

Style Invitational Week 1172: What can you cook up with pieces of ‘Pie’?

Write something using the words in ‘American Pie’; plus winning super-nerd humor



Sweet perfume: Foul Moss With Pink Fat? This week's contest is to write something with words from "American Pie." (Bob Staake/for The Washington Post)

By Pat Myers • Entertainment April 21

(Click [here to skip down](#) to the winners of our esoteric-humor contest.)

“Sweet perfume for your love? How about this ‘Foul Moss With Pink Fat’?”

For me, the day the music died was when my bride told me she had made love with the marching band, all of them.

The Empress doesn't care that she's dating herself to recall picking up and resetting the arm of her Panasonic turntable 2 million times as she painstakingly transcribed the lyrics to Don McLean's "American Pie" from the 1971 album, as her eighth-grade school algebra homework lay undone. (Not that they weren't just as baffling.) This week we offer the latest of several "word bank" contests we've done over the years, mining, among others, the Book of Genesis, Hamlet's soliloquy, the Gettysburg Address and "The Cat in the Hat": **Write a short passage — an observation, a joke, a dialogue, a poem, anything — using only words that appear in the song "American Pie,"** as in the examples above (the first is by Jeff Shirley, who suggested this contest). The lyrics are available all over the Internet; I'd go with the ones at lyrics007.com, which you can reach from this week's Style Conversational column. *One note, though:* McLean's "American Pie" album didn't include a lyric sheet (I didn't hate algebra *that* much) and so: Who "read a book on Marx" — Lenin or Lennon? The context of the song (as well as most Internet lyrics) indicates Lennon, but surely there's a definitive ruling? Well, I found the sheet music, published by Warner Bros.

And it says, right there in Verse 2: "Lennin." So you may use either Marx-reader. You may use words in the song only as often as they appear in the lyrics; for instance, the word "down" appears twice, so your passage could include "down" twice. You can't use part of a word as a whole word — don't pluck "with" from "without," for example. You may change capitalization and punctuation however you like.

but that's not how it used to be when the
In a coat he borrowed from James Dean
Oh and while the king was looking down,
The courtroom was adjourned, no verdict
And while Lennin read a book on Marx t
And we sang dirges in the dark
The day the music died
We were singin'... bye-bye... etc.

The sheet music for "American Pie" doesn't rule very usefully on whether it's "Lennon" or "Lenin." You may use either for Week 1172. (Warner Bros. Music)

Winner gets the [Inkin' Memorial](#), the Lincoln statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets a handsome, tall ceramic mug depicting Rosie the Riveter — no, wait, it's Princess Leia depicting Rosie the Riveter. Who would also rock in the Rebel Alliance. Donated by Brendan Beary.

Other runners-up win their choice of a yearned-for [Loser Mug](#), the older-model "[This Is Your Brain on Mugs](#)" mug or a vintage Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-over Loser magnets, "[Magnet Dum Laude](#)" or "[Falling Jest Short.](#)" First Offenders receive a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" ([FirStink](#) for their first ink). Email entries to losers@washpost.com. Deadline is Monday night, May 2; results published May 22 (online May 19). You may submit up to 25 entries per contest. Include "Week 1172" in your email subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline for this week's results is by Jon Gearhart; the honorable-mentions subhead was submitted by both Kevin Dopart and Chris Doyle. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev. "Like" the Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; follow [@StyleInvite](https://twitter.com/StyleInvite) on Twitter.

🗨️ **The Style Conversational:** The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. Especially if you plan to enter, check it out at wapo.st/styleconv.

[And the winners of the Style Invitational contest announced four weeks ago . . .](#)

THE GAME IS AFOOT(NOTE): THE NERD-HUMOR WINNERS OF WEEK 1168

We called [Week 1168](#) Asterisky Business: We asked for jokes whose punch lines required specialized knowledge to get. Whew, there are a lot of erudite people out there, many of whom helpfully offered 200-word explanations of the joke. These, fortunately, are more concise.

4th place

Doc 1: I treated a kid who bruised his patella on some rocks.

Doc 2: What was your diagnosis?

Doc 1: ***Nephrolithiasis!**

*Kidney stones (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

3rd place

Why did the farmer get arrested? Because he said he was going to go out and mow down his ***grama**.

*Any of various grasses of the genus *Bouteloua*, often used for pasturage. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)





Coffee and buns: Princess Leia does Rosie the Riveter on this week's second prize.

2nd place and 'The Ultimate North Carolina Quiz Book':

Why did the gerontologist immediately switch his choice after watching the debate?

The candidate promised that he would make America not just great, but ***confabulous**.

*Confabulation can occur in certain forms of dementia; the patient has no conception of what is true, and in conversation may invent things. (Kel Nagel MD, Salisbury, Md.)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKIN' MEMORIAL:

Why were the French tourists in D.C. embarrassed when they took their toddlers to the National Zoo?

A. The kids started yelling, ***"Seal! Seal!"**

*The French word for seal is *phoque*. (Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

LESSOTERICA: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Why didn't historians like the movie "Braveheart"?

They found Mel Gibson's performance too ***woaden**.

*Woad, a blue dye derived from *Isatis tinctoria*, would not have been worn as face paint as late as the 13th century. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)

Why did 1960s singer Mary O'Brien pick a new stage name?

Because ***"Pulveratricious Springfield"** didn't fit on the marquee.

*Covered with dust. (Jon Gearhart, Des Moines)

"After three dates, he still seems afraid of physical contact. I finally told him: "If you're just going to approach me but never touch me, you can take your ***asymptote** it home."

*In analytic geometry, an asymptote is a line that continually approaches a given curve but never meets it. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Why did the Greek priest run out of the harvest festival to place bread in his chariot? Because he forgot to *feed Demeter.****

*The first loaf of bread was always sacrificed to Demeter (de-ME-ter), the goddess of grain. (Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

What did the tritium say to the nuclear reactor on their 12th anniversary? "You *made me what I am, and I ***halved the time of my life.**"****

*Tritium, a product of nuclear fission, undergoes radioactive decay with a half-life of 12 years. (Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.)

Why did the princess leave the stable with a hoofprint on her face?

Her fairy godmother had told her to kiss a ***frog!**

*The frog is the wedge of cushioning tissue under a horse's foot. (Sarah Jay, Churchville, Md., a First Offender)

What did the print shop owner tell his queasy employee?

"If you're going to throw up, then ***vomit under the 3/em-spaces and run!"**

*A mnemonic used for the order of part of the [California Job Case](#), a storage unit for letterpress type; a 3/em-space was used between words. (Gil Glass, Washington)

Why will your fuddy-duddy composer friend get upset if you invite him over to drink a couple bottles of vodka with you?

He doesn't approve of ***parallel fifths**.

*Parallel fifths — two consecutive chords of intervals five notes apart — were long frowned upon in classical music. (Duncan Stevens)

Einstein's Mama is so huge that **her waist is a ***straight line.****

*Einstein hypothesized that space was curved, so that after traveling a HUGE distance, a straight line might meet itself. (Edward Gordon, Austin)

Why were sportswriters shocked when Adrian Peterson put up stats of 4 fumbles, sixty-two yards rushing, and no touchdowns?

Because it's not ***AP style!**

*Per the Associated Press Stylebook, numbers under 10 should be spelled out, numbers 10 and above are written in numerals, and the serial comma is not used in simple series. (Dallas Baker, Arlington, Va., a First Offender)

A grisly sight in the corridor at Springfield Elementary: There was a dismembered human foot labeled "video," a hand marked "videre," an ear labeled "vidi" and a nose marked "visus." "But who is the victim?" gasped Mrs. Krabappel. The Latin teacher whispered, "It's Mr. Skinner — those are **principal parts.**"

*The labels are the principal parts (or verb forms) of the Latin *video*, "I see." (Latin teacher Ann Martin, Falls Church, Va.)

At a recent summit, Angela Merkel leaned over to Barack Obama and suggested they share a private hot-tub rendezvous. The president whispered back, "Your place or mine?" Just then, Michelle Obama walked by and gave them both a dirty look. At which point Merkel passed Obama a note: "**My *Bad.**"

**Bad* is a German word for "spa." (Mark Raffman)

Why did the exchange student from Athens think his fraternity would have pay toilets?

Because the frat was ***Pi Pi Phi.**

*The modern Greek pronunciation of "pi pi phi" is "pee pee fee." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

What does the worst kid at sports have in common with ***Constantine, son of Áed?**

Both are the last Pict.

*Constantine (c. 874-952) was the last king of the Picts, a Scottish tribe. (Frank Osen)

What did one **haloquadratum** say to the other haloquadratum about their forbidden love?

"We have to stop *mating like this."

*Haloquadratae are unicellular organisms that can reproduce only asexually. (Jeff Shirley, Richmond, Va.)

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How could Alice be sure that Joe, the masked man, was her mugger?

It was ***appositive** identification.

*An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that re-identifies the noun preceding it; in this entry, "the masked man" is an appositive, offering another identification of Joe besides his name. (English professor Amanda Yanovitch, Midlothian, Va.)

Physics prof: Do you know what Avogadro's number times Planck's constant equals?

Student: ***NAh.**

Prof: That's it!

*In physics, the product of Planck's constant and Avogadro's number is NAh, the molar Planck's constant — the amount of uncertainty associated with calculating the mass of carbon-12. (Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.)

Why wouldn't the zombies eat the **incompetent geologist?**

He had ***schist** for brains.

*A metamorphic rock. (Kathleen DeBold, Burtonsville, Md.)

How do you get to **Paradise?**

You get to ***Paradise** through ***Intercourse**, as long as you stop before ***Blue Ball**.

*Paradise, Intercourse and Blue Ball are towns near Lancaster, Pa. (Jim Swartz, Madison, N.J., who died last month; his son-in-law Warren Tanabe, Annapolis, Md., passed it along)

Still running — deadline Monday, April 25: Our contest for song "tailgaters." See bit.ly/invite1171.

 **2 Comments**

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