

KICKSHAWS

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LOGORIDDLES

Now is the time for everyone to face the fact that he or she has been playing with letters from a very young age. Unless one has been a hermit or, if a guy, a hismit, one has probably heard the likes of the following riddles, which are in essence logological posers. Answers can be found in *Answers and Solutions*.

1. What is the longest word in the English language?
2. What's the difference between a champ and a chump?
3. What is the only place where success comes before work?
4. What word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it?
5. From what can you take the whole and still have some left over?
6. Why is the letter D like a naughty child?
7. Why is noon like the letter A?
8. What starts with T, ends with T, and is full of T?
9. Which letter is like a Roman emperor?
10. What other letters are like a Roman emperor?
11. It occurs once in every minute, twice in every moment, and yet never in one hundred thousand years. What is it?
12. A pastor put up a sign that read THIS IS A CH-CH. What is missing?

LOGOLOGY VS. MORPHOLOGY

But what is logology? Throughout *The Word Circus*, I have striven mightily to avoid miscegenating morphemes (meaning-bearing units) with logology (letter engineering). My view is that when morphological manipulation starts, pure logology ends.

I'll illustrate with a few exhibits:

- Cyclical transposals, such as BEDLAM/LAMBED and STABLE/ABLEST, are far more logologically satisfying than the looping of SONG-BIRD/BIRDSONG and TAKEOVER/OVERTAKE because logology is about

letter play, not the syntactic rearrangement of morphemic (meaning-bearing) units.

- Logologists know their S from a hole in the ground. The curtailing of terminal S's in plural nouns or third-person singular verbs, as in WORDS/WORD or SPEAKS/SPEAK, draws a yawn. The looping of an initial S, as in SCAR/CARS or SPEAK/PEAKS, inspires a burst of apathy. Why? Because the S is primarily a meaning-bearing element.
- PARTIALLY/PARTLY is not worth discussing as a kangaroo family because etymology dominates letter pattern. CONTAMINATE/TAINT is a star pairing because the letter play's the thing. The banishing of internal solids--asSURED, enJOYment, inTOXICated--from the exhibition of joeys is somewhat tied to the fact that such solids usually house meaning.
- The charades HOUSECAT = HOUSE + CAT and PEACOCK = PEA + COCK do not excite the lover of letter play. ANTELOPE = ANT + ELOPE and PIGEON = PIG + EON do because ELOPE and EON are marvelous accidents.
- In *I Love Me*, Vol. I, Donner observes, "Composing word-unit palindromes is an entirely different kettle of fish from composing letter-unit palindromes...The word-unit composer seems to require as good a grasp of syntactic possibilities as the letter-unit composer requires of spelling possibilities. The only catch is that the two types of familiarity are quite distinct and perhaps equally hard to acquire." I submit that it is because whole-word palindromes and word-reversal palindromes involve words, i.e. morphological units, that they occupy a lower stratum in the logological pantheon than does the more familiar kind of palindromic statement, which leaps the spaces separating words.
- Bookend words of the type LIGAMENT = LINT + GAME work better than the type DEPARTED = PART + DEED because the bookends in the second class are essentially morphological, hence second-class.
- Both JUMBO SHRIMP and CONNECTICUT = CONNECT + I CUT are amusing oxymorons, but the second example boasts the added feature of sheer accident of letters.

Logology is the realm of letter engineering; morphology is the realm of meaning-bearing units. Logologists are not morpheme addicts.

THE GAME IS THE NAME

- Basketball star and flake Dennis Rodman is infamous for his amoral and unpredictable behavior--everything from stomping a courtside photographer to dressing in drag. All this is not so surprising when you observe that DENNIS is a semordnilap of SINNED, and RODMAN is an anagram of RANDOM.
- Disgraced Cambodian dictator POL POT had a tendency to LOP off the TOP of people.
- Can anyone ever top the combination of charade and famous name in ALKALINE = AL KALINE, the Hall of Fame outfielder for the Detroit Tigers?

- THEDA BARA, the stage name of one Theodosia Goodman, combines an anagram and a palindrome for ARAB DEATH.
- The surname of French existentialist writer Albert CAMUS becomes the semordnilap SUMAC, which happens to be not only a rash plant but the last name of Camus' contemporary, singer YMA SUMAC, a reversal of AMY CAMUS. Had the two actually met, onlookers might have observed that CAMUS SEES SUMAC.
- AL GORE's name becomes GALORE when spoonerized, then GAL ORE when charaded. That's what we call an Al Gore rhythm!
- RIP VAN WINKLE turns into the elderly sadist WHIP VAN WRINKLE.
- In the film *Batman and Robin*, the villainess Poison Ivy is played by Uma ThUrMAN, whose first name is concealed as a joey in her last name.
- In a chapter I was writing that included AEIOU names, I vacillated about whether to include golfer JUstIn LEOnArd, fearing that he was not sufficiently famous. But the man made the decision for me when he went out and won the 1997 British Open at the age of 25.
- ULYssEs SIMpsOn GrAnt is the only presidential name that yields single instances of A,E,I,O,U and Y.
- One reason that San Diego Padres outfielder Tony GWYNN is baseball's best hitter since Ted Williams is that his last name is not weighted down by any major vowels--another benefit of abstemiousness.

A NAME AT PLAY

In such classics as *An Almanac of Words at Play* and *The Word's Gotten Out*, word wizard, letter engineer, poet, and raconteur extraordinaire Willard R. Espy guides his readers along the giggle road through the mischief of words. How serendipitous it is that Willard's surname is one of the most logologically incandescent in the onomastic universe. ESPY is a gramogram--SP--and a letter statement questioning extrasensory perception--ESP? WHY? Perhaps you ESPY and SPY that ESPY is also a capitonym and a beheadable synonym.

A BRAND NEW PALINDROME

I've recently moved to Sun Diego, where I read Z00N00Z, a magazine published by the Zoological Society of San Diego since 1920. In capital letters, Z00N00Z is an extraordinary title because it is palindromic, palindromic in a mirror, palindromic upside down, and palindromic upside down in a mirror.

But the quintessential brand-name palindrome belongs to a stock (bouillon) cube popular throughout the United Kingdom--OXO, a palindrome in at least ten ways. Like Z00N00Z, OXO appears as a palindrome rightside up, upside down, and both ways in a mirror. But unlike Z00N00Z, each letter in OXO, whether upper or lowercased, is itself a palindrome when sliced horizontally or vertically, yielding six additional palindromes.

OXO! OXO! Burning bright
 In the forests of the night?
 What immortal hand or eye
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

The letters H and I are also horizontally and vertically symmetrical. But the horizontal halves do not match the vertical halves in the manner of O and X. That's why the symmetry of OXO is especially fearful. That's why the OXO delivery trucks are emblazoned with OXOXOXOXOXOX-
 OXOXOXOXOXO.

STAR ANAGRAMS

And now, please offer a big round of applause to the luminous, the pulsing, the radiating, the brilliant, the scintillating, the twinkling star among simpler anagrams. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the word STAR.

Semordnilapically, S-T-A-R spells RATS backwards.

Employing a cyclic transposal, we get TARS.

Now we twice progress from inside to outside, in the order of 2-1-3-4 and 3-4-2-1, and we derive TSAR and ARTS. STAR (and, obviously, its reversal, RATS) is the only word in English of four letters or more that can perform a double inside-to-outside.

All these combinations produce a perfect anagram:

STAR-TSAR-TARS-ARTS-RATS.

STAR even has a one-letter shiftgram: STAR(1)TUBS.

A close runner up to STAR is the gutsy word INTESTINES. The first five letters, INTES, are anagrammed in the second half, TINES. Both halves are anagrams of INSET, so we have a pair isogram made up of two anagrammatical insets. For a finishing touch, a second body part, with letters in order, is hidden in INTESTINES. That word is TESTES.

Third prize goes to ROSE, which comes out smelling like a rose:

ROSE-ROES-ORES-SORE-EROS.

ROSE and ROES are anagrammed homophones. SORE and EROS are meaningful semordnilaps. SORE becomes ORES and EROS, ROSE when cyclically transposed. ROES becomes ORES when anagrammed from the inside out: 2-1-3-4.

PALINDROMIC POETRY

Name Me Man

Backward and forward, as you will perceive,
 Read Adam's first greeting to dear Mother Eve:
 MADAM, I'M ADAM. Now we can conceive
 That her answer was simply: EVE, MAD ADAM, EVE.

Adam may have ribbed us when he said EVE WAS I ERE I SAW EVE, because Eve was one of his ribs before God extracted it and made her. When he said MADAM IN EDEN, I'M ADAM and NAMED UNDER A BAN, A BARED NUDE MAN, she could have offered any of the following replies:

SIR, I'M IRIS
 ADAM, I'M ADA

EVE IS A SIEVE
 I'M A MADAM, ADAM, AM I?

EVE MAIDEN NAME. BOTH SAD IN EDEN? I DASH TO BE MANNED. I AM EVE

Route Canal

There was a man who had a plan
 To set a can inside a pan.
 He added AL and then A MA--
 Built a canal in Panama.

A MAJA PLAN A CANAL? PAJAMA!
 A MAN APART LUSTS ULTRA PANAMA.
 His critics tried to ban him, pan him. Ah!
 A MAN! A PLAN! A CANAL! PANAMA!

SEMORDNILAPIC REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY

Sometimes a semordnilapic reversal is especially meaningful. For instance, a number of people feel that the sport is called GOLF not just because all the other four-letter words were used up, but because GOLF spelled backwards is FLOG. Others insist that BOSS is spelled B-O-S-S because your boss is a backward double S-O-B!

Here are some other choice examples of backward logic:

- One is liable to find AMOR in ROMA.
- Theater lovers are AVID about a DIVA.
- During an EMBARGO, each article withheld seems to say "O GRAB ME."
- EROS spelled backwards gives you an idea how it affects beginners.
- HARPO Marx was famous for his silence; OPRAH Winfrey is famous for her conversation.
- A LEPER tends to REPEL.
- A dark MOOD presages DOOM.
- To Captain NEMO a giant squid was an ill OMEN.
- It's apt that a PAT is a kind of TAP.
- PEES often SEEP.
- We are likely to RAIL at a LIAR.

- Bud SELIG and Warren GILES have both been high-ranking major league baseball officials.
- STATE in reverse is ETATS, its own plural in French.
- WAR is a RAW experience for humankind.
- A WONK will KNOW a lot about a certain subject.

A special twist on the meaning of a meaningless letter string was displayed on a subway poster created by the Commission on Intergroup Relations in the City of New York: "ECIDUJERP spelled backwards is prejudice. Either way it doesn't make sense."

HAPPY PALINDROMIC NEW YEAR

We are in the middle of an eleven-year span between the palindromic years 1991 and 2002. The last time a smaller hiatus occurred was between the years 999 and 1001. Then for almost an entire millennium, we had to wait 110 years from one palindromic year to the next: 1001, 1111, 1221, 1331, 1441, 1551, 1661, 1771, 1881, 1991. Only one out of every two billion of us human beings lives to the age of 116. Thus, hardly anyone during the past millennium has ever lived through two palindromic years.

Now there's an excellent chance that you, gentle reader, will accomplish that feat. After the year 2002, we'll go back to the 110-year intervals--2002, 2112, 2222, 2332 and so on and won't attain another eleven-year spacing till 2992-3003!

Turning from mathematics to names, in 1991 what seventeen-year-old woman supplanted Steffi Graf to become the top-ranked tennis player in the world? The answer is Monica SELES. In other words, a woman with a palindromic last name became the world's best tennis player in a palindromic year. You might call the coincidence a self-fulfilling moniker.

A PANGRAMMATIC HEADLINE?

We'll probably never see a newspaper headline that uses all the letters of the alphabet, but Darryl Francis spotted one in the 30 Mar 1997 Sunday Times that gets off to a good start with JQXZ present: TOP TORY QUILTS IN NEW SEX SCANDAL AS PARTY SPURNS MAJOR'S SLEAZE PLEA. If only BFGHKV had been included! Can you rewrite it to qualify?

COUNTRY TO COUNTRY

Can you change the first letter of a word that means "suspecting something wrong" to produce another word that means "boding something favorable"? The answers are SUSPICIOUS/AUSPICIOUS.

Now, can you change one letter in the name of a Middle Eastern country to generate the name of another Middle Eastern country? Can you do the same thing with two European countries?

Name a country whose name means "East Land" that reposes as a joey in the name of another country whose name, in a different language, means "South Land." When you arrive at a solution, you'll discover that this has truly been a kangaroo challenge. (Answers are in Answers and Solutions.)

ANAGRAMARAMA

In each of the following phrases, change either the first or last word or expression to an anagram of the other half. In each case, the new word will be a synonym of the base word or words. For example, in the phrase "autographed the design" you would change the first word to SIGNED to produce "SIGNED the DESIGN"; the phrase "Socratic word puzzle" would become "SOCRATIC ACROSTIC." (Answers are in Answers and Solutions.)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. pilot's firearm | 16. resign, crooner |
| 2. perceives section | 17. leather North Carolinian |
| 3. mother's container | 18. entrap father |
| 4. lauded diapers | 19. generate an adolescent |
| 5. incautious runway | 20. grounded longshot |
| 6. talented fidget | 21. license for muteness |
| 7. hurry, sleuth | 22. aboard far away |
| 8. gamester's parsley | 23. brides in rubble |
| 9. most joyful epitaphs | 24. diminutive Batman |
| 10. sectional shore | 25. hides rubies |
| 11. remember the cellar | 26. singer's entrance |
| 12. resist sibling | 27. vainest residents |
| 13. viewing genies | 28. treason by congressman |
| 14. married devotee | 29. congressional rationales |
| 15. hope to praise | 30. grandest police traps |

SPOT THE PATTERN

Within each five-word set lurks a common denominator, a characteristic shared by every word in the cluster. Identify each characteristic. Example: in the set DEIFIED, NOON, PEP, SEES, STRESSED all the words are palindromic. (Answers are in Answers and Solutions.)

1. deer, dog, gnat, ram, rat
2. dissident, hosannas, millimeter, sniffing, suffuse
3. category, crowned, dogma, emulate, wrench
4. blotter, escrow, forebear, scallion, vamoose
5. calmness, hijack, indefinite, stuck worst
6. area, example, Israeli, onto, Urdu

7. gypsy, myrrh, nth, pygmy, rhythms
8. ambidextrous, cauliflower, exhaustion, housemaid, pandemonium
9. giggling, maharaja, possess, razzmatazz, whippersnapper
10. bassoon, coffee, raccoon, roommate, tattoo
11. are, eye, pea, queue, why
12. ewe, eye, hour, there, wee
13. id, shed, shell, wed, well
14. barbaric, bringing, counterterrorism, possessed, ratcatcher
15. civic, civil, livid, mimic, vivid
16. selective, sexist, slake, stern, swindles
17. ant, asp manatee, mite, owl
18. chatter, frightful, revolution, treason, vindicate
19. peppery, pretty, quieter, rupture, typewriter
20. circus, cook, judge, solstice, zebras

NEIGHBORLY SWITCHES

In an installment of Johnny Hart's comic strip B.C., one caveman screams at another, "No, no, no, no! I distinctly said to GIRD your LOINS! The other caveguy has drawn a grid on a lion. The humor of this episode arises from the fact that a number of words transform into other words when two adjacent letters are switches--TRIAL/TRAIL, DIARY/DAIRY, SILVER/SLIVER, CLOSETS/CLOSEST, INFRACTION/INFARCTION and, of course, GIRD/GRID and LOINS/LIONS.

With the same interchange of neighboring letters UNITED becomes its opposite--UNTIED. COMPLAINT and COMPLIANT form near opposites, as do SACRED and SCARED. Depending on your point of view, MARITAL and MARTIAL may be antonyms or synonyms.

SIMULTANEOUS LOOPERS

A number of four-letter words become new words when, contemporaneously, the front letter is looped to the back and the back to the front, among them BRAG/GRAB, DOOM/MOOD, DROP/PROD, GRIP/PRIG, LAIR/RAIL, LEAP/PEAL and PART/TARP. The first and last letters must be different, of course.

Rarer five-letter examples include DOPER/ROPED, KHANS/SHANK, LEVER/REVEL, ROBES/SOBER and SINEW/WINES.

Reaching for six-letter prizes, we note the pattern DAPPER/RAPPED, DIPPER/RIPPED and DUBBER/RUBBED. More elegantly, TARMAC/CAR MAT features a sense of semantic kinship. It's a shame that CAR MAT is two words.

ABSTEMIOUS WORDS

There exists a cluster of one-syllable words that--believe it or not, and you soon will believe it!--do not include any of the major vowels A,E,I,O or U! That's right, ladies and gentlemen and boys and girls. You won't find any LADIES or GENTLEMEN or BOYS or GIRLS in this lexicon. That's right, folks. You just can't buy a vowel.

With tongue firmly planted in cheek, some call these words that have had a vowel movement "abstemious" words, a facetious label since ABSTEMIOUS (along with FACETIOUS) is fraught with every major vowel, and in order. How many words missing any major vowel are there?

Would you believe more than fifty--even as we exclude bizarre abstruse words like CWM, QYRQHYZ and CRWTH?

Among these familiar abstemious words are BY, CRY, CYST, DRY, FLY, FRY, GLYPH, GYM, GYP, HYMN, LYMPH, LYNCH, LYNX, MY, NYMPH, PLY, PRY, SHY, SKY, SLY, SPRY, SPY, STY, SYLPH, SYNCH, THY, TRY, WHY and WRY (as well as many of their plurals).

Add two letters to CRY and you get CRYPT. Add two letters to TRY, and still avoid using any major vowels in TRYST. Add two letters to MY, and you get MYTH; add three and you get MYRRH.

Among two-syllable words that exclude A,E,I,O and U are GYPSY, PYGMY, FLYBY and the adverbs DRYLY, SHYLY, SLYLY, SPRYLY and WRYYLY. Each of these possesses two Y's, but one common two-syllable word of this type includes only one Y: RHYTHM.

One three-syllable word also avoids the major vowels--SYZYGY, which means "the straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies."

A Sonnet to Abstemious Words

Once did a SHY but SPRY GYPSY
 SPY a PYGMY, who made him feel tipsy.
 Her form, like a LYNX, SYLPH and NYMPH,
 Made all his DRY glands feel quite LYMPH.

He felt so in SYNCH with her RHYTHM
 That he hoped she'd FLY to the SKY with him.
 No SLY MYTH would he TRY on her;
 Preferring to PLY her with MYRRH.

When apart, he would FRY and then CRY,
 Grow a CYST and a STY in his eye.
 That's WHY they would TRYST at the GYM,
 BY a CRYPT, where he'd write a WRY HYMN.

Her he loved to the NTH degree,
 Like a heavenly SYZYGY.

Now that you're wise to the Y's, ask yourself are there any words that cavort across the wire without any A,E,I,O or U--or the minor vowels Y or W?

HMMM...that's one that you can find in some dictionaries, including Scrabble lexicons. We're not including letter abbreviations such as TV and Ph.D.

SHH..before you grab some Z's, give me some time to think. There, you've just spotted another two, along with BRRR, PFFT and TSKTSK.

I sincerely hope that these abstemious words have pleased you, not just to the first, fifth or tenth degree, but (and embedded in the poem above) to the NTH degree!

TELEPHONE WORDS

How many times a year do you answer or dial the telephone? Chances are that your annual telephonic visits number in the thousands. Yet can you identify, without going to a telephone, which two letters of the alphabet are missing from your telephone dial?

Here's some more telephonic logology. The longest word that can be dialed (pushed? punched? poked?) using only letters that appear with odd numerals on a standard telephone is WELL-EXPRESSED (9-355-3977-37733). The longest word that can be dialed using only letters that appear with even numerals is NONCOMMUNICATING (666-266-6864-228464). As with the word TYPEWRITER, we behold [Twilight Zone theme music here] an eerie confluence of letter configurations and meaning.

What are the longest pairs of words (seven letters) with no overlapping letters in the same place that can be dialed on a telephone? Try 278-7433 and you'll reach ASTRIDE and BRUSHED (or CRUSHED). Try 266-8687 for AMOUNTS and CONTOURS, another pair with no crashing letters. PYGMIES and SWINGER (794-6437) come close, save for the penultimate E in each.

Oh yes. The missing telephonic letters are Q and Z.

WE HAVE YOUR NUMBER

FIRST is the only ordinal number whose letters appear in alphabetical order. The only cardinal number that matches FIRST is FORTY. A number of other "figurative" words have our number:

- ONE is the only number in reverse alphabetical sequence and the only cardinal number formed from a cyclic transposal--EON/ONE.

- FOUR is the only number with a quantity of letters that matches its value.
- Take from FIVE the first, second and fourth letters and you end up with V, which still signifies "five."
- EIGHT is the first number alphabetically of all the finite numbers named.
- EIGHTH is the only ordinal number that can be curtailed to yield a cardinal number (EIGHT), the only ordinal number that results from a looping anagram (HEIGHT/EIGHTH), and (with TWELFTHS) the only number that contains five consecutive consonants when pluralized (EIGHTHS).
- TEN is the only number that spells a common word when its letters are reversed.
- ELEVEN is the longest number name with alternating vowels and consonants; NINE/TEN/ELEVEN make a thirteen-letter consonant-vowel string.
- TWELFTHS is the longest number word having only one vowel.
- SEVENTEEN is the last of all numbers (THREE, SEVEN, TEN, ELEVEN are the others) whose names are spelled with E as the only vowel.
- EIGHTY-ONE is one of only two square-root words, in which the number of letters (nine) is the square root of the number signified by the word itself. The other square-root word is the ten-letter ONE HUNDRED.
- FIVE THOUSAND is the longest and highest number that is spelled isogramatically--no letters repeated.

Quick: you have two minutes to rattle off a series of words that are completely devoid of the letter A. Actually, all you have to do is start counting "one-two-three-four-five-six...". You can progress all the way through NINE HUNDRED NINETY NINE and never use an A--not until you reach ONE THOUSAND.

SINGULAR PLURALS

KINE is the only plural that contains no letter in common with its singular, COW. Sure, KINE is archaic, but we're allowed to have archaic and eat it too.

Most English nouns form their plurals by adding -S or -ES, as in ELEPHANTS and HORSES. But two parts of the body, three animals, and three human beings become plurals by changing the vowels in their middle. Identify the eight words in this category.

What is the only common English word that forms its plural by adding a consonant other than S in the middle? And what noun become plural by dropping its last letter? (Answers are found in Answers and Solutions.)

PSEUDO-COMPARATIVES

Pseudo-comparatives are words that can add both an -ER and -EST but which lead to words unrelated to the original. For example, the triad TEMP/TEMPER/TEMPEST looks like the SMALL/SMALLER/SMALLEST adjective model, but it isn't a true progression of adjectives. Other examples: BE/BEER/BEEST, P/PER/PEST. PRY/PRIOR/PRIEST comes so close, except that PRIOR lacks the crucial -ER suffix. DETER/DETEST is the ultimate heartbreaker--a comparative and a superlative, but with no base word. I welcome additional examples.

MAINTAINING YOUR EQUINE-IMITY

Examples of consecutive vowels, as in QUEUEING and MIAOUED, are surpassed by the name POT00000000, assigned a British racehorse born in 1773. That name was pronounced "Potatoes"--Pot + eight 0's.

THE WORD CIRCUS AFTERWORD

Life is a circus where thousands throng but none can stay. The only permanence of the circus is its impermanence. Each time the Greatest Show on Earth leaves a city, it tears itself down and piles itself onto railroad cars. Not so with the Word Circus.

Nothing now to mark the spot
But a littered vacant lot.
Sawdust in a heap, and where
The center ring stood, grass worn bare.

But remains the alphabet,
Ready to leap and pirouette.
May the spangled letters soar
In our head forever more.