

# THE *Journal* OF WORDPLAY

**Excavating the First  
Crosswords (see p. 37)**

**#14 • AUG 2026**

**Poem Boy: An Interview  
A Linguistic Salmagundi  
“14” Wordplay for #14  
Supersuperb Repeaters  
Crosswords 1929-1930  
What Are Panagrams?  
More Dictation Gaffes  
Puzzles That Perished  
The Trembley Enigma  
Game-Show Mashups  
Irregularized Plurals**



THE JOURNAL OF WORDPLAY

© 2026 T Campbell

Issue #14, August 2026

Copyrights to articles revert to the authors after publication.

**Editor:**

T Campbell

To send submissions or request to join the *TJoW* email list, contact:

[tcampbell1000@gmail.com](mailto:tcampbell1000@gmail.com)

For news about this and other wordplay-related things, you can also subscribe to:

<http://tcampbell.substack.com>

Published Quarterly in February, May, August, November

**Editorial Advisors:**

Don Hauptman

Janice Campbell

Nameplate designed by **John Langdon**. Front cover refined from advertising image and a grid from 1870's *Our Young Folks*. Back cover includes an 18<sup>th</sup>-century engraving. All other design by **T Campbell**.

## CONTENTS

You can click each title to be taken to it!

|                                                                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND by T Campbell .....                                 | 4  |
| THAT’S ABOVE MY PLAY GRADE by Don Hauptman.....                                        | 5  |
| FOUR- AND FIVE-LETTER REPEAT WORDS by Darryl Francis .....                             | 7  |
| FLUXIS IS...FLUXED by T Campbell .....                                                 | 12 |
| FOURTEEN by Darryl Francis .....                                                       | 15 |
| STACKS, TOPPLED by T Campbell .....                                                    | 18 |
| WHO’S SIRI NOW? by Don Hauptman .....                                                  | 29 |
| THE TREMBLEY ENIGMA by Daniel Galef and Michael Griffith.....                          | 30 |
| FOXEN IN THE HENHICE by Richard Lederer .....                                          | 34 |
| THE PUNNIT WORDPLAY GAMESHOW PODCAST by Gregg Siegel.....                              | 37 |
| NEWFOUND EARLIEST CROSSWORDS by Daniel Galef .....                                     | 43 |
| SMALLEST ANAGRAMS AND PANAGRAMS FROM THEMATIC WORD LISTS by Michael Keith .....        | 53 |
| GRAVE SIGNS I SEE AND OBSCURE by Daniel Galef .....                                    | 59 |
| HAVEN, KIGGINS, BELL, AND THE NEXT BIG THING: CROSSWORDS 1929-1930 by T Campbell ..... | 60 |
| POEMS? BOY!: THE A. HARRIS “POEM BOY” INTERVIEW by T Campbell.....                     | 72 |
| OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST .....                                                      | 79 |
| SUBMISSION GUIDELINES .....                                                            | 80 |
| CONTRIBUTORS .....                                                                     | 81 |
| ANSWERS .....                                                                          | 83 |

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND

T Campbell, editor

In the last issue, I talked a bit about “neophilia,” the love of the new. I tend to interpret it not as just embracing the latest fad to be cool, but to look out for new discoveries, new ideas, and always be open to incorporating them into our lives.

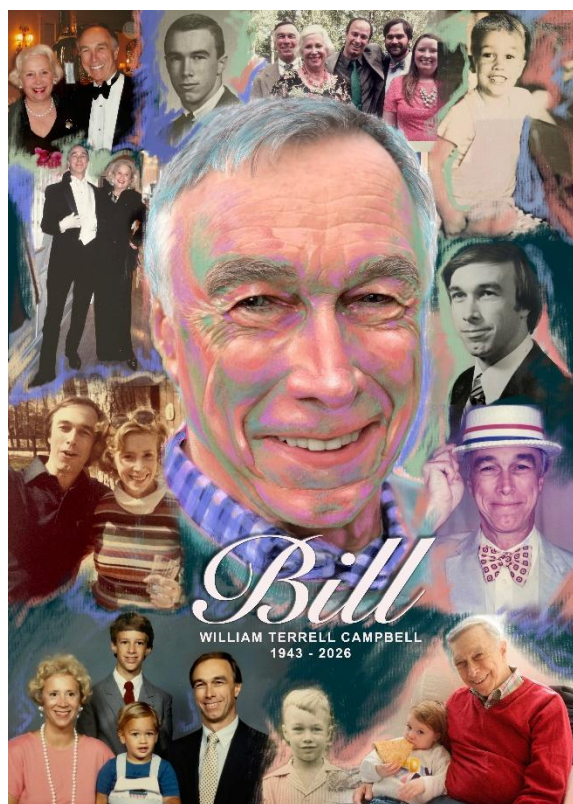
My father was a neophiliac. He passed away at the beginning of this month, so he’s still very much on my mind. Dad would sit down with me and watch *The Avengers* or *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, not because those were his preferred *style* of movie, exactly, but because he wanted to add them to his experience. I tried to get across their appeal in a few sentences before we began, but once we started, Dad was glad to follow along.

Over on my Substack ([tcampbell.substack.com](http://tcampbell.substack.com)), I’m currently in the middle of a long suite of short stories and poems, dedicated in part to the special Sundays we shared doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. As I explain in that series, the act of filling in over a hundred words each week meant that we had over a hundred prompts to tell each other stories, to share ideas we thought were interesting.

This often meant me explaining, with my *relatively* youthful perspective, what Ariana Grande had been up to lately and what “ghosting” was. But Dad had a few stories to share too, and those stories were new *to me*, so how could I not be interested in that “newness”?

I wanted to follow his example, after all. I’ll do my best to follow his example for the rest of my own days.

Editing this journal is one way how. **In this issue**, Daniel Galef identifies new candidates for the title of earliest crosswords and, with Michael Griffith, composes an epic sonnet acrostic. Richard Lederer and Daniel also both report on encounters with eccentrics! Don Hauptman offers a variety of verbal oddities and text-message “incorrections.” Darryl Francis explores new letter patterns and variations on the word “fourteen.” Michael Keith explores the difficulties of finding anagrams and pangram anagrams within a specified list. Gregg Siegel discusses game-show inspired mashups. And finally, I review a couple of defunct games and recount another slice of crossword history. Join us, won’t you? ■



Dad, memorialized from photographs in a collage by family friend John Koehler.



## THAT'S ABOVE MY PLAY GRADE

### Another Mischievous Miscellany of Linguistic Notes and Queries

Don Hauptman

New York, New York

donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

A California friend tells me that among homeowners, “mow, blow, and go” is a common pejorative taunt for less-than-stellar lawn-care services.

Beginning a decade ago, in articles in *Word Ways* and *Interim*, the predecessors of *The Journal of Wordplay*, I cited examples of what I dubbed “occupational rhyming trios.” The classic example may be “drill, fill, and bill,” the puckish itemization of the sequential elements of a dental practice.

Recently, I’ve encountered “list, persist, and assist” (real-estate agents), the cynical “sue, screw, and review” (lawyers and others), and “forming, storming, norming, and performing” (psychologist Bruce Tuckman’s model for team effectiveness, admittedly a quartet).

Usually, such catchphrases are waggishly applied to business and professional fields, but they can potentially be deployed in any context. Consider “grip, rip, and dip” (an approved procedure for consuming bagels!).

What’s the appeal of these quips? According to a Wikipedia page: “People prefer rhymes for their ‘pleasurable aesthetics,’ as the rhyme creates a sense of unity and coherence, increasing the aphorism’s appeal, repeatability, and memorability. This cognitive bias is often explained by fluency heuristics, where the ease of processing a rhyming statement enhances its perceived truthfulness.” Wow. Who knew?

\* \* \*

Once again, this is a gallimaufry of wordplay items that don’t fall into my usual genres: puns, spoonerisms, bloopers, mixed metaphors, and funny redundancies. All or most of the following is original, at least according to Google. But some searches are problematic, and not everything is on the internet. Apologies for omitting credit to any prior creators.

To begin, a batch of pithy conundrums:

- Isn’t *Krispy Kreme* a contradiction in terms?
- Why is a success called a *blowout*? Doesn’t that word suggest a destructive explosion?
- When someone is disparaged as a “big baby” or a “little baby,” aren’t those pretty much the same slight?

- Why do diagrams of family trees “grow” *downward*?
- Is it wisdom if it doesn’t have teeth?

And a few more “brain pleasers”:

- Businesses are often described as being launched “on a shoestring.” But if the budget is really small, maybe it’s financed on an *aglet*.
- When someone immediately qualifies an ambiguous utterance with the assurance that he is half joking, that means he is also half serious.
- Consider the emporia displaying banks of bins, inviting customers to “mix and match.” Really, after the candies or other treats are mixed, they are no longer matched.
- I complained to a company, but the response was unsatisfactory and accompanied by a suggestion that I take further steps on my own to resolve the problem. I quipped to a friend: “This just added insult to insult.”
- “It has a lot of moving parts.” This idiom, intended to convey a project’s complexity, is surely outdated. After all, computers and cellphones are as complex as things get, yet their semiconductor circuits are solid state and thus have *no* moving parts.
- I like to tease interlocutors and correspondents by quoting someone saying, for example: “Oh [or words to that effect], when I was last in London. . . .” I may be alone in finding such bracketed banter amusing!

Here are three pet usage peeves, peripherally incorporating wordplay, all called to mind by recent newspaper reports:

“She went on to help run state finances for many different Republican governors.” Come on! Would they be the *same* governors? Writers and editors should observe the commandment of Strunk and White: “Omit needless words.”

“A programmer . . . dreams of working as a white hat hacker, testing computer programs for security flaws.” This is the frequent error of omitting mandatory hyphens in compound adjectives, thus possibly miscuing the reader. Is his ideal job a Caucasian who chops headwear?

Finally, *trope* has become trendy. Yet its meaning has metastasized and the word is routinely misused and abused. It now describes any sort of plot twist, theme, motif, or Hitchcockian MacGuffin. According to multiple unabridged dictionaries on my shelf, however, a *trope* is a metaphor, figure of speech, or rhetorical device. As a prescriptivist, I usually favor respecting original meanings. Thus, when I see or hear the word, I’m tempted to shout: “Trope? Nope!” ■

NOTES: For a video about the use and misuse of *trope*, see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Bk7McICUkI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Bk7McICUkI). On the appeal of rhyme in aphorisms and elsewhere: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhyme-as-reason\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhyme-as-reason_effect).

## FOUR- AND FIVE-LETTER REPEAT WORDS

Darryl Francis  
Cumbria, England  
darryl.francis@yahoo.co.uk

*Editor's note: Darryl's work here extends a study of three-letter repeat words that he, I, and Charles Montpetit performed in the previous issue.*

The words and terms below are four- and five-letter repeats, with one or more additional letters...

|       |   |                                 |
|-------|---|---------------------------------|
| acet  | : | <b>acetacetic</b>               |
| acks  | : | <b>packsacks</b>                |
| anap  | : | <b>anapanapa</b>                |
| anti  | : | <b>antiantibody</b>             |
| anti  | : | <b>antiantidote</b>             |
| anti  | : | <b>antiantienzyme</b>           |
| anti  | : | <b>antiantitoxin</b>            |
| arch  | : | <b>archarchitect</b>            |
| army  | : | <b>barmy army</b>               |
| atin  | : | <b>gelatinating</b>             |
| atin  | : | <b>gratinating</b>              |
| bang  | : | <b>alibangbang</b>              |
| beri  | : | <b>antiberiberin</b>            |
| beri  | : | <b>beriberic</b>                |
| chin  | : | <b>chinchin</b>                 |
| chin  | : | <b>Cochin-China</b>             |
| chis  | : | <b>craniorhachischisis</b>      |
| chis  | : | <b>rachischisis</b>             |
| clem  | : | <b>Clemclemalats</b>            |
| coli  | : | <b>colicolitis</b>              |
| cora  | : | <b>coracoradialis</b>           |
| cous  | : | <b>couscousou</b>               |
| dfor  | : | <b>Blandford Forum</b>          |
| eeds  | : | <b>reed-seeds</b>               |
| einst | : | <b>Bose-Einstein statistics</b> |
| eniz  | : | <b>denizenize</b>               |
| ethyl | : | <b>methylethylacetic</b>        |
| ever  | : | <b>never ever</b>               |
| four  | : | <b>four-four time</b>           |
| geor  | : | <b>George Orwell</b>            |

|       |   |                                |
|-------|---|--------------------------------|
| great | : | <b>great-great-grandfather</b> |
| hiop  | : | <b>Carphiophiops</b>           |
| humu  | : | <b>humuhumunukunukuapuaa</b>   |
| hypo  | : | <b>hypohypophysism</b>         |
| iber  | : | <b>antiberiberin</b>           |
| idan  | : | <b>notidanidan</b>             |
| ights | : | <b>night-sights</b>            |
| ileo  | : | <b>ileo-ileostomy</b>          |
| ingl  | : | <b>jinglingly</b>              |
| ingl  | : | <b>minglingly</b>              |
| ingl  | : | <b>tinglingly</b>              |
| ious  | : | <b>homoiousious</b>            |
| jack  | : | <b>Jack Jackson</b>            |
| koun  | : | <b>Youkounkoun</b>             |
| kowa  | : | <b>Nkowakowa</b>               |
| lite  | : | <b>polite literature</b>       |
| lypo  | : | <b>family Polyporaceae</b>     |
| mani  | : | <b>Chimanimani</b>             |
| meha  | : | <b>Kamehameha</b>              |
| micro | : | <b>micromicrocurie</b>         |
| micro | : | <b>micromicrofarad</b>         |
| micro | : | <b>micromicron</b>             |
| moya  | : | <b>moyamoya</b>                |
| napa  | : | <b>anapanapa</b>               |
| ncol  | : | <b>Lincoln College</b>         |
| ngui  | : | <b>panguingui</b>              |
| nize  | : | <b>denizenize</b>              |
| north | : | <b>north-northeastward</b>     |
| north | : | <b>north-northeastwards</b>    |
| north | : | <b>north-northwestwards</b>    |
| nuku  | : | <b>humuhumunukunukuapuaa</b>   |
| ootr  | : | <b>shoot-root ratio</b>        |
| ophi  | : | <b>ophiophilism</b>            |
| ophi  | : | <b>ophiophilist</b>            |
| orali | : | <b>moralioralist</b>           |
| oste  | : | <b>osteosteatoma</b>           |
| ostr  | : | <b>postrostral</b>             |
| peri  | : | <b>peripericarditis</b>        |
| philo | : | <b>philophilosophos</b>        |



|       |   |                                           |
|-------|---|-------------------------------------------|
| phio  | : | <b>Carphiophiops</b>                      |
| phor  | : | <b>camphorphorone</b>                     |
| phos  | : | <b>phosphosilicate</b>                    |
| pinus | : | <b>Spinus pinus</b>                       |
| quin  | : | <b>quinquina</b>                          |
| quin  | : | <b>quinguino</b>                          |
| rinac | : | <b>Arinacrinachd</b>                      |
| ring  | : | <b>bearing ring</b>                       |
| ring  | : | <b>firing ring</b>                        |
| ring  | : | <b>spring ring</b>                        |
| round | : | <b>ground round</b>                       |
| south | : | <b>south-southerly</b>                    |
| south | : | <b>south-southwesterly</b>                |
| spho  | : | <b>amorphous phosphorus</b>               |
| spho  | : | <b>bisphosphonate</b>                     |
| star  | : | <b>star-staring</b>                       |
| super | : | <b>supersuperabundance</b>                |
| super | : | <b>supersuperabundant</b>                 |
| super | : | <b>supersuperabundantly</b>               |
| super | : | <b>supersuperb</b>                        |
| super | : | <b>supersuperior</b>                      |
| tche  | : | <b>Tchetchentsish</b>                     |
| toma  | : | <b>stomatomalacia</b>                     |
| ulda  | : | <b>Should auld acquaintance be forgot</b> |
| umin  | : | <b>aluminum industry</b>                  |
| vaso  | : | <b>vasovasostomy</b>                      |
| vice  | : | <b>vice-viceroy</b>                       |
| wing  | : | <b>swing-wing</b>                         |
| wisty | : | <b>twisty-wisty</b>                       |
| xyli  | : | <b>Leifsonia xyli xyli</b>                |
| ypla  | : | <b>work-study-play plan</b>               |
| zint  | : | <b>Pipilzintzintli</b>                    |

The words below are four- or five-letter repeats with *no* additional letters...

|       |   |                    |
|-------|---|--------------------|
| agas  | : | <b>Aga-sagas</b>   |
| alces | : | <b>Alces alces</b> |
| ayer  | : | <b>ayer-ayer</b>   |
| beri  | : | <b>beriberi</b>    |

|       |   |                    |
|-------|---|--------------------|
| bison | : | <b>Bison bison</b> |
| bunya | : | <b>bunya-bunya</b> |
| chin  | : | <b>chin-chin</b>   |
| china | : | <b>chinachina</b>  |
| chop  | : | <b>chop-chop</b>   |
| cous  | : | <b>couscous</b>    |
| devil | : | <b>devil-devil</b> |
| drip  | : | <b>drip-drip</b>   |
| four  | : | <b>four-four</b>   |
| frou  | : | <b>frou-frou</b>   |
| gang  | : | <b>ganggang</b>    |
| gluck | : | <b>gluck-gluck</b> |
| gong  | : | <b>gong-gong</b>   |
| gris  | : | <b>grisgris</b>    |
| guit  | : | <b>guitguit</b>    |
| hots  | : | <b>hotshots</b>    |
| hush  | : | <b>hush-hush</b>   |
| ilang | : | <b>ilang-ilang</b> |
| khus  | : | <b>khuskhus</b>    |
| kina  | : | <b>kinakina</b>    |
| lead  | : | <b>lead-lead</b>   |
| lomi  | : | <b>lomi-lomi</b>   |
| mahi  | : | <b>mahi-mahi</b>   |
| mako  | : | <b>mako-mako</b>   |
| mange | : | <b>mange-mange</b> |
| mony  | : | <b>Mony Mony</b>   |
| neti  | : | <b>neti neti</b>   |
| never | : | <b>never-never</b> |
| niam  | : | <b>Niam-niam</b>   |
| onga  | : | <b>onga-onga</b>   |
| pinc  | : | <b>pincpinc</b>    |
| piou  | : | <b>piou-piou</b>   |
| quack | : | <b>quack-quack</b> |
| quae  | : | <b>Quaequae</b>    |
| quina | : | <b>quinaquina</b>  |
| rewa  | : | <b>rewa-rewa</b>   |
| riro  | : | <b>riroriro</b>    |
| sing  | : | <b>sing-sing</b>   |
| strum | : | <b>strumstrum</b>  |

|       |   |                          |
|-------|---|--------------------------|
| talky | : | <b>talky-talky</b>       |
| tick  | : | <b>tick-tick</b>         |
| topa  | : | <b>Topatopa</b>          |
| tuco  | : | <b>tucotuco</b>          |
| turn  | : | <b>Turn! Turn! Turn!</b> |
| wakey | : | <b>wakey-wakey</b>       |
| whos  | : | <b>Who's Whos</b>        |
| yeah  | : | <b>yeah-yeah</b>         |
| ylang | : | <b>ylang-ylang</b>       |
| zero  | : | <b>zero-zero</b>         |

## FLUXIS IS...FLUXED

T Campbell

I'd been thinking for a while of reviewing the *Atlantic's* puzzle features, its (now somewhat harder) mini-crossword, Bracket City, Fluxis, Stacks, Caleb's Inferno, and Trivia.

When the *Atlantic* announced Fluxis was to stop offering new entries, I figured it was now or never. I'm not as surprised as I could be, because Fluxis struck me as a broken game. But it's broken in some fascinating ways.

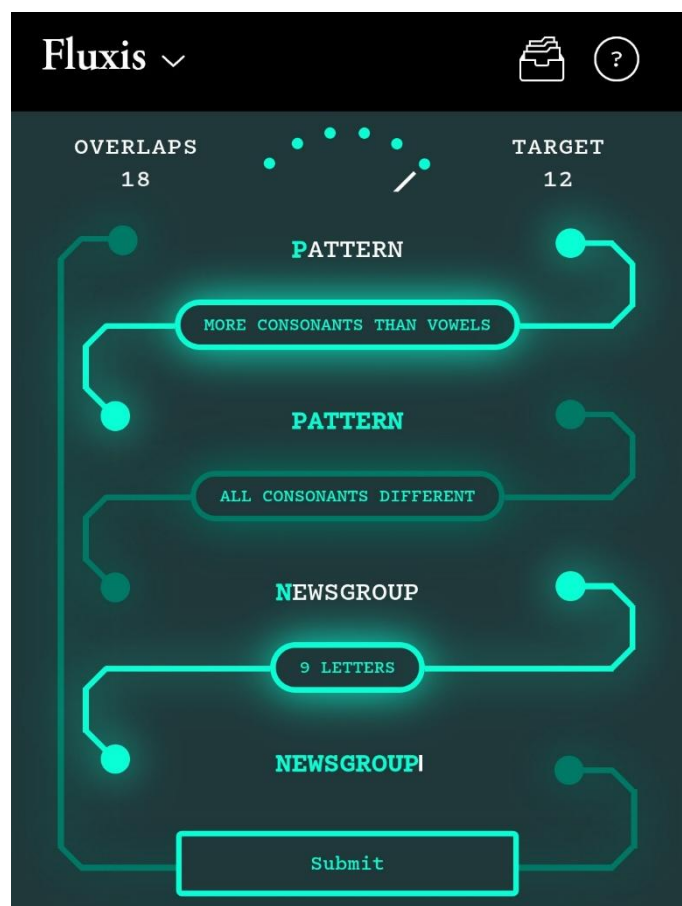
The way you play is this: you're given a word—say, **PATTERN**—and asked to supply three more words. Each word must overlap with its following word at least a little, as if they're part of a longer string that's scrolling to the left. **PATTERN** could be followed by **TERNS**, or **PATTERN** could be followed by **NEFARIOUS**, but **PATTERN** could not be followed by **JUICE**. Nor could it be followed by **EXPAT**, which shares some of its letters in order, but on the right, not the left. Keep going until the fourth word connects with the first, completing the circuit.

This wouldn't be so hard if not for two extra restrictions. The three words you add must each obey some arbitrary other rule—for today's, the rules are "more consonants than vowels," "all consonants different," and "9 letters."

And you're graded on the number of legitimate overlaps you can get. The game will accept any set of answers that obey its rules, but if the "Fluxometer" says you should be able to get 10 overlaps and you only got 9, well, it feels like you didn't *really* win.

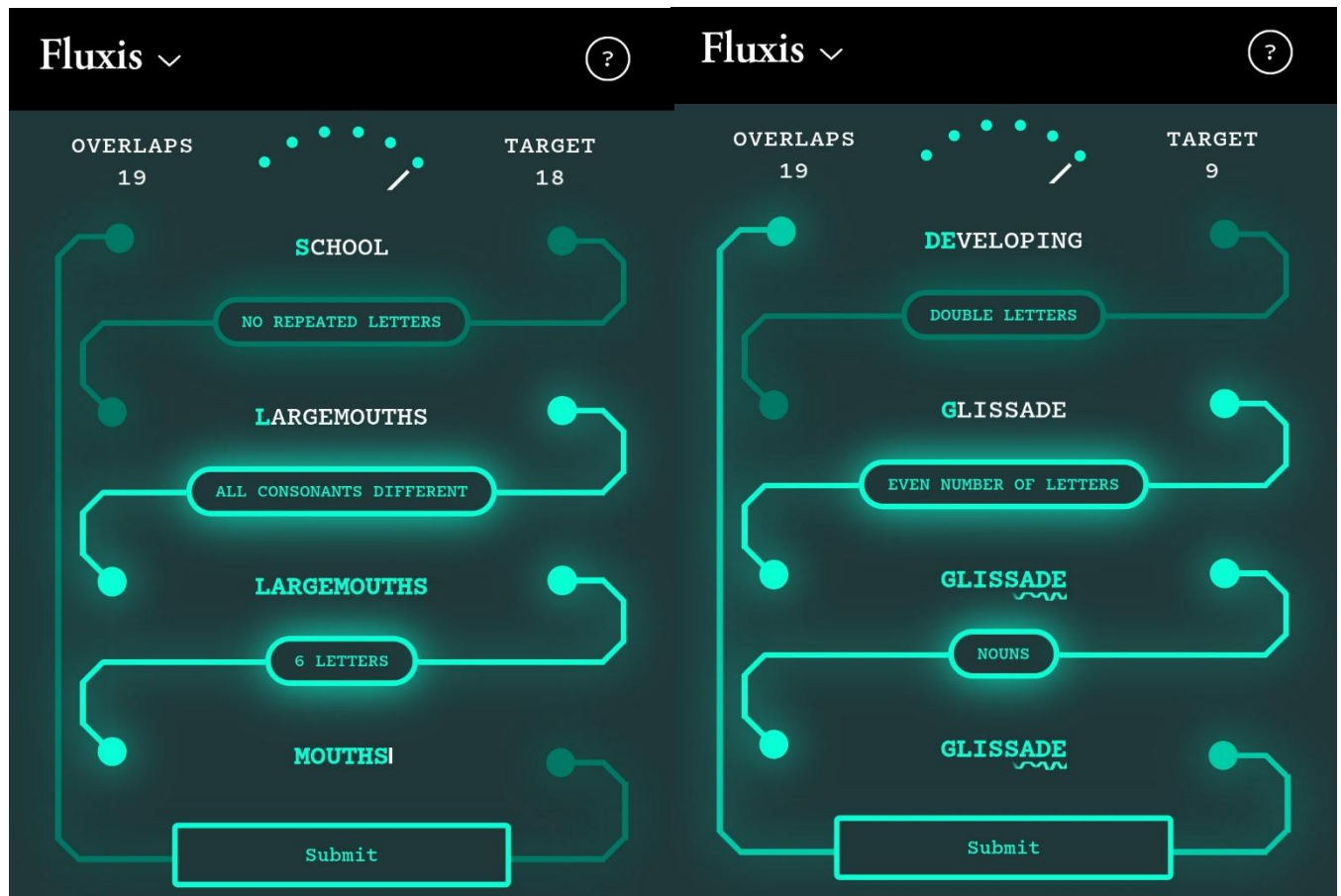
There's one aspect of Fluxis that I don't know if anyone planned: the easiest way to get a lot of overlap is to use the same word twice in a row when you can. That's been my strategy almost from the start, once I realized that the system wouldn't flag it as cheating.

People who enjoy this kind of thing tend to like to show off their vocabulary. So you'd think this game would be asking you



A screenshot of a finished Fluxis. All other images in this piece are similar screenshots.

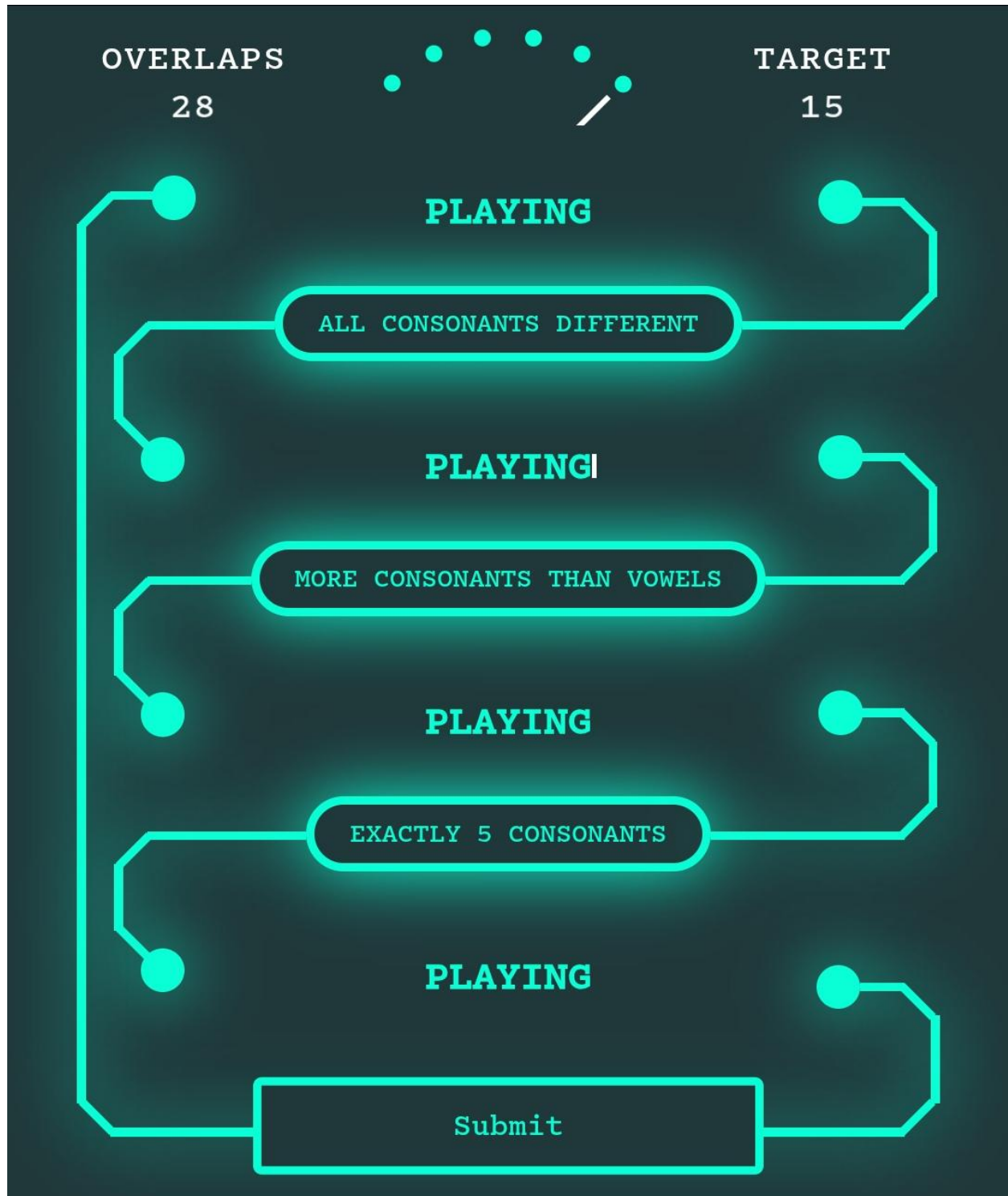
to come up with four different words. But in its system, a word in the hand is often worth two in the bush.



The difficulty of the rules also seems inconsistent. Finding a word with more consonants than vowels is pretty easy. Finding a word with more vowels than consonants? Harder. Nine letters is a tougher length to achieve than five. *The Atlantic's* other puzzles increase their difficulty from Monday to Sunday in measured, observable ways, but Fluxis seemed to spin the dial at random and give the audience whatever resulted.

Fluxis also had a glitchy database. A Y was always counted as a consonant, not a vowel, regardless of whether it appeared in "YES," "FLY," or "YTTRIUM." Common words were often unrecognized—not only slang, but terms that entered the lexicon ten years ago or more. Other words were recognized but miscategorized: GRATED was not considered an adjective, which would be a surprise to anyone who's ever had grated cheese.

Many times, I beat the Fluxometer by a lot, but some days, I had no idea how I could have reached its number. Maybe if *The Atlantic* had published a bogey set of answers the day after releasing the puzzle? That might've helped maintain some healthy engagement. Oh, well. Shoulda coulda woulda, right?



Unlike other games offered by *The Atlantic* and its competitors, Fluxis was a puzzle with no single, clear “right answer.” For all its problems, that made it something special, a celebration of more creative problem-solving. But a neat concept isn’t everything. Potential matters less than execution. In the end, it seemed like Fluxis couldn’t quite close the loop. ■

## FOURTEEN

Darryl Francis  
Cumbria, England  
darryl.francis@yahoo.co.uk

As this is the **fourteenth** issue of the Journal, here are some snippets based around the word **FOURTEEN**.

Let's begin with the transposal **NEETROUF**, a 19<sup>th</sup> century back-slang term for the number **FOURTEEN**. Listed in various slang dictionaries, it's not quite a reversal, due to the OU digram not being reversed.

Here's a form (that's National Puzzlers League terminology) involving the successive deletion and addition of letters of **FOURTEEN**. Is there a triangle constructed from more than twelve words?

O  
TO  
ROT  
TOUR  
OUTER  
TENOUR  
FORTUNE  
FOURTEEN  
FOURTEENS  
UNFORESTED  
DENTIFEROUS  
DUFRENOYSITE

In the form above, each word is a transaddition of the word above, so a limit is reached when no further letter can be added to the bottom-most word. But if the transaddition requirement is removed, how many different letters can be added to **FORTUNE** until none further can be added? Any improvements on the on the set below?

FOURTEEN  
BEFORTUNE  
UNFORESTED  
FLUORESCENT  
UNPERFORATED  
UNFORGETTABLE  
COUNTERFEITERS  
PERFUNCTORINESS  
DESSERTSPOONFULS  
UNCOMFORTABLENESS  
FORETHOUGHTFULNESS  
AUTODIFFERENTIATION



CHLOROFLUOROMETHANES  
TETRABROMOFLUORESCEIN  
POLYTETRAFLUORETHYLENE  
CHLOROTRIFLUOROETHYLENE  
DICHLORODIFLUOROMETHANES

How about a word ladder converting **FOURTEEN** into **THIRTEEN**?

**FOURTEEN > HEREUNTO > ETHERION > THIRTEEN**

And there's this longer word ladder converting **FOURTEEN** to **NINETEEN**:

**FOURTEEN > SOFTENER > SEROTINE >  
INTERNES > INTERNEE > NINETEEN**

How about some 14-letter transposals? There are many more of these in my collection of transposals. Watch out for the 15-letter examples in the fifteenth issue of the Journal.

|                       |              |                       |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| <b>AURISCOPICALLY</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>CAPSULOCILIARY</b> |
| <b>CONNATURALISED</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>UNDECLARATIONS</b> |
| <b>CONTRANTISCION</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>TRICONSONANTIC</b> |
| <b>CONTRAVENTIONS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>NONCONTRASTIVE</b> |
| <b>DIVERSILOQUENT</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>VENTRILOQUISED</b> |
| <b>ELEPHANTICIDES</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>ENCEPHALITIDES</b> |
| <b>FICTIONALISING</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>LIGNIFICATIONS</b> |
| <b>FRACTIONALISES</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>STERNOFACIALIS</b> |
| <b>IMPASSIONATING</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>MISPAGINATIONS</b> |
| <b>IMPENETRATIONS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>OPINIASTREMENT</b> |
| <b>INTERSCAPULARS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>PARTICULARNESS</b> |
| <b>MISINCORPORATE</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>PROCREATIONISM</b> |
| <b>ORTHOEPISTICAL</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>PHOTOREALISTIC</b> |
| <b>PERINEOSCROTAL</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>REPERCOLATIONS</b> |
| <b>PLEUROCENTESIS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>SUPERSELECTION</b> |
| <b>PRECONSOLATION</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>SPIRONOLACTONE</b> |
| <b>PREINSULATIONS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>UNIPERSONALIST</b> |
| <b>PROTOMAGNESIUM</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>SPERMATOGONIUM</b> |
| <b>SUPERINDIGNANT</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>UNDERPAINTINGS</b> |

|                       |              |                       |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| <b>SUPERINTENDERS</b> | <b>&amp;</b> | <b>UNINTERSPERSED</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|

At its entry for the word **FOURTEEN**, the Oxford English Dictionary lists 48 other historic variant spellings of the words, taken from Old English, Middle English, Scottish and the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here's the full list of those 48 variants:

|                    |                   |                  |                  |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>faurten</b>     | <b>feowertyne</b> | <b>fouretene</b> | <b>fowertene</b> |
| <b>feortene</b>    | <b>feowertyno</b> | <b>fourteene</b> | <b>fowretene</b> |
| <b>feouerteno</b>  | <b>ffortene</b>   | <b>fourtein</b>  | <b>fowrtein</b>  |
| <b>feouwertene</b> | <b>fforteyne</b>  | <b>fourteine</b> | <b>fowrteine</b> |
| <b>feovertyne</b>  | <b>ffourtene</b>  | <b>fourten</b>   | <b>fowrten</b>   |
| <b>feowertene</b>  | <b>foorteen</b>   | <b>fourtene</b>  | <b>fowrtene</b>  |
| <b>feowerteno</b>  | <b>fortain</b>    | <b>fourteyn</b>  | <b>fowrtene</b>  |
| <b>feowertiene</b> | <b>fortein</b>    | <b>fourteyne</b> | <b>furten</b>    |
| <b>feowertine</b>  | <b>fortene</b>    | <b>fourteynn</b> | <b>furtine</b>   |
| <b>feowertune</b>  | <b>fouertin</b>   | <b>fourtiene</b> | <b>fywertina</b> |
| <b>feowertyna</b>  | <b>foureteene</b> | <b>fourtine</b>  | <b>vourteen</b>  |
| <b>feowertynæ</b>  | <b>foureten</b>   | <b>fovtene</b>   | <b>vourtene</b>  |

The two spellings shown in red are transposals in addition to the earlier seen **FOURTEEN** and **NEETROUF**.

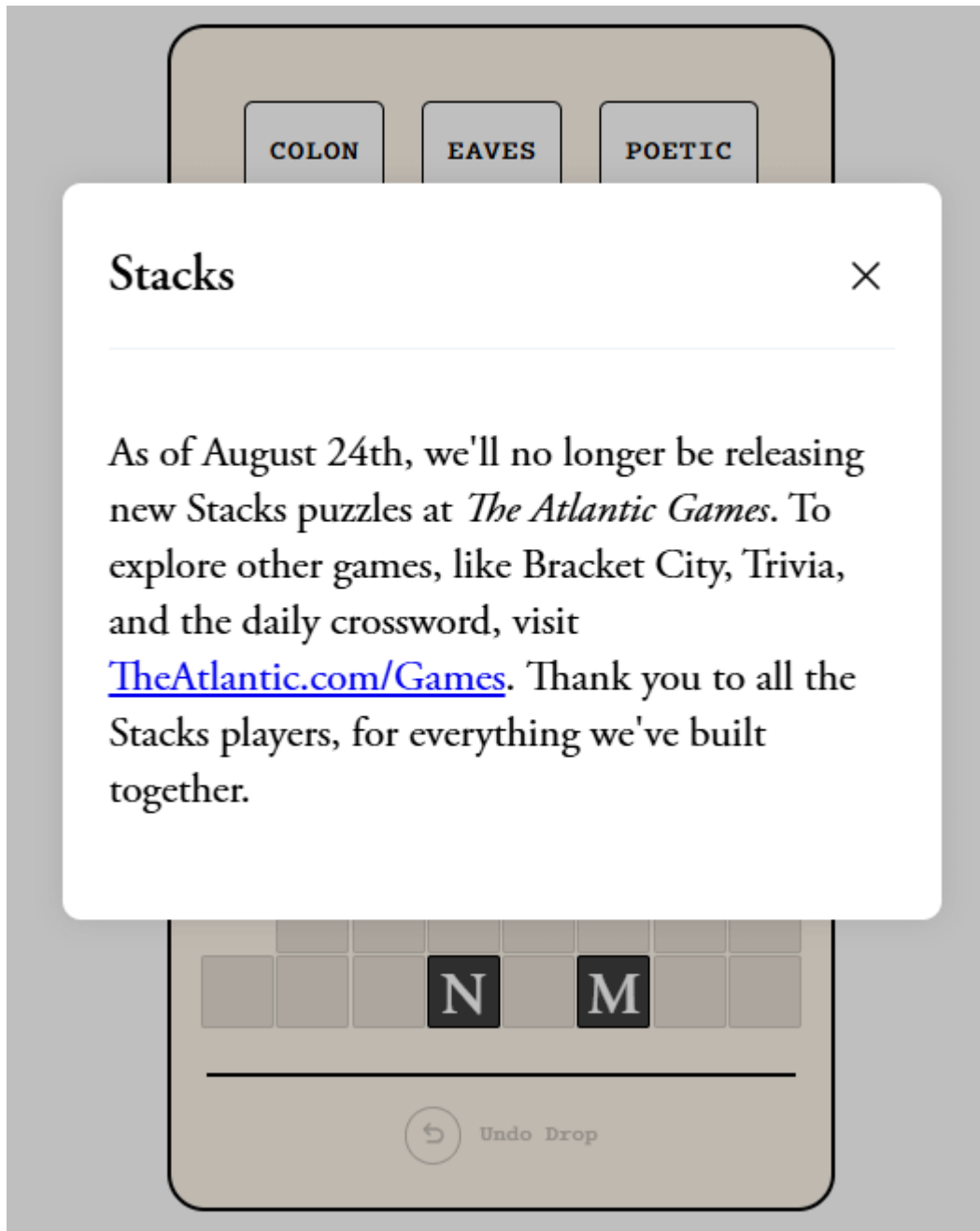
Finally, the number **FOURTEEN** rendered in Roman numerals is **xiv** and **XIV**. There are many English words containing these letters in order and adjacently. Here are just fourteen:

|                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>annexive</b>     | <b>lixive</b>        |
| <b>complexively</b> | <b>lixivate</b>      |
| <b>connexive</b>    | <b>lixiviation</b>   |
| <b>fixive</b>       | <b>reflexive</b>     |
| <b>fluxive</b>      | <b>reflexiveness</b> |
| <b>inflexive</b>    | <b>reflexivity</b>   |
| <b>irreflexive</b>  | <b>sexivalent</b>    |

## STACKS, TOPPLED

T Campbell

One month after it announced the end of Fluxis, *The Atlantic* prepared to say goodbye to another of its features, Stacks. It should be gone by the time you read this.



Stacks is an altogether more functional and enjoyable game than Fluxis, though not without its eccentricities. Users are given a series of words—from four to six—and will be using those to create a series of new words. It's one part anagram puzzle (or acrostic), one part Tetris. And also there's some kind of Colonial-era pulley operator? Who is possibly a ghost, I'm not sure?

COLON

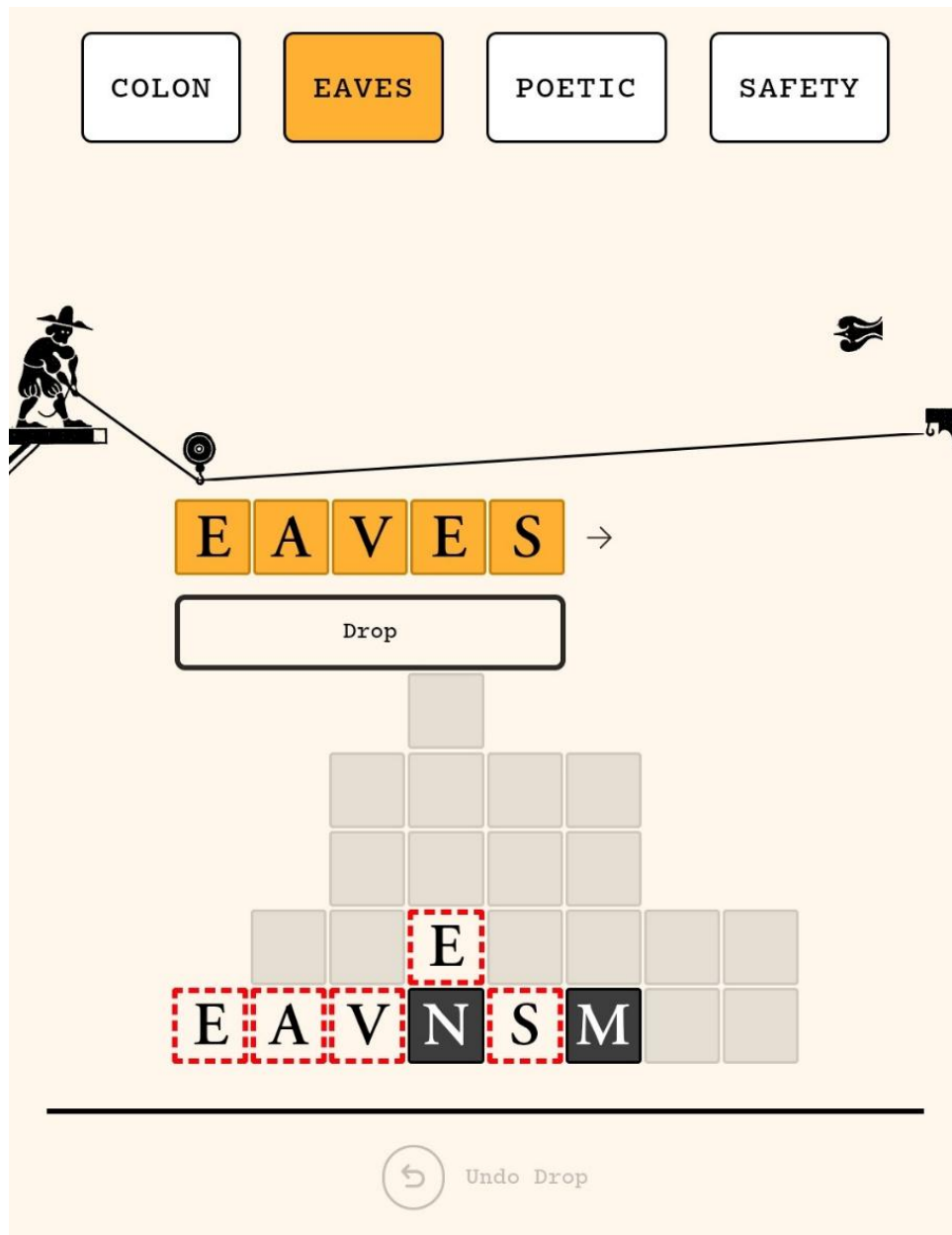
EAVES

POETIC

SAFETY

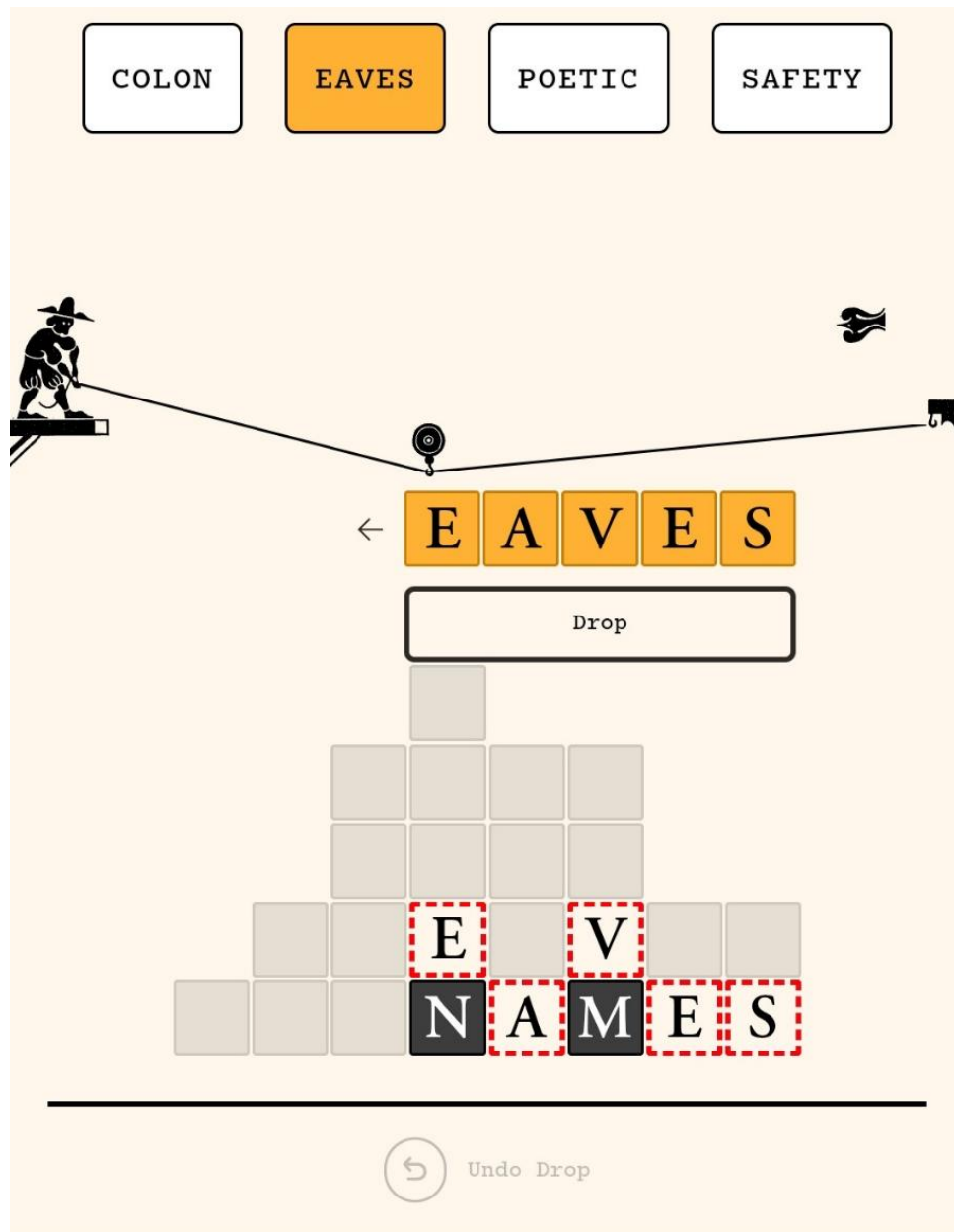


Undo Drop

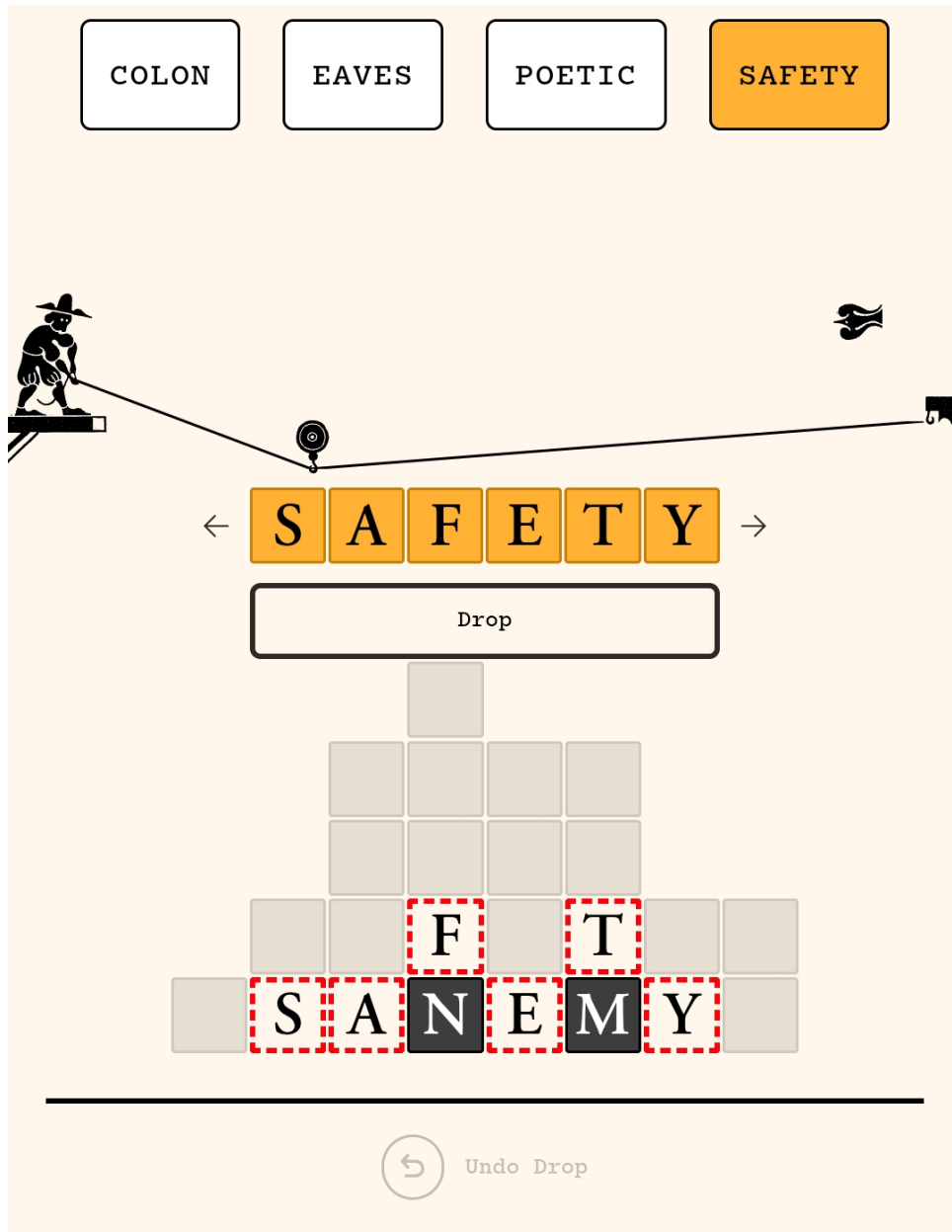


As you can see from the above, the dotted red boxes below indicate where the letters would fall *if* the word were dropped into this position. Users can choose which word they want to drop next, and move the word back and forth before dropping.

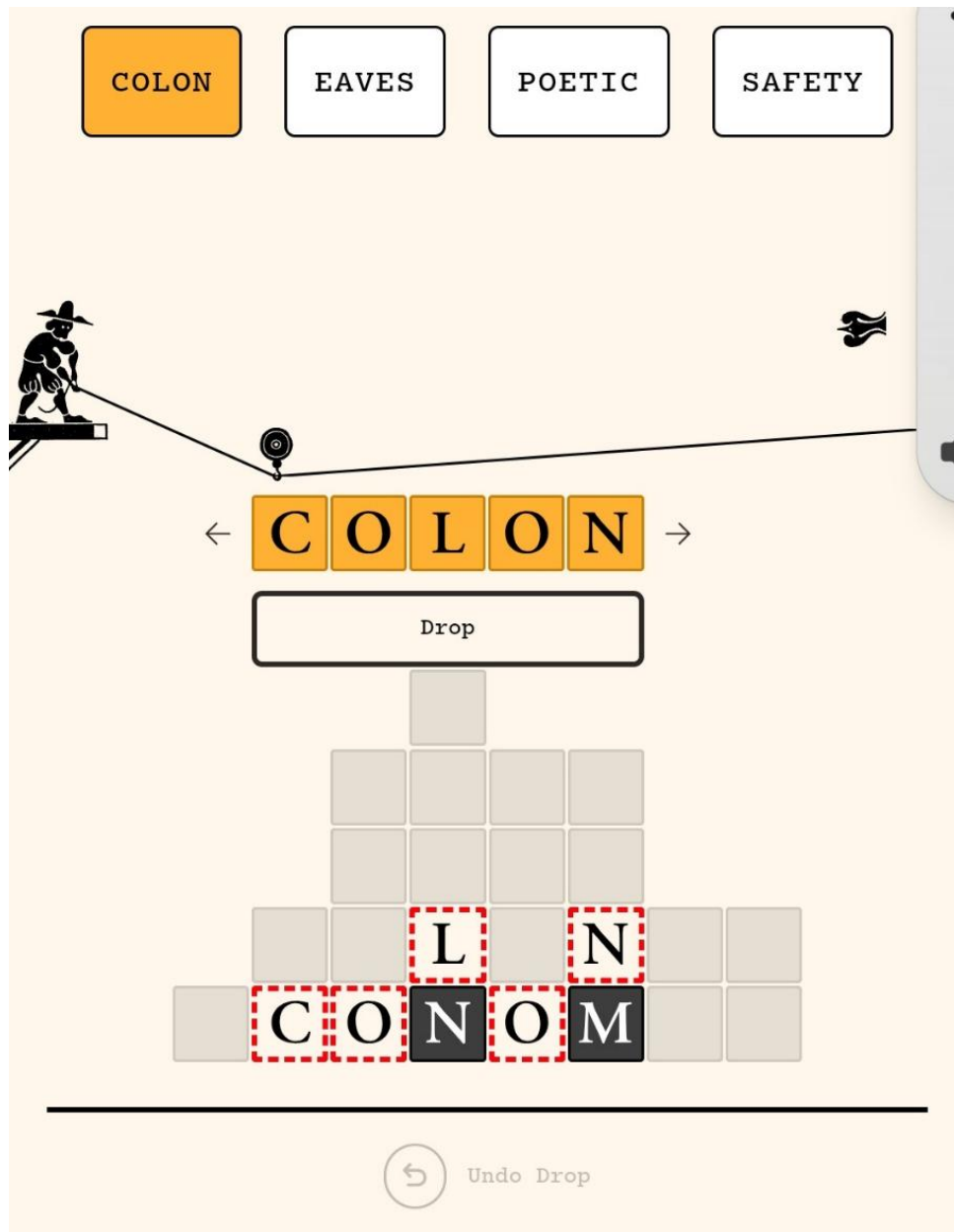
Note also the shaded boxes that indicate how long a word will be—these disappear in the game's "hard mode," and your "undo" options become more limited.



The above configuration looked promising, and there are a handful of words to fill in ???NAMES. SURNAMES, MISNAMES, PRENAMES...even PENNAMES, though that's more often given as PEN NAMES. But the other words couldn't build that on the other end, so back to the drawing board I went.

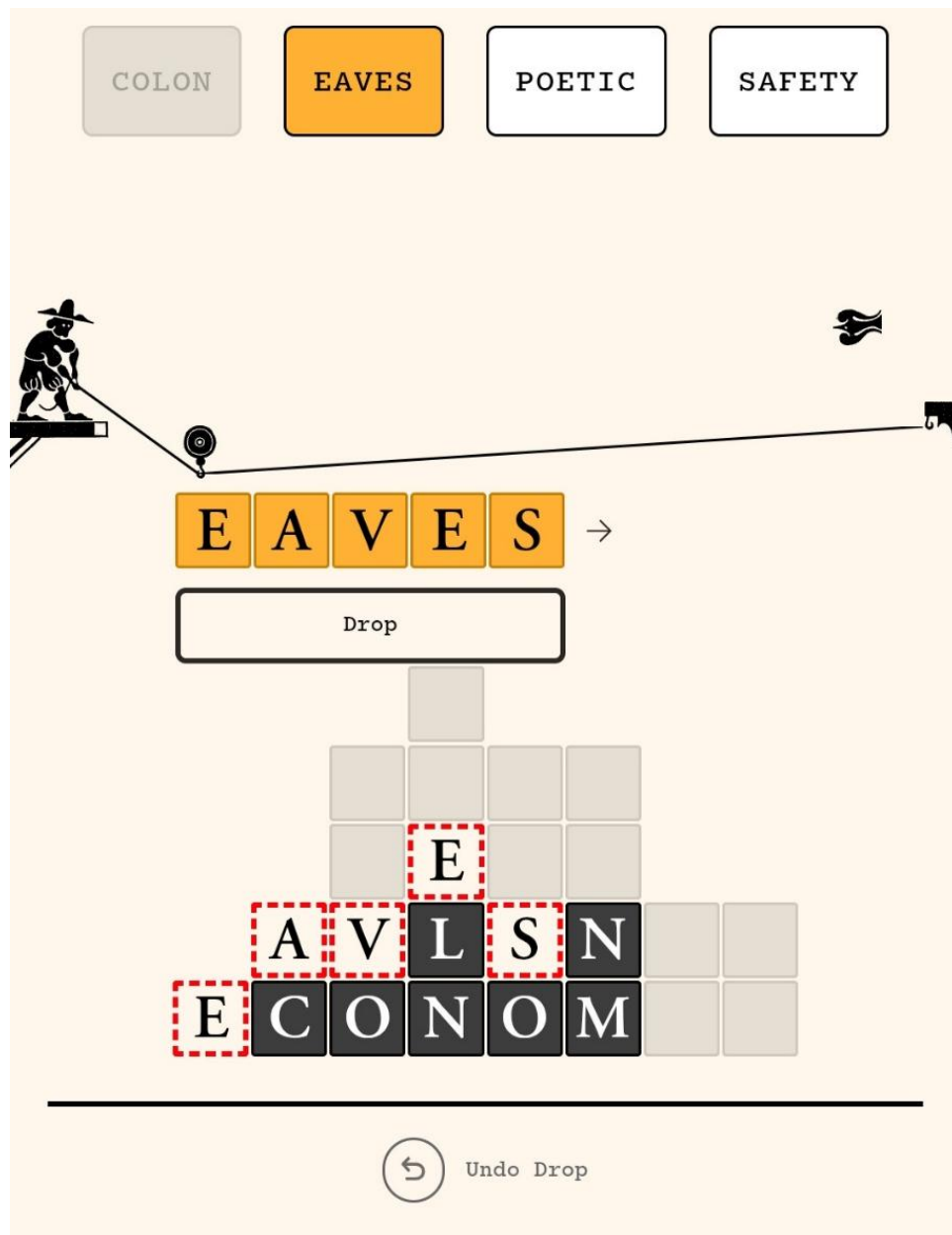


Didn't get much out of this one...

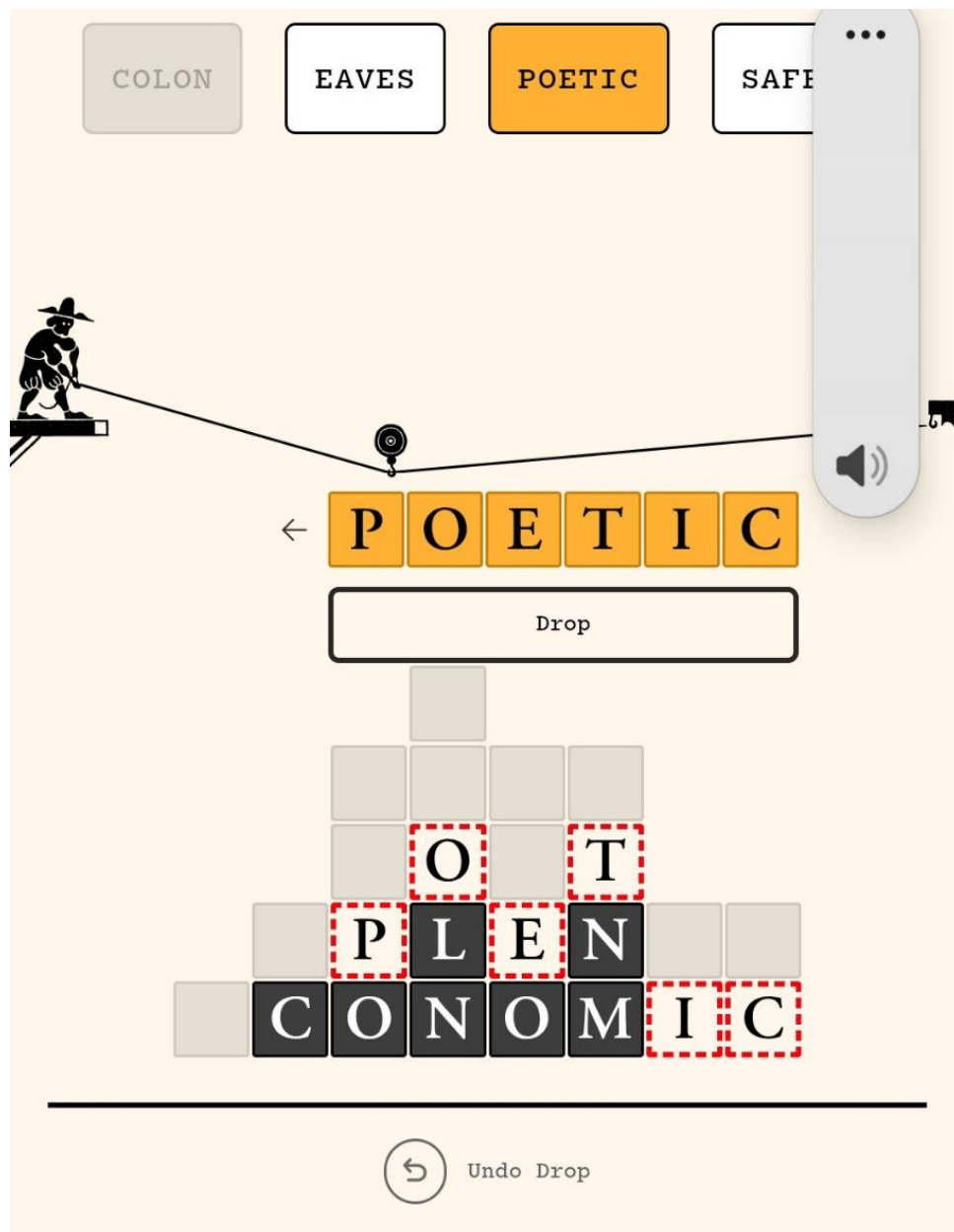


Ah, but now we were getting somewhere. This middle bottom suggested ECONOMIC, and the other words were capable of finishing that out.

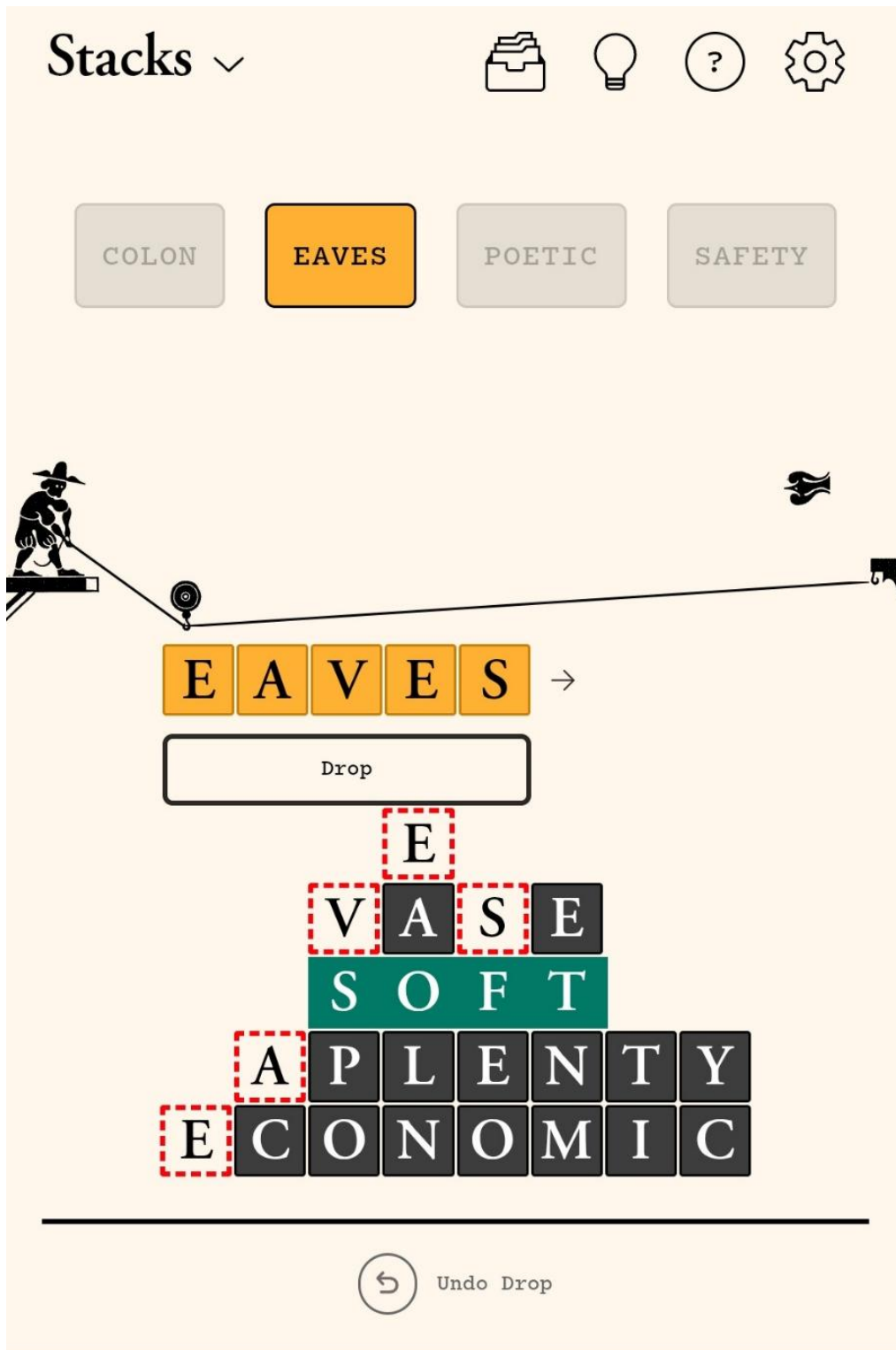




I couldn't put EAVES in next, though, because AVL SN doesn't start anything.



I was a little stumped on what ?PLEN?? could be, but it looked promising. And sure enough, dropping SAFETY onto the right after this got me in position to finish up with the spread below.



The lone E at the top is meant to be a leftover. Some games have two such leftover letters, though not in adjacent spots.

The biggest flaw in the UI for this game—and all the *Atlantic* games, just about—is that it doesn’t give the best possible cognitive reward for victory. After a tantalizing quarter-second glimpse of your victory, it takes you to a separate page that announces it and tells you to “come back tomorrow for a new puzzle!” (At this writing, the last Stacks puzzle has just dropped, but it still urges users to do the same, so that’s a day’s worth of fibbing.)

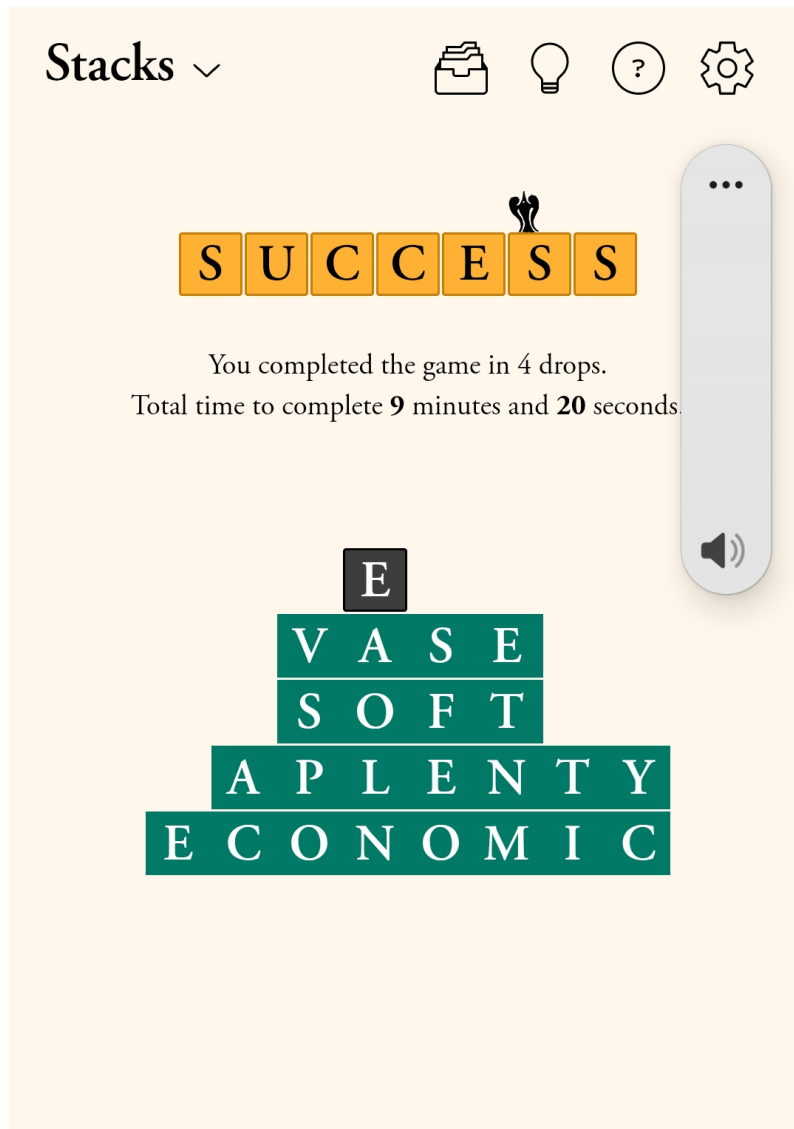
# PUZZLE SOLVED!

You completed Stacks in **4 drops**.  
Come back tomorrow for a new  
puzzle!

Play More Puzzles

Share Results

The above page seems very text-driven, compared to the visual experience of putting the Stacks’ words together. The other puzzles have a similar “Puzzle Solved” announcement, though Bracket City’s at least adds some visual whimsy. If you click “Return to Puzzle” for Stacks, you’re given a much more gratifying experience: the sight of all the words you’ve completed turned green to mark their integrity. Plus a time score, if you care about such things (next page).



Fluxis and Stacks have cycled out, but other *Atlantic* games have cycled in: an elaborate mystery from Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler) and a new trivia game (with a touch of word association) called Rabbithole.

The early Stacks were credited to **Patrick Berry**, but they've been anonymous for some time, so other hands may have finished the run.

Regardless of who's worked on them, they have my gratitude for many a calming moment. Enjoy some pancake stacks on me, fellas. Just send me the bill. ■

## WHO'S SIRI NOW?

### More Risible Voice-to-Text Errata

Don Hauptman

New York, New York

donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

One of the words I find useful is *solecism*. But when I dictated the word in an email, it became *solar system*. Now that's a solecism! This is a typical instance of an annoying—albeit amusing—error generated by dictation.

I use Siri on my iPhone, so I can't speak (pun intended?) for other speech-recognition platforms and digital assistants. Why do such bloopers occur? I asked A.I., which responded:

“Siri's dictation struggles because it often lacks on-device context, relies on short conversational models rather than continuous dictation, and frequently misinterprets proper nouns or industry terms. Additionally, Apple's strict privacy policies mean less voice data is sent to the cloud for training compared to competitors.”

Here are other recent examples of what I uttered, followed by what was transcribed:

- *paying bills* → *pain pills*
- *fictionalizes* → *fiction lies*
- *predecessors* → *predator processors*
- *foreboding* → *for boating*
- *Tristan and Isolde* → *Kristin and his old*
- *exegesis* → *extra Jesus*
- *a critic friend* → *acrylic friend*

Also: *soubriquet* became *super K* (a vitamin supplement), *you clipped* bloomed into *eucalypt* (yes, it's the plant), and *jocular* metamorphosed into the murderous *Jack killer* (and on another occasion, *Dracula*).

All of the above are my own experiences, but I Googled for examples posted by others. When I searched *funny dictation errors*, the entire first results page consisted of links to *medical* transcription errors. Selected specimens: *peripheral vascular disease* turned into *purple basket disease*. *Buprenorphine* was prescribed as *boot and nor fiend*. And a doc's diagnosis “I found the patient to be in extremis” was modified to “I found the patient to be an extremist.” Apparently, there's no cure! ■



## THE TREMBLEY ENIGMA

Daniel Galef and Michael Griffith

*“Apparently these gentlemen have some cherished system that they are frightened of disturbing.”*

—Abraham Trembley, in a letter to René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, quoted in the biography *Abraham Trembley of Geneva: Scientist and Philosopher 1710–1784*, by John R. Baker

The naturalist Abraham Trembley shook the scientific world with his revolutionary discovery of jellyfish-like creatures capable of regenerating or reassembling themselves after being cut into several pieces. His discoveries were met with both awe and, initially, hostility, as the creatures’ existence exploded traditional understandings of life and ultimately led, along with the work of Carl Linnaeus, to the development of the modern field of biology.

**Instructions,** for those new to acrostic puzzles: Answer the crossword-style clues in the blanks provided, then transfer those letters to the corresponding squares in the grid. Once you have enough squares filled in, you can start guessing words and phrases from context and transferring the letters in reverse into the clue blanks to use as hints in answering other clues.

Rhyme and meter are further solving aids.

Reading the first letter of all the answers vertically gives a quotation from a congratulatory letter to Trembley from a fellow naturalist, with attribution. The poem is also itself an acrostic: the initials of each line give a quotation from the letter of a colleague to the Royal Society of London first informing them about Trembley’s discoveries.

### CLUES

|                                                        |    |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| The Kraken’s arms, which, fried, may turn out rubbery; | A. | <u>299</u> | <u>44</u>  | <u>379</u> | <u>459</u> | <u>215</u> | <u>118</u> | <u>107</u> | <u>403</u> | <u>71</u>  |
| What Dürer does, when shadows he depicts;              | B. | <u>69</u>  | <u>224</u> | <u>182</u> | <u>311</u> | <u>447</u> |            |            |            |            |
| A cat in this ain’t broke, but isn’t fixed;            | C. | <u>110</u> | <u>150</u> | <u>407</u> | <u>86</u>  | <u>289</u> | <u>359</u> |            |            |            |
| Verbal equivocation, or a shrubbery;                   | D. | <u>191</u> | <u>15</u>  | <u>97</u>  | <u>465</u> | <u>279</u> |            |            |            |            |
| They guard the jewels locked up within the Tower;      | E. | <u>320</u> | <u>199</u> | <u>270</u> | <u>10</u>  | <u>381</u> | <u>137</u> |            |            |            |
| Type of coat that’s fastened with a toggle;            | F. | <u>152</u> | <u>350</u> | <u>292</u> | <u>473</u> | <u>100</u> | <u>306</u> |            |            |            |
| Painter known for subjects who may joggle;             | G. | <u>57</u>  | <u>162</u> | <u>335</u> | <u>194</u> | <u>236</u> | <u>444</u> |            |            |            |
| Catchphrase for one who feigns a sorcerer’s power;     | H. | <u>240</u> | <u>38</u>  | <u>329</u> | <u>164</u> | <u>427</u> | <u>48</u>  | <u>214</u> | <u>56</u>  | <u>349</u> |
| Dark arts, with pentagram and salt and taper;          | I. | <u>95</u>  | <u>145</u> | <u>342</u> | <u>266</u> | <u>290</u> | <u>102</u> |            |            |            |
| Foodstuff found in pocket (chickpeas, fried);          | J. | <u>156</u> | <u>388</u> | <u>63</u>  | <u>21</u>  | <u>340</u> | <u>211</u> | <u>373</u> |            |            |
| A slight change, or get high inhaling vapor;           | K. | <u>353</u> | <u>49</u>  | <u>183</u> | <u>209</u> | <u>402</u> |            |            |            |            |
| What you might wear, a bad hair day to hide;           | L. | <u>172</u> | <u>219</u> | <u>309</u> | <u>462</u> | <u>53</u>  | <u>109</u> | <u>325</u> | <u>277</u> | <u>439</u> |
| To do tax paperless (but still lose paper);            | M. | <u>80</u>  | <u>243</u> | <u>410</u> | <u>346</u> | <u>385</u> |            |            |            |            |
| The plain mate of a bird symbolic of Pride;            | N. | <u>255</u> | <u>39</u>  | <u>405</u> | <u>176</u> | <u>339</u> | <u>269</u> |            |            |            |



For a cephalopod, a controversial plural;  
 Not to bother with, steer clear, or swear off;  
 Underwear that's long (and rarely floral);  
 A stick or slat, or else to ward or scare [off];  
 Packet grits that take less time to soften;  
 Type of cheese possessing holes and rinds;  
 Egghead, Poindexter, geek, swot, or boffin;  
 Where one sits if one is of two minds;  
 They trot naively (so it's said) to slaughter;  
 In *Hamlet*, she's Polonius's daughter;  
 It didn't make it in, although it oughter;  
 A board game in which faces you discern;  
 A type of [[T]] that's made not far from Bern;  
 The beaten track, which might fork, end, or turn;

O.  $\overline{204} \overline{179} \overline{446} \overline{298} \overline{75} \overline{332}$   
 P.  $\overline{98} \overline{458} \overline{229} \overline{469} \overline{195} \overline{287}$   
 Q.  $\overline{310} \overline{376} \overline{192} \overline{471} \overline{83} \overline{293} \overline{337}$   
 R.  $\overline{254} \overline{125} \overline{78} \overline{263} \overline{336}$   
 S.  $\overline{103} \overline{326} \overline{228} \overline{470} \overline{426} \overline{372} \overline{175}$   
 T.  $\overline{352} \overline{303} \overline{294} \overline{421} \overline{87}$   
 U.  $\overline{147} \overline{223} \overline{99} \overline{327}$   
 V.  $\overline{161} \overline{333} \overline{210} \overline{89} \overline{398} \overline{323} \overline{472} \overline{248} \overline{6} \overline{416}$   
 W.  $\overline{104} \overline{221} \overline{81} \overline{313} \overline{437}$   
 X.  $\overline{11} \overline{384} \overline{252} \overline{177} \overline{423} \overline{73} \overline{331}$   
 Y.  $\overline{117} \overline{66} \overline{226} \overline{193} \overline{380} \overline{273} \overline{418} \overline{91}$   
 Z.  $\overline{163} \overline{305} \overline{112} \overline{227} \overline{94} \overline{440} \overline{261} \overline{321}$   
 AA.  $\overline{371} \overline{20} \overline{466} \overline{239} \overline{301} \overline{88} \overline{201} \overline{135}$   
 AB.  $\overline{47} \overline{450} \overline{233} \overline{186}$

What juries do when gloves don't fit your mitt;  
 To tout connections ("Mr. Big sent me");  
 A gossip you might trust to spill the tea;  
 Unpunctual punks might flunk because of it;  
 A trickster god of commerce, [[AB]]s, and travel;  
 How oil slicks look by nature, CDs intentionally;  
 Where [[X]] was told to go (Tom Swift, conventionally);  
 When [[AE]]s meet to trade good yarns and cavil;  
 By what you see the silv'ry moon at night;  
 Greeting from a yogi's acolyte;  
 French philosopher who wrote *The Plague*;  
 To be (compared to something else) less light;  
 One whose recollection's never vague;  
 These letters help prevent a math mistake;

AC.  $\overline{345} \overline{391} \overline{54} \overline{149} \overline{463} \overline{234}$   
 AD.  $\overline{22} \overline{354} \overline{208} \overline{185} \overline{455} \overline{122} \overline{304} \overline{389}$   
 AE.  $\overline{358} \overline{61} \overline{295} \overline{190} \overline{24}$   
 AF.  $\overline{181} \overline{253} \overline{452} \overline{46} \overline{189} \overline{344} \overline{85} \overline{278} \overline{154}$   
 AG.  $\overline{397} \overline{436} \overline{218} \overline{188} \overline{59} \overline{330}$   
 AH.  $\overline{31} \overline{131} \overline{467} \overline{92} \overline{361} \overline{197} \overline{232} \overline{167} \overline{297} \overline{406}$   
 AI.  $\overline{454} \overline{244} \overline{32} \overline{174} \overline{369} \overline{417} \overline{158}$   
 AJ.  $\overline{200} \overline{9} \overline{425} \overline{160} \overline{173} \overline{259} \overline{129}$   
 AK.  $\overline{64} \overline{377} \overline{111} \overline{435} \overline{260} \overline{216} \overline{365} \overline{171}$   
 AL.  $\overline{50} \overline{429} \overline{113} \overline{258} \overline{341} \overline{367} \overline{151}$   
 AM.  $\overline{251} \overline{51} \overline{393} \overline{90} \overline{286}$   
 AN.  $\overline{146} \overline{250} \overline{79} \overline{396} \overline{432} \overline{93} \overline{220} \overline{312}$   
 AO.  $\overline{404} \overline{275} \overline{132} \overline{2} \overline{474} \overline{355} \overline{155} \overline{390} \overline{203}$   
 AP.  $\overline{134} \overline{28} \overline{318} \overline{242} \overline{448} \overline{438}$

Sounds like a carnival, but no, it's carnal;  
 Values (outliers too) logged by scale or ruler;  
 Who burns you, ere you face damnation 'tarnal;  
 Beneath this on a sunny day it's cooler;  
 One whose parts may one day get reused;  
 Gussie's favorite clade of salamander;  
 Joins two lengths of steel so that they're fused;  
 Unswayable (won't give in, flip, or pander);  
 Equivalent, or might as well be, [to];  
 Demigod fresh off his dozenth feat;  
 Slang you shout before you hurl or toss;  
 It's labeled "Hank Chief" instead of "Hugo Boss";  
 (Stereotypically) weakest or most effete;  
 A bell's done this, and ladders have a few;

AQ.  $\overline{460} \overline{424} \overline{148} \overline{42} \overline{207} \overline{351}$   
 AR.  $\overline{16} \overline{413} \overline{272} \overline{356} \overline{76} \overline{315} \overline{237}$   
 AS.  $\overline{324} \overline{169} \overline{430} \overline{314} \overline{419} \overline{245} \overline{3} \overline{360} \overline{70} \overline{126} \overline{202}$   
 AT.  $\overline{67} \overline{387} \overline{106} \overline{43} \overline{378} \overline{222} \overline{184} \overline{119} \overline{456}$   
 AU.  $\overline{283} \overline{457} \overline{217} \overline{136} \overline{52} \overline{101} \overline{328} \overline{382} \overline{68} \overline{96}$   
 AV.  $\overline{316} \overline{124} \overline{34} \overline{449} \overline{267}$   
 AW.  $\overline{271} \overline{142} \overline{27} \overline{285} \overline{347}$   
 AX.  $\overline{401} \overline{123} \overline{187} \overline{36} \overline{133} \overline{268} \overline{235} \overline{434} \overline{334}$   
 AY.  $\overline{414} \overline{19} \overline{213} \overline{238} \overline{343} \overline{362} \overline{121} \overline{453} \overline{127} \overline{30}$   
 AZ.  $\overline{138} \overline{82} \overline{386} \overline{212} \overline{428} \overline{105} \overline{264} \overline{74}$   
 BA.  $\overline{25} \overline{408} \overline{8} \overline{296}$   
 BB.  $\overline{230} \overline{29} \overline{18} \overline{114} \overline{475} \overline{366} \overline{257} \overline{307}$   
 BC.  $\overline{431} \overline{399} \overline{476} \overline{116} \overline{12} \overline{400} \overline{338} \overline{246} \overline{166} \overline{383}$   
 BD.  $\overline{282} \overline{55} \overline{144} \overline{412}$

Sack in stack to stop flood flowing through;  
 Sound produced by striking metal bar;  
 Atmospheric setting for cigar;  
 Existential tension for [[AM]];  
 Though it's called "hayfever," this causes nasal drips;  
 What a mama mammal does, to earn the name;  
 Bygone Brooklyn ballpark of Dodgers fame;  
 When the Grim Reaper scythes you, what Death grips;  
 Peninsula due south of San Diego;  
 He rows, but lets the cox decide where they go;  
 One whose tailor rarely gets an order;  
 "Northerner," to one South of the Border;  
 Current events? (they'll put an [[BN]] through it);  
 Candle substance made from rendered suet.

BE.  $\overline{165} \overline{128} \overline{464} \overline{72} \overline{157} \overline{5} \overline{375}$   
 BF.  $\overline{281} \overline{7} \overline{153} \overline{461} \overline{65}$   
 BG.  $\overline{415} \overline{130} \overline{225} \overline{17} \overline{140} \overline{300} \overline{442}$   
 BH.  $\overline{139} \overline{120} \overline{364} \overline{451} \overline{409} \overline{62}$   
 BI.  $\overline{4} \overline{205} \overline{468} \overline{284} \overline{394} \overline{41} \overline{291}$   
 BJ.  $\overline{108} \overline{256} \overline{26} \overline{368} \overline{1} \overline{411} \overline{302} \overline{395}$   
 BK.  $\overline{143} \overline{198} \overline{84} \overline{276} \overline{33} \overline{178}$   
 BL.  $\overline{13} \overline{196} \overline{168} \overline{420} \overline{40}$   
 BM.  $\overline{141} \overline{441} \overline{265} \overline{180}$   
 BN.  $\overline{348} \overline{262} \overline{60} \overline{363} \overline{443} \overline{159} \overline{206}$   
 BO.  $\overline{231} \overline{322} \overline{170} \overline{374} \overline{249} \overline{14}$   
 BP.  $\overline{241} \overline{288} \overline{370} \overline{274} \overline{422} \overline{37} \overline{445}$   
 BQ.  $\overline{433} \overline{280} \overline{45} \overline{247} \overline{319} \overline{357}$   
 BR.  $\overline{58} \overline{35} \overline{23} \overline{115} \overline{392} \overline{308}$

## FOXEN IN THE HENHICE

Richard Lederer  
San Diego  
verbivore.com

Recently I undertook an extensive study of American dialects, and a friend told me about a farmer named Eben Pluribus who spoke a most unusual kind of English. So I went to visit Farmer Pluribus, and here is a transcript of our interview:

“Mr. Pluribus, I hear that you’ve had some trouble on the farm.”

“Well, young fella, times were hard for a spell. Almost every night them danged foxen were raiding my henhice.”

“Excuse me, sir,” I interjected. “Don’t you mean *foxes*?”

“Nope, I don’t,” Pluribus replied. “I use oxen to plow my fields, so it’s foxen that I’m trying to get rid of.”

“I see. But what are *henhice*?” I asked.

“Easy. One mouse, two mice; one henhouse, two henhice. You must be one of them city slickers, but surely you know that henhice are what them birds live in and that, when they’re little critters, they utter all them peep.”

“I think I’m beginning to understand you, Mr. Pluribus. But don’t you mean *peeps*?”

“Nope, I mean *peep*. More than one sheep is a flock of sheep, and more than one peep is a bunch of peep. What do you think I am, one of them old ceet?”

“I didn’t mean to insult you, sir,” I gulped. “But I can’t quite make out what you’re saying.”

“Then you must be a touch slow in the head,” Farmer Pluribus shot back. “One foot, two feet; one coot, two ceet. I’m just trying to easify the English language, so I make all regular plural nouns irregular. Once they’re all irregular, then it’s just the same like they’re all regular.”

“Makes perfect sense to me,” I mumbled.

“Good boy! exclaimed Pluribus, and a gleam came into his eyes. “Now, as I was trying to explain, them pesky foxen made such a fuss that all the meese and lynges have gone north.

“Aha!” I shouted. “You’re talking about those big antlered animals, aren’t you? One goose, two geese; one moose, a herd of meese. And lynges is truly elegant — one sphinx, a row of sphinges; one lynx, a litter of lynges.”

“You’re a smart fella, sonny,” smiled Pluribus. “You see, I used to think that my cose might scare away them foxen, but the cose were too danged busy chasing rose.”

“Oh, oh. You’ve lost me again,” I lamented. “What are *cose* and *rose*?”

“Guess you ain’t so smart after all,” Pluribus sneered. “If *those* is the plural of *that*, then *cose* and *rose* got to be the plurals of *cat* and *rat*.”

“Sorry that I’m so thick, but I’m really not one of those people who talk through their hose,” I apologized, picking up Pluribus’s cue. “Could you please tell me what happened to the foxen in your henhice?”

“I’d be pleased to,” answered Pluribus. “What happened was that my brave wife, Una, grabbed one of them frying pen and took off after them foxen.”

I wondered for a moment what frying pen were and soon realized that because the plural of *man* is *men*, the plural of *pan* had to be *pen*.

“Well, Pluribus went right on talking, “the missus wasn’t able to catch them foxen, so she went back to the kitchen and began throwing dish and some freshly baked pice at them critters.” That part of the story stumped me for a time, until I reasoned that a school of fish is just more than one fish and more than one die makes a roll of dice, so Una Pluribus must have grabbed a stack of dishes and pies.

Pluribus never stopped. “Them dish and pice sure scarified them foxen, and the pests never came back. In fact, the rest of the village heard about what my wife did, and they were so proud that they sent the town band out to the farm to serenade her with tubae, harmonicae, accordia, fives, and dra.”

“Hold up!” I gasped. “Give me a minute to figure out those musical instruments. The plural of *formula* is *formulae*, so the plurals of *tuba* and *harmonica* must be *tubae* and *harmonicae*. And the plural of *phenomenon* is *phenomena*, so the plural of *accordion* must be *accordia*.”

“You must be one of them genii,” Pluribus exclaimed.

“Maybe,” I blushed. One *alumnus*, an association of *alumni*, so one *genius*, a seminar of *genii*. But let me get back to those instruments. The plural of *wife* is *wives*, so the plural of *fife* must be *fives*. And the plural of *medium* is *media*, so the plural of *drum* must be *dra*. Whew! That last one was tough.”

“Good boy, sonny. Well, my wife done such a good job of chasing away them foxen that the town newspaper printed up a story and ran a couple of photographim of her holding them pen, dish, and pice.”

My brain was now spinning in high gear, so it took me but an instant to realize that Farmer Pluribus had regularized one of the most exotic plurals in the English language — *seraph*,

*seraphim*, so *photograph*, *photographim*. I could imagine all those Pluribi bathing in their bathtubim, as in *cherub*, *cherubim*; *bathtub*, *bathtubim*.

“Well,” crowed Pluribus. “I was mighty pleased that everybody was so nice to the missus, but that ain’t no surprise since folks in these here parts show a lot of respect for their methren.”

“*Brother, brethren; mother, methren,*” I rejoined. “That thought makes me want to cry. Have you any boxen of Kleenices here?”

“Sure do, young fella. And I’m tickled pink that you’ve caught on to the way I’ve easified the English language. One ox, two oxen, so one box, two boxen. One index, two indices, so one Kleenex, two Kleenices. Makes things simpler, don’t it?” ■

## THE PUNNIT WORDPLAY GAMESHOW PODCAST AND OTHER WORD MASHUP CHALLENGES

Gregg Siegel  
gregg17@comcast.net

Many wordplay aficionados were probably first introduced to the concept of word mashups by the “Before & After” categories on the gameshow *Jeopardy*. One of the most commonly deployed, most popular and arguably most clever and laugh-provoking *Jeopardy* features, “Before & After” presents a word puzzle where two famous phrases, titles, or names overlap, with the end of the first word or phrase becoming the start of the next.

For example, one might be prompted with “The capital city of Arkansas that doubles as a crystalline sugar treat on a string” to respond “Little Rock Candy;” “Paul McCartney's Bond theme plays as Bruce Willis fights off bad guys at the Nakatomi Building” to get “Live and Let Die Hard;” or “Hollandaise-laden breakfast entree known as a traitor in the United States” to return “Eggs Benedict Arnold.”

The show presents the concept in its general knowledge “Before & After” form, as well as in many more targeted categories such as “Shakespeare Before & After” “Pop Culture Before & After,” and “Movies Before & After,” as well as in a number of twist variants.

In the world of the major pun competitions, including the O. Henry Pun-Off World Championships, The PUNDERDOME® in New York, Washington D.C.’s PUN DMV and Always Punny in Philadelphia, this type of pun-adjacent wordplay, unlike, for example, the occasional spoonerism, does not usually fit well into general live show formats of punning on specific words (cues) in specific categories (prompts).

It can be noted that in a related offshoot, in the popular, fun and versatile PUNDERDOME® Card Game, many advanced punners do in fact use the cards in this manner for a tangential pun challenge, in addition to also using them for practice and training purposes. The traditional way to play this home game is to combine the card prompts thematically into a sentence or story, but many advanced players also will use them to create Before & After-type word mashups. For example, if one picks the cards “Composers” and “Food,” one might usually play their turn by saying something like “Who is your favorite composer? Some people like Beethoven, but me, I’m a Bach lover” (baklava). Alternatively, players could decide to go the mashup route and compete with word smushes such as “Chopancakes” (Chopin + Pancakes), “Haydnner Rolls” (Haydn + Dinner Rolls) or Beethovenison (Beethoven + Venison).

However, there is an online pun game show that focuses *specifically* on this type of highly enjoyable, funny and challenging wordplay. Punnit, produced in the U.K. by Tom Kwei, a prolific pod culture podcaster and wordplay enthusiast, is a competitive online gameshow where guests are tasked with smashing two completely disparate concepts together to create funny mashups, often referred to as *punnits*. Through more than 80 episodes and counting, audio-only at first and currently video, intriguing and juicy wordplay-worthy category combinations have included:

FURNITURE & SHAKESPEARE  
FAMILY GUY & GREEK FOOD  
JAPAN & MOVIE GENRES  
SPORTS & AFRICAN CAPITALS  
SEA CREATURES & BOOKS  
PLAYWRIGHTS & CHOCOLATE BARS  
THE BEATLES & WEATHER  
AMERICAN PRESIDENTS & ROCK BANDS  
SAMUEL L. JACKSON FILMS & MATHS TERMS  
JAMES BOND FILMS & FISH  
TOM CRUISE FILMS & COLOURS  
HORROR FILMS & DESSERTS  
STEPHEN KING & SPORTS

I have had the pleasure of being a participant on the show several times over the past few years. It is held on Zoom or a similar platform and recorded for later editing and release. For each episode, competitors are given, a few days in advance, two sets of categories to mash up. They are usually allowed to use as creative fodder any term associated with the category, casting a fairly wide and fertile net. In my opinion, the purest mashups, merging one word directly into the other, make the best punnits, but contestants can also use rhyme, similar sounding words, homophones, homonyms, word-deconstruction and other devices from the pun construction toolbox to compose their submissions. Competitors can use not only phrases but also individual words to make the smush.

The show's format has evolved and changed slightly over the run, but, generally, each of three competitors presents one prepared mashup in turn from the first set of categories, from which Mr. Kwei will immediately select the one he believes to be most funny or clever. This continues for five rounds for each of the two sets. In addition, there is a challenging freestyle "lightning round," in which new, as yet unheard category combinations are announced, and participants must instantly create a mashup in seconds on the fly. These are also judged by Mr. Kwei, with points awarded, and as in *Final Jeopardy*, this round can often turn around the results of the main game. Of note, lightning round challenges might often "crosspollinate" the mashups, combining one from one of the original assigned sets and one from the other. After these three rounds, the participant with the most points is declared the winner of the episode.

Of course, one might expect that the main rounds, where careful preparation, polishing and vetting of selections is the norm, would generate the best mashups, and that is likely the case, but the exciting improv vibe of the lightning rounds with so little time allowed for creativity can also lead to the creation of some surprising gems pulled out of the air. Indeed, my crafting of "Lee TreviNOFX" for a GOLF & PUNK BANDS lightning round, crosspollinated category mashup, and "BarbieQSauce" in a CONDIMENTS & TOYS challenge stand as some of my favorite constructions I created for the game. But, of course, there are also many other examples of my coming up with little more than gibberish in the scant time allotted.

Prep for the show, at least the process used by this writer, consists of developing lists of words associated with each topic, with this background material readily found on the Internet at various

sites, and then studying the lists looking for juicy punnit-creating mashup opportunities, focusing most strongly on the opening and closing syllable sounds of each word or phrase on the list.

An added bonus of this research is the educational opportunities provided; for example, in the ancient Egypt category, I learned of the havoc that weevils caused to ancient granaries, with weevil remains found in excavated archeological sites, as well as the fact that ancient Egyptians pioneered self-glazing quartz materials, hence the inclusion of some of those associations in the examples below. And of course, the opportunity to revisit the enjoyable oeuvres of the various bands, actors or authors mentioned in many categories is a plus as well.

Readers might intuit that one would need to prepare more than five mashups for each game, as there is always the possibility that someone going before you will “steal” one of your offerings, usually one of your favorites, causing you to quickly scramble to your next choice. With so many creative competitors mining similar raw material, this can and does happen frequently, and I have had many of my darlings presented out from other me, as I’m sure I have done to others as well.

Readers might also note some of the challenges inherent in international play, with, for example, “British Prime Ministers” being less familiar to Americans, and “NBA Teams” being less familiar to residents of the U.K. However, as long as these are kept to the main game, where preparation and research is done anyway, as opposed to the lightning rounds, this is not usually too much of a problem. Also potentially problematic can be product knowledge categories that include commodities such as Car Brands or Shoe Brands or Candy Brands, where specific brands may not be internationally universal. I, and I’m sure others, have learned to be sure to include searches specifically on *British* (or *American*, as the case may be) brands of these and other commodities when doing research to ensure familiarity and representation during gameplay. In fact, I would argue that striving to make local references while a “guest” in someone else’s country in just good manners anyway.

For wordplay fans, here is a selection of mashups I have written in preparation for some of the episodes of Punnit I have been on, most actually presented on the shows, and some “stolen” by others or otherwise held in reserve. Note that since they are coinages meant to be spoken, written presentation and “proper” spelling can be subjective.

## **THE MILITARY & AMERICAN COMEDIANS**

Kevin Hartillery  
Roseanne Barbedwire  
Dave Chappellephants  
George Carlinfrantry  
Amy Schumerines  
Bill Burrgade  
CorporAL Franken  
David Lettermaneuvers



## **GERMANY & NICHOLAS CAGE FILMS**

Con Aryan  
Fast Times at Ridgemont Heidleberg  
Lord of Warsaw Pact  
Leaving Las Vegasessen  
Rhine Valley Girl

## **PASTA & SPORTS STADIUMS**

Mannicotton Bowl  
BowTieger Stadium  
Spaghetti O's Park at Camden Yards  
LasanYakima Sun Dome  
Orzohio Stadium

## **PERIODIC ELEMENTS & VIDEO GAME CONSOLES**

BahWiiUm  
Nitrogenesis  
Odysseylenium  
Xboxxygen  
Colecobalt  
Sagallium  
SonyNeon  
Panasonickel

## **ROBIN WILLIAMS FILMS & GOLF**

Dead Poet's SocieTEE off  
Caddylac Man  
The Birdiecase  
Arnold PalMERry Freakin Christmas  
Hole in One Hour Photo  
Night At the Museagle  
Arnold PalmRV  
Back Nine Months  
Lie-sence to Wed

## **SHOE BRANDS & PUNK BANDS**

Doc Martenpole Tudor  
AvenEW York Dolls  
Jimmy ChooSie and the Banchees  
Dr. Schollny Ones  
New BalAnts (Adam's backup band)

Conversetiff Little Fingers  
Talking Keds  
Camper Vans Beethoven  
Nine Westerberg (Paul from The Replacements)  
Jimmy Choosker Du

## **NBA TEAMS & PHILOSOPHERS**

The Phoenix Sun-Tzus  
PlaTOronto Raptors  
Friedrich NietzCHicago Bulls  
Henry David Thoreauklahoma City Thunder  
Confuciouston Rockets  
Milwaukee Bucksminster Fuller  
Henri Balzacremnto Kings  
Ayn Randiana Pacers  
Atlanta Hawkings

## **EUROPEAN CITIES & PARTS OF THE BODY**

Penistanbul  
Calaisbia  
Versaillesinuses  
Birminghamstring  
MykoNose  
Barcelulna  
Brightonsils  
Parwrist

## **QUEEN & ANCIENT EGYPT**

Tie Your Mummy Down  
Weevill Rock You  
Glazing on a Sunday Afternoon  
Rosetta Stone Cold Crazy  
Lily of The Valley of The Kings  
Who Wants to Live Pharoahever  
Keep Yusef Alive  
John Deconopic Jar

## **HAND TO HAND COMBAT & ASIAN COUNTRIES**

Taiwando  
Afghanistanding dropkick  
Kazhookstan—Left Kazhookstan and Right Kazhookstan

Bahrain Damage  
Nepalooka  
Georgious George  
Weigh Indonesia

## **GIRLS NAMES & EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

Carlatvia  
Germandy  
UKatie  
Portiagal  
Eleanorway  
IsaBella Rus  
Andorrothy  
Great Brittany  
Serbiatrice  
Ann Marino

## **CAR BRANDS & BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS**

Mercedes Benzimen Disraeli  
Cadillac Neville Chamberlain  
Ford Winstar Churchill  
William Lambergini  
Tony Belair  
Dodge Ramsay Macdonald  
Arthur Balfourd  
Archibald Primrose Royce  
Theresa Mayserati

Wordplay fan, many thousands of other mashups/punnits/before & afters await you, many much better than these, through the archives of Punnit shows available online. You can check out past episodes of Punnit on different podcast apps such as Apple Podcasts, Castbox, PlayerFM, and, although availability may vary, especially with some of the older audio only episodes, they are, in my opinion, all worth seeking out. And, of course, subscribe and keep an eye out for new ones as they appear. Some direct links include:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@thepunpodcast>

<https://www.youtube.com/@thepunpodcast>

<https://open.spotify.com/show/327XlvPmn3QbgmpESWEaoA?si=29bcd53911604f26>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/punnit-wordplay-gameshow-podcast/id1743663781> ■

## NEWFOUND EARLIEST CROSSWORDS

Daniel Galef

*First, a caveat: trying to identify the first ever crossword puzzle is a bit like trying to identify the first novel (Cervantes? Murasaki? Apuleius?) or the first science fiction story (Verne? Shelley? Swift? Lucien?). Crosswords evolved over decades from the confluence of multiple sources and we can draw the line at many different points depending on what definition we use. But the working definition of a crossword puzzle I'll use here—a clued word square—I believe is sound and avoids the problems produced by other proposed definitions. The first draft of this started off with a lengthy justification of this definition, but this was distracting and so is left for an appendix I may or may not write.*

I credit T Campbell's excellent series of articles/blog posts on the history of the crossword puzzle, which I first read in the pages of this journal two years ago, as setting me off down this rabbit hole. Particularly I was fascinated by the first installment, in Issue #7, covering the puzzle's early history, which in other crossword books and articles is often glossed over.

The development of the crossword feels a little like the invention of gunpowder in how the ingredients were all around independently waiting to be finally combined. Basically, people have been composing word squares and coming up with riddles for thousands of years, and several awfully crossword-like word puzzles (charades, double-acrostics, enigmas) are popular throughout much of the 1800s, but we don't get true crosswords until two things happen: there is a popular craze for composing word squares in the 1850s, which is then followed by the first *clued* word squares in 1872/1873, turning the exercise into a puzzle by shifting the source of amusement from coming up with the words yourself to working out the words the puzzle setter came up with.

These earliest crosswords were not as big or as geometrically complex as the modern version of the puzzle. The solution was a solid word square with no gaps or black squares separating multiple words in the same row or column. But all the mechanics are present: you solve a series of clues to work out the interlocking words running across and down such that solving one word gives you individual letters in yet unsolved perpendicular words as a hint. Some proposed "firsts" earlier than this do not fit these criteria in glaring ways: the letters do not form a grid, or not all the letters are checked (part of both an across and a down), or the "crossword" is not a puzzle at all but just a clueless bunch of words published as interesting in its own right. Meanwhile the later developments, like a demand for negative space/black squares in the grid, seem like much appreciated improvements to the form but incidental to determining whether something counts as being one. If you're sitting on the train with your pen and paper thinking *What's a five-letter word for a collection of maps? Bearing in mind that I've already worked out that the fourth letter must be 'A' by solving a different clue . . .* then you are doing a crossword.

My curiosity was piqued by the long, inexplicable gap in between the fad for squaring words and the first crossword puzzle in 1872/1873. Campbell's documentation of early developments is scrupulous and thorough, but ultimately recognizes the impossibility of confidently asserting that the earliest crossword he cites is in fact the earliest one to have been printed: "I don't have the resources to claim whether that was genuinely the first of its kind, but a lot of interesting crossed-word constructions were happening in that period." Looking for more info on this era, I read other crossword books,<sup>1</sup> as well as articles on nineteenth-century non-crossword word puzzles.<sup>2</sup>



Campbell's reconstructed grid from *St. Nicholas*.

Something I began to notice was that a magazine called *St. Nicholas* was cited as the source for several of the earliest milestones: A word diamond published in its pages in 1875, Will Shortz notes in his 1988 *Games Magazine* article "Is This the World's First Crossword?," was recognized as such by Guinness World Records. Campbell in his book notes an earlier example of a palindromic diamond-shaped crossword in a *Saint Nicholas* issue from 1874, as well as a later "double word square" whose appearance more closely resembles the modern shape of the puzzle in 1876. Scans of a "primal acrostic" published in its pages in 1873 are featured on the Wikipedia entry for acrostic puzzles.

So I phoned up *St. Nicholas* and asked the editor if their crossword puzzle composer from 1873 still worked there.

Okay, no, not really, but I figured that if this magazine was such a significant contributor to the puzzling world, then it was a bit odd that nothing else was ever really said about it. It does not number among the Victorian periodicals that held some culturally significant station and

<sup>1</sup> I read Campbell's, from which the article series is adapted, as well as Adrienne Raphel's *Thinking Inside the Box*, Anna Shechtman's *The Riddles of the Sphinx*, and Natan Last's *Across the Universe*, which came out just last year (whom I was put onto by Professor Michael Griffith, my cowriter for the acrostic puzzle in this same issue, when he interviewed Last for the *Cincinnati Review* last year). These other books are fantastic, too, but they mostly ignore or gloss over the puzzle's early history, or, without ever offering a formal definition, implicitly use one that disqualifies the first half century of crossword puzzles (see appendix, which doesn't exist). Ben Tausig's *The Curious History of the Crossword* is a collection of 100 puzzles, with the first being from 1913. Ximenes wrote the standard cryptics handbook *On the Art of the Crossword* in 1966, which begins with an explicit assertion that it "will not attempt to give a detailed historical account of the coming of crossword puzzles. Such an account would be alien to the purpose of this book," that purpose being only to describe best practices of the craft as it then stood.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Will Shortz's incredible four-part article series in *Word Ways* in the 1970s chronicling "Early American Word Puzzles" and other old *Word Ways* investigations into the contemporary puzzle landscape such as Faith Eckler's "A Puzzling Past," A. Ross Eckler's "The First Double and Triple Acrostics?," and Susan Thorpe's "Acrostic Variations," all of which highlight the family of word puzzles that directly preceded and ultimately evolved into the crossword.

whose names we remember, like *The Strand* or *Household Words* or *Athenaeum*. And none of the crossword books or articles citing it said anything about it at all other than its name. For all the information given it might have been a dedicated puzzlers' magazine for bored Oxbridge dons, or a literary organ of the Aesthetic Movement that printed puzzles among its poems the way the *New Yorker* includes gag cartoons, or, given its name, a Catholic circular whose non-crossword-related content was limited to hardball interviews with Cardinal Manning and fiery denouncements of popular heresies. So it was a surprise to find, finally looking at the thing itself, this was basically the horse-and-buggy-era equivalent to *Highlights for Children*. (And maybe it is a good reminder not to get too obsessive about all this, historical mystery or no, to remember that it all began as just a children's amusement.)

The other interesting fact that comes of looking up *St. Nicholas* is that it was published from 1873 to 1943.

It is not really all that surprising that all these *St. Nicholas* citations don't go back further than 1873 if 1873 is simply the year the magazine came into existence! I decided to check out if other magazines were doing what *St. Nicholas* was before *St. Nicholas* popped up.

Major children's magazines of the previous decade were *The Youth's Companion* (1827–1929), *Our Young Folks* (1865–1873), and *The Little Corporal* (1865–1875). The latter two, in particular, seemed like likely spots to potentially discover the earliest crossword puzzle because they folded around the same time *St. Nicholas* was founded and “merged into” it, which makes it likely that *St. Nicholas* was a sort of successor to them in other ways, including potentially that there may have been overlap of staff, and that the early crossword puzzles appearing in *St. Nicholas* may have been continuing a practice already established in those earlier magazines. I started reading through old issues I could find on Google Books, Internet Archive, HathiTrust, and some university library sites<sup>3</sup> (not just for this investigative project but also for fun: the word games are genuinely enjoyable and I would love to see a resurgence of some of the forgotten puzzle forms like verse charades, acrostics, and numerical enigmas).<sup>4</sup>

Not every issue of every magazine is available, but I clicked at random on some issues from likely-seeming years (late 1860s and early 1870s) and noticed that, like *St. Nicholas*, they all had a dedicated puzzle section once per issue. *Our Young Folks*'s puzzle page was titled “Round the Evening Lamp.” *The Youth's Companion*'s was sometimes called “Nuts to Crack.” *The Little Corporal*'s was called “Private Queer's Knapsack” (!).

---

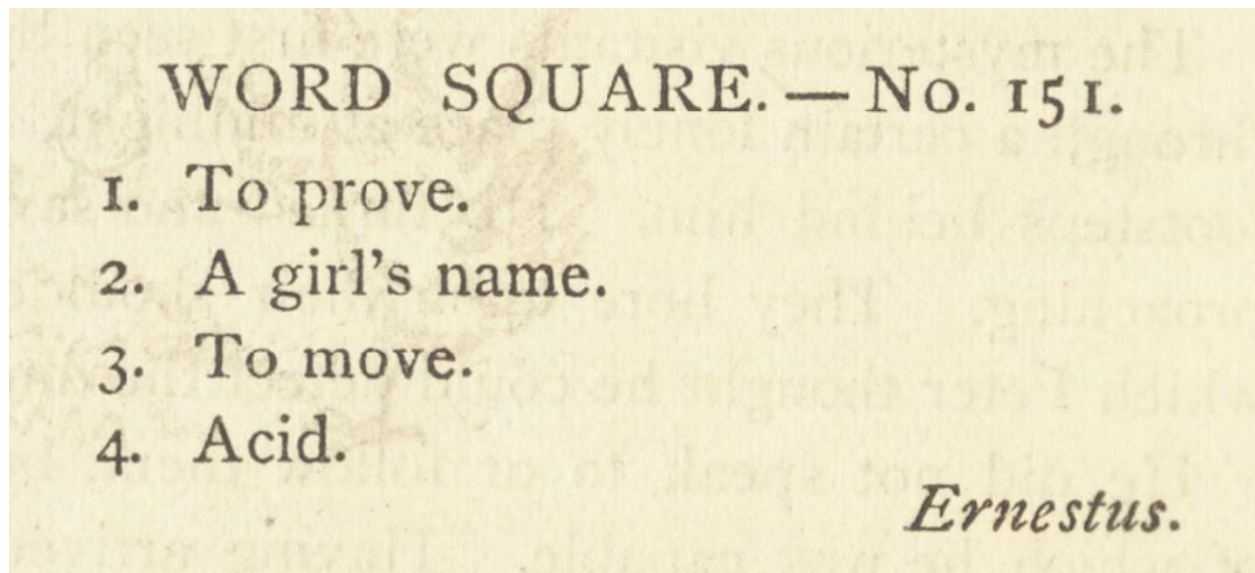
<sup>3</sup> I am extremely grateful to the University of Florida Digital Collections, from which the images in this article are taken. This is the second good turn UF has done me this year despite the fact that they are the primary athletic rivals of my own master's program institution, as I was already won over to the Gators' side for their buying my short story “Cassini Cuts Up” for the next issue of their literary journal *Subtropics*, forthcoming this summer.

<sup>4</sup> For more about these including a comprehensive taxonomy and examples galore, see the Frederick Planché book cited in T Campbell's article, *Guess Me*. Later I stumbled across Will Shortz's excellent article series from the 1970s in *Word Ways* chronicling “Early American Word Puzzles” and “British Word Puzzles,” which discuss them as well and bring up a lot of interesting points about their context and cultural history. The names are not always indicative: some of the “Enigma” puzzles are basically modern acrostics sans the actual acrostic part and are the real progenitors of the puzzle Asimov loved rather than the other puzzles named “Acrostic” at the time, like the “primal” one Wikipedia misleadingly features in the entry—confusingly, these are more closely an ancestor of crosswords!

After a while I forgot why I was doing this in the first place and got distracted becoming the world's best and only recreational solver of Victorian puzzles (I have a notebook filled with scratchwork from playing these; one notable feature of the puzzles in this era is that they were not accompanied by a published space for the solution to be written in, so you had to draw out the blanks or grid solution yourself).

And then I found it!

There, in the November 1872 installment of *The Evening Lamp*, couched among a gallimaufry of other puzzles with titles like "Anagram Blanks," "Curtailings," "Charade," "Enigmas," and "Metagram," were three puzzles (No. 151, No. 159, and No. 162) each titled "Word Square." Each one consisted of a series of four or five clues which could solve to a square of interlocking words.<sup>5</sup> Here, at last, were both ingredients simultaneously: the square, and the clues. A crossword.



*The first of the three November 1872 crosswords.*

---

<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, words that interlock *at every letter in every word* such that every letter is checked both horizontally and vertically and all letters sit on (all) the intersections of a perfect Cartesian grid, unlike double- and triple-acrostics where only some verticals count and there may be different numbers of letters in each non-aligning row.

WORD SQUARE. — No. 159.

1. A useful article.
2. A girl's name.
3. A blessing to travellers.
4. To whip.

*Carrie.*

WORD SQUARE. — No. 162.

An ancient country.

Expands.

Wants.

A country in Asia.

To try.

*Jack.*

*The second and third November 1872 crosswords.*

Apparently submitted by subscribers, the puzzles are signed "Ernestus," "Carrie," and "Jack." Beneath the puzzles are the solutions to the puzzles from the previous month, showing that the October issue had featured three crosswords, as well, which had not come up in the OCR search, so I set off to find earlier examples by trial and error.



## A N S W E R S .

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>128. Hitty Maginn.<br/>         129. Lincoln.<br/>         130. 1. St. Helena. 2. Cuba. 3. Porto Rico.<br/>         4. Hayti.<br/>         131. 1. Otter Creek. 2. Tennessee (10 e sea).<br/>         3. Onion. 4. Snake. 5. Pearl. 6. Tombigbee.<br/>         7. Yellowstone. 8. Cooper. 9. Red Cedar. 10. Elkhorn.<br/>         132. "Come into the garden, Maud." [(Comb) inn too) (th e)(gg Arden) (Maud).]<br/>         133. A little ewe (u) in trouble.<br/>         134. Maple Sugar.<br/>         135. Dolly Varden.<br/>         136. 1. Cork. 2. Albi. 3. Ayr. 4. Deal, lead, lea, ale. 5. Door, rood.<br/>         137. Senegal, Gambia, Senegambia.</p> | <p>138. P A R T S<br/>         A P A R T<br/>         R A T I O<br/>         T R I C K<br/>         S T O K E</p> <p>139. Baltimore.<br/>         140. Tombigbee.<br/>         141. Beau, bow; boar, bore; boast.<br/>         142. I O W A      143. B E A R<br/>         O R A L      E Z R A<br/>         W A F T      A R M Y<br/>         A L T O      R A Y S</p> <p>144. Buffalo.<br/>         145. Antelope.<br/>         146. United we stand, divided we fall. [(Unit ed) (wee stand) (divided we) (fawl).]</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Answers from the October 1872 issue.*

Before that, in April 1872, not in the puzzles section at all but rather on the letters page, a subscriber has sent in a word square they have composed and the editors have taken it upon themselves to turn it *into* a puzzle by writing clues for it and printing those instead of the actual square.<sup>6</sup> And before that, in February, an 11-year-old child had contributed a six-by-six crossword (*not* in verse, but don't be too hard on the kid).

*E. Grace Shreve* sends the "Letter Box" a word square, which we put into rhyme as follows:—

My first before our friends is spread;  
 My second troubles many a head;  
 My third confronts the battle dread;  
 My next are plain and fancy too;  
 My fifth appoints a rendezvous.

Who can reconstruct it?

*Letter from April 1872.*

<sup>6</sup> And in verse, too!—another common feature of this era of puzzles that I adore is how almost-expected it was for puzzles to be written in rhyme and meter, as if they were worthy as a piece of writing of care being given both to form and content, as if it mattered for the list of instructions to be not merely functional machines for the working out of the answer but themselves objects of some small aesthetic value, that the reader ought to derive some pleasure from reading them even before they are solved.

## WORD SQUARE. — No. 23.

1. A kind of currency in use in the United States.
2. Decorated.
3. Noses.
4. One of the signs of the zodiac.
5. To put in tune.
6. Smaller.

*Lyndsay M. Brown, age 11 years.*

*From February 1872.*

Actually, it seemed I had not been ambitious enough just focusing on 1872. Flipping through the issues of that year made it obvious that crosswords were already commonplace and popular, and almost every issue I found one in showed, in the answers section, more having been printed previously, so I went back further and stopped noting every one found.

Crosswords get less frequent in 1871 and then eventually, they stop showing up in 1870, even though the magazine was around for half a decade prior, which is strong indication that this is an actual starting point of a new thing being introduced and then slowly catching on. I kept following the word squares back, some clued and some not, issue by issue, and eventually found what I believe to be the first crossword published in the magazine:

The *Evening Lamp* puzzles section for the August 1870 issue of *Our Young Folks* contains, in order, two charades in verse, two illustrated rebuses solving to short verse quotations, a riddle, also in verse, and three more prosaic rebuses—fairly standard and representative of the puzzle pages for the issues leading up to it. The September 1870 issue of the same contains a similar lineup (following a panto Cinderella playscript): a charade, an illustrated rebus, a puzzle entitled “buried cities” involving words hidden inside of other words (now a common species of cryptic crossword clue which Ximenes names Hiddens), an enigma, an illustrated rebus, a puzzle titled simply “Puzzle” (of a form that in other issues is sometimes ambiguously also called an “enigma”) . . . and then, finally, Puzzle. No. 82, titled “Word Square.”

## ILLUSTRATED REBUS.—No. 80.



Hitty Maginn.

## PUZZLE.

No. 81.

- |                                                  |                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| My <i>first</i> is in song, but not in hymn.     | My <i>seventh</i> is in stone, but not in rock. |
| My <i>second</i> is in stitch, but not in seam.  | My <i>eighth</i> is in pier, but not in dock.   |
| My <i>third</i> is in mound, but not in cave.    | My <i>ninth</i> is in almond, but not in nut.   |
| My <i>fourth</i> is in prince, but not in knave. | My <i>tenth</i> is in house, but not in hut.    |
| My <i>fifth</i> is in steal, but not in rob.     | My <i>eleventh</i> is in cent, but not in dime. |
| My <i>sixth</i> is in weep, but not in sob.      | My <i>whole</i> is the name of a nursery rhyme. |

A. F. D.

No. 82.

## WORD SQUARE.

(These words read *the same*, either across or from the top to the bottom.)

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. A collection of maps. | 4. Sour substances. |
| 2. An impression.        | 5. Understanding.   |
| 3. A language.           |                     |

L. B. H.

## ILLUSTRATED REBUS.—No. 83.



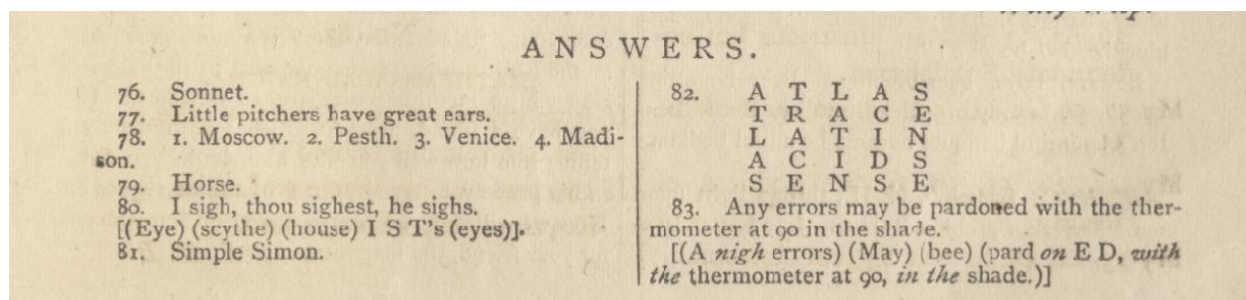
F. C. O.

## ANSWERS.

- |                                                                                                |                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 68. Pilgrimage.                                                                                | 72. Answer by W. H. C., Langdon, N. H. :—                                           |
| 69. Warlock.                                                                                   | First he drew <i>five Times</i> , you see,                                          |
| 70. "A simple maiden in her flower<br>Is worth a hundred coats of arms."                       | And then he made a <i>tar</i> for <i>T</i> ;                                        |
| [(Ace imp ell) (maiden <i>in</i> HER) (flower) (is) (W<br>earth) (a hundred) (coats of arms).] | Now who would think he meant to say<br>That <i>five times eight are forty</i> , eh? |
| 71. River.                                                                                     | 73. Because it is a <i>Salt</i> with intent to kill.                                |
|                                                                                                | 74. Fisher's Hornpipe.                                                              |
|                                                                                                | 75. Altar.                                                                          |

The September 1870 puzzle page.

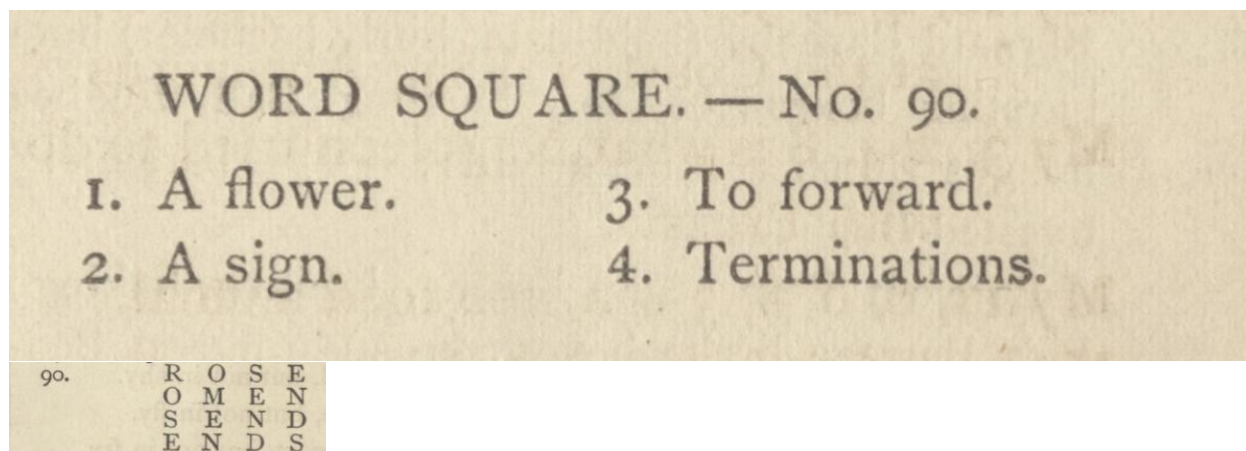




*Answers to the September 1870 puzzles, published in the following issue (October 1870).*

The brief description of the puzzle published along with it, in contrast to all other puzzles in the section and later word squares simply labeled “a word square” with no further explanation needed, further indicates that the magazine is introducing to the reader something new with which, unlike acrostics and charades and rebuses, they are not expected to be already familiar.

The crossword is signed *L.B.H.* and consists of five clues. (The clues resemble acrostic clues and riddles already common, which is to say that they resemble the later 1870s crossword clues Campbell finds so frustrating for their vagueness in comparison to modern clues.) The actual five-by-five word square, its solution, was published in the puzzle page of the next issue, that of October 1870 . . . and so was, just above it, a second set of crossword clues (sans explanation). Evidently the first puzzle had been popular with readers.



*The second crossword, one month later.*

The November issue featured a third (and the first to have its clues set in verse!). In December *L.B.H.* sends another, and a craze is cemented. Overall, a dozen or so crosswords were printed in the *Evening Lamp* prior to the founding of *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1873, making it much more understandable how the latter was apparently publishing earth-shaking puzzle innovations from its very first issue.

## WORD SQUARE. — No. 98.

My *first* a blessed Christian grace,  
 My *second* may describe a face,  
 My *third* the milk-maid bears aloft,  
 My *fourth* a girl's name, sweet and soft.  
*E.*

98.    H O P E  
       O V A L  
       P A I L  
       E L L A

*The third (and first versified) discovery.*

I am not under the impression that this is a particularly earthshaking discovery, but I have done my best to convince myself that it is, and if anyone out there will appreciate it, I hope it is the readership of this magazine! More than anything I welcome this spurring someone better at research than I to go digging and for me to be bested when one of you finds some earlier crossword from 1869, so that I have to go and find one from 1868 to restore my honor, and so on. Meanwhile, I will be starting a campaign (donate via the link printed in the appendix that does not exist) to mandate that all crossword setters go back to composing their puzzles in rhyming verse.

Transcript of the earliest puzzle I found, in the September and October 1870 issues of the magazine *Our Young Folks*:

## WORD SQUARE

(These words read *the same*, either across or from the top to the bottom.)

- |                          |  |                     |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 1. A collection of maps. |  | 4. Sour substances. |
| 2. An impression.        |  | 5. Understanding.   |
| 3. A language.           |  |                     |

*L. B. H.*

ANSWERS.

A T L A S  
 T R A C E  
 L A T I N  
 A C I D S  
 S E N S E

## SMALLEST ANAGRAMS AND PANAGRAMS FROM THEMATIC WORD LISTS

Michael Keith

A recent article in this journal [1] considered the following problem: given a thematic list of words or names (such as, say, the names of the chemical elements or the constellations), what's the smallest subset of that list which makes a pangram? For the current list of world country names, for instance, the answer is six, and the solution is unique if we also require that the number of letters be as small as possible (50 in this case):

*Bosnia and Herzegovina Cyprus Fiji Iraq Kuwait Luxembourg*

Multi-word entries, such as *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, are, of course, allowed in a list, and we'll use the term *item* for each entry in a list, since it can be either a single word or multiple words.

In this article we explore two similar challenges involving anagrams:

**(1) List Anagrams.** In a list anagram, one group of  $n$  different items from the list is identified, along with a second group of  $n$  items (all different, and all different from the items in the first group), such that the combined items in the first group are an anagram of the items in the second group. Again, the goal is to find the smallest such anagram constructible using a given list. For instance, the country names contain anagrams as small as  $n = 2$ , such as

*Belarus + India = Liberia + Sudan.*

In this article we only consider *balanced* anagrams, where the number of items on each side of the equation are equal. Unbalanced anagrams also raise interesting questions, such as “what's the most unbalanced an anagram can be for this list?,” but we'll leave that topic for future study. The number of items on each side of the equation will be denoted by  $n$ .

**(2) List Panagrams.** This combines the two previous concepts, by asking for a list anagram that's also a full pangram. The combination of a pangram and an anagram suggests the obvious portmanteau term *panagram*, which (surprisingly) seems to be a new coinage—at least in this context. In a panagram, both groups of items (the left side of the equation and the right side) must contain all 26 letters of the alphabet, which means that the word list itself must have at least two of each letter. Panagrams are quite challenging to find, and minimal ones almost always have a value of  $n$  larger than the minimal  $n$  for a pangram. More generally, the  $n$  values for the minimal anagram, pangram, and panagram of a specified word list usually satisfy

$\text{anagram} < \text{pangram} < \text{panagram}.$

For countries, these numbers are  $2 < 5 < 8$  (we'll reveal the  $n = 8$  country panagram later on).

**The Lists.** We use 18 of the 26 lists from [1] in this study, removing a few lists that are less interesting in this setting. These lists vary widely in size, from a maximum of 25,950 items to a minimum of 40. This allows us to see how the minimum anagram / pangram / panagram sizes vary based on the size of the list. With a very small list (say, 20 items) it's quite possible that there are *no* anagrams or pangrams or panagrams of any size, but as we use larger lists, the number of solutions will tend to increase and the value of  $n$  will decrease.

The 18 lists we'll use are shown below. Preceding each list name is an index number and the number of items in the list, and the lists are ordered in columns from largest to smallest (or easiest-to-hardest in terms of finding solutions). Sources for these lists can be found in [1].

- |                                 |                            |                                 |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. 25,950 All Minor Planets     | 7. 332 Largest U.S. Cities | 13. 66 Books of the Bible       |
| 2. 13,858 All U.S. Cities/Towns | 8. 272 London Underground  | 14. 63 Moons of Saturn          |
| 3. 1922 U.S. County Names       | 9. 193 Country Names       | 15. 50 U.S. States              |
| 4. 1000 First 1K Minor Planets  | 10. 193 Country Capitals   | 16. 50 U.S. State Capitals      |
| 5. 943 Moon Crater Names        | 11. 118 Chemical Elements  | 17. 48 U.S. Vice Pres. Surnames |
| 6. 830 Shakespeare Characters   | 12. 88 Constellations      | 18. 40 U.S. President Surnames  |

**Minimal Anagrams.** Table 1 below gives the anagrams(s) that can be made from each list that have the smallest possible value of  $n$ . All solutions with that value of  $n$  are shown except for the first two lists (which have too many solutions to show) and the London Underground list, where we only show one of the nine solutions.

---

**TABLE 1:** Smallest possible anagram(s) from 18 thematic word lists

---

**All Minor Planets**     $n = 1$  (643 anagrams)

**All U.S. Cities/Towns**     $n = 1$  (388 anagrams)

**U.S. County Names**     $n = 1$

Antrim = Martin (MI, FL)      Forest = Foster (WI, ND)      Osborne = Robeson (KS, NC)

**First 1000 Minor Planets**     $n = 1$

Alice = Icea    Altona = Latona    Amelia = Lameia    Arne = Erna    Ate = Tea    Athor = Thora  
Dorothea = Theodora    Hera = Rhea    Inna = Nina    Iris = Siri    Itha = Thia    Rosina = Sirona

**Moon Crater Names**     $n = 1$

Abel = Bela    Dale = Lade    Geminus = Sung Mei    Ian = Ina    Mason = Osman

**Shakespeare Characters**     $n = 1$

Alice = Celia      Mardian = Miranda      Violante = Violenta

**Largest U.S. Cities**     $n = 2$

Beaumont + El Paso = Pueblo + San Mateo  
Charlotte + Spokane = Charleston + Topeka  
Chicago + Reno = Chico + Orange  
Dallas + Fremont = Allen + Stamford  
Macon + Shreveport = Manchester + Provo  
Odessa + Saint Paul = Pasadena + St. Louis  
Plano + Sacramento = Lancaster + Pomona

**London Underground Stations**     $n = 3$

Leyton + Victoria + West Ham = Oval + Stanmore + White City  
(and 8 others)

**Country Names**  $n = 2$

Algeria + Sudan = Israel + Uganda  
Belarus + India = Liberia + Sudan  
Gabon + Italy = Libya + Tonga  
Iraq + Malta = Mali + Qatar

**Country Capitals**  $n = 2$

Abuja + Amman = Juba + Manama  
Baku + Kingston = Bangkok + Tunis

**Chemical Elements**  $n = 2$  or 5 or 7 (depending on -UM rule)

Multiple -UMs: Niobium + Rhenium = Erbium + Nihonium  
Rhodium + Barium = Radium + Bohrium  
Rubidium + Indium = Iridium + Dubnium

Single: Argon + Carbon + Rhodium + Tennessine + Tin = Arsenic + Bismuth + Neon + Nitrogen + Radon

None: Antimony + Argon + Astatine + Boron + Chlorine + Gold + Tungsten =  
Cobalt + Hydrogen + Iron + Nitrogen + Oganesson + Tantalum + Tin

**Constellations**  $n = 2$  (a bit inelegant) or 3

So-so: Norma + Sagittarius = Sagitta + Ursa Minor

Good: Andromeda + Leo + Musca = Caelum + Dorado + Mensa  
Apus + Aquila + Centaurus = Aquarius + Lepus + Tucana  
Aries + Chamaeleon + Scorpius = Cassiopeia + Hercules + Norma

**Books of the Bible**  $n = 4$  (numerical I's allowed) or 7 (no I's allowed)

With I's: Amos + Ecclesiastes + II John + Ruth = I Chronicles + Hosea + James + Titus

No I's: Ephesians + Ezra + Job + Judges + Luke + Nehemiah + Romans =  
Genesis + Hosea + Joel + Jude + Mark + Numbers + Zephaniah

**Named Moons of Saturn**  $n = 3$

Aegir + Dione + Thrymr = Anthe + Geirrod + Ymir  
Anthe + Narvi + Telesto = Helene + Tarvos + Titan  
Erriapus + Gerd + Hati = Gridr + Iapetus + Rhea

**U.S. State Names**  $n = 8$

Alaska + Indiana + Missouri + Oklahoma + Pennsylvania + Rhode Island + Utah + West Virginia =  
Illinois + Kansas + Louisiana + Maryland + Nevada + New Hampshire + South Dakota + Virginia

**U.S. State Capitals**  $n = 6$

Annapolis + Juneau + Lansing + Little Rock + Madison + Providence =  
Augusta + Denver + Indianapolis + Jackson + Lincoln + Montpelier

**U.S. Vice President Surnames**  $n = 6$

Arthur + Biden + Bush + Garner + Roosevelt + Wallace =  
Curtis + Dallas + Gore + Hobart + Van Buren + Wheeler



## U.S. President Surnames $n = 10$

Adams + Coolidge + Harding + Harrison + Jefferson + McKinley + Reagan + Taft + Trump + Wilson =  
Fillmore + Ford + Garfield + Grant + Hayes + Jackson + Madison + Pierce + Truman + Washington

---

Three of these lists have some quirks that make the “best” solution a bit unclear, since the solutions with the smallest  $n$  are inelegant in some way. For the chemical elements, the fact that 79 of the 118 elements end in IUM (and, more generally, that 83 elements end in UM) makes the minimal  $n = 2$  anagrams somewhat unsatisfying, since all the elements on both sides of the equation end in UM. To remove this weakness, we can insist that no more than one element in the anagram end in UM, so that there aren’t any UMs on both sides to “cancel out.” The  $n = 5$  solution shown in the table has this property. And to make it even more interesting, we can completely disallow –UM elements, leading to the  $n = 7$  anagram shown.

The smallest constellation anagram (with  $n = 2$ ) has SAGITTA on one side and SAGITTARIUS on the other. So we also show three  $n = 3$  anagrams that don’t have this shortcoming.

Finally, in the Bible list we have to deal with the fact that there are multiple books with almost the same name, such as 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians—not to mention the fact that these names include numbers. To solve the numbers problem, we’ll write them in the style of a century or two ago (II Corinthians instead of 2 Corinthians), and we also don’t allow the same word to appear on both sides of the anagram (e.g. I John on the left side and II John on the right side). With these restrictions the best anagram is the  $n = 4$  example shown in the table. This has a minor flaw, with I on the left side and II on the right, so to avoid that we can ban the numbers (I, II, III) entirely. The smallest possible anagram in this case, also shown in the table, has  $n = 7$ .

The computational difficulty of finding these grows quickly with both the size of the word list and  $n$ , the size of the minimal anagram. As an example, the number of pairs of size-8 subsets of the 50 U.S. state names is  $C(50, 8) \times C(42, 8) / 2 = 31,683,943,191,025,125$ , where  $C(n, k)$  are the  $n$ -choose- $k$  numbers. Even with careful pruning of the search tree this is still a formidable number. For this reason we strongly suspect this is the first time that an anagram has been constructed from some of these lists, especially the state names, presidents, and Bible books.

**Minimal Panagrams.** Attempting to find the smallest panagrams for the same 18 lists quickly reveals a surprise: no panagrams of any size are possible for 11 of the 18 lists. To see why, recall that a panagram requires a list in which each letter of the alphabet appears at least twice. But 10 of our 18 lists have one or more *singletons*: letters of the alphabet that only appear once in the entire list, as shown below.

| <i>List</i>            | <i>Singletons</i>                 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 7. Largest U.S. Cities | Z in Elizabeth                    |
| 8. London Underground  | Z in Belsize Park                 |
| 10. Country Capitals   | Q in Quito                        |
| 11. Elements           | W in Lawrencium                   |
| 12. Constellations     | F in Fornax                       |
| 13. Books of the Bible | F in Song Of Solomon, X in Exodus |

- |                          |                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 15. U.S. States          | J in New Jersey, Z in Arizona |
| 16. U.S. State Capitals  | X in Phoenix                  |
| 17. U.S. Vice Presidents | Q in Quayle                   |
| 18. U.S. Presidents      | X in Nixon                    |

And there's one more with a slightly different problem: list #14 (moons of Saturn) has exactly two Z's, but they are both in a single item (Thiazz), so there's no way to put one Z on each side of the panagram.

With these eleven lists being impossible, we searched for and found the minimal panagrams for the other seven:

---

**TABLE 2:** Smallest possible panagrams from 7 word lists

---

**All Minor Planets** (*heterocon*)

4 33 Fedotov + Korpas + Mychajliw + Ziqiangbuxi =  
 Dipasquale + Gabrynowicz + Jimfox + Tikhov and 7 more solutions

**All U.S. Cities/Towns** (*heterocon*)

5 32 Fox Chapel + Jameson + Utqiagvik + Ward + Zyb =  
 Goldsby + Java + Marquez + Phoenix + Tickfaw and 7 more

**U.S. Counties** (*heterocon*)

6 35 Beckham + Jay + Loving + Queens + Wexford + Zapata =  
 Knox + Nez Perce + Oldham + Quay + Swift + Vega Baja and 1 more

**First 1000 Minor Planets**

7 43 Aquitania + Cybele + Franzia + Hidalgo + Juewa + Moskva + Pax =  
 Aglaja + Arequipa + Clivia + Dembowska + Fanny + Thia + Zeuxo *unique*

**Moon Crater Names**

7 36 Demonax + Fibiger + Joy + Krogh + Vlacq + Watt + Zupus =  
 Byrd + Jose + Markov + Petit + Wolf + Xu Guangqi + Zach and 1 more

**Shakespeare Characters**

6 46 Duke of Albany + Gonzalo + Jaques + Sherwin + Simpcox + Travers =  
 Caliban + King John + Lopez + Marquess of Dorset + Sawyer + Vaux *unique*

**Country Names**

8 58 Burkina Faso + Egypt + Jordan + Lithuania + Mexico + Qatar + Slovakia + Zimbabwe =  
 Botswana + Cote D'Ivoire + Fiji + Iraq + Kazakhstan + Libya + Luxembourg + Panama *unique*

---

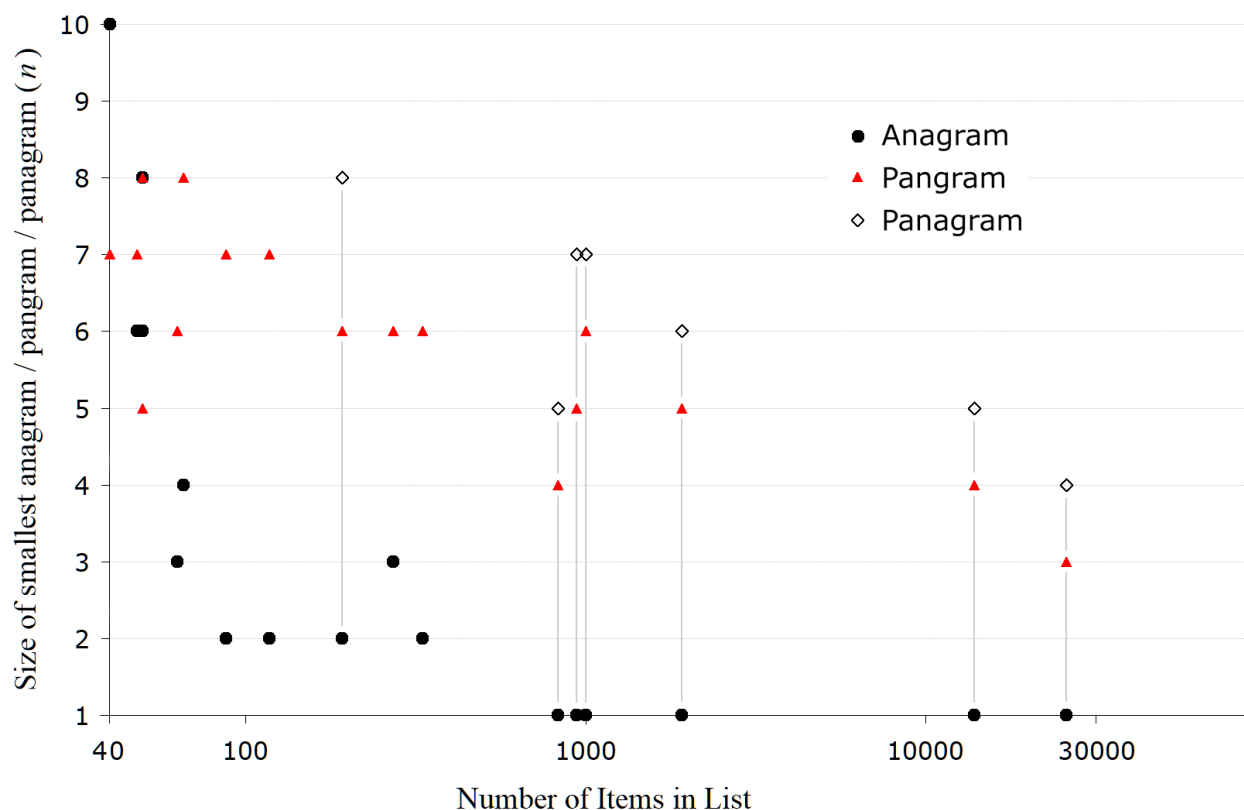
In the left column of Table 2 we show the value of  $n$  for each panagram followed by the number of letters. All solutions shown have the smallest possible  $n$  as well as the minimum possible number of letters for that  $n$ . We only show one solution for each list, but the right column says

how many more solutions there are (if any) of the same size.

Since the top three lists are quite large, the minimal pangram can be fairly small, with its number of letters in the low-to-mid 30s. Even more remarkable, these three pangrams are *heterocons*: no consonant appears more than once on each side of the anagram. Additionally, in the Minor Planets pangram, E, U, and Y also appear only once, for a total of 23 unrepeated letters.

**Summary.** The graph below is a scatterplot showing the minimal anagram, pangram (from [1]), and pangram for all 18 word lists. Of course, only seven lists have data points for all three types of constructions, since only seven lists have a pangram. For these seven special lists the three data points are connected with a vertical line.

This graph illustrates the fact that for smaller word lists (left side), the minimal solutions tend to be large (since it is harder to make an anagram/pangram/panagram with a smaller list), but as we move to the right, the bigger word lists make it easier for smaller solutions to exist.



## References

[1] Darryl Francis, Michael Keith, *Minimal Pangram Subsets of a Word List*, The Journal of Wordplay, #13 (May 2026), 54-63, available at [journalofwordplay.com](http://journalofwordplay.com).

## GRAVE SIGNS I SEE AND OBSCURE

Daniel Galef

I met a cryptic gentleman on the train the other day.

I was happily absorbed in my crossword when he sat opposite me and spoke, in a sepulchral voice: “Said upon meeting one circle of the Inferno.”

I’m no slouch. I know my Dante. ““Abandon all hope’?” I ventured.

He shook his head sorrowfully.

I abandoned all hope.

“Er, sorry,” I said. “Um. I’m an American, you see.”

He scoffed. “Sounds like a jolly jug of liquor across the pond!”

If one of us was potted, it was he. But I remained courteous. “Yes, quite. How do you do?”

“Ground up, dismembered, approaching ineffable,” he said. He looked perfectly intact to my eyes, though the ineffability I could heartily corroborate. He gestured to me. “The second person to cry like a little lost sheep?”

I was getting fed up with this nonsense. “Bah,” I said.

The strange fellow took his leave, pausing only to turn, stare straight at me with those flaming eyes, and give one final, ominous utterance: “Said upon departing a deep pit following the price paid for passage.”

As he disappeared down the aisle, I certainly *did* feel as if I had been left in a deep pit, and I wondered what the price might be I would have to pay to escape. I returned to my crossword.

## HAVEN, KIGGINS, BELL, AND THE NEXT BIG THING: CROSSWORDS 1929-1930

T Campbell

This continues an ongoing year-by-year exploration of the history of the crossword puzzle begun in issue [#7](#) of *The Journal of Wordplay*.

---

### The Herald-Tribune Heritage

Who was Helen Haven?

In previous entries, I said Margaret Petherbridge Farrar had no real successor in the 1920s—no one could be as influential, really, once the days of the craze were over. But Haven’s time at the *New York Herald Tribune* is as close as you get—and in terms of design and community, she took things further than Farrar could.

Haven’s crossword career seems to have begun with the *Chicago Daily News* in September 1924, where she continued until March 1926—even though she left Chicago in 1925 to settle in with her new husband, a New York adman. While there, she was known as Helen Hahn. From *Editor and Publisher*, March 26, 1927:



MRS. HELEN HAVEN

*THE New York Herald Tribune’s new “How Do You Rate?” feature is being edited by a recruit from the ranks of cross-word puzzle editors Mrs. Helen Haven, wife of Dwight Haven, formerly of Chicago.*

*Mrs. Haven took charge of the cross-word puzzles on the Chicago Daily News in September, 1924, and conducted the department until March, 1926, under her maiden name Helen Hahn.*

*Later she also conducted several contests for the Daily News, among them a “Scare” contest and a patriotic contest. She assisted in editing the children’s page.*

*Shortly after her marriage in 1925, Mrs. Haven left Chicago with her husband, who is associated with John G. Woodward, publisher’s representative, to come to New York.*

*Before joining the Chicago Daily News, Mrs. Haven studied art at the Chicago Art Institute, and attended Smith College, at Northampton, Mass.*

In 1928, another wedding announcement appeared—with a divorce announcement as footnote. Helen’s second marriage was to a notable crime writer whom she met at work:

### ***Herbert Asbury Weds Mrs. Helen H. Haven***

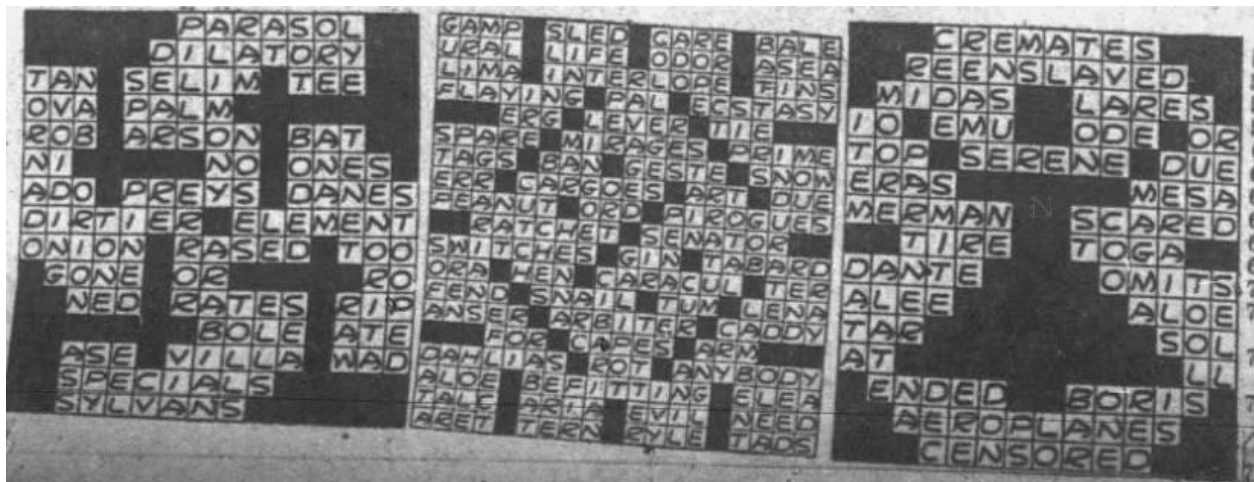
*CHICAGO, Sept. 1.-(AP)-Herbert Asbury, author of "Hatrack," the publication of which in the American Mercury magazine caused the arrest two years ago of H.L. Mencken, Friday married Mrs. Helen Hahn Haven, a few hours after Judge David N. Brothers had granted her a divorce from Wright E. Haven, New York advertising man.*

*The couple left at once for New York. Asbury is a member of the staff of the New York Herald-Tribune.*

The articles disagree on whether Helen's first husband's name was "Dwight" or "Wright." Later accounts of Asbury's life mention only one wife, and it's not Helen—leading one to suspect this marriage was brief.

*The New York Herald Tribune's crossword section, called "Meeting Place of the Puzzle Makers," was syndicated from 1925 to 1942. Not long after the paper recruited her for the short-lived "How Do You Rate?" feature in 1927, Haven had moved into the "Meeting Place" to stay.*

Haven's column promoted experimental work. She challenged constructors to build puzzles with PHENOMENON as 1-Across. A discussion of "-ose" endings led to a puzzle that featured eight "-ose" words. 1929 alone saw a circular crossword, a big grid divided into a 3x3 set of 5x5 grids, and other unconventional shapes, sometimes to be discovered by the solvers of diagramless puzzles.



*Several typical answer grids from the 1929 New York Herald Tribune.*

As Todd Gross [documented](#) in the online Pre-Shortzian Puzzle Project:

*In the Herald Tribune's daily puzzle column, Ms. Haven included a paragraph or so of text every day. And it wasn't just about the puzzle printed below—it could be about puzzles in general, or interesting stories about people who solve puzzles, or questions and/or comments addressed directly to the readers. It could even be content from readers themselves. Through this limited channel, six times a week, readers were able to comment*

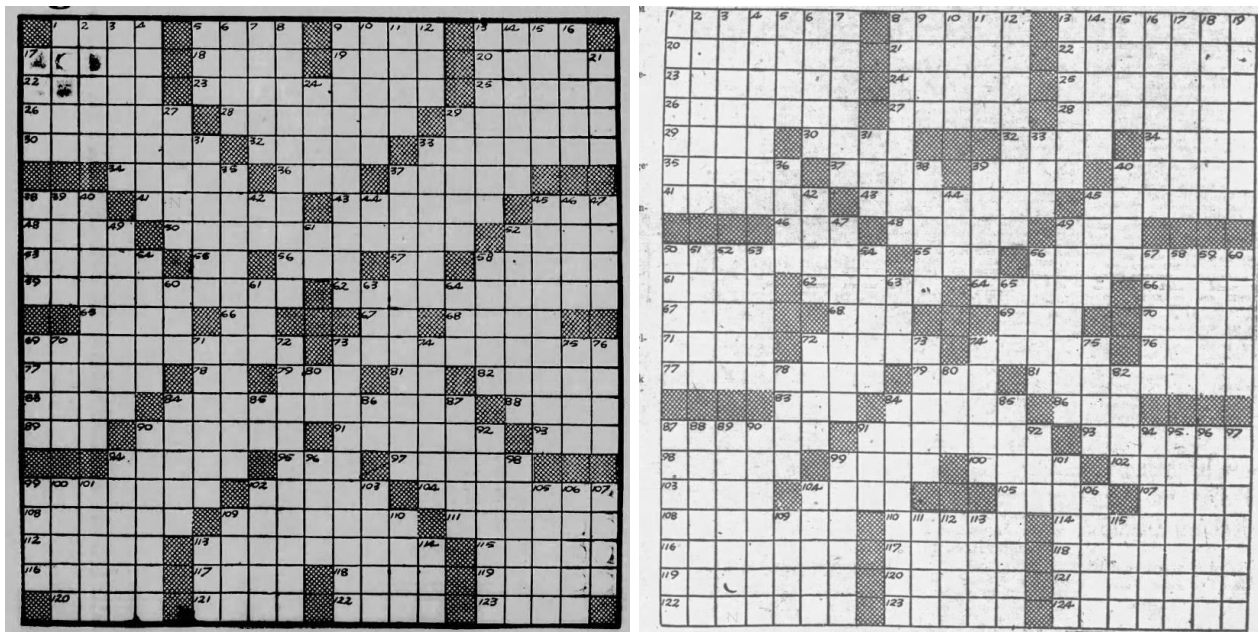


*about puzzles, and their comments might be incorporated into future columns, even future puzzles.*

The New York *World* and the *Boston Globe* had once done such community-building, but by then the *Herald Tribune* was the only source for it.

Haven brought a new flourish by including cryptograms with her columns. On April 22, 1929, she started publishing constructors' addresses with their puzzles—and back in the day, this was seen as fostering correspondence, not creating concerns about privacy.

Haven kept up Farrar's practice of making two-letter entries a last resort for the experimental grid designs, but their appearances continued to decline in the more conventional layouts. The puzzle grid at left below has ten two-letter entries near the center, but they're well integrated enough that you might not spot them at first. The one on the right has no two-letter entries at all. And check out those chunky compass points!



### Approaching and achieving “two-less” designs.

Haven's editorship ended sometime before February 23, 1935—the date of the final *Herald Tribune* crossword tournament, which we know was attended by her successor, Dorothy Kiggins. Kiggins would stay in the role until at least 1943. Whether there were any intervening editors between Haven and Kiggins is also unknown. Editorial lead-ins were anonymized and varied little in tone from year to year, so they're not much help in identifying any regime change.

They were sometimes shorter after Haven's first couple of years of activity—sometimes as brief as a single line. 1/3/1930: "A few five-letter words that haven't been overworked."

1/7/1931: "You will find No. 4 Down very handy in working out Mr. Kuhl's puzzle." (4-Down clue: "Lexicon.")

But the same was true of Farrar's lead-ins toward the end of her tenure, and this may have reflected the ebb and flow of space available as much as of literary inspiration. The puzzle at right, with four lines in its lead-in, is from Saturday, January 6, 1940.

The 1940 Sunday spread on the next page has no *space* for a lead-in. It continued a "Meeting Place of the Puzzle Makers" section, chockablock with offerings, that had begun in Haven's day. Check it out: one 23x23 grid, two diagramless puzzles, and a cryptogram.

Though Kiggins' career began well after 1929, she is worth a quick digression. She and her husband harvested tomatoes and other vegetables on a suburban rooftop garden. She participated in a "Battle of the Sexes" on NBC radio, vying with three *Herald Tribune* "girl reporters" against four of the paper's male editors in a trivia contest.

There was a Dorothy Kiggins who later got into the radio business, inheriting ownership of some stations from her husband. Was this the same Dorothy Kiggins? If it isn't, the early radio appearance is an odd coincidence; if it is, she moved around the country, taking up later residence in Wyoming and then Florida. Evidence is inconclusive.

Haven's history after her tenure is also unknown. What is known is that these two women were the primary standard-setters in American crosswords in Farrar's absence and deserve more recognition for that than they get.

## DAILY CROSS-WORD PUZZLE

Today's Puzzle by Elizabeth Patterson

Henry Sherman Adams is a man after our own heart. He disagreed with the spelling of *Mimi* for the dwarf in the "Ring of the Nibelungs" in Funk & Wagnalls. After extensive research he called up Mr. Funk who agreed to change it in the next edition to the accepted *Mime*.

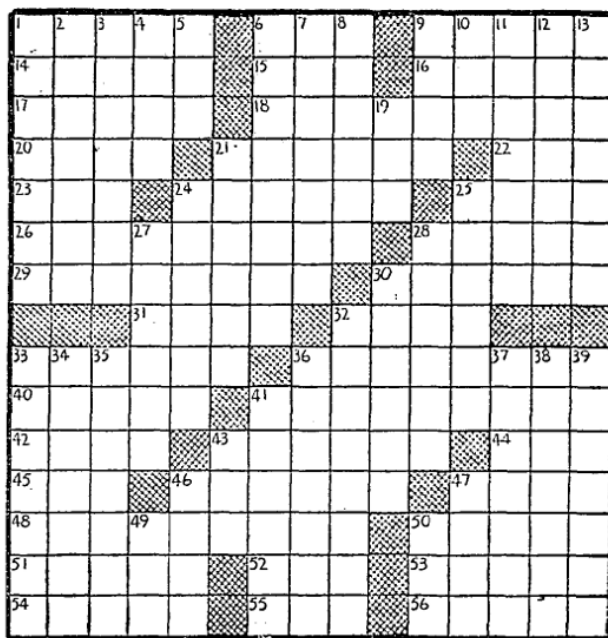
- | ACROSS                           | DOWN                               |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Spanish fare-well.             | 1 Undying.                         |
| 6 Carriage.                      | 2 A fault.                         |
| 9 Enwrap.                        | 3 Plunge.                          |
| 14 Leaf bud.                     | 4 Hebrew measure.                  |
| 15 Masculine nickname.           | 5 Assembled.                       |
| 16 Agog.                         | 6 Variety of cabbage.              |
| 17 An ant.                       | 7 Sour ales.                       |
| 18 Eastern Mediterranean native. | 8 Daydream.                        |
| 20 Sinister glance.              | 9 Coin.                            |
| 21 Temporary ruler.              | 10 Buddhist column.                |
| 22 Tenant's payment; O. Eng.     | 11 Discompose.                     |
| 23 Misjudge.                     | 12 State councils.                 |
| 24 Compensation.                 | 13 Lend.                           |
| 25 Note the time.                | 19 Conjunction.                    |
| 26 One of joint signers.         | 21 Anything withheld.              |
| 28 Destined.                     | 24 Branched.                       |
| 29 Vessels.                      | 25 Ingenious.                      |
| 30 Malay dagger.                 | 27 Rich Anglo-Indians.             |
| 31 Habit.                        | 28 Saving.                         |
| 32 Mountain quarrel.             | 30 Nucleus.                        |
| 33 Thrust upward.                | 32 Fanciful composition.           |
| 36 Spicy tropical drink.         | 33 Deprives of legislative rights. |
| 40 Tantalus's daughter.          |                                    |
| 41 Buffoon.                      |                                    |
| 42 Town in France.               |                                    |

Solution to Yesterday's Puzzle

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | A | B | S | A | C | M | E | C | R | U | S | T |
| O | G | R | E | P | O | E | M | L | A | N | C | E |
| M | A | I | N | T | A | I | N | S | A | I | R | E |
| M | I | N | D | I | N | G | S | I | L | E | N | E |
| A | N | Y | T | A | N | T | R | U | M | S | A | B |
| S | A | G | R | I | D | H | E | R | R |   |   |   |
| S | P | L | I | N | E | E | N | S | E | R | I | A |
| C | O | A | G | S | B | A | G | D | E | V | O | N |
| A | L | U | M | L | A | C | M | O | D | E | S | T |
| P | A | R | A | L | L | E | O | S |   |   |   |   |
| I | R | E | P | I | K | E | M | A | N | P | E | A |
| N | I | A | T | A | S |   | A | N | G | O | R | A |
| A | S | T | O | R |   | M | I | A | N | D | A | T |
| D | E | E | P | S |   | E | R | N | I | E |   |   |
| E | S | S | I | E |   | W | E | A | R | C | I | S |

- | ACROSS                | DOWN                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 43 Shelf.             | 34 Pantomime character.   |
| 44 Dolt.              | 35 Radio cabinet.         |
| 45 Vetch.             | 36 American herb.         |
| 46 Russian relish.    | 37 Vagabonds.             |
| 47 Utter.             | 38 Reddish dyes.          |
| 48 Pungent plants.    | 39 Install: var.          |
| 50 African carnivore. | 41 Street sur-facer: var. |
| 51 Entices: obs.      | 43 Rug.                   |
| 52 Israelitic priest. | 46 Sparish house.         |
| 53 French edict.      | 47 Brazilian wildcat.     |
| 54 Greek pillar.      | 49 Honey: Lat.            |
| 55 Turmeric.          | 50 Befall.                |
| 56 Outmoded.          |                           |

1-6-'40



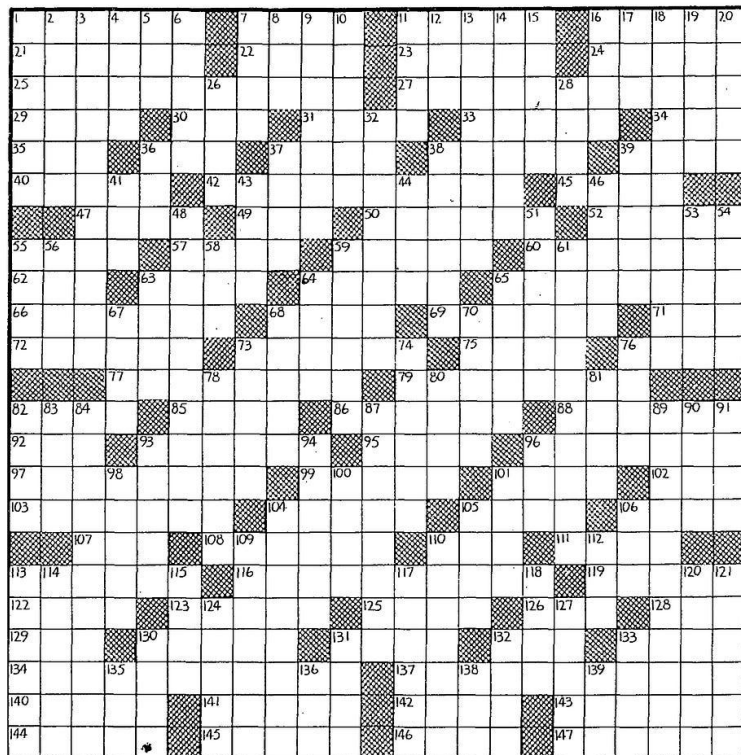
On this page, a typical Saturday's NYHT offering. On the next, a typical Sunday's.



# MEETING PLACE OF THE PUZZLE MAKERS ★

by F. C. Jaschob

- ACROSS**
- Degrades.
  - Narrow woven fillet.
  - Indoor game of skill.
  - Increase the pressure of a fluid.
  - Fasten.
  - Blunders.
  - French bond.
  - A fruit.
  - Inscribed phrases or clauses.
  - Roundabout course.
  - Canary Island commune.
  - Roman bronze.
  - Flowerless plant.
  - Silkworms.
  - Bow.
  - Steal.
  - Coagulate.
  - Petted.
  - Mountain lakes.
  - Drinks slowly.
  - Growing out.
  - Sequential.
  - Young animal: Fr.
  - Drive down by a succession of light blows.
  - A soft drink.
  - Call for repetition.
  - Pertaining to the genesis of anything.
  - Stern.
  - Storm.
  - Doubt.
  - Italian marble used for statuary.
  - Ingredient of varnish.
  - Peruses.
  - A place of confusion.
  - Make eccentric.
  - College.
  - Small valley.
  - Cease.
  - Deceive.
  - In any conceivable degree.
  - Greedy.
- DOWN**
- Desire with eagerness.
  - Signal of fire.
  - Gymnastic.
  - Wood.
  - Roman date.
  - To deprive of natural qualities.
  - A cut.
  - High mountains.
  - Indonesian Indians.
  - Darts: colloq.
  - Twin crystals.
  - Malay gibbon.
  - Eatcums.
  - Sweettop.
  - Inflammable marsh gas.
  - Slightly sour.
  - Even.
  - Slat.
  - Large weight.
  - Opposite.
  - Rescued.
  - Portend.
  - Fine rain.
  - Exist.
  - Dealer in cattle.
  - Downcast.
  - Disorganized flight.
  - Foolish.
  - Immeasurable expanse of time.
  - A grown-up.
  - Heroic.
  - Fertile spots.
  - Redact.
  - Lively.
  - Small cube.
  - Fabulous bird.
  - Metric measure.
  - Paradise.
  - Irish sweetheart.
  - Feminine name.
  - Resembling gypsum.
  - Accomplishments.
  - Make tardy.
  - To be of use.
  - A group working together.
  - Mexican dish.
  - Less.
  - Vends.
  - Margin.
  - Steps over a fence.
  - Sea bird.
  - Bristlelike parts.
  - Small earth mounds.
  - Land measures.
  - Introduction.
  - Two-wheeled chariot.
  - A heavy silk.
  - Female feathered animal.
  - Strive.
  - Agitator.
  - European finch.
  - Clusters.
  - Choose.
  - Obstinate.
  - One-masted vessel.
  - Minds.
  - Aid.
  - Compass point.
  - To be alike.
  - Precious stone.
  - System of signals.
  - Weights of Siam.
  - Harsh.
  - Head covering.
  - Tatters.
  - Large knife.
  - Monsters.
  - Public walks.
  - Establishment of a migrating plant in a new habitat.
  - Goddess of peace.
  - Pastboards.
  - Pleased.
  - Speed contest.
  - Some.
  - Ointments.
  - Apparatus for determining acidity of solutions.
  - Yield.
  - A beverage.
  - International tennis cup.
  - Defective bombs.
  - Drench.
  - Nice discernments.
  - Commence.
  - Engaged in a tumult.
  - Measure of length.
  - Expiated.
  - Christmas carol.
  - Vow.
  - Winglike.



- 83 Shoe string.
- 84 Lie.
- 87 Cavellike.
- 89 Pertaining to a distance north or south of the equator.
- 90 Son of Seth.
- 91 Dispatched.
- 93 Measures of area.
- 94 Bondsmen.
- 96 Insane.
- 98 Silken.
- 100 Always.
- 101 Mineral deposit.
- 104 Pertaining to salvation.
- 105 Lure.
- 106 Mire.
- 109 Keep back.
- 110 Confined.
- 112 Cereal grass.
- 113 Harbinger.
- 114 Having no poles.
- 115 Garden tools.
- 116 To form a mental conception.
- 118 Hindu woman's garment.
- 120 Small.
- 121 Annoys.
- 124 Indian flour.
- 127 Gasps.
- 130 Fortifies.
- 131 Elongated fish.
- 132 Sport.
- 133 Ancient Gauls.
- 135 Supplicate.
- 136 Nothing.
- 138 Label.
- 139 Floor covering.

19 x 19, by Willard N. Jordan

- ACROSS**
- To have consciousness of.
  - Bedewed.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Toward the apex.
  - Services owed to freedman's patron: Lat.
  - Madagascan civet.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Heart stimulant.
  - Stake.
  - Medieval fabric of silk and gold.
  - To strike.
  - Saltpeater.
  - Pielet.
  - Celtic Neptune.
  - Tribute.
  - Pitcher.
  - Mimelism.
  - Can be counted.
  - New Zealand shrub.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Way.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Mistake.
  - Trilling.
  - Mountain pass.
  - Tepee.
  - Letters.
  - Tropical drug plant.
  - Organized athletics.
  - Curious memoranda.
  - Urgency.
  - Genus of rodents.
  - Gait of a horse.
  - Indian tent wall: India.
  - Strain.
  - Cornet: poet.
  - Woeke.
  - Rise.
  - Efficacy.
  - Green.
  - Refrigerator.
  - Copper.
  - Exasperation.
- DOWN**
- Jewish month.
  - Dejected.
  - Panic.
  - Siesta.
  - Enzymes.
  - Ringed as if with bracelets.
  - Chewer.
  - Straighten.
  - Flavor.
  - Lubricating.
  - Armado.
  - Tomato-like vegetable.
  - Perfume.
  - Garters.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Rub out.
  - Nothing.
  - Ooze.
  - Landed property.
  - Madman.
  - Unclose: poet.
  - Cleft.
  - Gold pendant.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Groups of whales.
  - Philippine tree.
  - State flower of Utah.
  - A blow.
  - Feast.
  - Spiritual meetings.
  - Journal.
  - Perjurer.
  - Merry.
  - Race.
  - Tropical food plant.
  - Drizzles: Scot.
  - Espouse.
  - Haven.
  - Small auricle.
  - Baby's bottle.
  - Bolivian Indian.
  - Cold Adriatic wind.
  - Ironwood.
  - Adolescent years.
  - Goobar.
  - Natural.
  - Mexican basket grass.

17 x 17, by L. C. Whitman

- ACROSS**
- Animal fat.
  - Feminine name.
  - Destination.
  - Border.
  - Jute.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Armpit.
  - Style.
  - Dactyl.
  - Toothdrawer.
  - Duration.
  - Zodiacal sign.
  - Mollifying.
  - Sold again.
  - Bearing blocks.
  - Copious.
  - Barbary ape.
  - Hat brim.
  - Liberty.
  - Upon.
  - Divorce center.
  - Double.
  - African antelope.
  - Biblical pronoun.
  - Throw.
  - Sortie.
  - Quote.
  - Upon.
  - Counts.
  - Fairland.
  - Whim.
  - Flute player.
  - Uproar.
  - Aside.
  - Engraver's tool.
  - European title.
  - Rattling breath.
  - Decoy.
  - Seasoning.
  - Exists.
  - Deed.
  - Containers.
  - Chaste.
  - One who poses for a portrait.
  - Wept.
  - Love: Lat.
  - Front of an army.
  - Builds.
  - Indian poet.
  - Capital.
  - Company.
  - Bonus: Fr.
  - Feline.
  - About.
  - Evil: prefix.
- Cryptogram**
- Submitted by R. A. Dahlgren
- LZPEDENTSU PALM-  
ISTRY TR UPALTYOP  
STRIU SILMI ERSH  
PALBIU EX POITA  
AILA PTAIU.
- Last Sunday's Cryptogram**
- Calm introspection induces unbiased self-appraisal but may generate inferiority complex.

## SOLUTIONS OF LAST WEEK'S PUZZLES

PERSUADE AROMA HISTORIC  
OLEANDER RUDE ANTI-DOSE  
TICKLE OPIATE ANDRE TREMOR  
STAG TRACER SUMMER ANAM  
HILLO STORM BELT THE  
EVENTS HURON TEE PROZEN  
REDEEMS REMOVED MEANEST  
PACIFIC LAURENCE  
STROLLERS DAL GRACE SET  
TRIPARTITE CYNIC CHESS PODE  
RIGOR CYNIC CHESS PODE  
ACHE QUAGGAS EASY STAVES  
PACIFIC LAURENCE  
SLAVE RATES COIR  
CURIOUS DETECTS MENACER  
AND IN THE CALOME  
SCANT BELLE SOLAR CLON'S  
MEET LIVES BRISTLE COSE  
IDELSE ZEAL CAMO AORA  
MESS MATTER NGOT CORRIVAL  
RICH UNNERVY ASPERATE  
STEWARDS GREEN LESSENED

SPITE PRATE PLAR  
DRAPER AUGSTER  
FLEEN SHAGGLED  
OMEGA TAR RATIO  
DELEITE EPI ZENANA  
MOA POLYNIAL ABB  
OUTRAN BLAQUE  
ENRAGED OMORCHIDE  
ROC UASPERITE LEG  
AXE CRAWED TWO  
CALMOLA  
MONEYLESS  
CUT SEAS SHIP  
REUSA CATACHRE  
ARIL ERE ICON  
TELESTREETINGS  
SERVITORS  
PRELATE SALSIE

SOME SALSE DRIAB  
OVOID CREEL SEINE  
REATA AMATI UNFIT  
ANTHROPOPHAGI ELIA  
ENDER ATA  
COURSES IMPROMPTU  
AWN TATRU RIAL  
LEISURE SINO LENE  
CAPOTE DENIED  
EBON THAN LENTILS  
BARDS ASI CEE  
ORNAMENTS SENATOR  
HEM LIDNIOGRAPHER  
AROMA ACORN REEVE  
INDEX TORSO SCION  
LEET SINEIR TREE

## Get Crazyed, Will Ya?

Haven and the *Herald Tribune* aside, newspaper puzzle sections' biggest boom times were behind them. Publishers refused to accept this. Surely the next puzzle craze—something so fantastic, so consuming, it'd outcrossword the 1924 crossword—was right around the corner.

The *Tulsa Tribune* commissioned a word game from Birdie Reeve, a teen prodigy known to vaudeville as “the world’s fastest typist,” among other accomplishments in chess and memory games. Her game asked solvers to find words including every two-letter and three-letter sequence one could make.

This is a cool exercise when thinking of \*DK\* and \*DQ\* and getting VODKA and BEDQUILT, but it gets less fun when you start trying to find answers for \*DX\*, never mind \*JRT\* and \*QCB\*. Reeve’s apparent belief that her own father “was the one primarily responsible for the popularity of crosswords” highlights that she was out of her depth here. No one’s a genius at *everything*. Sometimes being an unconventional thinker just means there’s no one who can check your work.

Another attempt was the *Record-Journal*’s “Word Hunt.” It’s not the word-find puzzle you’re probably picturing. Alexander Lichtentag’s invention started with identical half-filled in words—four-letter words starting with RU, for instance, or five-letter words starting with PRI. Solvers were given clues for each variation; e.g., “Regretted, repented” for RUED and “The hind end” for RUMP. Like the Reeve puzzle, it was gone in less than two months.

**REEVE'S CREATIVE GAMES**  
To Stimulate Creative Minds

*New Ideas*  
that made Birdie Reeve world's fastest typist, memory marvel and greatest master of English words of all time, will be divulged in this column in games and serial articles. Cut this out and save it every day for reference. Here's one game with an objective, not a merry-go-round.

Let's **ABC** and master play a dictionary

BIRDIE REEVE  
Lexicologist

English is composed of 26 single letters, 676 sets of twos, 17,376 threes, 456,976 fours, 11,881,376 fives.

Make a word of any group of letters and put it in a sentence. AB as in baby.  
—Copyright, Thomas L. Reeve.

|    |       |
|----|-------|
| EA | ..... |
| EB | ..... |
| EC | ..... |
| ED | ..... |
| EE | ..... |
| EF | ..... |
| EG | ..... |
| EH | ..... |
| EI | ..... |
| EJ | ..... |
| EK | ..... |
| EL | ..... |
| EM | ..... |
| EN | ..... |
| EO | ..... |
| EP | ..... |
| EQ | ..... |
| ER | ..... |
| ES | ..... |
| ET | ..... |
| EU | ..... |
| EV | ..... |
| EW | ..... |
| EX | ..... |
| EY | ..... |
| EZ | ..... |

Birdie Reeve’s “creative game” was an interesting attempt but could have used more playtesting.

Some publishers tried variations on the crossword. One such was the *Weekly Times*' "pyramid device."

There were no down/vertical entries in this puzzle: only the outer diagonal edges were required to match the longest across entry at the base (at right, ADVENTUROUSNESS).

The biggest and longest-lived attempt to jumpstart a craze, though, was Movie Star Crosswords. *The Chicago Tribune* crafted 42 grids around the photographs of then-famous thespians, including the first and last names of each.

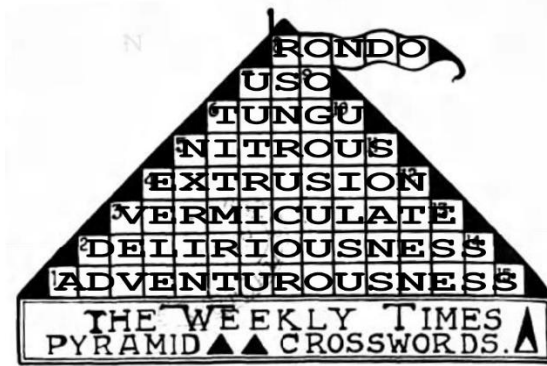
It hyped the series to the skies, offered impressive cash prizes for correct solutions, and must have boosted circulation. Because a few months later, the *San Francisco Examiner* launched a similar photo-puzzle series, Distinguished American Crossword Puzzles.

Could individuals make their mark in this field? In America, that was getting more challenging. The *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 31, informed an aspiring crossword designer, "Crossword puzzles are marketed almost entirely by syndicates." Even famous papers like the *World* and the *Herald Tribune* had syndicated their features to other papers almost from the start.

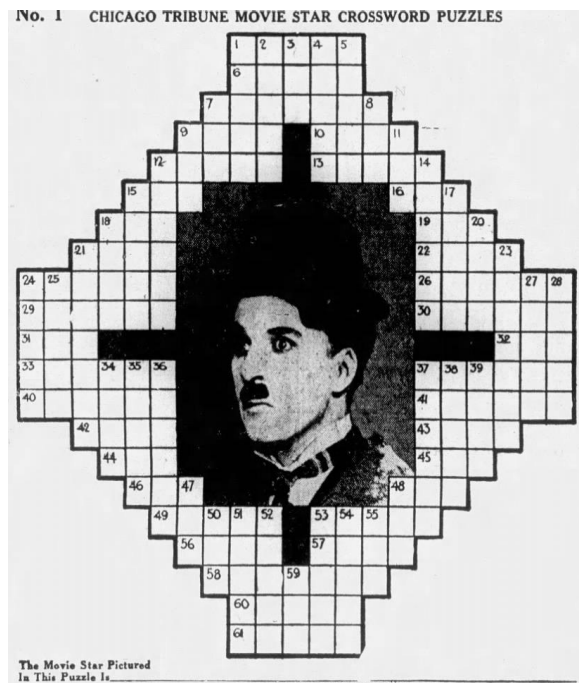
J. van Cleft Cooper, who'd distinguished himself in *Herald Tribune* and National Puzzlers' League solving contests, only became a known name by supplying puzzles to the Associated Press, which used his expertise to promote their feature.

In England, the identity of the *Telegraph* constructor was stoking fevered speculation among readers, and the *Telegraph* was all too glad to publish their "deductions."

*SIR—The problem of the identity of your cross-word expert has been an agitating subject of controversy in this district for some time, and I have been deputed to "do better" than Mr. C. H. Bompas and to express some disagreement with Mr. S. Watson. Here are my deductions:*



From The Weekly Times. Is it technically a crossword if only the outer edges and the bottom word "cross"?



The first of the Chicago Tribune's Movie Star Crosswords.



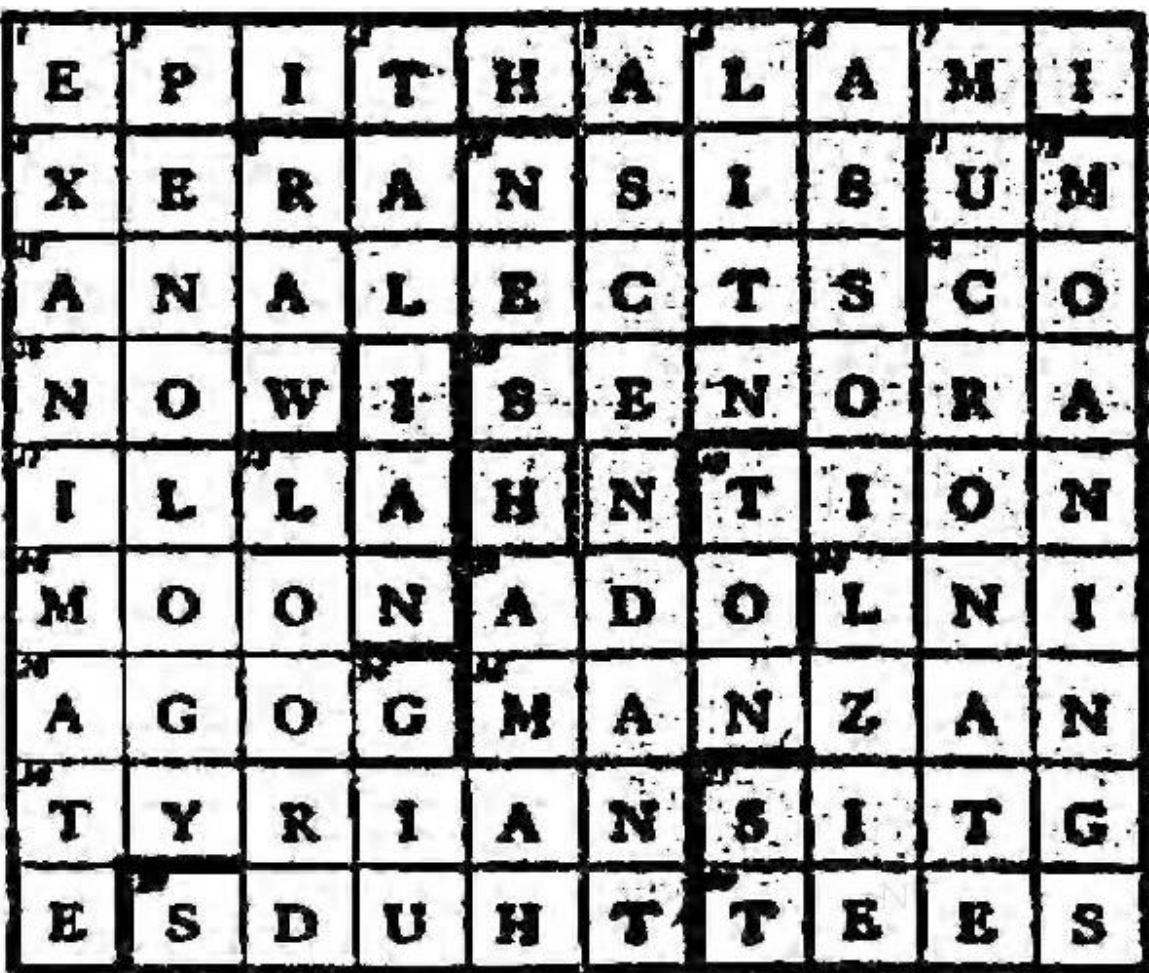
*The cross-word composer is a retired naval officer, probably a navigator, who had sufficient time on his hands in a small ship in the Far East and Mediterranean to re-read Shakespeare and Milton, to study heraldry, and to play chess.*

*He speculated with his gratuity without much success. Is married—not because he knows the destination of old coats, but because his wife does feather-stitching. His children are old enough to play “The Word Game,” hence those devastating Anags.*

*He does most of his own gardening—raffia and scarlet runner. He is a Scot, used to shoot and play cricket, and still plays golf. He has a car but is not very fond of it. He does not enjoy very good health. -Yours, &c.,*

*JUNE RUCK KEENE.*

Torquemada was shifting from the illustrative layouts they’d employed a couple years prior to more and more “plain” grids like the one below. Though, as you can see, the approach to language still wasn’t “plain.” As if EPITHALAMI and XERANSIS aren’t challenging enough, the last two lines included a scrambled GIST and a reversed THUDS.



A sample 1929 Torquemada answer grid.

“Crossword language” was maturing in the UK too, but over there, “crossword words” were not as prone to use common letters, as seen in this cheeky passage from *The Guardian*.

*A lorel went out in a zebec to fish for tai. He was ree and yexing, and what between the sleazy boat and the scopulous sea he had only theopneusty to depend on. [A child went fishing for trout, tipsy and hiccupping: between the frail boat and the rocks in the sea, he had only divine inspiration to depend on.]*

This was the first known publication of “crosswordese writing” in the UK, and it introduced a contest that produced more.

The *Guardian* also reported one crossword-connected crime—on December 19, a so-called enthusiast was found with 74 reference books stolen from libraries. One can imagine the reaction to this during the days of crossword moral panic, but those days were past. Instead, the *Guardian* told his story with cheeky sympathy.

*He lessened the chances of his competitors... No doubt he looked forward to a day when he should have cleared all the public libraries in England of all their reference-books. Then he could hope to reap the reward of enterprise and persistence. Let us hope that they will provide him with a crossword on Christmas Day so that he may dream of the triumphs he might have won.*

*Judge* Magazine published its first collection of crosswords with more humorous clues, foreshadowing the tone of modern cluing: “Kick in the pants” (PINT), “What Peggy Joyce’s husbands say it with” (FLOWERS).

One of 1929’s best bits of crossword news came from France: Morris Anceaux developed a new matrix of Braille squares that permitted the blind to make and do crossword puzzles, as well as work out algebraic problems and perform other grid-related tasks.

As 1929 concluded, multiple outlets announced they’d soon start running the “pinwheel puzzle,” destined to—you guessed it—replace the crossword and kick it to the curb like an old, bad habit. *This time we’ve figured it out for sure! You’ll all go back to buying multiple copies of the paper any day now!*

## A New Bell Sounds

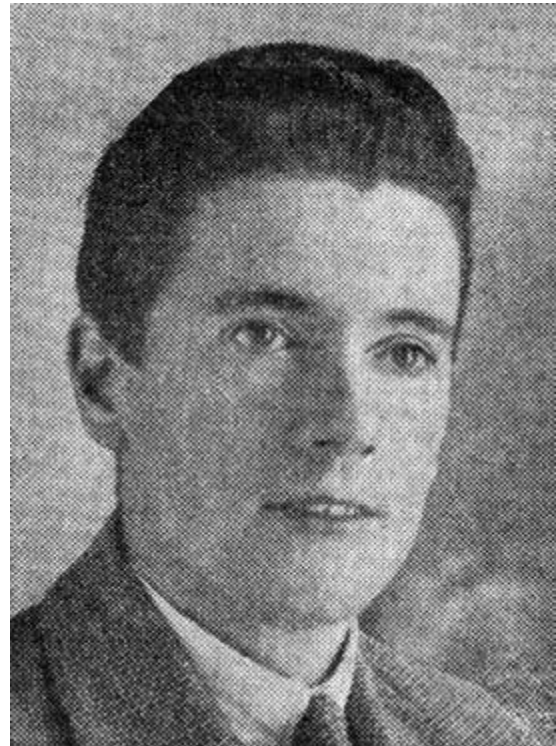
*I was upon the fringe of Suffolk, a county rich in agricultural detail missed by my untutored eye. It was but scenery to me: nor had I an inkling of what it might become. Farming, to my mind, was as yet the townsman’s glib catalogue of creatures and a symbol of escape. The friendliness of the scene before me lay beneath ardours of which I knew nothing. I was flying from the threat of office life. I was nineteen years old, and the year was 1920.*

—Adrian Bell, *Corduroy*, 1930

Adrian Bell seemed an unlikely choice to compose high-profile crosswords in 1930. His chief passion was farming, and the many books and newspaper articles he produced documented the rural life. Despite his love of great authors, he believed the best writing needed physical experience to inform it, and he lived by that belief. But in 1930, he was struggling. Unprepared for changes in British agriculture he'd later criticize, he'd sold his first farm and moved back in with his parents two years earlier.

The *Times* of London was the last major British paper without a crossword and had poooh-pooed the very idea in its early days. But it changed its tune after losing circulation to *The Daily Telegraph*. In early 1930, Adrian's father recommended him to become the *Times*' crossword-setter—despite his having never solved one in his life, much less made one. Adrian had ten days to put the first London *Times* crossword together. It appeared on February 1, and its debut was anything but auspicious.

The clues were unremarkable, and the left and right didn't even interlock. But a few tries later, Bell started finding his feet, incorporating the proto-cryptic clues Torquemada was doing. The *Times* would, in the long run, do more to standardize cryptic cluing than any other single publication.



Andrew Bell, in relative youth.



Bell's crossword feature, first installment.

Some crossword answers were Latin references: “Virgil speaks of barriers put up to me” (ILIUM) and “Horace calls Tarentum this” (AULON). That last clue must've meant a lot to Bell. Horace's poem praised the busy city of Tarentum but noted Horace would rather live out the rest of his days on a farm. Highfalutin' scholarship *and* the agrarian life? That was Bell all over.

Initial reactions to the *Times* crossword were mixed. The Canadian paper *The Province* (February 23) couldn't get enough:

*And so The Times, with a benignant gesture towards Mr. Winby of Notting Hill, has taken up with crossword puzzles. Ah, but not ordinary crossword puzzles! No crossword puzzles in The Times that you might solve while you were having your kipper for breakfast! No, but cultured crossword puzzles, erudite crossword puzzles, crossword puzzles that assume you to be a classical scholar, but which are still so erudite and cultured that you have to look up the standard authors on almost everything. How pleasant and delightful it all is; and how it softens the blow which fell when we discovered the incredible origins of that blessed word “carbarians.”*



Finally, someone classed up the pastime! What a relief! (“Carbarians” is a car-barbarians portmanteau for dangerous drivers.)

The National Puzzlers’ League was also taking note. In its *Enigma* publication, the puzzler Tweedledee, aka Geoffrey Gilbert, wrote:

*The crossword puzzle[s] as now published in such English papers as the Observer and the Times...demand mental agility. And when they are cracked, they leave the solver with the feeling that both he and the constructor are rather clever fellows. Which, to my mind, is the first and last requirement of a good puzzle.*

The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (March 8) was far less impressed:

*The trouble with them is that they are just as puzzling after they have been solved as they were before. Of course, anyone would be able to fill some of the spaces. When we were given the suggestion, “This cat evidently minds her own business,” we guessed at once that it was a “mouser” the Times had in mind; and sure enough, that is what it was. But other solutions are as clear as a London fog. For example, “One good ‘do’ and daddy goes to the wall” is interpreted as “dado.” We are told that “mischievous dealings usually come to a fishy end” suggests “elfin”; that “what we sometimes regard as employment is partly melted into thin air” suggests “fused,” and that “such a trap would never do for the gross” suggests “net.”*

*Though the publication of cross-word puzzles is to be regarded as a progressive step, it is to be feared that the Times has appraised the intelligence of its readers too highly, or that the wires are crossed in its puzzle department. If it hopes to lift cross-word puzzles to the high place in public esteem they have reached in the United States, it should not make its puzzles so puzzling.*

The *New York Times*’ reaction was an improvement from its days of withering scorn, but not a great improvement.

*[One] may wonder why the cross-word puzzle should win recognition in Printinghouse Square, London, E.C. 4 when it is plainly past its prime with us...*

*The explanation may be that the English public is more constant in its fashions, its amusements and its fads. With us the bicycle is the symbol of a vanished age, but in England it is a normal mode of locomotion. Among us ping-pong is occasionally played, but...in England people still play backgammon as a matter of course...*

*In the year 1960, when New York is mad over radio polo or kinemacolor chess or something of the sort, the London Times will probably continue to take adequate notice of the obi, the ai, the ore, and the snead.*

The casual use of American crosswordese made it clear the *NYT* staff had never *tried* one of the London *Times* puzzles—or any UK puzzle. It believed no crossword feature was different from any other, an illusion it'd cherish until it finally tried its own feature a decade later.

Insufferable as the *NYT* could be, it wasn't wrong that interest in the UK burned much hotter than in the US. Outside of the *Herald Tribune*, when US papers mentioned crosswords in 1930, they were often profiling a female celebrity, like actresses Eva Lang and Kathleen Nuttall, author and crossword designer Carolyn Wells, or motorcycle daredevil Olive Hager, who solved between stunts.

Meanwhile, in the UK, the crossword was expanding its reach: The *Guardian* rolled out a reworked main feature and a children's crossword. So did the *Irish Independent*.

It was inspiring arguments: one *Daily Telegraph* reader claimed he could defeat Torquemada's crossword in under eight minutes. Other letters to the editor asserted the booster must have been talking about the *Daily Telegraph*'s children's crossword.

It was motivating scholarly discourse: Edward Mathers (Torquemada) wrote a feature about it for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In December, the *Guardian* started publishing reader letters with titles like "The Anatomy of Crosswords," "The Superfluity of Black Squares," and "The Importance of Brevity" [in Clues].

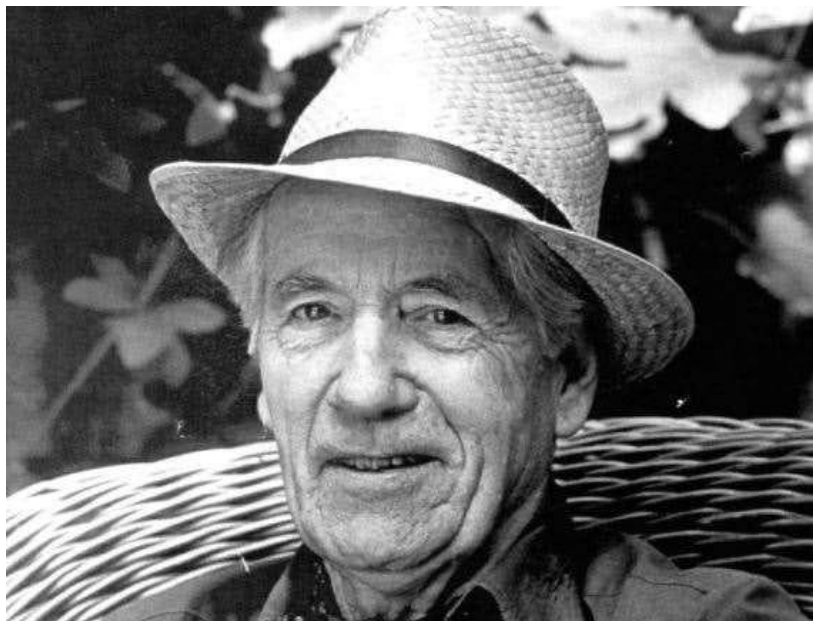
The *Newspaper World*, covering the newspaper business, reported the *Times* feature had had a ripple effect:

*The insertion of a crossword puzzle in The Times has caused several journals that have previously disdained them to look upon crosswords as perfectly respectable elements in a newspaper* (quoted in *The Australasian*, July 12).

And the money helped Adrian Bell get back to farming. He'd create more than 5,000 puzzles for the *Times* over 59 years. He composed most of them on the farms where he did indeed live out the rest of his days.

So, win-win. ■

*Special thanks to Ben Zimmer for research assistance.*



*Bell in later days.*



## POEMS? BOY!: THE A. HARRIS “POEM BOY” INTERVIEW

T Campbell

*Aled Harris, also known as A. Harris, made a name for himself this year via Facebook. The algorithm seems to love his simple poems, which is one of the few times it can be commended on its taste: their playful nature shows a lot of tricks with words that remind us what can be done with language, appropriate for his career as an English teacher. Some are also puzzling, not in an “oh, what does the symbolism mean” way but in a “what seven-letter word are these seven lines hinting at?” way. He released his first book last year and made a little time to talk to me as his day job’s summer vacation began.*

**T:** So you’re heading off on Thursday to Thailand, sounds like an interesting trip, very relaxing.

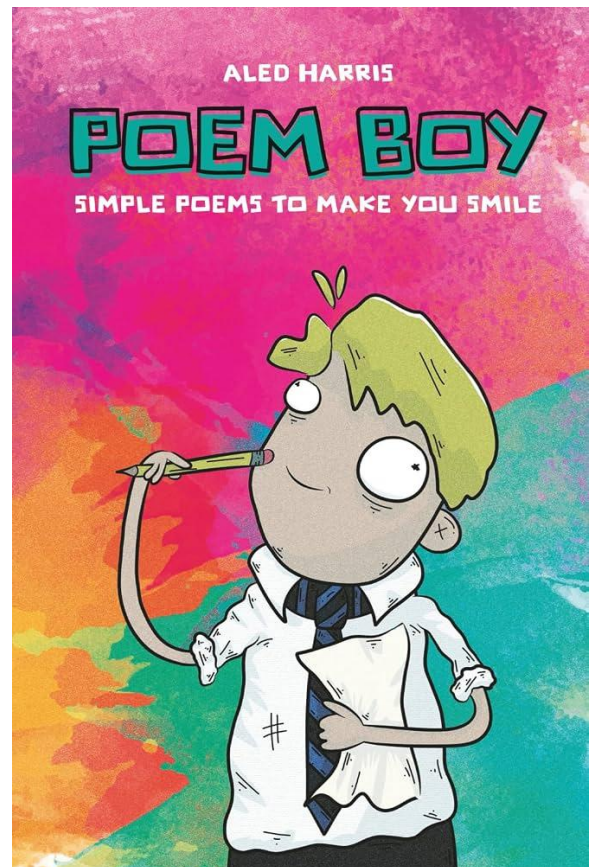
**A.:** It’ll be very much winding down, because I feel largely slammed by the end of term, we’ve got so many exams together, the final exam’s are just one week before we break up, and it’s like, oh, you need to mark all of these writing assignments...

**T:** Nobody talks about how stressful the end-of-term pile-up is for the teachers. Tell me a little bit about yourself. You go by A. Harris online, but your real name is...

**A.:** Aled Harris. I live in China and have done for a long time, but I started just south of London in England, that’s where I grew up. You want to know about why I started writing poems and stuff?

**T:** Yeah, I think that’s part of your origin story.

**A.:** I think a lot of poets have a similar story. I learned piano when I was 10 years old and was always writing songs. I’d write melodies and harmonies first, then I’d have to fit the lyrics into them. I had no idea what I was doing, but I was just winging it.



*The cover of Harris' first book is a self-portrait.*

Fifteen years later, when I finally sat down to write a poem, I realized I had trained myself to recognize emphasis on syllables, and without knowing it, to write poetry. I found it really quite easy compared to what I was doing, matching lyrics to random melodies. I think I was 28 when I started writing properly for poetry. I had a quarter-life crisis. I gave up drinking alcohol, I gave up smoking, I gave up meat, and then I started taking up more creative pursuits like photography and poetry. I wanted to learn how to write kids' poetry...

**T:** I assume your career teaching English in China was also informed by these newer priorities?

**A.:** I started in Spain. I went to university to study acting and drama, and there was a writing portion to that. My first job out of university was an acting job, going around schools in Spain and doing a show. The students study the material, and then you do a show, and the kids watch your show. It was a really cool job but very intense: you'd spend one week in Valencia, and then you'd travel for a week and go do five shows, you'd come back to Valencia for a week and then go out again, and every other week you went on this massive journey around Spain.



*Harris as rendered by conventional means.*

I liked it, but I wanted to be more central, so I decided on teaching English as a second language. I got a job in the International School of Madrid as a special needs assistant. I was basically employed by five of the parents to help their kids to study and keep up in class and stuff. And from there, my mum said, "Why are you in Spain? I've heard China's really good for teaching, and you seem to like doing that, so why not try China?" So I did, and in China, I taught at a load of different schools. I trained for my PGCE, and now I'm in an international school as an English literature teacher.

**T:** I would say that your work is informed by a sort of empathetic connection to the playfulness of youth, but there's a certain resonance that makes me think of Shel Silverstein...

**A.:** I didn't know him before, but I've read lots of his work now. I don't think that he does just write for kids. Shel Silverstein is insanely impressive, because he's so universal. The things that he writes, everyone understands.

**T:** It's something we can use more of in the world, I think. Language and entertainment as a unifying force. What poets *would* you consider influences?

**A.:** Kenn Nesbitt. He's a poet laureate for children in America, or at least for the Poetry Society. When I first started trying to learn to write poetry, I was looking online, like, "How do I do this? What am I meant to do?" And his website taught me how to use rhyme and meter, the basic rules of it, and listed some academic books, which I then went and got. He must be the biggest influence, because he literally taught me how to write poetry.

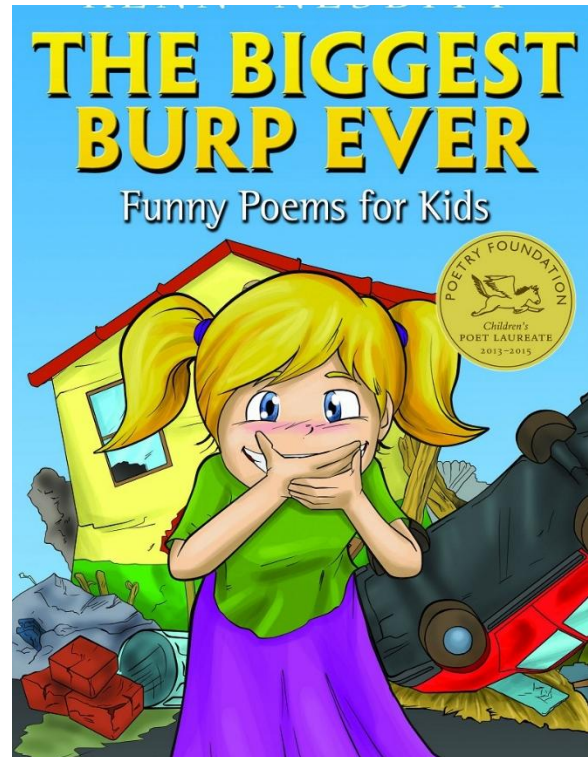
Brian Bilston. He's a very big poet on the internet, and I've always liked his poetry. I think it's led into how I make my poems. I get compared to him quite a bit.

Henry Normal is a poet too. I actually reached out to him last year as a grade seven teacher to interview him for the kids. We spoke in a bit back and forth. He's a great guy.

**T:** That's really cool for your students. I've never had an English teacher who did something like that.

It seems like you've got a preference for what I'd call formal poetry. There are a few naturalist poems guided more specifically by subject matter, but there does seem to be a very strong emphasis on "What can we do with words, what can I do with this particular poetic idea?" I was wondering if you thought in those terms, or if you just thought in terms of, "Well, what seems interesting today?"

**A.:** I'm consciously playing with form when I'm doing it but it's nothing grandiose. I tend to break my poems down into different categories. Because I'm so busy at work, and it is so tiring, I don't want to be writing these emotional poems. I like finding something not emotionally taxing. When you're already drained, it's just a nice activity, like putting



*One of Kenn Nesbitt's collections.*



*All poetry is a little magic. From the Poem Boy book, with illustrations also by Harris.*



together a puzzle. Sometimes I'm thinking, "What do I feel like today? Okay, I'm just going to make this, and let's see if I can do it."

I made a poem not too long ago asking the readers to find hidden words, and then another where they used all the silent letters from words to form another word. I like playing with form, and someone who looks at my work might think, "Wow, he's pushing form here, this is experimental!" But it's not out of a desire to further poetry or anything like that. It's just because I have this idea and I want it to work. I take pleasure in making it work or getting as close as I possibly can.

## Unspoken

-A.Harris

first, take the last of "Arkansas"  
then, "friend", you take the third  
in "would" we'll have the second to last  
and once again in "blurred"  
now, take the foot of "column"  
and the tail of "ricochet"  
listen, please don't mix it up,  
they're letters we don't say.

*A simple exercise for the reader.*

**T:** It seems you've been tacking toward puzzle poems lately. I remembered the silent one, and the acrostic one, the joke, and there was was one I wanted to ask you about, the "spot the difference" pair of poems. Are there really ten differences? Because I topped out at around six.

**A.:** There are. The whole concept of the poem sounds so easy, so I had to be pretty creatively tricky.

## Spot the Difference

-A.Harris

It ought to be straightforward.  
*Oh, how simple could this be!*  
*It's writing so the differences*  
*can't be that hard to see.*

Okay, that's fair,  
you've made your point.  
But try to find them, then.  
I bet you it's quite difficult.  
You'll never find all 10!

## Spot the Difference

-A.Harris

It ought to be straightforward  
*Oh, how simple could this be?*  
*Its writing so the differences*  
*can't be that hard to see.*

OK, that's fair,  
you've made your point.  
But try to find them, then.  
I bet you it's quite difficult.  
You'll never find all 10!

*A more challenging exercise for the reader!*

**T:** It's certainly good for engagement, and you've come a long way in those terms.

**A.:** I released this book a year ago, and I was writing for it a year before that, and at the beginning of April, I had 2,500 followers, and now, two or three months later, I've got 16,000 going on 17,000. The growth speed is insane. A lot of it is because it's so interactive that people click on it and spend a long time looking and reading through and trying to work out what's

happening. With photography, they scroll straight past. So Facebook's algorithm, for some reason, has picked up on people spending longer looking at it.

**T:** Sometimes I'll say to my friends that life is often unfair, and so we have no reason to complain when it's unfair in our favor, and the same thing can be said for the Facebook algorithm.

**A.:** I was talking about rhyme and meter earlier, how it became quite natural for me. I don't think it's such a difficult skill. It's something many people aren't even aware of. But I remember learning in school about Shakespeare using iambic pentameter. The way it was taught, or at least the way that I learned it was "Look at this amazing thing that Shakespeare did, he could write in iambic pentameter!" and that was such a skill that none of us could ever hope to learn. It's just normal, like, "would you like a cup of tea?" That's iambic, it's nothing special. When I write just a normal poem, I am worried people don't really see the skill, because it's all kind of underneath the hood. I think they just see it as a rhyme, and kind of think kids or anyone else can do it. Whereas, if I write something that has another layer, something a bit quirky, it's instantly visible that something else is happening.



**T:** And it's tricky sometimes, in your dual capacity as a poet and a teacher, because you want the work to feel accessible, you don't want people to feel like iambic pentameter is completely beyond them, but at the same time you want them to value what you do and not just say, "Oh, well, he's just talking. Anybody could do that."

*On one level, a straightforward abcb iambic pentameter quartet. On another, a cool stunt.*

**A.:** I teach grade seven and eight, and they love rhyme, but they don't love hard-to-get-into poems. They like figures of speech and rhyme, but it's really hard to write that. So I show them these poems that I love that are rhyming, and then have to tell them, "You probably shouldn't think about writing this kind of poem."

**T:** The subhead of your *Poem Boy* book is "Simple Poems to Make You Smile." Would you say that that's still the primary goal, considering what we've been talking about?

**A.:** Yeah. I would argue there's a lot of skill that goes into them, and there's a lot of thought that goes into them. I don't think they're simple to write. But I want things to be accessible, and I want them to be easily understood by everyone. Not everything I write is going for a smile, sometimes there's a bit more meaning, but yeah.

**T:** We always have to start by amusing ourselves. Have there been any poems or types of poems that the audience on Facebook seems particularly responsive to?

**A.:** The ones with the shapes. Those did far better than any other poem that I've ever posted. I have to be quite sparing, but there's a strategy to how I post them. Sometimes when things get slower, and I need to post repeats, I'll post those ones again. They're hard to write. They're actually the ones that I find hardest to write.

It's a completely different skill. It feels like luck to find a shape that works. For every one I write, there's ten that I don't like, so it's very hit and miss. With most other poems, I have an idea I work. With normal poems if it's good enough, it's fine. But with the shape poems, I abandon so many of them. I have an idea, for example, that I'm going to make one of the shape of an axe, thinking that should be easy, and then when I do it, it's not.

## Depth

*This face is fairly tough to read  
So, well done if you can. I kinda  
didn't factor in this stanza to my  
plan. Still, here we are, it reads  
some more and anything will do.  
Here's a little nonsense speech...  
Bee-bee-badder-baa. That's a sea.  
I think I see. I think I understand.  
Perhaps it's not about the shape.  
Does he think my writing's bland?*

My teacher said, the other day, But truly, paper's good enough.  
my poetry is 'flat'. I didn't really Did Shakespeare ever mention  
understand just what he meant needing to devise a way to use  
by that. It's on a piece of paper. the third dimension? Really, it's  
It's only in 2D. Should I write it ridiculous. Aren't poems tough  
on a box? Cause that feels off enough, without you adding all  
to me. Maybe I could carve the these useless, silly bits of fluff?  
work or sculpt it out of clay. Or Well, here you are. Is this okay?  
maybe paint the wall in school, I think I've cracked it now. If not  
"Hmmm, such depth" he'd say. I'm sorry. I just don't know how.

-A.Harris

*One of Harris' trickiest concrete-poem designs.*



T: My favorite, by the way, is the duck poem. The one with the feet.

A.: The duck poems are both favorites of mine. The other one is a simple exercise. It's not comparable, really.

T: I'll keep an eye out for the other one. I clearly need to go through them all.

A.: I'll probably repost it soon. Facebook pushes me to get out a post three times a day. I do it hearing myself say, "Make the most out of it."

T: Well, it's the world we live in.

A.: It's something I strongly, strongly criticize about "the world we live in." We play the game, we push hundreds and hundreds of posts out for an algorithm that, in the end, is not healthy in any way. The amount that I check my phone now is shameful. But if I don't, and then my Facebook account just stops whatever number I'm at now...

T: I have grappled with and have friends who've grappled with this. "How do I define myself when this algorithm that has no real interest in my well-being is happy to define me *for* me?"

A.: It's horrible. If a dating app does its job properly, it loses a customer, so they're motivated to keep you, not motivated to put you in the best match or someone that's going to be your active soulmate, even if that was possible. They don't have that motivation, and it's the same for any of these big tech companies. And instead of standing strong against it quietly, I'm actively leaning into it...

T: All this stuff is complicated. You're right about the incentive of the dating app, but if it becomes too frustrating and too obviously broken, they *also* lose customers, so they have an incentive to do their job to a certain degree, just not as well as most of us would like. Facebook is a negative place, but you make something positive.

A.: Yeah, with everyone putting their own poetry into my comments and stuff, it's genuinely a nice area of the internet that I have somehow carved out.

T: I think that's a good goal. ■

### Ducks -A.Harris

ducks  
are elegant  
above the water.  
They  
float  
slowly,  
this way and that.  
Graceful, peaceful, gentle,  
little birds which are definitely not  
hiding secret chaos legs beneath  
— the water's surface —  
not at  
all. No  
way, José.

### Autocorrect -A.Harria

Duck this phone.  
I've had Enoch.  
I sweat this thing is cursed.  
Stupor bustard, piece of shut.  
Autocorrect is the worst.

*Two very different poems beginning with more or less the same word.*



## OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST

T Campbell

This is the spot for additional items of interest to *Journal* readers. Though it's aimed at recent work, sometimes things don't come to my attention right away, so publications can be from anytime in the last couple of years.

### **Square Theory**

Adam Aaronson

Adam (a friendly acquaintance of the editor) composed this complex meditation on linked meanings with applications for crosswords and the class of wordplay known as double-doubles. A delightful journey through linked meanings and a new way of looking at the world.

<https://aaronson.org/blog/square-theory>

### **Palindrome complexity versus factor complexity**

Jeffrey Shallit

A deep dive into the mathematical nature of palindromes as a part of any real or theoretical language. Not for the amateur mathematician!

<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2606.08127>

### **“I See What You Did There”: Can Large Vision-Language Models Understand Multimodal Puns?**

Naen Xu, Jiayi Sheng, Changjiang Li, Chunyi Zhou, Yuyuan Li, Tianyu Du, Jun Wang, Zhihui Fu, Jinbao Li, Shouling Ji

Like it or not, AI and LLMs have had a huge impact on modern life. A recent avenue of research is not just large language models, but large vision-language models. The authors test how good these advanced models are at detecting human-like humor.

<https://aclanthology.org/2026.acl-long.444.pdf>

### **EmoType-Zero: Adaptive Fonts to Render the Speech Emotion**

Dong She, Jinghe Yu, Nuo Chen, Yuting Bai, Yang Gao, Zhanpeng Jin

The authors present EmoType-Zero, an interface that uses lively typography as a means of emotional expression, to liven up and realify online speech.

<https://dl.acm.org/doi/full/10.1145/3772363.3798656>

### **Book: *The Wombats Go Wild for Words***

Beth Ferry with illustrator Lori Nichols

“A trio of wandering wombats with a passion for words inspire an enthusiastic duckling to transform her town from dull to dazzling in this delectable picture book.” ■

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

*The Journal of Wordplay* is a free-to-submit, free-to-read publication. All rights revert to the original authors after publication.

Formats are generally 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri without indents, though exceptions can be made, especially if the format is important to the content of the piece.

*The Journal* is interested in any studies, essays, puzzles, exercises, or other works that showcase wordplay of any kind. However, broader forms of wordplay call for a more specific approach.

Almost any material that uses specific wordplay types like anagrams, spoonerisms, palindromes, or letterbanks might be of interest. That's just a quick list of some of the most prominent types: there are many more.

Broader forms of wordplay include puns, puzzles, writing-style exercises, and even well-worn literary techniques like alliteration and rhyme. However, we wouldn't want to publish a piece of short fiction just because it reads like James Patterson, or song lyrics just because they rhyme, or a crossword with some punny theme entries. In the case of each of those examples, there are plenty of other venues for such works, and there'd be no point in us competing for those!

Here are a few examples of specific approaches to those broader forms: a jokey exercise where a famous work is rewritten in the styles of different authors, an account of how a songwriter might build a "book of rhymes," a study of Shakespearean punning, or a survey of the most commonly used crossword grids. (Here too, there are many more possibilities.)

We are fine with wordplay that ventures into sex, bathroom humor, and other taboo topics. However, we do not generally accept studies that focus on words that primarily insult genders and minority groups, and we will sometimes edit submissions to remove those terms. This policy helps maintain the playful spirit and long-term health of the publication.

Rule of thumb: *The Journal of Wordplay* is here to provide studies and perspectives on wordplay that readers won't often find anywhere else. If that sounds like something you're into, then we look forward to your *Journal* submission!

Submissions can be directed to the editor at [tcampbell1000@gmail.com](mailto:tcampbell1000@gmail.com). ■

## CONTRIBUTORS

**T Campbell** has written many experimental works, including long-running webcomics series (*Fans*, *Cool Cat Studio*, *Rip and Teri*, *Penny and Aggie*, *Gilded Age*, *Traveler*), collections of anagrams, and the Ubercross Abecedaria, the world's largest crossword puzzle. He has served *The Journal of Wordplay* as editor and contributor since its inception. Regular updates can be found at his Substack, <http://tcampbell.substack.com>.

**Darryl Francis** writes:

My introduction to word puzzles and word games came via a Martin Gardner review in *Scientific American* of one of Dmitri Borgmann's first two books—either *Language on Vacation* or *Beyond Language*. I very quickly bought both books, then began subscribing to *Word Ways*, from its first issue in February 1968. I've created over 200 articles for *Word Ways* right up until its last issue in 2020. Then a brief stint at *Interim*, and now finally onto *The Journal of Wordplay*. I had ongoing correspondence with *Word Ways* editors Borgmann and Ross Eckler over the years, plus plenty of occasional contact with other word puzzlers. I've also been a member of the National Puzzlers' League. I've written books on Scrabble and been a longtime compiler of Collins Official Scrabble Words, which is used pretty much everywhere outside the US. I also collect all sorts of dictionaries, word books, gazetteers, thesauruses (thesauri!), and puzzle material.

**Daniel Galef** is a PhD student at the University of Cincinnati, where he teaches classes on science fiction and collects counterfeit coins. His puzzling poems have appeared in, among others, *Word Ways*, *Light Quarterly*, and *Scientific American*. If you liked this and want to read more weird persona poems chock full of wordplay, check out his book *Imaginary Sonnets*: <https://danielgalef.com/book/>.

**Don Hauptman**, *TJoW* Resident Punster, says:

I'm a recreational linguistics enthusiast, thoroughly captivated by what Leo Rosten once called "the mischief of language." I've written two published books in this genre: My celebration of spoonerisms, *Cruel and Unusual Puns* (Dell, 1991), received rave reviews and quickly went into a second printing, selling in total almost 40,000 copies. The second book is *Acronymania* (Dell, 1993), a serious/funny look at abbreviations.

For its last several decades, I was a regular contributor to *Word Ways*. My humor, wordplay, and light verse have appeared as articles, fillers, and letters in *Reader's Digest*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Observer*, *7 Days*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and two major in-flight magazines: *Sky* (Delta) and *American Way*.

I made more than 100 appearances in the wordplay competitions that were a popular feature of *New York Magazine*. For four and a half years, I wrote "The Language Perfectionist," a (mostly) serious weekly column on grammar and usage, for *Early to*

*Rise*, at the time the largest-circulation online daily newsletter. In real life, I'm a freelance advertising copywriter, now quasi-retired.

**Michael Griffith's** most recent book is *The Speaking Stone: Stories Cemeteries Tell*. Since 2020, he has contributed two puzzles to each issue of *The Southern Review*.

**Michael Keith** is a retired software engineer whose career included Bell Labs, the David Sarnoff Research Center, and Intel. His abiding interest in recreational mathematics and wordplay is the direct result of religiously reading Martin Gardner's monthly column in *Scientific American* starting in the mid-1960s. He contributed around 40 articles for *Word Ways* and 10 or so for *Interim*. In 2010 his book *Not A Wake* was released, the first (and still the only) book ever published written entirely in Pilish (English but with the letter counts in successive words following the digits of pi).

**Richard Lederer, Ph.D.**, is the author of sixty-five books about language, history, and humor. His newest language books are *Lederer's Language & Laughter*, *A Feast of Words*, *Anguished English*, and *Jest for the Pun of It*. He is a founding co-host of "A Way With Words" on public radio. Dr. Lederer has been named International Punster of the Year and Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel winner.

**Gregg Siegel** is a freelance copywriter, former freelance jokewriter for several late night shows and a competitive punner. Yes, that's a thing. ■

## ANSWERS

### THE TREMBLEY ENIGMA: SOLUTIONS

Poem solution text:

#### Abraham Trembley to a Polyp: An Imaginary Sonnet

A miracle! A monster! If a man  
Lay cleft in twain, beheaded, drawn and quartered  
Like so, his disparate members thus disordered  
Till all resemblance borne to nature's plan  
Had been confused, as if by a fougasse,  
And then the scattered smithereens began  
To animate and aggregate, amass,  
Concatenate, and fuse in such a span  
As I have just now witnessed, crowds would faint.  
Not one would watch but name you fiend, or saint.  
Beliefs can also burst, and systems shatter;  
Enlightenment, perhaps, comes when, like matter,  
It gathers itself back, a queenless swarm,  
So that our understanding might Reform.

Acrostic key:

**“The hydra of the poets is no longer anything in comparison with yours, and the hero who delivered the world of it had not, in my opinion, a juster claim to be celebrated, than the observer to whom we owe so many prodigies.”**

—**Charles Bonnet**, letter to Abraham Trembley

Poem acrostic:

**“They [Trembley’s observations] show us very clearly that the whole of nature proceeds by gradations, and that *all that can be is*.”**

—George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, letter to the Vice-President of the Royal Society, 18th July 1741

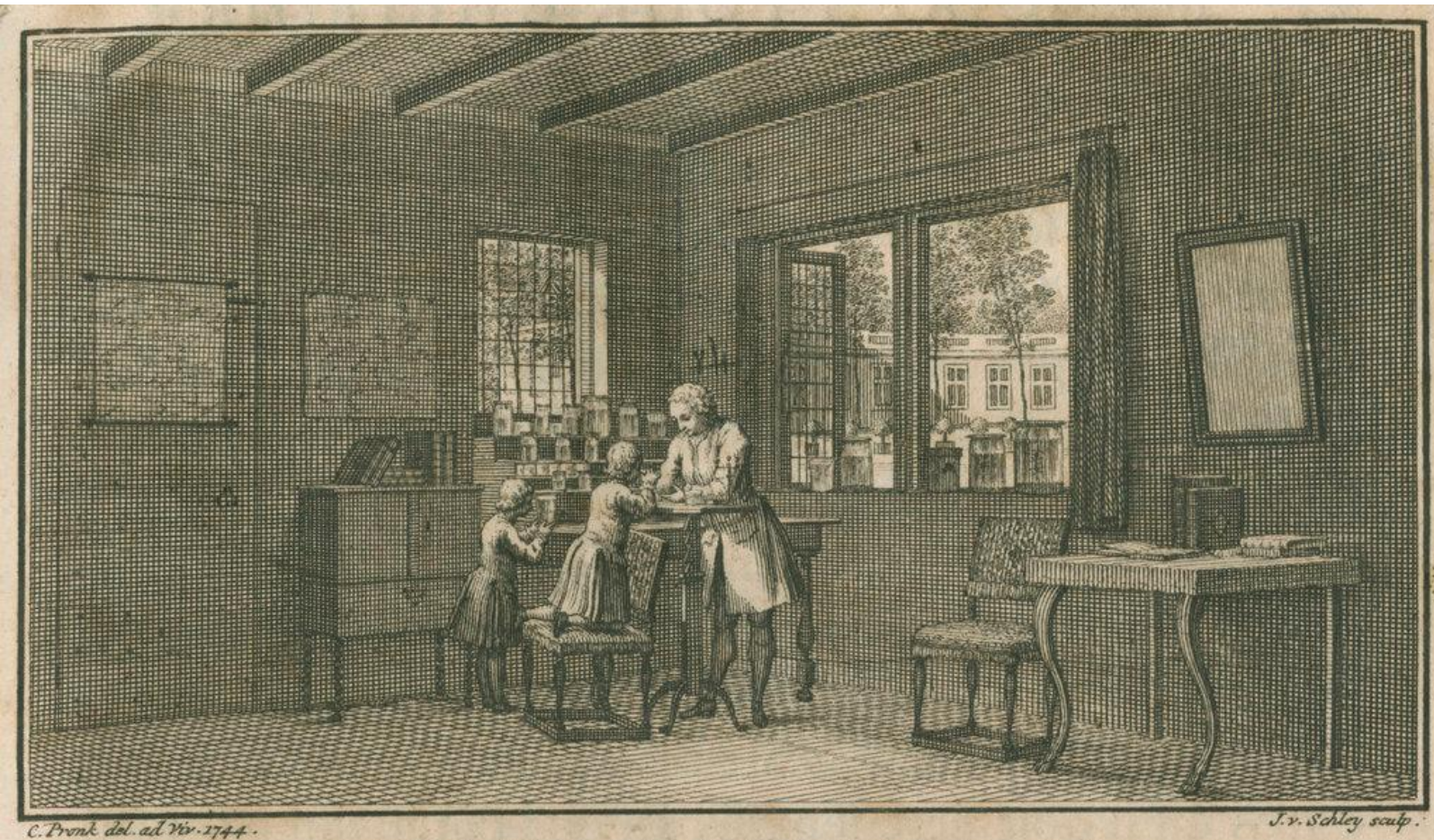
Individual clue answers:

- A. TENTACLES
- B. HATCH
- C. ESTRUS
- D. HEDGE
- E. YEOMEN
- F. DUFFEL
- G. RUBENS

H. ABRACADABRA  
 I. OCCULT  
 J. FALAFEL  
 K. TWEAK  
 L. HEADDRESS  
 M. E-FILE  
 N. PEAHEN  
 O. OCTOPI  
 P. ESCHEW  
 Q. THERMAL  
 R. STAVE  
 S. INSTANT  
 T. SWISS  
 U. NERD  
 V. ON THE FENCE  
 W. LAMBS  
 X. OPHELIA  
 Y. NEAR MISS  
 Z. GUESS WHO  
 AA. EMMENTAL  
 AB. ROAD  
 AC. ACQUIT  
 AD. NAME-DROP  
 AE. YENTA  
 AF. TARDINESS  
 AG. HERMES  
 AH. IRIDESCENT  
 AI. NUNNERY  
 AJ. GABFEST  
 AK. ITS LIGHT  
 AL. NAMASTE  
 AM. CAMUS

AN. OUTWEIGH  
 AO. MNEMONIST  
 AP. P. E. M. D. A. S.  
 AQ. AFFAIR  
 AR. RAW DATA  
 AS. INQUISITION  
 AT. SHADE TREE  
 AU. ORGAN DONOR  
 AV. NEWTS  
 AW. WELDS  
 AX. INSISTENT  
 AY. TANTAMOUNT  
 AZ. HERAKLES  
 BA. YEET  
 BB. OFF-BRAND  
 BC. UNMANLIEST  
 BD. RUNG  
 BE. SANDBAG  
 BF. CLANK  
 BG. HUMIDOR  
 BH. ABSURD  
 BI. RAGWEED  
 BJ. LACTATES  
 BK. EBBETS  
 BL. SNATH  
 BM. BAJA  
 BN. OARSMAN  
 BO. NUDIST  
 BP. NORTENO  
 BQ. EDDIES  
 BR. TALLOW





*Abraham Trembley with pupils  
(see page 30)*