

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 706: Questionable Journalism

Perhaps he should check to make sure that he does not have bad breath. What excuse has Bill O'Reilly resorted to in an effort to explain the president's current approval ratings?

Writers and editors at The Washington Post hope our paper's articles will answer the questions that readers have on their minds. Of course, we're not thinking of readers like you. **This week: Take any sentence that appears in The Post or in an article on washingtonpost.com from March 24 through April 2 and come up with a question it could answer.** You can use part of a sentence, as long as that part could be a full sentence in itself. Please cite the date and page number of the article you're using (or if you're online, include that section of the article). The example above is from today's Ask Amy column.

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets a pair of yummy treats: a vaguely brain-shaped little dispenser of Brain Drain Liquid Candy ("Eat Your Brains Out!"), donated by Loser Scion Erin Carnahan; and a jar of Scorned Woman mustard ("Hell hath no fury like . . ."), sent in by Ed Gordon.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, April 2. Put "Week 706" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published April 22. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Kevin Dopart. The revised title for next week's contest is by Dave Prevar of Annapolis.

REPORT FROM WEEK 702

in which we sought "Unreal Facts," little things to know and tell, like the "Real Facts" inside Snapple lids, except that these, well . . .

- 5** A man in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, has created a ball of string the size of the planet Jupiter. (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)
- 4** The plays of Shakespeare were actually written by a different person with the same name. (Ronald Semone, Washington)
- 3** In early drafts of "Citizen Kane," Rosebud was a pogo stick. (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- 2** The winner of the cloth belt lettered with unintelligible misspellings of Rolling Stones songs: Carlos Guitarra, inventor of the stringed instrument that bears his name, had six fingers on each hand. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER
Although the Chinese outnumber us 4 to 1, Americans have a greater combined weight. (Joseph Romm, Washington)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A NICE SET OF FALSIES

In Kenya, the native land of Barack Obama's father, the word "barack" can be translated as either "clean" or "articulate." (Mike Hammer, Arlington)

For many years, Sears catalogue pages came perforated for easier use in outhouses. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

In France, the musical "Les Misérables" is known as "The Miserables." (Russell Beland)

Most of the world's supply of lenthicum and timonium is found within a 25-mile radius of Baltimore. (Dudley Thompson, Cary, N.C.)

Columbus, Ohio, was named for a local farmer called Ebenezer Columbus. (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)

Not only was Judy Garland's real name Frances Gumm, but John Wayne's real name was Francis Gumm. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

"Beelzebub" is written as "XAENE" in the Greek language version of the Book of Revelation; it is pronounced "heinie" or "cheney." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

The last one-digit number to be discovered was the 7. (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

A plasma-screen TV uses plasma that manufacturers buy from funeral homes. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

The White House is actually ecrú. (Bob Kopac, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

In Italy, pizzas contain no cheese, tomatoes or flour. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

One out of every 14 e-mails offering big money for help in an African currency exchange is genuine. (Jack Fiorini, Williamsburg)

If you soak a new \$20 bill in lemon juice overnight, the eyes on Andrew Jackson turn red. (Mike Livingston, Takoma Park)

An unopened can of Spam found in a pharaoh's tomb was still edible after 4,000 years. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

The fruit of female banana trees is doughnut-shaped. (Russell Beland)

In the 1700s, Mohawk Indians sometimes fooled European settlers by moving moss to the east sides of the trees. (Steve Langer, Chevy Chase)

Scotter Libby recited the first 29 digits of pi correctly in a high school contest. (Kevin Dopart)

Jerry Mathers of "Leave It to Beaver" was convicted of insurance fraud after faking his own death in Vietnam. (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn)

In Japanese, "Yoko Ono" means "bony chicken that screams when plucked." (Judith Cottrill)

No two snowflakes are completely different. (Russell Beland)

Bats urinate only while perched upside down. The noxious odor coats their bodies with a scent that repels predators. (Patrick Mattimore, San Francisco)

During World War II, a secret U.S. Army survey identified 4,389 atheists in foxholes. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

George W. Bush is the first president to use a phonic teleprompter. (Kevin Dopart)

The MasterCard originally was to be named the Magna Carda. (Bob Kopac)

The phrase "rule of thumb" is derived from King Thumb, who ruled England from 896 to 913. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

The act of eating celery burns more calories than it contains. (Chris Sonnenberg, Reston)

Ancient Romans used human umbilical cords for sandal straps. (Stephen Dudzik)

Construction on New York Avenue has now lasted longer than it took to build the Great Pyramid at Giza. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

In Switzerland, it's American cheese that's sold with holes in it. (Mike Hammer)

In the Southern Hemisphere, a falling cat always lands on its back. (Bob Mulvaney, Alexandria)

Neil Armstrong hated Tang. (Russell Beland)

Before World War II, Almond Joy candy bars contained real joy. (Russell Beland)

The tune to the Oscar Mayer wiener jingle is an upbeat version of a dirge that Viking warriors would sing before beheading an enemy. (Mike Herring, Washington)

There are fewer U.S. families with five children than childless couples with five cars. (Fred B. Ruckdeschel, Bethesda)

Only by writing left-handed can one use a Bic pen upside down. (Steve Fahey)

Manila folders are so named because the first specimens were discovered there by Spaniards in 1720. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Worldwide, the leading cause of flight delays is goats on the runway. (Mike Fransella, Arlington)

The "bomp" in "bomp-sha-bomp-sha-bomp" and the "ram" in "ram-a-lam-a-ding-dong" were put in their respective phrases by Melvin R. Quisterberry of Chippewa Falls, Wis., and Alma Fruiterman of Albany, N.Y. (Bob Dalton)

The Internal Revenue Code contains 1,278,312 words, none of them ending in the letter "b." (Bob Dalton)

Eskimos have more words for "snot" than for "snow." (Kevin Dopart)

Sgt. Dudley S. Doright, a retired Canadian Mountie, filed a defamation suit against the makers of "Rocky and Bullwinkle" shortly before his death. (Russell Beland)

Veteran ballerinas do not need to wear special toeshoes, because the bones in their feet have become fused en pointe. (Paul Kocak, Syracuse, N.Y.)

Jimi Hendrix's first band in high school, the LFI Stinkers, did polkas at weddings in the Seattle area. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Director Chuck Jones based the Porky Pig character on a real stuttering pig his parents once owned. (Brendan Beary)

An Inker is exactly 319 Loser magnets tall (stacked flat) but weighs only as much as 127 magnets. — R. Beland, Springfield (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

Next Week: Freak Trade Agreements, or Let's Fake a Deal

Searching for A Place Between Art and Politics

FARAH, From D1

gime but made a quiet trip back home last fall to try to mediate peace talks between the "Islamists" and federal forces.

Wow. Major breakthrough? "Actually, they paid me no mind at all," he says, laughing, in Bangkok Joe's Restaurant in Georgetown, while on a recent stop on his North American book tour. "Absolutely none. It just didn't matter."

He's of medium height and build, soft-spoken. He's wearing a plaid Burberry scarf. His salt-and-pepper hair is cropped close. His manners are impeccable. No wonder the men with the guns paid him no mind! He's clearly more at ease with stories and characters than firearms and political brimstone. You try to picture him pounding the lectern like Soyinka discoursing on Nigeria, calling his home country "the open sore of a continent," and you get no image.

He's lived in Europe and America, always in pursuit of the meaning in fiction, and always just below the radar line of international fame. He speaks English, Italian, Amharic, Arabic and Somali. He tried a stint as a Hollywood screenwriter 30 years ago, an adventure that left him a collapsed film project and not enough money for a plane ticket back to Africa. "I haven't been back to L.A. since."

But mainly, he sits alone in a rented apartment he uses for a writing studio in Cape Town and maps out novels. He works from 8:30 a.m. till 4 p.m., on the theory that it's the hours and discipline that matter. Going for a word count encourages hasty work to fill a quota, he figures.

He writes about women. There was Ebla, fleeing an arranged marriage in his first novel, "From a Crooked Rib." It's still in print after 37 years. Most recently, there is Cambara, a Somali living in Canada who returns to Mogadishu, in "Knots." (Publishers Weekly, in giving it a starred review, dubbed it "mesmerizing.")

In between was "Maps," named one of the best 100 African books of the 20th century (a category encompassing fiction, nonfiction, plays, poems, children's books, the works), winning the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1998 (and a \$50,000 award, one of the richest in world lit) and becoming that rarest of things, a full-time creative writer.

"There may be four or five African novelists who survive just by their writing, and he's probably the only one who doesn't do academic stints," says Charles Larson, the American University professor who has chronicled the rise of African literature for 40 years. "I saw him in India last year at a conference, at this exotic, five-star, 14th-century palace, and at the end of every day, he went back to his room and wrote. He works at it every single day, no matter where he is."

He once said that he was "trying to keep my country alive by writing about it." Now he says that sounds like "something that I said when I was very young." He has a 13-year-old daughter, Abyan, who has already won a national literary prize in South Africa. His 11-year-old son Kaahiye wants to be a soccer star.

Would he consider moving his family to Somalia, to live amid the gunfire and devastation?



BY JAY PAUL FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Nuruddin Farah has been writing since the 1970s. Some consider him the leading African candidate to next win the Nobel.

No, no, he says, wrapping his scarf back around his neck and trekking back uphill to his hotel, the posh Latham. He loves Somalia, but his children know it only as a place their dad goes on about. And yet, he misses the political give-and-take, the heydays when African writers were key players in the continent's post-colonial drama.

"When Soyinka, Ngugi, Achebe, were on the continent, there was lots of change and possibility, and they produced very intense, lively works. I feel a bit like the Lone Ranger,

riding around on a depleted landscape. Cacti and not much else."

He steps into the three-story Barnes and Noble in Georgetown, where he walks about until he finds his books. There are four or five of his titles. No one recognizes him, so he is free to wander, alone, next door for tea and a glass of wine, the night unwinding, his children awaiting his return, and Somalia in the back of his mind: indifferent, nurturing, hostile, endearing, a million miles away, home.

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

South dealer
N-S vulnerable

NORTH		EAST	
♠ A Q 3	♥ 9 6	♠ J 9 6	♥ 9 7 5 2
♥ A 4	♦ 8	♦ 8	♣ 8
♦ 9 7 5 3 2	♣ K 6 4	♣ A 9 8 7 2	
SOUTH			
♠ K 5 4 2	♥ K 6	♦ A Q 10 4	♣ Q J 3

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♦	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass

Opening lead: ♥ Q

Best you think today's North had his brain permanently in power-saving mode when he bid two diamonds with 13 points, his action was an "inverted minor-suit raise," a treatment many tournament players use.

This treatment reverses the meanings of a direct single and double raise: A raise to three diamonds would have been weak; the raise to two diamonds was strong. The theory is that you can preempt on weak hands while saving room on strong hands to look for your own best contract.

At 3NT, South won the first heart with the ace and led a diamond to his queen. West took the king and led another heart. South won, led a spade to dummy and returned a second diamond. East discarded, and South lost three hearts, two diamonds and a club.

How would you play 3NT? South should cash the ace of diamonds at the second trick and next take the king, queen and ace of spades. When spades break 3-3, South forces out the ace of clubs, winning four spades, two clubs, two hearts and a diamond.

If the spades broke 4-2, South would lead a diamond from dummy next. He would get the four diamond tricks he would need unless West had K-J-x.

I don't care for "inverted minors," not because I think the idea itself is theoretically unsound but because the development of the auction will be confused unless a pair spends considerable time in discussion. It won't do to say "Let's play inverted minors" and let it go at that. The same is true when you adopt any conventional method.