

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 720:
The Course of
Humor Events

1521: Martin Luther could not stomach the Diet of Worms.
1544: Cartographer Gerardus Mercator was imprisoned for heresy: Religious authorities refused to give him any latitude.

About three years back, we ran a great set of results to a contest asking for rhyming couplets that told about historical events. Loser Peter Metrinko, who just happened to get no ink in that contest, asks that we compile another such chronicle, but that we also allow other short formats as well, such as those above. Okay, there should be enough history to go around: **Sum up a historical event in a two-line rhyme or other clever and pithy epigram.** Though history tends to repeat itself, we'd like to prevent it: The results of the Week 570 contest are posted at www.washingtonpost.com/style/invitational. Don't use the same jokes, please.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a 2007 Extreme Ironing calendar (hey, you'll still have five more months), donated by Poetical Loser Brendan Beary; it depicts "ironists" ironing while hanging on the side of a cliff, swimming underwater, suspended from a tightrope, etc. Must take a heck of an extension cord.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. 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, July 9. Put "Week 720" 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 July 29. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Beth Bariszewski of Somerville, Mass. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Kevin Dopart. The new contest was suggested the first time around by Russell Beland, who would never stop reminding us if we didn't mention it.

REPORT FROM WEEK 716

In which we asked for poems featuring words from this year's National Spelling Bee. The Empress granted no ink to those who made up their own meanings or used the words as nonsense syllables.

4 Oubliette, a dungeon with an opening only in the ceiling:
With an old oubliette, one could just forget
About terrorists like old Geronimo.
So why must the press write of the distress
At our new oubliette in Guantanamo? (Steve Ettinger, Chevy Chase)

3 Affliction by leeches — hirudiniasis:
Bloody disgusting, however you spin it.
They trigger our deep-seated hygienic biases:
But worst is that one of them's born every minute. (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

2 Strigil, an ancient Roman tool to scrape dirt and sweat from the body:
He comes, he sees, he takes a bath,
For he is dirty. Crud he hath.
He's pulled another all-night vigil.
Caesar takes his trusty strigil,
Scrapes away all grimy matter,
Then goes after Cleopatter. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

THE BEE'S ANKLES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Furfuraceous, having dandruff or other scaly particles:
My skin is furfuraceous;
That's to say, it's very scaly.
Truth be told, I look hellacious
From exfoliating daily.
Each day's worse, I can't deny it,
Though I will admit, in candor,
That perhaps I shouldn't try it
With a Black & Decker sander. (Brendan Beary)

Beccafico, a small bird prized as a delicacy:
O wondrous beccafico, o golden-throated bird!
Your song is warbled sunshine, the sweetest ever heard.
How many hearts have swelled with joy to hear your cherished tweeter!
But sadly, little 'fico, your taste is even sweeter. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Illeist, someone who refers to himself in the third person:
When the Empress speaks to her legion of geeks,
Third person is self-referential.
Could this illeist style be only a wile
To make us yet more deferential? (Steve Ettinger)

Lambdacisms, mispronunciations of the letter L, or saying L instead of R:
Lambdacism means you say
One letter in a sclewy way. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)



AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Acariasis, a mite infestation:
I'm sad to say my grandpa Zacharias is,
Alas, no more. The doctor has suggested
The cause of death was likely acariasis;
With tiny parasites he was infested.
The wee arachnids he indulged with bonhomie,
For piety was one of his delights;
Remembering the book of Deuteronomy,
He loved the Lord his God with all his mites.
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Alas, that word refers to snakes;
He meant to say "obsidian."
She knocked him flat and left, aloof;
(A Webster's could have saved his toof.) (Beverly Sharp)

Retiarius, a type of Roman gladiator who fought wearing fisherman's gear:
Gripping trident and net, the vindictive Belarius
Knows he's a soon-to-be-sacked retiarius.
Christians are scared 'cause today's his last day
And each one he beheads boosts his severance pay.
(Chris Doyle)

Strigil:
For cleaning off, the Romans
Scraped themselves with iron strigils —
But folks back then, you understand,
Were tougher indivijuls. (Brendan Beary)

Theologaster, a religious quack:
How will you know a theologaster?
In many a church he's the pederaster. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Yosenabe, a Japanese stew:
Would you like a wee taste
Of kelp-based yosenabe?
Well, I think that depends:
What mean "wee," Kimosabe? (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Still waxing lyrical? See lots more Honorable Mentions at www.washingtonpost.com/style/invitational

Next Week: Pitch Us a No-Hitter, or I'm Feeling Unlucky

Gingrich,
Weighing
His Options

GINGRICH, From D1

predictions ranging from, yes, he'll "probably" do it to, no, the odds are "4 to 1 against." He says he'll give his final answer by Oct. 1 — after one of his televised American Solutions mega-workshops on how to transform government from bloated bureaucracy to lean machine — and until then he's keeping his options open.

"He's a dynamic person that can rally a lot of intellectual firepower around him. He has a new idea every five seconds," says prickly Texas Republican Tom DeLay — a frequent Gingrich detractor who resigned as House majority leader last year to fight charges of campaign law violations.

"But I think when people take a look at what he's really saying, he's going to have a hard time with conservatives. He's trying to appeal to everyone and cover up who he really is — which is typical of Newt."

"He's a dynamic person. . . . He has a new idea every five seconds."

Tom DeLay
on Newt Gingrich

other. "He's not in sync with the base of the party," DeLay insists. "Take his whole American Solutions idea. I'm very skeptical about finding solutions for government. Government is the problem, not the solution."

Still, Gingrich has been carefully cultivating key Republican constituencies, especially Christian activists who might balk at nominating a formerly liberal Mormon who claims to have seen the light and abandoned at least his ideological apostasy (former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney) or a pro-abortion rights, pro-gun control, occasionally cross-dressing, thrice-married Yankees fan (former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani). Never mind poor Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), sinking in the polls as though lashed to an anchor.

"I like John," Gingrich says, "but the combination of McCain-Feingold [the widely despised campaign finance law] and McCain-Kennedy [the hated immigration bill] is a tad heavy." Since the Supreme Court just carved up the former, and a raucous grass-roots insurgency deep-sixed the latter, it might seem Gingrich is on to something here.

As for former Tennessee senator Fred Thompson, expected to announce a run for the presidency this week, "I think he becomes the establishment alternative," Gingrich says. "I've been fond of Fred ever since 'The Hunt for Red October.' I think he was totally convincing as an admiral."



BY BRIAN SNYDER — REUTERS

Reaching for the future: Newt Gingrich extends a hand while signing copies of his new book.

What about Thompson's reputation for being the opposite of a workaholic? "I don't think it's a matter of working all that hard and being all that intense if he can put together a fairly bold, Sarkozy-like program," Gingrich says, referring to the just-elected center-right president of France. "Fred is not Ronald Reagan, but he could be Dwight Eisenhower." But could he have organized D-Day? "No," Gingrich chuckles, "but Eisenhower couldn't have been in 'The Hunt for Red October.'"

Gingrich, for his part, dismisses warnings that October will be too late for a non-billionaire to jump into the race and raise the necessary cash. "Do you know the approximate size of the U.S. economy? About \$14 trillion. Annually. And how much money has been raised in politics? Hillary peaked in the first quarter with \$26 million. If you assume we live in a limited universe of relatively impoverished people who can afford to contribute to only one candidate, then I will probably not find any supporters on October 1.

"But if you assume we live in a country of 300 million people, a substantial number of whom will not have contributed to anybody, we'll have to see. Assume for a minute that one of the three front-runners collapses. How many supporters does that make available? Assume for a minute that none of them catch fire."

Enter Newt? It's a testament to Gingrich's belief in endless possibility that in May he traveled to the late Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., to give a commencement speech inveighing against the evils of "radical secularism." (Last year he published a book on the subject, "Rediscovering God in America: Reflections on the Role of Faith in Our Nation's History and Future.")

A Lutheran-turned-Southern Baptist, a native Pennsylvanian who made his political career in Atlanta, Gingrich likes to attend Mass with his Catholic wife (who sings in the choir at Washington's Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Concep-

tion). He had already taken the extraordinary step of going on right-wing evangelical leader James Dobson's radio show to admit committing the sin of adultery prior to tying the knot with his third wife — who, when the married speaker of the House took up with her, was a 30ish, syphilike Agriculture Committee clerk named Callista Bisek. (In August, they'll celebrate their seventh wedding anniversary. "This time it's really love," says Gingrich's friend, former representative Steve Gunderson of Wisconsin, Callista's boss before she joined the committee staff.)

In a riveting moment of political theater, Dobson grilled Gingrich on "the rumors . . . that you were in an affair with a woman obviously who wasn't your wife at the same time that Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky were having their escapade." Gingrich manfully replied: "Well, the fact is that the honest answer is yes." Then he tried to draw distinctions between himself and Clinton, noting that House Republicans impeached the president for felony perjury, not sex. Dobson, a psychologist by training, brushed aside Gingrich's quibbles.

"Do you understand that word, 'repentance'?" he persisted.

"Absolutely," Gingrich answered. "I also believe that there are things in my own life that I have turned to God and have gotten on my knees and prayed about and sought God's forgiveness."

Today Gingrich verbally winces as he recalls that radio interlude: "Of course it's tough! It's like talking to your mom. There are things in life you just don't want to go home and tell mom. But it was my intuitive judgment that this was a room I had to walk through. If I never walked through it, I'd always be on the other side of the door."

Conservative activist and onetime presidential candidate Gary Bauer says the gambit was smart politics. "If you're thinking about running for the presidency and you have a personal history that you know will be used by your opponents — and will raise questions for some who want to be your friends — it is wise indeed to try to deal with that on your own terms rather than have people hear about it first from those who wish you ill," he says.

But former House majority leader Dick Army, who was Speaker Gingrich's second-in-command, isn't so sure.

"Personally, I would not have gone on Dobson's show and made a confession of any kind," says Army, who counts himself a Gingrich admirer. "My own view of the troubles of the Republican Party is that there have been many times over the years that Republicans have gotten themselves in trouble with the electorate by trying to make the Jim Dobsons of the world happy. But it isn't possible to make Jim Dobson happy. His occupation is not to be happy. Why give him what he will never receive?"

Army claims Dobson's vaunted political influence is greatly exaggerated. "I doubt very much that Dobson can control all the votes even in his own family, let alone hundreds of thousands of votes. . . . I guess it's not outside the realm of possibility that Newt could be playing out a newfound religious conviction."

On the other hand, Bauer adds, Gingrich has never been a convincing religious firebrand. "Economics and national security are always what have made Newt's heart beat fastest."

Baggage Claim

"Are you Newt Gingrich?" asks a plump middle-aged woman in T-shirt and shorts.

See GINGRICH, D3, Col. 1