KICKSHAWS

DAVID MORICE
Saint Louis, Missouri

Kickshaws is currently being assembled by a series of guest editors. All contributions should be sent to the editor in Morristown, New Jersey.

The Universal Letter

The Universal Letter is a composite of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. All knowledge that can be communicated in English is stored in this symmetric symbol. Most of the letters appear upright; the rest are placed sideways. E pluribus unum.

Adjectivizing, Verbizing and Adverbizing

Xerox, usually a noun, has come into popular usage as a verb meaning to photocopy (I Xeroxed the book). For marketing purposes, a few other companies run ad campaigns turning their brand names into adjectives, such as Marlboro man, Pepsi smile, or Excedrin headache. Proper nouns in general — names of artists, cities, presidents, etc. — can be used as adjectives, nouns or adverbs: a Picasso painting, St. Louis woman, etc. This versatility of English invites further experimentation:

The beauty queen laved her hands after Gleeming her teeth
Crestfully
"I feel somewhat Mozartish," Bached the conductor, Beethovening the orchestra during rehearsal
Toyota-faced, he asked his parents for the car
"Stop it! Stop Chicagoing me!" she screamed as she New Yorked him on the knee

The Thirdway

When I was a ston Bedge, six, seven, the Universal Letter was accompanied by any request for solutions for the Thirdway.

Oneway is
Twoway is
Threeway is

Bilingual Revivals

The sentence, which was followed by the Universal Letter, was:

Epa! Eres, so dote, Do bogo, the Same rut:
Ora! Es el, O, I, rare:
A Papa: Epa! Eres
Leap on a De it? Me sal:
La palabra, Sal, a bar:
O, el dia:
O, I rate:

Homonymic Sentences

In Beyond the Sentence, which was of Buffalo, Buffalo, and Buffalo, Buffalo, "Below the Sentence" followed the previous paragraph:

In the 19th century, he was written as the other words, the bongos —
Millions of years ago, the earliest amoeba Campbellled out of the primordial soup
Her sweet, Murine eyes belied her Real-Kill tongue
"Schlitz!" the carpenter yelled when he Budweisered his thumb with a hammer

The Thirdway Wordway
When I was working at Iowa Book & Supply bookstore with Ralph Bedge, a word-minded friend of mine, we discovered an unusual and incomplete set of word pairs. Can you find new pairs for six, seven, nine, ten, or beyond? Bedge and I couldn't come up with any real phrases, so we coined our own (see Answers and Solutions for our coinages).

One-way runway
Two-way thruway
Three-way freeway
Four-way doorway
Fiveway driveway
Eightway gateway

Bilingual Reversals
The sentences below are Spanish in one direction and English in the other. English translation of the Spanish is in parentheses, followed by the English reversal on the next line.

Epa! Eres amigo de todos! (Hey, you're everyone's friend!)
So dote, Dog, I'm a sere ape
Yo bogo, tu remas (I row, you row)
Same rut: O, go boy
Ora! Es el raton temerario (Pray! he is the fearless rat)
O, I, rare, met not Arles' ear, O! [Van Gogh?] 
A Papa: Es ta-tacano pa' el (To Papa: He is st-stingy for him)
Leap on a cat at sea, Papa
De ti? Me llamo "Paz" (Of you? I call myself "Peace")
Zap! O Mall, emit Ed
La palabra balas (You bleat the word)
Sal, a barb: Al, a pal
O, el dia monetario (O, the monetary day!)
O, I rate no maid, Leo

Homonymic Sentence
In Beyond Language, Dmitri Borgmann presents a homonymic sentence, which uses the same word four times: BUFFALO BUFFALO BUFFALO BUFFALO. He translates this as "Wild oxen roaming the streets of Buffalo, New York bewilder visiting North Carolina coast dwellers." Below is a five-word homonymic sentence, introduced by the following paragraph:

In the 1950s, a bearded rebel entered a bongo drum contest. He was worn out, however, and his drumming didn't win. In other words, the tired beatnik played a losing drumbeat on his bongos - BEAT BEAT BEAT BEAT BEAT.
Spliced Haiku

In these three-line pieces, the middle line, divided into odd and even letters, produces the two outer lines. In the haiku on the left, the odd letters form line one, and the even letters form line three. In the haiku on the right, vice versa.

Toned for a
two in need of no tread -
wine on Ted. 

Blink! Do KO
ball. I'm no kid. Look, no
alm oil on.

Claim rented out
cold: a dimmer actna tier, door unto
odd meat - air or no.

Quik Quiz

1. How do you change a quarter to get the sentence "I like medicine, M.D."
2. If you drop the vowels in the phrase "pink baroque," what popular game do the remaining consonants suggest?
3. What is the middle word in the dictionary?
4. What is the next number in the series 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, ...?
5. What uncommon noun has three plural forms, each of which has a different meaning?
6. What common adverb is almost always preceded in normal usage by a number? What other word can precede this adverb?

Long String

Stretching language almost to the breaking point, the sentence below has a string of twenty Ls. First, an introductory paragraph to set up the situation:

Mr. L.L. Lloyd is talking to his supervisor about a defective neon sign, in which the two Ls in MALL don't light up. The supervisor starts to suggest that someone named L.L. LaVill might be able to fix it. Reading off an alphabetized list with last names followed by first and middle initials, he speaks Lavill's name as it appears. When he starts to utter the verb "light" (indicated by "L--"), Mr. Lloyd expresses doubt about the idea of hiring L.L.L., and then he states his opinion that the neon LL will start working again. Here's their dialogue:

"If the LL in the word MALL in the marquee won't turn on automatically," said the supervisor, "then maybe Lavill, L.L. 'L--'; "L.L.L.'L? LL'L!" L.L. Lloyd interrupted.

Vowel Shift

One day, when Rudyard Kipling was low on money, fellow poet Alfred Edward Housman gave him ten pounds to tide him over. Kipling wrote a note on a small piece of paper and passed it to Housman. It was:

Housman, a gift, so I send it back to you.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Here's the time I played a small piano:
Sigmund Dow.

Alva bet I owe to it:
I owe to it.

Headline Hunter

A few years ago, in a room above a next-door neighbor's garage, after reading a line to tack it on as a headline hunter, I wrote:

RAINBOW
KURDS MA
FAIR HIC
BULLDOGS
INDIANA'S
MOSES CH
BELL NOT
CARL CH
RED SOX
RAPE CAS
IOWA SNA
DAVENPORT

Around this time, after Johnson admonished some people, he called the legal psychotics to order: what was up a great legal psychotics posed in some order?

Numb Error

O, net will exit end:

What is the next number in the series 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, ...?

Solutions.
The superman. It was brief, but to the point: A.E., I.O.U.

Housman, however, was surprised. He'd meant the money to be a gift, so he wrote an even briefer note on the paper and handed it back to Kipling. It said: Y?

Ode on a Grecian Alphabet

Here's the Greek alphabet punned into a paragraph about the time I played poker against Alva, Sadie, Cap, Mike, Ron Pyre, Sigmund Dow, and Maggie:


Headline Hunting

A few years ago, I was living a Spartan existence in a single room above the Englert Theatre. One afternoon, Ralston Bedge, my next-door neighbor, taped a strange newspaper headline to my door. After reading it, I searched through the paper and found a headline to tack on his door. For the next few months, we became headline hunters, hanging up captured headlines like trophies of the hunt. When I moved out of the theater, I saved some of my favorites. I'd like to add them to the ranks of headlines enshrined earlier in Word Ways:

RAINBOW GIRLS ADMIT BLACK
KURDS MASS ON TURKEY BORDER
FAIR HICKS DON'T NIX STYX LICKS
BULLDOGS CAN'T LIVE IN PAST Vs. CALIFORNIA
INDIANA'S NIT GOAL: HALT TORRID CARROLL
MOSES CHARGED WITH MURDER
BELL NOT A COX MAN
CARL CHILD DIES AT 91
RED SOX PURCHASE FINGERS
RAPE CASE RESULTS IN HUNG JURY
IOWA SNATCHES WIN IN GIRLS' BASKETBALL
DAVENPORT ANNEXATION ASKED FOR BY CATERPILLAR

Around this time, news reports said that the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations had given permission for the Central Intelligence Agency to administer lysergic acid diethylamide, the illegal psychedelic drug, to unwary army men. The newspapers passed up a great chance to plaster the front page with a headline composed of individually pronounced letters: JFK, LBJ OK CIA LSD.

Numb Errors

0, net worth, reef, ourself. I've, si, Xmas Eve. Neigh, tin in exit end.

What is the significance of the preceding text? You have ten seconds to figure it out. Nine...eight...seven... See Answers and Solutions.
Words can be chosen to make a sentence with apostrophes bristling out like the quills on a porcupine. The sentence below has 42 apostrophes in 37 words. It doesn't include the more common contractions, such as I'd, he'll, won't, etc., nor the possessive. Most of the words can be found in Robert Burns' poetry, and two appear in Alan Frank's article in the May 1986 Word Ways. Can you translate the paragraph "For a' that, and a' that?" The full text is given in Answers and Solutions.

'Tis o'er ev'ry fo'c's'le th' bo's'n look'd wi' min' pu'd 'til fu' o' fa', e'en t' nor', tho' mis'ry's awfu', 'n' ca's sigh'd thro' ha's e'er sin' a' kiss'd, car'd, wish'd, an' clasp'd, ne'er ev'n i' lo'e.

Traveling further into the twilight zone of language, greater heights of apostrophization can be achieved. For instance, using commonly accepted methods of contraction, "Shall not have had" can be changed to "Sha'n't've'd" and pluralized with an's, then extended even further with the contracted form of "will." The new word has six apostrophes among eleven letters: sha'n't've'd's'll. Example of usage: If the secretary shortens have had wherever it appears, then all of the sha'n't've'd's'll be published next month.

Letter-Heavy Sentences
Here are a couple of sentences which have a much greater percentage of one particular letter:

Sis sasses asses as sissies assess sassers.  
[22 Ss, 14 other letters; 61.1 per cent letter-heavy]
"Gee, bee deeded wee eel fee, Dee" Lee eeked; "Eye, see tee?"  
[26 Es, 15 other letters; 63.2 per cent letter-heavy]

Letter-heavy sentences of 50 per cent or more could probably be written for most of the alphabet, but the percentage would be much less for the rare letters J, Q, X and Z.

Wordcycles
A single word can be expanded in charade fashion to build a full sentence. For instance, the word "open" written next to itself a few times (openopenopenopenopenopenopen), divided into smaller words (open o pen ope nope no pen open), and dressed up with capitalization and punctuation, results in the first line below. In addition, no two-word phrase is repeated.

Open, O pen, ope. Nope, no pen open.

Important imp or tan Tim? I'm port, ant. Import ant.


Banana ban: a nab, Ana, Nab a nana.

Glowing, lowing. Low in glow, in glowing.

Bele verb, Eli, ever believer.

Ann O'Tate, Dan; not a Ted annotated.

Pan a map, Ana, Ma: Panama.
ophes brist-

e below has

more common

possessive.

ry, and two

Ways. Can

that?" The

n' pu'd 'til

c'a's sigh'd

an' clasp'd,

age, greater

tance, using

have had" an 's, then

ll." The new

't've'd's'll

se shall not

n't've'd's'll

greater per-

see tee?"

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ext to itself

taller words

ith capita-

w. In addi-

Kinetic Palaver

How many different ways can this surrealistic poem, including

the title, be read aloud? For answer, see Answers and Solutions.

When tunes upon a zither whirl
As desolate as bogs,
I shall forestall a courtesan
Without aquatic togs.
A hussy on a patio
Can quash a vase, or should
Seduce you on koala loam
As just a hussy could.
Effulgence's a nuisance: half
Your bistro's mongrel, or
Safari on a patio -
I recognize you, for
Your xeric, middling duplicate,
A babel as I read,
Confounds tomatoes with a root
To exit when I lead.

Alphabetical Algebra

What happens when you double the alphabet? Or square it?

In order to multiply the alphabet, convert the letters to their
positional value (A=1, B=2, ..., Z=26) and multiply each value
by the given number. Then convert the 26 products to their alpha-
betic equivalent. For a product over 26, divide by 26, and
convert the remainder to a letter. A zero remainder equals Z.

If the alphabet is multiplied by 2, all the vowels drop out, and
if it's multiplied by 13, all odd letters change to M and all
even letters change to Z.

ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ x 2 = BDFHJLNPRTVXZBDFHJLNPRTVXZ
ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ x 13 = MZMZMZMZMZMZMZMZMZMZMZMZ

Squaring the letters of the alphabet one by one results in a
sequence which is palindromic, except for the final letter.

ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ² = ADIPY JWL CVQMNQVCLW Y P IDAZ

Cubing the alphabet produces a sequence remarkable for a cou-
ples of reasons. First, every odd letter except for the middle M
is a vowel, and every even letter is a consonant. Second, a sur-
prising number of words in Webster's Seventh Collegiate are formed
by adjacent letters in the cubed alphabet: AH, AHA, HA, HE, HER,
HERA, ERA, RA, RALE, ALE, EL, ELM, NUN and EN. The regular
alphabet has only three such words, AB, HI and NO, and similarly
the squared alphabet, AD, DI and ID.
Multiplying by 26, of course, results in total and final homogeneity - a string of 26 Zs.

P-(A,E,I,O,U)-T

The next paragraph features a set of five words with different vowels: pat, pet, pit, pot, put. Each line has a particular order in which the vowels appear. By vowels, the order is aeiou, eioua, iouae, ouaei, uaeio. Although it's not intended to be a tongue-twister, the poem does have an interesting feel and sound when rapidly read aloud.

Pat a pet in a pit or a pot. Put a pet in a pit or a pot, and put Pat in a pit or a pot. Put Pat and a pet in a pit? Put Pat and a pet in a pit or a pot.

Distorted Titles

The list below presents a baker's dozen of distorted titles. Each refers to a well-known song, play, musical, novel, movie, newspaper, or magazine. The original words have been replaced by synonyms, antonyms, spoonerisms, tense changes, plurals, etc. What are the original titles? Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions.

1. A Purple Number
2. Salad of the Bad Cafe
3. She Didn't Desire to Put Her Foot Down
4. At What the Buzzer Buzzed
5. Blueberry Swede
6. Nothing's III Which Starts III
7. Into a Mirror
8. San Francisco Places
9. We Didn't Stab Cows, Did We?
10. Back From the Draft
11. Dog Under the Cold Aluminum Siding
12. Your Unfair Gentlemen
13. Letter Routes

The License Plate Game

When you're driving along, bored with the radio and tense from the traffic, you can pass the time more easily by playing the License Plate Game. Here's how it goes:

Look for the standard license plates with three random letters such as CAK-325. Vanity plates aren't allowed. Try to make three words by adding one or two letters to the trigram. First, try to make a word with an unbroken string, as CAKe; second, with a broken string, as CreAK; and third, with a rearranged string, as bACK. Score two points per four-letter word and one point per five-letter word. See how many points you can make from five consecutive plates.

Animal Form

The sheep's tang. As the hippo's tiger dogged bit into a C, the turtledove went ape over the mouse in the elands, the weasel out of the turtledove, batting the turtledove, the turtledove out of the elands, the elands.

Without looking, they appear in the list below. Can you find them?

The International English-language edition has a peculiar alphabetical order with the letters A-only word, B-all, C-all, D-all, E-all, F-all, G-all, H-all, I-all, J-all, K-all, L-all, M-all, N-all, O-all, P-all, Q-all, R-all, S-all, T-all, U-all, V-all, W-all, X-all, and Y-all, with Z-all. Can you find them?

A Bahamas
F Sweden,
I Fiji
O Congo, T Ung

In the United States:
A Alabama, E Tennessee, I Mississippi

Other words for the rainbow:
Does this plane have a reason for being?
Iowa City Window

Some winter wintering:
With my nose cold one dewdrop, I wonder what's the pun: Eye, sea
secutive plates; the maximum possible score is 30. Play against a friend - the loser pays for the gas.

Animal Form

The sheepish antelope horsed around with a zebra in his Mustang. As the lion was pigging out on a giraffe, the elephant got the hippo’s goat by badgering the pigeons. Like an alligator, the tiger dogged the walrus and then wolfed down the owl. The cat and his foxy chick buffaled a squirrely ass, who steered his Rabbit into a Cobra. The chimpanzee rammed a Pinto, too, because the turtledove was monkeying around with a mole on her calf. She went ape over the aardvark, till the springbok cowed the gorilla batting the koala. "Rats!" crowed the snake, "How does that turkey weasel out of it?" While the kangaroo was parroting the gerbils, the mouse in a mink goosed the frog on a mule, the llamas chicked out, and the burros ducked! And when the vultures henpecked the elands, the toad couldn’t bear it.

Without looking, guess how many different animal and bird names appear in this story. Now go back and try counting them. Are you sure you're right? See Answers and Solutions.

The International A

English-language place names for countries of the world exhibit a peculiar abundance of the letter A. If you consider every country name with the same vowel throughout (univocalic), most of them are A-only words. The names were taken from Washington University’s International Office list of 174 countries.

A Bahamas, Canada, Chad, Japan, Malta, Panama, Qatar, Rwanda
E Sweden, Greece
I Fiji
O Congo, Togo

In the United States, a majority of state names are A-only, too.

A Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Kansas
E Tennessee
I Mississippi

Other word sets, such as names of numbers, months, colors of the rainbow, etc., have a preponderance of E-only words. Is there a reason for the popularity of A in naming countries and states? Does this phenomenon hold true for cities of the world? It does for the planets: Mars is an A-only word.

Iowa City Winter Scene

Some winters back, a ferocious ice-storm blasted Iowa City during the night. Next morning, I saw the frozen residue – a spectacular glasslike coating on the trees, the houses, and the roads. With my nose stuck to the window, I composed this chilly quintuple pun: Eye, see icy I.C.? Aye, si, I see.
Poetry City, USA

In Stratford, Iowa, the streets are named after famous English poets. I photographed the street sign at the intersection of Byron and Keats, then walked to the next street, Shakespeare, which runs into Milton a block later. As I recall, a greasy spoon restaurant sits near the Shelley Avenue exit to Wordsworth Road. One dubious source claimed the rate of traffic accidents in Stratford increases in direct proportion to the quality of the poet whose name appears on the street, with Shakespeare Street the most hazardous. The power of poetry, eh?

Three Coins in a Fountain

Many writers coin words in their work. Lewis Carroll's nonsense words from the Alice books are undoubtedly the most widely-known, and James Joyce's novels establish him as the master word-minter of all time. In this matching game, the object is to pair up each author with his/her own list of three coined words found in published works. For answers, see Answers and Solutions.

A Lewis Carroll  D Gerard Manley Hopkins  G Ogden Nash
B e.e. cummings  E James Joyce  H Wallace Stevens
C T.S. Eliot  F Marianne Moore  I Dylan Thomas

1. balletbottle, frecklessness, paranymphs
2. elephant-ear-witness-to-be, half-fledge, pale-ale-eyed
3. prepopcopos, sanguage, vilence
4. cococoucouchcoughough, flipchucking, unununun
5. featherlands, owl-light, turnturtle
6. callay, outgrabe, slithy
7. effanifeffable, goonight, wopsical
8. dapple-dawn-drawn, leafmeal, selfyeast
9. hoobla-hoo, meta-men, shiddow-shaddow

The Last Word in Poetry

The search for the last word in the dictionary or the last name in the phone book is a time-honored quest. But what about the last word in the entire canon of English-language poetry? I nominate William Carlos Williams, American poet, for a word he coined in his poem, "Ballad of Faith," which appears on page 131 of his Later Collected Poems (New Directions). His coinage, a word to end all words, is ZZZZZZZZZZ.

New Punctuation

Complex times demand complex punctuation. A few years ago, the interrobang, a superimposed question mark/exclamation point, was created to satisfy the needs of the modern world. Now, by means of linguistic engineering, the traditional comma, period, colon, semicolon, question mark, and interrogation point have been further cross-bred to produce more hybrids. On the next page are enough new punctuation marks to satisfy human needs well into the 21st century. It's up to you to determine how to use them.
famous English
fiction of Byron
ere, which runs
poon restaurant
l. One dubious
ford increases
ame appears
azardous. The

roll's nonsense
widely-known,
er word-minter
pair up each
found in pub-

Nash
Stevens
Thomas
ved

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