

HIDDEN STATES

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Over the last five decades, there have been numerous wordplay items using the names of the 50 states of the USA. This is another one, but exploring a theme not previously covered.

Anyone taking a quick look at the state names will recognise that KANSAS can be spelled out consecutively in ARKANSAS, and similarly VIRGINIA can be spelled out consecutively in WEST VIRGINIA. But suppose we search for state names that are hidden, where the state names aren't spelled out consecutively. In this way, IDAHO can be spelled out from the letters of RHODE ISLAND; IOWA can be spelled out from WASHINGTON; MAINE can be spelled out from both MINNESOTA and NEW HAMPSHIRE; OHIO can be spelled out from both NORTH CAROLINA and SOUTH CAROLINA; UTAH can be spelled out from MASSACHUSETTS, SOUTH CAROLINA and SOUTH DAKOTA. Further, both OHIO and UTAH can be spelled out from SOUTH CAROLINA, but not at the same time, as there is only a single H in SOUTH CAROLINA. This is the full collection of state names that can be spelled out, hidden or otherwise, from other state names.

That the two state names OHIO and UTAH can both be spelled out from SOUTH CAROLINA set me wondering about the wider challenge of finding words or names that have 2 state names hidden in them. Indeed, what is the shortest word/name that has 2 state names hidden in it? And beyond that, what are the shortest words/names with 3, 4, 5 and maybe more state names hidden?

Let's begin with words having 2 hidden state names. OHIO and TEXAS can be spelled out from the 12-letter EXHORTATIONS (Webster's Third, W3). Better still, GEORGIA and OREGON can be spelled out from the 9-letter GORGONEIA (W3). But the shortest dictionary-sanctioned words with 2 state names hidden in them are HOMALOID (Webster's Second, W2) and MAIDHOOD (W3), both of which contain IDAHO and OHIO. However, going outside of mainstream dictionaries, there are two even shorter words/names. IDAHO and OHIO can be spelled out from HOODIA (*A Dictionary of the Flowering Plants and Ferns*, 7th edition; a genus of plants); and OHIO and IOWA can be spelled out from OHIOWA (*Times Index Gazetteer*; a small town in Nebraska).

Onwards and upwards to words/names with 3 hidden state names. Since ALASKA only requires the addition of an L to the ARKANSAS/KANSAS pair, a good starting point was to search for a word/name which would allow all 3 of these state names to be spelled out. The starting point solution here is the 15-letter SHAKESPEAREANLY (W2). But this seems too long to be the shortest solution to the 3 state name challenge. The 12-letter WASHINGTONIA (W3) allows us to add HAWAII to the previously identified pair of IOWA and WASHINGTON. One letter better still is the 11-letter FOOLHARDIER, which conceals FLORIDA, IDAHO and OHIO. But best of all appears to be the 9-letter GAWKHOOD (W2), which conceals IDAHO, IOWA and OHIO. Is there a shorter solution still to the 3 state name problem?

Now for the 4 state name challenge. We started by trying to build on the ALASKA/ARKANSAS/KANSAS solution of SHAKESPEAREANLY. We saw that NEBRASKA could be added as a 4th state name as this only required the 2 additional letters BR to be added. A solution is offered by the 16-letter BALLAST BRAKESMAN (W2). We felt we could improve on this by finding a shorter, single-word solution. The next improvement was the 15-letter NEOWASHINGTONIA (W3), which now provides the 4 hidden states HAWAII, IOWA, OHIO and WASHINGTON. A further improvement comes from noting that MAINE is already hidden in MINNESOTA, and finding a word containing the letters of MINNESOTA and another A (to allow MONTANA) and an X (to allow TEXAS) to be included would provide a solution. Two such words are the 12-letter EXAMINATIONS (W3) and EXANIMATIONS (W3). Is there a shorter solution still to the 4 state name problem?

On to the 5 state name challenge. The starting point here was to see if we could extend the MAINE/MINNESOTA/MONTANA/TEXAS solution above. If a word/name including these 4 states could be found, along with the additional letters HO, then that would provide a solution that included OHIO. We found the 18-letter, 2-word EXAMINATION SCHOOLS (W2). Although the W2 entry is actually the plural form, we assume the 17-letter singular form EXAMINATION SCHOOL can be inferred. This would still provide the same 5 state names MAINE/MINNESOTA/MONTANA/OHIO/TEXAS. We felt there must be a shorter single-word solution somewhere. After a few dead-ends, we tried a different set of state names, eventually finding the 17-letter STROUTHIOCAMELIAN (W2), which manages to have hidden in it the names of LOUISIANA, MAINE, OHIO, SOUTH CAROLINA and UTAH. That's our best 5 state name solution so far. Can anyone improve on that?

And what about the 6 state name challenge? The 18-letter, two-word term ASPHYXIA NEONATORUM (W2) provides a solution here, containing these state names: MAINE, MINNESOTA, MONTANA, OHIO, TEXAS and UTAH.

We managed to move up to the 7 state name level by noting that the 22-letter, two-word term THERMONUCLEAR REACTIONS (*Oxford English Dictionary*, in a 1962 illustrative quotation at “thermonuclear”) includes these 7 state names: MAINE, MINNESOTA, MONTANA, NORTH CAROLINA, OHIO, SOUTH CAROLINA and UTAH. Are there any better solutions with 7 state names?

At the 8 state name level and beyond, there are probably no dictionary-sanctioned words and terms. Solutions at this level can probably only be offered by longer, multi-word terms – for example, book titles, film titles, quotations. We did note that ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK (Wikipedia; English electronic music group) contains these 16 state names: ALASKA, ARKANSAS, KANSAS, LOUISIANA, MAINE, MINNESOTA, MONTANA, NEVADA, NORTH CAROLINA, NORTH DAKOTA, OHIO, OKLAHOMA, SOUTH CAROLINA, SOUTH DAKOTA, UTAH and VERMONT.

Anyone care to tackle the 9 and more state name challenge?

