

# KICKSHAWS

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Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor (David-Morice@uiowa.edu).

## IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S...

Superman has powers far beyond those of mortal man, but how do those powers work? A search of the Medline database turns up 29 papers with "Superman" in them, but only one discusses the caped crusader's powers. The abstract:

Requirements that a vision system must meet to make Superman's X-ray vision possible are stated, and two solutions are proposed. In one, emitted X-rays carry the information to Superman's eyes; in the other, emitted rays make objects transparent to a second type of ray. Further subjects lending themselves to this type of research are superhearing, the biomechanics of leaping tall buildings, or being faster than a bullet.

## 22 NINES? TRIPLE THAT NUMBER!

Daniel McGrath found a numerically-huge error in the last Kickshaws:

"In Supernumbers, you refer to a string of 22 nines as the highest nameable number in numeric logology. 'Tis not so! The next number is ten sextillion, and you have a long way to go from there. Surely you mean 22 groups of three nines; that is the one thousand vigintillion minus one that you are looking for. This is actually 66 nines."

## CRISS-CROSS LETTERS

The alphabet has been divided in several ways according to the position of the letters on the keyboard. It has been organized according to the row or the column a letter appears in and according to the hand or the finger that strikes the letter. Another way to divide the typewriter letters is by tracing a path in a zigzag pattern from one side to the other. To find one set, start at Q, go down to A, Z, up to S, E, and so on till reaching L. The Q-set has 18 letters, QASZSEDCFTGBHUJMKOL. To find the other set, start at P and repeat the process, going from right to left. The P-set has 17 letters, PLKIJNHYG VFRDXSWA (note that the

comma appears on one key). The sets criss-cross at the keyboard's middle row; thus they have nine letters in common (ASDFGHJKL).

What is the longest word in each set for each possible starting letter? A word must have at least one letter unique to its set, and it should not use the noun or verb endings -S, -ES, -ED, -ING. Here is a set of words from Webster's 10th Collegiate, with asterisks indicating isograms:

Quickest\*, Amorous, Zestful\*, Schoolhouse, Egghead, Checkmate, Tattletale, Gumshoe\*, Behemoth, Hammock, Useful, Jumble\*, Malemute, Kickball, Oatmeal

Parlay, Lanky\*, Kinship, Inwardly\*, Jiffy, Ninny, Hallway, Yard\*, Glassful, Vilify, Frankly\*, Rally, Dandify, Xi\*, Swain\*, Wishywashy, Angina

Amazingly, SOUTH DAKOTA and MASSACHUSETTS are equal to or longer than any of the words given above!

#### TO QUOIN A PHRASE

The word QUOIN in Webster's Ninth Collegiate has a pangrammatic definition with the full alphabet appearing in only 99 letters (between the upright lines). Are there very many other pangrammatic definitions? Any shorter?

quoin 1 A: a solid exterior angle (as of a building) b one of the members (as a block) forming a ; quoin and usu. differentiated from the adjoining walls by material, texture, color, size or projection  
2: the keystone or a v|oussoir of an arch...

#### INEPT CARNIVAL? TRAVEL IN PANIC?

Prince Valiant, the hero of the comic strip of the same name, travels with his knights to FLORA MAGNESIA, the ISLE OF ANAGRAMS. PROTEUS, the TOP USER of anagrams on the island, informs the Prince that "anything you see or think will soon turn into whatever can be spelled by changing around the letters." This is illustrated by a HERD OF PONIES that metamorphoses into a menacing HOOFED SNIPER, and SOARING VULTURES that become VIRTUOUS ANGLERS.

The trick, Prince Valiant eventually discovers, is to turn anagrams to one's advantage by constructing an anagram of one's desire: think ANT HEAPS in order to flush out a PHEASANT, or TOE BATHS to arrange transport back to THE BOATS. But when Gawain carelessly says "BID YOU FAREWELL" to Proteus, he finds his ELBOW DULY AFIRE. (Had the fire been in his BOWEL instead, could he have quenched it with a dose of milk of magnesia?)

## ONE-LETTER CHANGES FOR THE HILARIOUS

Enoch Haga sends along the results of the Washington Post's "Style Invitational" contest, in which readers were asked to take a dictionary word, alter it by adding, subtracting or changing one letter, and supply a new definition:

REINTARNATION coming back to life as a hillbilly  
 FOREPLOY any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of sex  
 GIRAFFITI vandalism spray-painted very, very high  
 SARCHASM the gulf between the witty author and the clueless reader  
 INOCULATTE to take coffee intravenously when you are running late  
 HIPATITIS terminal coolness  
 OSTEOPORNOSIS a degenerate disease  
 BURGLESQUE a poorly-planned break-in (see Watergate)  
 GLIBIDO all talk and no action  
 DOPELER EFFECT stupid ideas seem smarter if they come at you rapidly  
 IGNORANUS a person who's both stupid and an asshole  
 INTAXICATION euphoria at getting an IRS refund--which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with

## ED CONTI GOES POSTAL

Say you're an alien from a galaxy far away (or maybe you're just from New Jersey) and you've been told upon arriving here that we have eight statenames beginning with the letter M: Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana. The postal service (surely you've heard of them in your galaxy, and perhaps in NJ) has assigned the two-letter codes MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT to these. Your mission is to figure out who gets which code. Sorry, there's not much more we can tell you, since it's difficult to get inside the mind of the postal service.

I tried to do this myself, and after figuring out that MD is for Maryland (because no other M state has a D in it) I was stumped. Perhaps one of your readers, aliens, Jerseyites or otherwise, can deduce them all logically. If you want to offer a prize for best deductive reasoning, I can offer four of my books: Hic Haec Hoc, Fractal Day!, Words and Music by Edmund Conti, and Ebb and Flo. (That would be the second prize. First prize would be one book.)

Deduction works with the four A states: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona and Arkansas (codes AK AL AR AZ). Either Alabama or Alaska could be AL, either Arizona or Arkansas could be AR, either Alaska or Arkansas could be AK, but only Arizona can be AZ (that is, of course, imputing some common sense to the postal authorities). Arkansas must be AR since neither Alaska nor Alabama has an R in it (these are evidently not good places for eating oysters). This leaves AK for Alaska (not in Alabama) and therefor AL for Alabama. Voila! Unfortunately, I can't make any of this thinking work for the M states.

## ROSS ECKLER GOES POSTAL

The following "rules" tell how the postal service assigned the second letters of the postal codes to the eight states starting with M:

- Any state with a letter not in the others is assigned that letter. Maryland is the only state with a D.
- The state having the most repetitions of a single letter is assigned that letter. In case a state qualifies with two different letters (as does Mississippi with I and S), select that letter having the earliest average position ( $S = 6 = (4+5+7+8)/4$ , not  $I = 7 = (2+5+8+11)/4$ ).
- After assigning letters to states with four-letter repetitions, continue with three-letter repetitions (Massachusetts has three S's, but S has already been used for Mississippi).
- Next assign letters to states with two-letter repetitions; if there is more than one such state, first assign the one earliest in the alphabet: Massachusetts has two A's, Michigan has two I's, Minnesota has two N's, Missouri has two I's and two S's but both letters have been used, and Montana has two N's and two A's but both letters have already been used.
- Assign the earliest unused letter to the remaining states (in alphabetic order): Maine is assigned E, Missouri is assigned O, and Montana is assigned T.

Alas, these rules don't always work for other sets of states starting with a common letter:

Arizona (INOZ), Alabama (BM not L), Arkansas (S not R), Alaska (L not K)  
 Idaho (H not D), Iowa (W not A), Illinois (L), Indiana (N)  
 California (AF), Connecticut (ETU), Colorado (D not O)  
 Washington (AHT), Wisconsin (C not I), Wyoming (YM)  
 Ohio (HI), Oklahoma (AKLM), Oregon (EGNR)

For a different take on this problem, see the editor's "Abbreviations Without Ambiguities" in the May 1995 Word Ways.

## INVERSION SQUARES

These are word squares of even size in which the word in the first row appears in reverse in the ultimate row, the word in the second row appears in reverse in the penultimate row, and so on. Invented by Frank Rubin while searching for ten-squares, they were first reported in the August 1990 Word Ways. As Rubin commented, the inversion square "has a sort of palindromic quality with its own esthetic appeal."

They are far easier to construct than single or double squares. For example, a 4x4 inversion square is constructed by writing down any word in the top row. The only restriction on the word in the second row is that its first letter must agree with the second letter of the top row word, and its last letter must agree with the third letter of the top

row word. In fact, it's almost impossible to think of a top row word which prevents selecting a second row word!

Inverse squares have received little attention since 1990; they were ignored as a variant square in *Making the Alphabet Dance* (1996). Recently, the editor called my attention to a 10x10 inversion square constructed by Chris Long which appears on part 3 of [www.cs.cubk.edu.hk](http://www.cs.cubk.edu.hk):

D E T A S S E L E D  
 E X E R C I T A T E  
 T E C T O N I C A L  
 A R T H R O L I T E  
 S C O R P I O N I S  
 S I N O I P R O C S  
 E T I L O R H T R A  
 L A C I N O T C E T  
 E T A T I C R E X E  
 D E L E S S A T E D

DETASSEL and ARTHROLITE are in Webster's Second, and EXERCITATE and TECTONICAL are in the OED and the OED Supplement, respectively. SCORPIONIS is not a dictionary main entry, but it is mentioned as the genitive form of SCORPIO in Webster's Second. Can anyone find a better inversion square of this size, or one of size 12?

#### THE STAR WARS VERSION OF THE BILL AND MONICA STORY

Elsewhere in this issue, Mike Morton exhibits a wide variety of anagrams crafted from the phrase STAR WARS, EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE. As a bonus, he also constructed a chronology of the Clinton-Lewinsky story in anagrams. First the encounter:

Warmth, hope: Monica teases a President  
 Aha, Monica, President's sweet metaphor  
 Monica: "Ah, President!" (sweat, atmosphere)  
 A shame: Monica at the President's "power"  
 Whoa, sperm! It penetrates Monica's head  
 Ah, wet dream: Monica's striptease

Then the consequences:

Media path seen: sports...weather...Monica  
 Ah, the media repeat: news...sports...Monica  
 Weep, Monica! Starr hath a semen deposit  
 Monica: "Starr? He's the media's pet weapon!"  
 A warm season to impeach the President  
 Oh...we impeach a President on a mattress?  
 America: "Wham President? Oh, Senate, stop!"  
 Impeach a President? Whoa! (Senate storm)

## DEB'S BED

Win Emmons writes "When I saw Deb in Kickshaws, I dusted of a few old favorites and added a few." Palindromes certainly make strange debfellows.

Deb, Mobutu bombed  
 Deb, rut Sid saw: I was disturbed  
 Deb bombed on air (A.M.), Maria? No, Deb mobbed!  
 Deb, Bork robbed  
 Deb or Sid was, I saw, disrobed  
 Deb or Pam A.M.A. probed  
 Deb, born in Asia, Raisa Nin robbed  
 Deb, rag red nude Jed, undergarbed  
 Deb ruckus (U.K.) curbed

## TOP TEN TIPS FOR 2K

According to Jim Puder, "Somewhere there is an ancient sage whose peculiar habit it is to impart his transcendent thoughts in transposals of the names of noted Word Ways contributors. Here is a list of the sage's top ten tips for the new millennium. After meditating upon its profound wisdom, try to identify the names which have been transposed. Note that the last one is doubly tricky.

- |                            |                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Avoid creme             | 6. Mar a trend--grin!            |
| 2. Beard wrong? Shower!    | 7. Reseal corks                  |
| 3. Brag on a trim mind     | 8. Shape no ruts                 |
| 4. Cherish not rum, scamp! | 9. Sip a well dry                |
| 5. Fry chars in lard       | 10. Tend quail (in a) quiet land |

## ALPHA, NUMERIC, AND ALPHA-NUMERIC SENTENCES

Win Emmons writes about three kinds of special sentences, an alpha (alphabetic) sentence, a numeric (snowball or rhopalic) sentence, and a new variation of his own, the alpha-numeric sentence:

Alpha: construct a sentence in which the first word begins with A, the second with B, and so on (very easy)

Numeric: construct a sentence in which the first word has one letter, the second word two letters, and so on (also easy)

Alpha-numeric: put the above two ideas together (significantly harder)

Here are Win's best efforts for the second and third categories:

I do not have seven clerks sending fourteen beautiful Floridians mislabeled contraptions, superficially supercomputers, notwithstanding sensationalistic misinterpretation transcontinentally interdenominational

A bi can dull every fervid, genteel heathen's intention, justifying kin-esthetic, longitudinal melodramatics newspaperwomen overburdeningly professionalized [bisexuals can cause rabid, refined atheists to want only to fake it from memory as female journalists, in the ultimate guilt trip, have become experts at]

### REALLY BAD HEADLINES

Headlines are always a source of the best humor through the worst puns. Jim Denigan sent these "really bad headlines" which, of course, are really good:

March Planned for Next August  
 Blind Bishop Appointed to See  
 Lingerie Shipment Hijacked; Thief Gives Police the Slip  
 Patient at Death's Door; Doctors Pull Him Through  
 Stadium Air Conditioning Fails; Fans Protest  
 Queen Mary Having Bottom Scraped  
 Henshaw Offers Rare Opportunity to Goose Hunters  
 Women's Movement Called Broad-Based  
 Antique Stripper to Display Wares at Store  
 Prostitutes Appeal to Pope  
 Teacher Strikes Idle Kids  
 Lawyers Give Poor Free Legal Advice  
 Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant  
 Fund Set Up for Beating Victim's Kin  
 Killer Sentenced to Die for Second Time in 10 Years  
 Cancer Society Honors Marlboro Man  
 Autos Killing 110 a Day: Let's Resolve to Do Better  
 War Dims Hope for Peace  
 If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile  
 Cold Waves Linked to Temperatures  
 Half of U.S. High Schools Require Some Study for Graduation  
 Blind Woman Gets New Kidney from Dad She Hasn't Seen in Years

### ELEMENTARY ERROR

Ed Wolpow writes "In November Kickshaws 'Elemental Period', you note only two number names writable with elemental symbols, ONe and NiNe. Why not TeN? And you can write HALF, probably the only fraction (as well as HALVES). PI is a writable number, as well as some almost-numbers like ScORe. You may know it is only recently that Argon was changed from A to Ar, to keep it like the other noble gases, He, Ne, Xe, etc. But A as an abbreviation for argon is still in Webster's Tenth Collegiate. That would allow ThOUSANd and even ThOUSANdThS to create lots of fractions."

TeN was in my notes, but it somehow escaped my final copy (probably a Y2K glitch). In any case, the almost-number NoNe (or N0Ne) works, as

does the plural SIXeS. In Spanish, UNO, SeIS, OCHo and ONCe are elemental. UNUS is the only one in Latin. Any other elemental numbers?

## HOW TO WRITE A REFERENCE

Have you ever been called upon to write a reference for a co-worker you know is a dud? Stan Isaacs has come up with a book entitled *Lexicon of Intentionally Ambiguous Recommendations (LIAR)* by Robert Thornton (ISBN 0-88166-111-2) which is full of phrases you can use:

I recommend this candidate with no qualifications whatsoever  
 I simply can't say enough good things about him  
 I can't recommend the candidate too highly  
 You will be very fortunate to get this person to work for you  
 There's no questioning his abilities [he gets angry if you do]  
 A man like him is hard to find [he frequently takes time off]  
 He's definitely a man to watch [he's light-fingered]  
 He could not have done a better job for us if he had tried  
 Waste no time in making this candidate an employment offer  
 There is nothing you can teach a man like him

## GO TUNE A TONGUE TWISTER

From New Bybwen, Peter Newby sends the following tale: "Helga was highly jealous of her boyfriend, a Scandinavian friendly goblin known as a nis. Visiting New Bybwen, she nass (or 'was not' as they still say locally) correct in her assumption that he had had his carnal needs catered for by a local wench in her Japanese car. Subsequently, a contrite Helga created this oral punishment: "NIS NASS IN NISSAN SIN!"

## S.M.D. MEANS "SPIN DOCTOR"

This bulletin just in from Peter Newby: "Leading British Conservative politician Peter Lilley has just been sacked as combined deputy leader and spin doctor, prompting his Liberal opposite number, Alan Beith, to comment that the lilies of the field toil not nor do they spin!"

## ANAGRAM WISDOM

In a moment of logological clarity Peter wrote the following sentence: "IMPELS is SIMPLE to anagram."

## RICE WHINE

According to Peter, "The lyricist Tim Rice was commissioned by the New Bybwen Natural History Society to write a show on the subject of



musci (mosses) growing on mountains. However, MUSCI, he said, is redolent of garbled MUSIC, and he didn't want to be associated with inferior sound. Trevor Overt, the organizer of the Society's music festival retorted MUSCI SUMMIT, TIM, MUSIC SUM!

### SNOW JOB

"Believe it or not," Peter writes, "but QAANAAQ genuinely is located in Greenland! (Otherwise known as Thule, it is featured on the Sep 1999 National Geographic map "The North".) Once the borough council of New Bybwen discovered Qaanaaq, they entered into a twinning arrangement with the world's most isolated palindromic community. The first communication from their twin town read as follows: WONSER, OFS, DRO, WOMIK SEENT, FOE, MOSERA ARE SOME OF THE ESKIMO WORDS FOR SNOW."

### MEADOW LARKS

And here's a tale of a cruise from the Newby world to the New World: "Tom Cruise was filming in Mercia. His host took him to a meadow where sheep were grazing. Unlike other flocks Cruise had seen, no one ram seemed to be dominant, and in consequence there appeared to be no emotional congress between the sexes. In reply to Tom's query, the Mercian host displayed another facet of the ancient kingdom's preoccupation with wordplay. A charade of his statement NO TUP, TOM, IS CHIEF said it all: NOT UP TO MISCHIEF.

### THREE MORE NINE-TO-FIVERS

Monte Zerger has found three more numerical relationships for the numbers NINE and FIVE (see November 1999 Kickshaws for others). There must be between 59 and 95 relationships in all. Can you find any others?

- Define a letter to be invariant in a word if it occupies the same position in the word as it does in the alphabet. The only invariant letters in MATHEMATICS are the fifth and ninth letters, E and I, in the fifth and ninth positions.
- Probably the most celebrated mathematical constant is pi, the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. The first invariant digit in pi is a 5 in the fifth position, immediately followed by a 9.
- Valentine's Day occurs on the (5+9)th day of February, which is the (5x9)th day of the year. February closes (leap years excepted) on the  $(5+9) + (5x9) = 59$ th day of the year.

So what does love have to do with MATHEMATICS? Recently I turned to Cupid for an answer, but all I could get out of him was a curt and cryptic I MATCH MATES.

## SCRABBLE PREFIXATION

Bill Webster sends this puzzle: "The ideal opening play in Scrabble is a seven-letter word. Often, it begins the fourth space from the left (or from the top) of the board. If it's the fourth from the other end, the addition of -ING often adds a good number of points. In the following list of words, what prefix could do the same?"

INSULAR	SCIENCE	CATIONS	NATIONS	INNINGS
PAPERED	ACHIEVE	PRINTED	OPENING	MERGING

## LATE TALE

Bill sent this short short short short short short story with a surprising ending involving not one but two forms of wordplay:

Kate was irate; Nate overlate. "We had a date, but you already ate?" "I overate." "With a playdate; who was your associate?" "Dunno; not so great." "You look desolate; I bet it was a bar bit u ate!"

## TELEPHONE DIRECTORY ODDITIES

"Jever notice the paired headings?" Bill writes. "A random search may turn up some oddities. U.S. West this year managed to make a 'thin' book of only 473 pages. Preceding the A-Z listing is Government Pages, just like in Congress. I'll just list some of the paired headings in the Yellow Pages that struck me as strange."

Allied-Allure, Another-Apache, Arizona-Arrowhead, Bank-Bargain, BIDS-Bills, Blonde-Boars, Dodge-Don, Family-Farmers, Fifth-Fire, Fire-First, Frank-French, Frozen-Furniture, Goodwill-Grace, Granny-Great, Hawaiian-Health, La-Lady, Lone-Lost, Maintenance-Man, Meek-Merchants, Resort Property-Rich, Sunset-Super, Vintage-Violin

## ROMAN NUMERAL CARS

Many cars (make, model, and/or any other company designation) have Roman numeral letters in their names, as do many words. However, Honda has cornered the market on all-Roman numeral car names in not one but three different models, CIVIC DX (deluxe?), CIVIC LX (luxury?), and CIVIC VX (what's this?). Cadillac has the only name with all seven Roman numerals in it at least once each: GM CADILLAC DEVILLE LUXURY.

## FORGOTTEN HOLIDAYS

The book *Forgotten Holidays* (Lost Memories Press) is a celebration of special days that have lost their place in the little boxes of the

calendar. Some of those holidays are worth reviving for the new millennium.

According to the book, a few French Floridians still celebrate CAJUN SNORE DAY by sleeping in, as was the custom until the invention of water beds. Two seasonal holidays called attention to bad weather and how it affects us: RUNNY THAW JITTER DAY and BEREFT WINTRY HURT DAY, both of which are celebrated by staying at home and looking out the window. However, our fast-paced lifestyles don't allow us such luxuries anymore. We don't celebrate OBSCURE FERN DAY, either, because no one is interested in obscure ferns.

Air traffic controllers used to have fantastic parties on JET RUNWAY CONSENT DAY, but President Reagan's crackdown on the industry in the 1980s put a halt to such frivolity. Speaking of presidents and airplanes, Gerald Ford was the only president to officially celebrate TWIRL-THEN-TRIP DAY, which he did in grand style while disembarking from Air Force One. For some unknown reason, that holiday slipped off the calendar after Ford left office.

In a challenge to the sexism of Miss America contests, MS CONE DAY was established in the late 1960s, ridiculed in the early 1970s, and abolished during America's Bicentennial. On PRINCETON WELTS DAY, upperclassmen at that renowned university were permitted to whack freshmen, but one huge lawsuit in the mid-1980s put a swift end to the tradition.

Some holidays have been instituted by New England cities. WORCESTER FUNNY BET DAY, like April Fool's Day, encouraged people to play pranks in the form of fake bets. So many people felt "taken" when they couldn't collect on a fake winning bet that the city council voted to critically condemn the practice. One of the most insignificant holidays ever observed was NEWPORT STENCIL DAY, when offices in that city gave out free stencils to celebrate the importance of the mimeograph machine. (The holiday lasted only half a day.)

Even more unusual, TUNGSTEN COW TUESDAY was created to commemorate the importance of tungsten by likening it to cows, which everyone knows are important. Since few people cared about either from a celebratory point of view, the tungsten industry gave up on it after three embarrassing years.

One holiday described in this book is MIRTH DAY. According to tradition, a man told people the most fantastic tales, backing them up with names and places, laughing uproariously while doing so. Later, these were printed in magazines and celebrated on WRITTEN MYTH DAY. He would ask people to figure out the date of a specific event without giving any clue but the name of the day, similar to those holidays cited above. Can you figure out the dates for all thirteen? Which two occur on the same date?