention on onyx (Tom Harris)
Pine needles escape pedestrian annihilation once cedar arrives (Tom Harris)
Lone neurotic iceman annoyed Edith, then enticed Edna naughtily (Keith Bradway)
Wine never erases essential aloneness (Carol Nolan)
Rye yeast starts tsetse sex experiment (Robert Eisenberg)
Our urine never erodes Eskimo morals (Robert Galejs)
Grandma makes essential aluminum umbrella labels (Jerry Abrams)
Keynesian anarchist stops psalmist stories (David Graves, Tom Singer)
Doctor Orlando does estrogen enhancements (Laura Pena)
We welcome Melvin into toilet etiquette (Dean Dalrymple)
Winter erases estimable leafage generally (Debbie Monroe)
Cuzco conquistador organizes essential alpaca caravan (Thomas Maguire)
The hearse sealed Edwin inside; death thus ushered Edwin into tomorrow (Linda Johnson)
First Stanley eyed Edith; then enraptured Edwin intervened (Fred Bortz)
Frankenstein intimidated Edith through ghoulish shenanigans (Lillian Range)
Active vermin inhabit Italian antiques establishment (Marie Vodicka)
Horse sense seemed edifyingly lyrical, almost starlike (Leigh Smith)
Madonna - naked! - edifies Estonia's asexual aldermen (Robert Eisenberg)
Casual (albeit itchy) hyena nabbed edible lemur (Mitch Mirsky)
Penelope's escargot otherwise seemed edible (Clay Marklin)
Masturbation Onan anticipated edifyingly (Marion C. Flanders)
First, stencil illustration onto toga (Cliff Ackman)
With the Hebrew ewe we wept (Frank L. Hoffman)
One neophyte teaches Esperanto to Tonkinese servant (Mitch Mirsky)
Martha has aspirin in industrial allotments (John J.B. Wilson)
Sage George Gershwin intones especially lyrical albums (Leslie Bitman)