

Entertainment

Style Invitational Week 1421: Alternaugural Address '21

Use words from Biden's speech to say something humorous; plus winning obit poems



(Bob Staake for The Washington Post)

By Pat Myers

Jan. 28, 2021 at 9:46 a.m. EST

+ Add to list

(Click [here](#) to skip down to the winning obit poems)

Four years ago in this space, the Empress invited (that *is* what we do) the Loser Community to compose a sentence or more that used only words appearing in the 2017 presidential inaugural address. The man who delivered those 1,433 words is now gone from Washington, but we're still here. And it seems only fair that we welcome President Biden to Loserdom as well, and this time we won't be worrying that he could explode into a tweet-rage. (That didn't happen in 2017, to our relief. But it might have!)

This week: Write a humorous passage — a “quote,” an observation, a joke, a dialogue, a poem, anything — using only words that appear in Biden’s inaugural address. For consistency, please use the White House’s transcript, which you can find at wapo.st/biden-address or by Googling. You may use a word only as many times as it appears in the speech; for example, you may use “history” up to seven times, and “hope” up to four, but “bottom” only once (and “carnage,” blessedly, not at all). You must use the whole word as it appears (“testing” but not “test”) but you may change capitalization and punctuation however you like. (Use the hyphenated “once-in-a-century” and “swearing-in” as separate words.) You may attribute your “quote” to someone else.



Handy-dandy tool! Thanks to Loser Todd DeLap, we've also published an alphabetical list of all 2,500 or so words in the speech, along with the number of times each is used. Check out wapo.st/invite-list-1421.

Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1421 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday, Feb. 8;** results appear Feb. 29 in print, Feb. 24 online.

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Katherine Heigl is done apologizing



It looks like something from Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory, but it's just an intriguing plaything. A "hand boiler," this week's second prize. (Pat Myers/The Washington Post)

results appear Feb. 27 in print, Feb. 24 online.

Winner gets the Clowning Achievement, our new Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a classic “**hand boiler**,” which, relax, doesn’t boil your hand; it’s a steampunk-looking plaything consisting of two feather-light glass bulbs with a tube coiling decoratively between them. When your hand warms the bottom bulb, the rise in gas pressure makes red liquid snake through the coils to the top bulb. Donated by Dave Prevar.

AD

Other runners-up win their choice of our “[For Best Results, Pour Into Top End](#)” [Loser Mug](#) or our “[Whole Fools](#)” Grocery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, “[No Bility](#)” or “[Punderachiever](#).” First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air “freshener” ([FirStink](#) for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at [wapo.st/InvRules](#). The headline “Yearly Departed” was submitted by both Chris Doyle and Jesse Frankovich”; Dave Prevar wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. 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](#); and follow [@StyleInvite](#) on Twitter.

The Style Conversational: The Empress’s weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. See this week’s, published late Thursday afternoon, Jan. 28, at [wapo.st/conv1421](#).

[And from The Style Invitational four weeks ago . . .](#)

Yearly departed: The obit poems of Week 1417

[Week 1417](#) was our annual contest for poems about those who died in the past year. Numerous verses about the artist Christo ended “That’s a wrap” or reported that Kenny Rogers knew when to fold ‘em.

4th place:

Whitey Ford (1928-2020)

Bob Gibson (1935-2020)

Phil Niekro (1939-2020)

Tom Seaver (1944-2020)

The way they’d pitch the ball,

And with perfection flirt,

Would hold us in their thrall,

And batters disconcert.

But now they’ve hit the wall,

For no one can avert

The Umpire’s final call:

“Outside and in the dirt.”

(*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

3rd place:

Katherine Johnson (1918-2020), protagonist of ‘Hidden Figures’

Katherine G. Johnson, the NASA computer,

Mathematician ahead of her time.

Lived a long life to a hundred and one,

Speaking numerically, died in her prime.

(*Ellen Haas, Alexandria, Va., a First Offender*)

2nd place

and the mask that accidentally says ‘crotch’ in Hebrew letters:

Frank Carney (1938-2020), co-founder of Pizza Hut

In keeping with traditions old,

Once boxed, he was delivered cold.

(*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)



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And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

Michael Sexson (1966-2020), treasure hunter

Michael Sexson, 53, had read of buried treasure;
Set out with just some clues, and an acquaintance, for good measure.
They didn't find the gold. Soon, cold and hungry, they got lost,
But searchers finally brought 'em down the mountain to defrost.



Now most folks, being reasonable, would kiss this quest goodbye;
But not *these* two! In just one month, they made a *second* try . . . ,
Bad choice. At least the *pal* survived ('cause later they were found),
But Michael (like the gold) has now been buried underground.
(Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

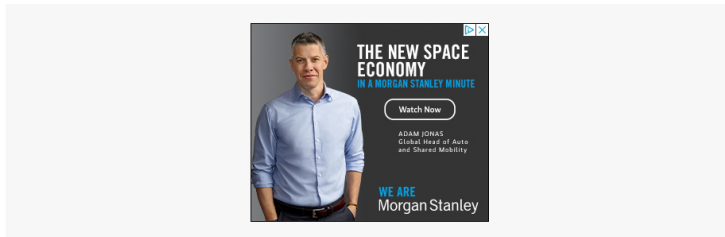
Passing: Honorable mentions

James Randi (1928-2020), magician and debunker

James Randi was the enemy of mystics and clairvoyants.
The so-called supernatural he looked on with annoyance.
He sniffed at paranormal claims and often proved them phony.
And what about the afterlife? His ghost says it's baloney.
(Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore)

Jim Lehrer (1934-2020), newsman and moderator of many presidential debates

Though you might well have wanted, if given a choice,
To put off that heavenly chime,
It wasn't to be — an ethereal voice
Spoke up: "Jim, you've exceeded your time."
(Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)



Whitlow Au (1940-2020), pioneer in understanding the echolocation of dolphins and whales

No matter their region or nation,
All dolphins and whales in creation
Revere Whitlow's name
And agree he became
The first ape to speak fluent Cetacean.
(Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.)

Herman Cain (1945-2020), politician who died of the coronavirus

Herman Cain, a mask-forgoer,
Should have been a better-knower.
(Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.)

Bill Withers (1938-2020), singer-songwriter

Bill Withers left some legacy:
"Ain't No Sunshine," "Lean on Me."
His hits are an impressive list;
I know I know I know I know
I know I know I know I know
I know I know he will be missed.
(Bruce Niedt, Cherry Hill, N.J.)

Chuck Yeager (1923-2020), test pilot

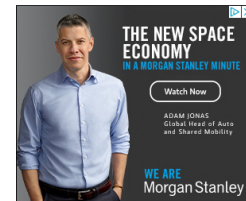
I. A brash young Chuck Yeager once flew up so high

Podcast

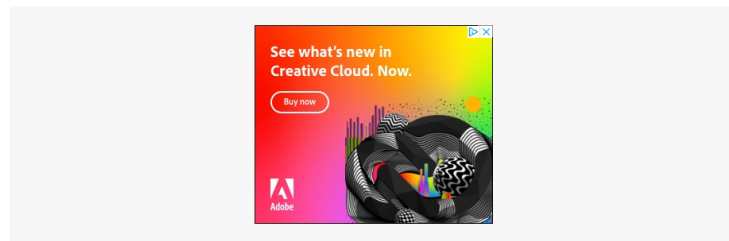
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He found himself passing through heaven.
He tried on some wings and then left with a cry:
"I'll take those when I'm 97."
(Bob Kruger, Rockville, Md.)



II. Too soon, it seems, Chuck Yeager passed.
Of course, the man was always fast:
We didn't have to wait around
For him to break the speed of sound.
But though he never made us wait,
We find that now we hesitate
To think he's gone: What made him great
Was never being called "the Late."
(Alex Steelsmith, Kailua, Hawaii)

Pierre Cardin (1922-2020), fashion designer

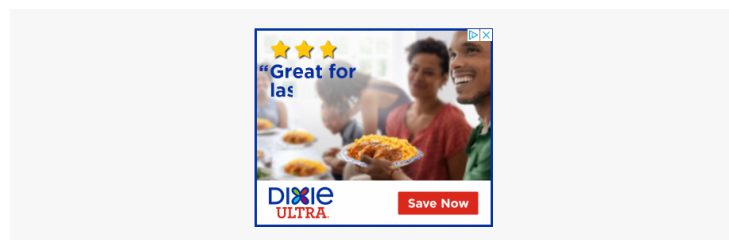
Pierre Cardin is *dans un jardin*,
In an urn that is trendily go-go,
With a very conspicuous logo.
(Frank Osen)

Don Larsen (1929-2020) pitched a World Series perfect game

In 1956 the Dodgers couldn't hit or score
As Larsen left them in a batting drought.
The men who took the field that day have all passed on before;
Now Don himself becomes the final out.
(Matt Monitto, Bristol, Conn.)

Mike Hughes (1956-2020), daredevil

I. They used to call him "Mad" Mike Hughes, a daredevil of sorts,
His motorcycle racing led to other dicey sports.
He built himself a rocket just to prove the Earth is flat,
The FAA said, "Nix!" and so it seemed that that was that.



But Mike was quite persistent, so their pesky rules he cast off;
The Science Channel even came to film his fatal blastoff.
A crash would be the death of him, and surely Mad Mike knew it;
Was it a dare? (And could it be, the devil made him do it?)
(Beverly Sharp)

II. My first name's Mike, last name Hughes.
I have some news that you can use.
No matter if Earth's round or flat,
A falling rocket goes kersplat.
(Sam Mertens, Silver Spring, Md.)

Regis Philbin (1931-2020), TV host

In light of Philbin's rapid rise
Down here in showbiz, no surprise
That up in heaven true prestige is
Getting booked on "Dead! With Regis."
(Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.)

Diana Rigg (1938-2020), British actress

Many geezers (it's time to reveal)

Used to watch “The Avengers” with zeal.
Even though they’ll attest
She was properly dressed,
How they wished they could watch [Emma peel!](#)
(*Beverley Sharp*)



James Bond movie stars Sean Connery (1930-2020) and Honor Blackman (1925-2020)

I. Honor Blackman’s signature role
Was in “Goldfinger,” playing a cat.
Of course, that’s not exactly true,
But you know where I’m going with that.
(*Neal Starkman, Seattle*)

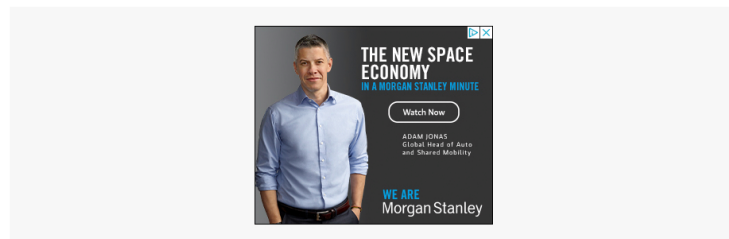
II. Saint Peter: “Step in through the door.
Have you any idea what’s in store?
Agent Double-O-Seven,
You’re gonna love heaven,
For here, too, we have Pussy Galore.”
(*Mark Raffman*)

Jack Sherman (1956-2020), guitarist for the Red Hot Chili Peppers:

Our eyes grow red, our tears amass,
It stings when Chili Peppers pass.
(*Danielle Nowlin, Fairfax Station, Va.*)

Larry Tesler (1945-2020) created computer cut, copy, paste, undo editing functions

For Larry Tesler, words of praise:
Mortality Ctrl-X short his days.
His shortcuts for a large text Ctrl-C
Kept online writers from getting sloppy.
How useful are the tools he’s given
In the fast-Ctrl-V world in which we’re livin’.
There is no doubt, it must be true,
Our thanks to him are not Ctrl-Z.
(*Ken Kaufman, Derwood, Md.*)



Lou Brock (1939-2020), baseball Hall of Famer

I. On the art of stealing bases, Mr. Brock could write a tome,
But only last September did we see him stealing home.
(*Jonathan Jensen*)

II. Of Lou Brock’s knack to swipe a bag, there just was no controllin’ it.
If heaven has a second base, by now Lou’s surely stolen it.
(*Bill Dornier, Indianapolis*)

Diego Maradona (1960-2020), Argentinian soccer legend
THIS STAR

I’ve been asked to write a poem to a star who died last year,
I didn’t know they’d passed — I’m shocked. My tribute follows here:
This star inspired mania! They’d fill any arena!
This star inspired us to sing “Don’t Cry for Me Argentina.”
This star’s amazing footwork was rhythmic and hypnotic.
This star could score at will, but could still be quite neurotic.
This star is well deserving of that stellar Grammy honor . . .
This star . . . What? Who? Diego? Oh, I thought you said Madonna!
(*Tommy Griffin, Greenville, England*)

(Tony Crayter, Sevenoaks, England)

Tom Dempsey (1947-1920), record-setting NFL kicker

You astounded the docs who were there by your bed;
You succeeded in raising the bar.
They'd seen folks kick the bucket, but never, they said,
Had it flown so remarkably far.

(Duncan Stevens)

Betty Dodson (1929-2020), 'guru of self-pleasure'

I'd like to think that, with her death impending,
She somehow engineered a happy ending.

(Melissa Balmain)

Phil Niekro, Whitey Ford, Bob Gibson, Tom Seaver

Four Hall of Fame pitchers were called up this year:

Niekro, Ford, Gibson and Seaver.

They started — and finished — 800-plus games
with no need to call a reliever!

So picture the angel who gave them the hook,
Enduring their protests and pouts.

You know each one said: "Hey, my arm isn't dead —
It's good for another three outs."

(Bob Kruger, Rockville, Md.)

Too-bold animal photographer

Though warned 'bout a gator at rest by a lake,
Someone wanting a pic makes a most grievous flub.
This gal steps too close, knows at once her mistake,

Blurting, "Guess I won't ever do that again . . ." [Glub.] (Chris Doyle)

Four various selfie-takers

It happened in Colombia, in Turkey and Australia;

Photographers were done in by their own paraphernalia.

The selfie sings a siren song, a "come-and-get-me, friend!" call;

But photos of yourself should NEVER be the be-all, end-all. (Beverley Sharp)

Still running — deadline also Feb. 8: our contest for songs for and about work. See wapo.st/invite1420.

DON'T MISS AN INVITE! [Sign up here](#) to receive a once-a-week email from the Empress as soon as The Style Invitational and Style Conversational go online every Thursday, complete with links to the columns.

1 Comments



Pat Myers

Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. Follow [Twitter](#)

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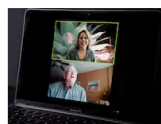
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February 6, 2021 EST



For 92 years my father buried his feelings. Then he started Zooming.

Perspective · February 5, 2021 EST



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February 4, 2021 EST



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February 6, 2021 EST



UPDATES: Snowy this morning, drying out



this afternoon; more storm chances to come this week

Today at 9:30 AM EST



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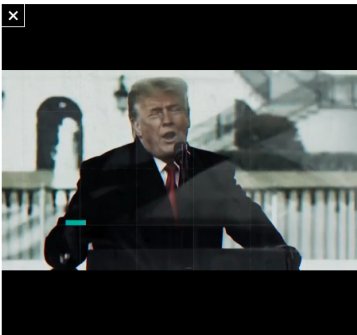
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