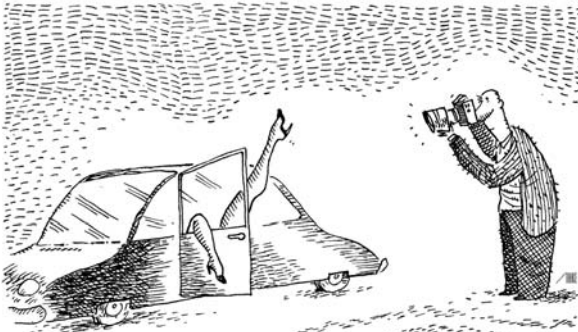


THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 757: Gorey Thoughts From A to Z



U is for Undies you no longer wear.
V's for the Vistas we hope you don't share.

BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Edward Gorey did it famously and fabulously with his "Gashlycrumb Tinies," but he restricted his wickedly funny verses to various ways in which children suffered terrible deaths. You have freer rein to summon up all matter of edgy pairings, such as the example above that Loser Kevin Dopart offered along with his idea for this contest. **This week: Send us some rhyming alphabet-primer couplets. The pairs are AB, CD, EF, GH, IJ, KL, MN, OP, QR, ST, UV, WX and YZ.** You can go ahead and send all 13, but the Empress already knows that your complete set will not get ink in its entirety. If it were good enough it would, but it won't be.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives both a Loser T-shirt plus a T-shirt, donated by Loser Since High School Beth Baniszewski of Somerville, Mass., that reads, "Maybe if this shirt is witty enough someone will finally love me."

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions 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, March 31. Put "Week 757" 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 19. 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 results is by Phil Frankenkeld. This week's Honorable Mentions name is by Dave Prevar.

REPORT FROM WEEK 753

In which we asked you to submit short riddles, either well-known ones or your own, and supply both the for-normal-people answer and the not-for-normal-people Style Invitational answer. Sent by a half dozen people: Q: When is a door not a door? Normal answer: When it's ajar. SI answer: When he ODs in a Paris bathtub.

4 When things go wrong, what can you always count on?
N: A meringue-utan.
SI: John McCain discussing his defense strategy. (Don Kirkpatrick, Waynesboro, Pa.)

MORE ENIGMA VARIATIONS

What's white and fluffy and thumps its chest?
N: A meringue-utan.
SI: John McCain discussing his defense strategy. (Don Kirkpatrick, Waynesboro, Pa.)

What invention lets you look right through a wall?
N: A window!
SI: The HobbyHome Termite Farm Kit! (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)

What do you call two banana peels?
N: A pair of slippers.
SI: A balanced meal in Cuba. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

What do you call pigs who write letters to each other?
N: Pen pals.
SI: Lawyers. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

A boy buys a fishing pole that is 6 feet 3 inches long. As he goes to get on the bus, the driver tells him he can't bring anything longer than six feet. The boy goes back to town, he buys one more thing, and the bus driver allows him on. What did he buy?
N: A six-foot-long box — he put the pole in diagonally.
SI: A gun. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

What is in the middle of Paris?
N: The letter R.
SI: I'm not sure — that home video was a little fuzzy. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

What do you get when you cross an elephant with a fish?
N: Swimming trunks.
SI: Something that weighs five tons and stinks — just like yo mama! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Why did Silly Billy sit on a clock?
N: Because he wanted to be on time!
SI: Because the Preparation H tube said to apply with hands. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Who says, "Oh, Oh, Oh"?
N: A backward Santa.
SI: A Don Imus tape played in reverse. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

If you were in a race and passed the person in

second place, what place would you be in?
N: Second place.
SI: Depends on the superdelegates. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

What has a neck without a head and two arms without hands?
Kids: A shirt.
SI: A gay thief in Riyadh. (Chris Doyle)

What lies at the bottom of the ocean and twitches?
N: A nervous wreck.
SI: A crab in Jimmy Hoffa's eye socket. (Randy Lee)

Why did the tomato lose the race?
N: It couldn't ketchup!
SI: Because some fool had turned it into a vegetable. (Russell Beland)

What was Paul Bunyan's favorite game when he was traveling around America?
N: Wheeling West Virginia.
SI: Dayton Ohio and Macon Georgia. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

I live all alone in a little house that has no doors or windows. If I want to go out, I must break through the wall. What am I?
N: A chick in an egg.
SI: We deny that we have any such facilities. — MichaelHayden@cia.gov (Peter Metrinko)

What did the friendly bee say to the flower?
N: Hello, honey!
SI: Don't be embarrassed, there's no stigma in a short pistil. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

The man who bought it doesn't need it. The man who needs it can't buy it. What is it?
N: A coffin.
SI: Health insurance. (J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.)

What is the longest word?
N: Smiles — it has a mile between its ends.
SI: Iraq — no one can see the end of it. (Kevin Dopart)

Why won't you starve to death in the desert?
N: Because of all the sand which is there.
SI: Because you'll die of thirst first. (Chris Rollins, Cumberland, Md.)

What goes around a house but doesn't move?
N: A fence!

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

What is yours, but your friends use it more than you do?
Normal answer: Your name.
Style Invitational answer: Your sister. (Kelton Vincent, Rockville, a First Offender)

SI: Nancy Pelosi's smile. (J. Larry Schott)

What has 40 feet and sings?
N: A choir.
SI: A centipede after interrogation at Guantanamo. (Marty McCullen)

The more you take, the more you'll find behind you. What are they?
N: Footsteps.
SI: Doughnuts. (Dan Ramish, Vienna; Ralph Scott, Washington)

What has a tongue but can't talk?
N: A shoe.
SI: My dream date. (Russell Beland)

What time is it when an elephant sits on your bed?
N: Time to get a new bed!
SI: Time to reevaluate the Republican domestic spying bill. (Michael Platt, Germantown)

What do you call a cat in the water?
N: A catfish!
SI: I call it really funny. (Russell Beland)

What is black and white and red all over?
N: A newspaper.
SI: Pravda, once again. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

What do you get if you cross a chicken with a cement mixer?
N: A brick layer.
SI: The entree at a fundraiser. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

What goes "Ha ha ha, plop"?
N: Someone laughing his head off.
SI: Someone caught telling a joke by the Taliban. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Why is there a fence around the cemetery?
N: Because people are dying to get in.
SI: To pry guns from cold dead hands. (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

Why is Alabama the smartest state?
N: Because it has 4 A's and one B!
SI: C'mon, the Empress said "riddle," not "joke." (Marc Naimark, Paris)

Next Week: Canny Similarities, or Got Itk?

Sighting Down the Barrel of a Pen, Poets Take Aim at War

POETS, From C1

poets at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

"People in this society are starved for meaning," he says. "In a time of war, the government divorces language from meaning. . . . They drain the blood from words. Poets can put the blood back into words."

Or, as he puts it later at Bell Multicultural High School, "No change for the good ever happens without being imagined first. . . . That's where poets come in."

Yet this poet, so good with words, is careful not to overstate his case.

"What I do is an act of faith. I put words out into the atmosphere. They become part of what we breathe. Hopefully that has some impact. But we shouldn't try to quantify the impact of a poem like it's a package of beans."

Remember the words of the veteran of the Spanish Civil War, that noble, if doomed, cause. "You don't fight the good fight just because you think you're going to win," Espada says. "You fight the good fight because it's the right thing to do, regardless of the outcome, which you can't predict anyhow. That's how I feel about the work that I do."

At the registration table, the poets fill out cards labeled "Write a Haiku to the President."

About 250 people sign up for the conference, paying as much as \$85 for the four days.

There are two dozen featured poets, and the rest are poets, too, or students or lovers of poetry. (The schedule for today and tomorrow is at www.splitthisrock.org.)

The festival had its origins in the poets revolt of February 2003, when Sam Hamill declined an invitation from Laura Bush for a poetry event at the White House, because of the looming war, and instead launched a campaign of antiwar poetry writing. Out of that, local poet Sarah Browning formed D.C. Poets Against the War, which has been holding small-ish readings ever since.

Browning led the planning for Split This Rock, supported by Sol & Soul, the local grass-roots arts group, and the Institute for Policy Studies, the progressive think tank.

"Poetry is what we have as poets, so we use it," Browning says.

Now E. Ethelbert Miller, sometimes called the dean of D.C. poetry, is on stage.

Humble, serious, ascetic in black, yet with his customary twinkle not absent, Miller launches into a piece by Hughes:



PHOTOS BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST



Sonia Sanchez, above, recites her poetry before a packed house at Busboys and Poets as part of Split This Rock. Martin Espada, far left, E. Ethelbert Miller and Alix Olson talk verse before the program at Bell Multicultural High School.

*Don't you hear this hammer ring?
I'm gonna split this rock
And split it wide!
When I split this rock,
Stand by my side.*

The poem's original theme of worker solidarity lends itself to the task at hand.

"Split this rock. What rock?" Sonia Sanchez, the fierce, soft-voiced, veteran Philadelphia-based poet asks rhetorically at Busboys. "Any rock that interferes with progress. Any rock that attempts to kill."

Dennis Brutus, the revered South African poet with flowing gray hair who spent time in jail with Nelson Mandela, wades through the thronging restaurant wearing a hooded sweat shirt under his sports coat and greets Sanchez, who stands out with her red knit cap. Does poetry mat-

ter? Sanchez: "Nobody is saying poetry is the only avenue, but it's a mighty powerful one."

Brutus: "I think of someone like Shelley. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. . . . These are the people I think will kick alive the spirit of anger and resistance."

Between readings and pilgrimages to Hughes's and Whitman's haunts, the poets attend panel discussions such as "Writing in a War-rrior Culture" and "Personal and Political: The Difficult Art of Writing a Manuscript of Poems That Bear Witness."

In these intense seminars, the poets get down to the nitty-gritty of craft. Overheard:

"For me, the issue is always handling the narrative voice, the 'I.'"
"I wanted my 'I' to be the lens

in our society in these last years, because the status quo didn't feel as comfortable speaking out as we did."

Nye writes books for children, and saves her tougher political poetry for adults. She tries to humanize Arabs while confronting the U.S. reflex for war. From her opening-night reading, a poem called "Letters My President Is Not Sending":

*Dear Rafik, Sorry about that soccer game you won't be attending since you now have no . . .
Dear Fawziya, You know, I have a mom too so I can imagine what you . . .
Dear Shadiya, Think about your father versus democracy, I'll bet you'd pick . . .
No, no, Sami, that's not true what you said at the rally*

*that our country hates you, we really support your move toward freedom, that's why you no longer have a house or a family or a village . . .
Dear Hassan, If only you could see the bigger picture . . .*

The next morning, she gives a reading for preschoolers, children still young enough to be shielded from the images she raises in her "Letters." They sit cross-legged on the floor before her, their upturned faces fixed on her as she reads to them. She shows the children her pretty blue zippered pencil case, and her little plastic pencil sharpener. "That's your power tool," she says. "As a writer, that's all you need."

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