

NUMERICAL PALINDROMES: PART 1

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At first sight, RESEDACEAE (the plant family to which the mignonette belongs) is not a palindrome. But it is--in disguise! When its ten letters are split into two equal groups of five letters each, and the letters assigned the values A=1, B=2, ... RESED- totals 51 whilst -ACEAE totals 15. RESEDACEAE can thus be written 51.15 which is a numerical palindrome. The Romanian anatomist and surgeon, Dumitru GEROTA (12.33.21) and that useful garden tool, the WIDGER (32.11.23), are also numerical palindromes, but ones in which the word has been split into three equal groups of letters. Thus, assigning A=1, B=2, ... a numerical palindrome can be defined as a word which, when split into n groups each having the same number of letters, and the letter values of each group totalled, provides a number series whose digits read the same backwards as forwards. Here, however, I concentrate exclusively on splitting words (and phrases) into two groups ($n=2$) each of which consists of two digits.

As a genre, numerical palindromes have largely escaped the attention of Word Ways although EMBOLISM (35.53) was mentioned as such in "All Words Are Interesting" by Pamela Brang in the August 1977 issue. The current item seeks to redress this situation, not least because their counterparts, the numerical tautonyms--words such as MICROPHONE (58.58)--have long since received extensive coverage; see Leslie Card's "Six-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the November 1970 Word Ways, and "Eight-Letter Numerical Tautonyms" in the August 1971 issue. Incidentally, some words can lay claim to being both numerical palindromes and numerical tautonyms. These include CHEF (11.11), RACIAL (22.22), SAMPLE (33.33), CUTEST (44.44), SOURLY (55.55), INTERLOPER (66.66), GYNOPLASTY (77.77), STEPMOTHERLY (88.88) and TRANSVERSARIUM (99.99).

GAMBIA (21.12), HISPANIA (52.25) and COPENHAGEN (53.35) are all palindromic locations. SAMANTHA (34.43), FERNANDO (43.34), APPLETON (45.54) and CONRAD (32.23) are palindromic names. So is PANDORA, but only when she is in her Box-possessive mood: PANDORA'S (35.53). Descartes had palindromic aspirations too. He said "I think, therefore I am". But he wasn't. Short of an E, he could only contribute towards DESECRATES (36.63), his andagram!

Numerical palindromes boast a sequence of superlatives. BARN-, BUFF-FOAM-, FOGG-, MANG-, PECK-, SCAL-, SEDG- and TACK- each accommodate -IEST (53) to make (35.53). Similarly, the -OLOGY (74) set ACTIN-, FEMIN-, MONAD- and REACT- ea ch make (47.74).

The double letter delights KUUANT (53.35) and PUDDEE (41.14), the UOIEA-word UNOCCIDENTAL (65.56) and UN-AMERICAN (54.45) are all numerical palindromes. So is the plant DECABELONE (15.51), one of the few words whose first five letters are ABCDE (DEBACLE is another). REACTS and its transposal CATERS not only share the same letters but also the same palindrome. But they cleverly use different combinations of letters (REA,CAT and CTS,ERS) as the basis of their common palindrome (24,42).

The synonyms KID (24) and BOY (42) are, appropriately, numerically-palindromic synonyms as well. And they nicely serve to bridge the gap between numerically-palindromic words and phrases, for there is no reason why a search for numerical palindromes should be confined to single words. In these phrases, the two equal-length words form the two numerical halves of the palindrome:

CARD VOTE 26.62	OLD AGE 31.13	PEACH MELBA 33.33
DARK BOGS 34.43	HIND WING 35.53	NEW ERA 42.24
PALM LEAF 42.24	BOOK FAIR 43.34	DROP GOAL 53.35
WING FLAP 53.35	LOVE SEAT 54.45	MUSIC PAPER 65.56
CROWN HEADS 73.37	MUMMY CLOTH 85.58	

By way of contrast, the two words in each of these phrases are of different lengths and the junction of the two numerical halves lies within one of the words:

BACK G ARDEN 24.42	BAGGAG E AGENT 25.52	NEW S AD 42.24
CONY B URROW 59.95	SERVI CE HAT 73.37	PRIZE W INNERS 97.79

The words below have been selected from a list of 726, prepared with the minimum of computer assistance and the maximum of eyestrain! Together with 11.11, 22.22 ... to 99.99 (see above), they cover the 99 palindromic numbers from 0110 to 9999. The words ascribed to a particular number are of different lengths. A few numbers defied my attempts to find a word. In these cases, I have substituted a two-word coined phrase where possible. Ten numbers remain wordless: 0770, 0880, 0990, 2002, 3003, 4004, 5005, 7007, 8008 and 9009.

Unless specified otherwise, all words can be found in one or more of Webster's Second, Webster's Third, the Oxford English Dictionary, The Complete Word Game Dictionary (Tom Pulliam and Gorton Carruth, 1984), A Dictionary of Flowering Plants and Ferns (J.C. Willis, 1966), Nomenclator Zoologicus (Zoological Society of London), and Stedman's Medical Dictionary (25th edition).

0110 aj [Dictionary of Jamaican English (1967)]
 0220 aaas ?
 0330 bask
 0440 acus
 0550 baboot
 0660 Abba four [a pop group]

1001 ja
 1221 kail, hackia, bedabble
 1331 laze, befold
 1441 maut, heaven, deadlock
 1551 hafnyl, jacamars, Decabelone
 1661 cherry, diabolos [Gk]
 1771 decently
 1881 dabbed powder [coined phrase]
 1991 bald Suzy [coined phrase]
 2112 epic, braced
 2332 horn, emetic, barbered
 2442 sews. hoarse. bracelet
 2552 pizz ?, deploy, legalize, declaiming
 2662 grayly, gamester, bandalette
 2772 celebrator, academicisms
 2882 bragozzo, haematosiis
 2992 carbethoxy
 3113 opal, bonded, gem-faced
 3223 wire, salami, radiance
 3443 sorry, matter, enclosed, bidentalial
 3553 parrot, shaggily, abbeystede, deep-damasked
 3663 poetry, conducts, bandoliers
 3773 desirous, allegorize
 3883 Christys, filibuster, backcrossing
 3993 fasciaplasty, haberdasheress
 4114 tuck, simiad
 4224 single, five-leaf, beholdable
 4334 twos, buttie ?, impeding, leaf-shaped
 4554 fruity, colonize, ethicalism, reaffirmance
 4664 tincture, affronting, faciolingual
 4774 geotropy, actinology, affrightedly
 4884 eucaryotes, acidophilous
 4994 heliotropy, bacteriopepy
 5115 novcic, fullface, Cassiaceae
 5225 sulphur, formicid
 5335 muslin, Copenhagen
 5445 stover, operates, elliptical, meclofenamic
 5665 plug-ugly, equalizing, Judaeophobes
 5775 panzooty, Artocarpus, alexandrites
 5885 phenotypes, acrognostics, coffee-roasting
 5995 dichotomists, achromatocytic ?
 6006 toy cab [coined phrase]
 6116 tutche, thoracic
 6226 wurmal, Spiraeas, overbided
 6336 syssel, tetrapod, antisavage, gentle-handed
 6446 pewterer, proclaimer, Gondwanaland
 6556 propenyl, patisserie, unoccidental
 6776 overgently, circumlocute, mammogenically
 6886 brushworks, noncausality
 6996 bilipurpurin, antidepressant
 7117 tusk ache [coined word] what the elephant got?

- 7227 sultanic, stillehede
- 7337 stumbler, unmetallic, Schisandraceae
- 7447 routines, equivocacy, pinnatilobed
- 7557 oustitis, mutilative, Lophiomyidae
- 7667 starringly, levocardiogram
- 7887 mispursuit, counterstamp, chroaximetrics
- 7997 homomorphous, anthraquinones
- 8118 huzzahed, Hypericaceae
- 8228 smoothable, Amaryllidaceae
- 8338 systemas, nostomania, Tarsipedinae
- 8448 frustrated, conveyancing, molengraaffite
- 8558 nonswimmer, Monocystidae, hemorrhagenics
- 8668 zymography, butterscotch, compassionated
- 8778 synonymize, eventuations, allotriodontia
- 8998 preposterous, circumvoluting
- 9119 fusty-faced [coined word]
- 9229 wispy hedge [coined phrase]
- 9339 prospicience, vasculocardiac
- 9449 transvesical, superangelical
- 9559 synovially, hysteroceles
- 9669 dysoxidizing, Microtrachelus
- 9779 sixty-fours, Ostariophyseae
- 9889 sponsorships, trigonometries

A word can also be split into two equal-length groups of letters to form a six-digit, rather than a four-digit, palindrome. For example, UNINTERMITTENT (101,101) can be found in Webster's Second. These words, together with words split into a number of groups other than two, will be covered by Rex Gooch in the sequel.