

SOUNDING OF THE PUN: THE OFFICIAL SPOONERISM GAME

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In my semi-definitive but now tragically out-of-print spoonerism book *Cruel and Unusual Puns*, I spoke somewhat disparagingly of a familiar type of children's riddle. Example: *What's the difference between a church bell and a burglar? One peals from the steeple; the other steals from the people.*

My objection was that jests of this variety are invariably contrived. The paired phrases spoonerize but they are otherwise arbitrary and unrelated. In contrast, transposition wordplay that is equipped with a *context*—a story or other setup, preferably one that is natural and logical—qualify as esthetically and morally superior.

I still hold this view, but my position has evolved. I am reluctant to reject the "arbitrary" spoonerism genre *in toto*, in part because my archive contains lots of original specimens that aren't suited to a story or joke format. Fortunately, I realized that they might be appropriate for a brain-teasing quiz. At last, I reasoned, these orphans would find a good home.

Here's the drill: I supply a set of "definitions." From those clues, you must decipher the two intended spoonerized phrases. Sample problem: *Antique thread-making device/Oration that receives accolades.* Answer: *Spinning wheel/Winning spiel.*

Get the idea? Then sigh these on for tries! The openers are easiest, then the challenge becomes progressively tougher. Warning: some clues are tricky and unfair. When ready to surrender, please turn to Answers and Solutions.

1. Billiard equipment/Best seat in church
2. Scottish lair of legendary monster/What homeowners wish Jehovah's Witnesses would do
3. Popular ablution option/What occurred in Babel
4. Ethical system/À capella
5. 1996 presidential ticket/Sparkly center of a geode
6. Evil spell cast by sorceress/Why art critics dislike tacky pop culture
7. Parasitic passenger's aim/Mexican bean's fate
8. Epicurean mutton dish/Common computer problem
9. In-box alert/Cetacean sex

10. Make it easier for someone to follow/Pro bono
11. Plasterer's task/Clergyman's task
12. All-nighter/What to do if you distrust your butcher
13. Secretary of State/Method used to evaluate *American Idol* contestants
14. Poker player's bad luck/Destination of religious pilgrims
15. Brown-bagging/End of script falls flat
16. Quiet combat/Function of gold
17. Trendy casual shoe/Soap opera star's assistant
18. Anti-monarchists' plot/Insensitive bear
19. Mail-order clothing catalog/When very small children go to sleep
20. Intern's routine/Scavenger's unpleasant work
21. Pressure is on/Podiatrist's objective
22. Informal survey/Walk the dog
23. They struggle to make ends meet/Incipient hostilities
24. Leave it to chance/Rationing in China
25. Equitable outcome/Stock swindle
26. What restaurateurs encourage/Lack of self-confidence
27. Ecstatically happy/Why Peter Pan won't serve alcohol
28. Hesitant pace/Unoriginal management of subordinates
29. Classy café at NYC's Plaza Hotel/Sailor's favored destination
30. Exoneration for jealous murderer/Why women hate clunky designer styles