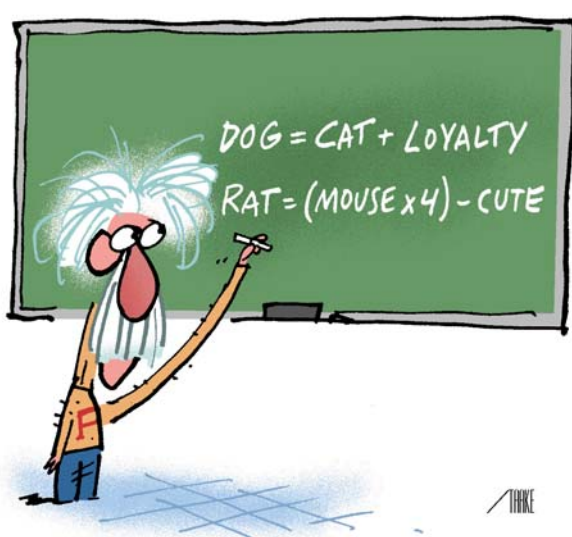


The Style Invitational »

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 807: Pretty Graphic Expressions

In our era of thumb-based communication, the well-constructed essay, paragraph — sentence — is increasingly seen as some quaint, fusty literary style better suited to a quill and parchment: We don't want to have to read through all those words to see the point.

Craig Damrauer is here to help you. His Web site *MoreNewMath.com* is a compilation of witty and often insightful thoughts, each expressed in the form of a mathematical equation, as in the ones by Craig in Bob Staake's cartoon. **This week: Express some insight as an equation or other mathematical expression.** What we're not looking for is a translation of a well-known platitude into graphic form, such as "Bird in Hand = 2(Bird in Bush)." It very well might be hard to out-Craig Craig here. We're a word person ourself.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets the Guest-B-Gone Emergency Kit, a cheap little red plastic bag including fake chickenpox spots, a CD of "Inhospitable Ambience" (Track 2: Broken Alarm System) and a tablet to make your dog's mouth foam.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air "Fresher" (Fit Sink for their First Link). 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 16. Put "Week 807" 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 4. 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 Chris Doyle; the revised title for next week's results is by Tom Witte.

REPORT FROM WEEK 803

in which we asked for diary entries by people throughout history:

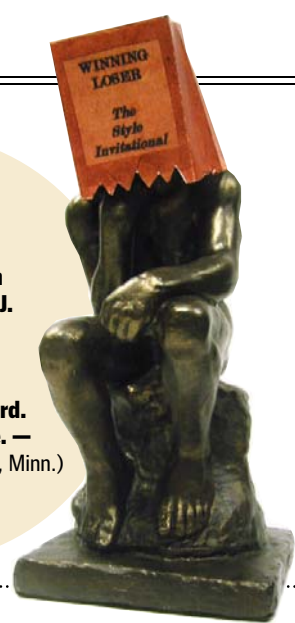
4 June 12, 1994, 11:30 p.m.: **Dear Diary: Stopped by Nicole's. Her new boyfriend was there. Lost one of my gloves. Didn't fit anyway.** (Arlee C. Green, Newington)

3 [Date redacted]: **Dear Diary: Today I met with some people who are none of your damned things. We talked about things that are none of your damned business. We met at a location that is still none of your damned business. We had steak for lunch. — Dick Cheney** (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

2 **the winner of the Bittersweets conversation hearts with cynical sentiments:** July 18, 1266: **Dear Diary: Today I swam in the Kublai Khan's palace pool and was surprised to hear children shouting my name!** (Chris Doyle, vacationing in Cape Town, South Africa)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

June 20, '76: **Working on draft of document for TJ. I've articulated two unalienable Rights — Life, and the Pursuit of Happiness — need a third. Well, it will come to me. — Sally** (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)



JOURNAL LEASTS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

00/00/00: **Went into work early today, was up at the crack of dawn. — God** (A.E. Casey Hermanson, Sioux Falls, S.D., a First Offender)

10,000 B.C.: **The interim program review went well. I asked the tribe to leverage synergies in order to take it to that next level of excellence. Tomorrow we execute my master plan for the mammoth hunt. — Oog the Caveman** (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn)

2580 B.C.: **My plan for the Great Cube is jeopardized by a shortage of building material. I must find a way to economize . . . — Imhotep** (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

Satan's Work Record Journal, 600 B.C., Monday: **Tortured that guy Job. Persecuted Job. Worked over Job. Broke for lunch. Pastrami on rye. Power nap. Gave Job a papyrus cut.** (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

Dec. 25, 0032: **My birthday, and no one remembered. Sigh.** (Jeff Brechlin)

March XX, XXXIII: **Another day dealing with a two-bit troublemaker. I feel destined for obscurity. — P.P.** (William Kane, Arlington, a First Offender)

Nov. 30, 1343: **Cut myself shaving this morning. — William of Ockham** (Jeff Brechlin)

July 13, 1793: **Note to self: Replace lock on bathroom door. — Jean-Paul Marat** (Gary A. Clements, Bethesda)

Oct. 17, 1796: **Had a dream that I lost my sight! Terrifying! — Beethoven** (Jeff Brechlin)

April 15, 1802: **Wandered lonely as a cloud all day. Stepped in cow pie. Fell in mud. Mosquitoes. Horrible, horrible. — William Wordsworth** (Jeff Brechlin)

June 27, 1862: **O Alice, light of my life, fire of my jabbawock! — Lewis Carroll** (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

April 15, 1865: **Terrible show last night — that diva Booth stepped on my funniest line. — Harry Hawk** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

1/15/1882: **Revealed the new product line today. It seemed to be well received and I know I should be glad, but it vexes me that I be destined to toil in obscurity. I had hoped so much to become a household name! — Thomas Crapper** (Jack Fiorini, Williamsburg)

Sept. 23, 1899: **Mr. Johnson came to Vienna to see me. He said his wife constantly fantasized about the Eiffel Tower, obelisks and lighting poles. I struggle to explain this obsession. He said he has his eye on a new red Peugeot. I am envious. — Sigmund** (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Captain's Log, 14 April, 1912: **An uneventful day, which is a good thing on a maiden voyage. I must remember, however, to tell the stewards that the passengers want more ice.** (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Oct 5, 1931, Paris: **Henry Miller left his toothbrush, so I used it all afternoon to clean the grout in the bathroom, then did the laundry and ironing. Leftovers for dinner. Just a boring day. I wish my diary were more interesting! — Anaïs** (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

June 27, 1932: **I messed up a whole batch of chocolate cookies today. The chocolate bar I chopped up and mixed into the dough didn't melt — there were just little chips all through them. I hope the Toll House Inn guests will eat them anyway. — Ruth Wakefield** (Kyle Patrick, Newark, Del., a First Offender)

May 18, 1959: **I do not think that I can cook, But I must eat, to write my book, So in the kitchen I explore What's left behind the icebox door. How old is this? — I wish I knew: The ham has a quite striking hue. — Ted** (Anne Paris, Arlington)

July 7, 1947: **Crash-landed in desert a few nights ago. Alien life-forms captured our ship. Now we're being held in a place called USAF. Got a feeling we're gonna be here awhile. — Frglzp** (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

Nov. 2, 1948: **Began measuring for drapes. — Mrs. Thomas Dewey** (Marc Boysworth, Burke; Mae Scanlan, Washington; Chuck Smith)

April 1, 1952: **Drunk, spilled a can of paint on a fresh canvas today. Oh well, who'll know? — Jackson Pollock** (Jeff Brechlin)

July 25, 2008: **Yayyyyyy, the test is positive — I'm pregnant! What's in store for me? I'll ask the Magic 8-Ball. — Nadya Suleman** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

7/2/2008: **The crew did a fantastic job on the set today — I really appreciate their talent and effort. But, you know, I don't want them to think I'm some kind of pushover . . . — Christian Bale** (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Dec. 13, 2008: **My annoying cousin Muntadar, the big-shot reporter, wants to borrow my new shoes to wear to that Baghdad press conference tomorrow. Like President Bush is gonna notice his shoes! Well, he'd better not scuff them up.** (JL Strickland, Valley, Ala.)

1/20/09, 3:30 a.m.: **I guess I shouldn't have stayed up this late playing Minesweeper — I hope I can focus on my one little task at noon. — John Roberts** (John Glenn, Tyler, Tex.)

1/20/2009, 12:30 p.m.: **Finally the madness is over! I got so tired of hearing, "You look just like George Bush." — Alfred E. Neuman** (Arlee C. Green)

Oct. 25, 1982: **Dear Diary: Today I started work at The Washington Post! How fortunate I am to embark on a career in which I can give voice to the undeserved! I mean undeserved. — The Pre-Empress** (Rob Cohen, Potomac)

Next Week: Our Type o' Humor, or Headline Ruse

National Gallery's Tower Elevates Guston's Palette

ART, From Page C1

Philip Guston (1913-1980) had two fames.

He got his first fame as an original abstract expressionist, as one of that heroic band of fast-brushed action painters who fought to carry New York art up from figuration to new and abstract heights.

With Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, Arshile Gorky and David Smith, with whom he worked and showed, Guston advanced ever upward, until — unlike the others — he decided, ah, the hell with it, and went the other way.

That's how he won his second fame. By puncturing high abstraction. He did this with startling pictures, first shown in 1970, that pelted it with clumsy shoes, stogies and banana skins, brought it back to earth, returned it to the low.

That was not foreseen. He'd been so high-minded. In 1962 (with Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell and Rothko), he'd resigned from the Sidney Janis Gallery to protest a pop-art exhibition, as if pop were desecration, and now here he was cartooning. The man had helped invent all-over field painting, and now he was littering his fields with rubbish — booze bottles, clothes irons, window shades, Klansmen's hoods, bricks.

What made this so surprising wasn't just the *splat!* that his art made when it landed. It was how slowly he had climbed.

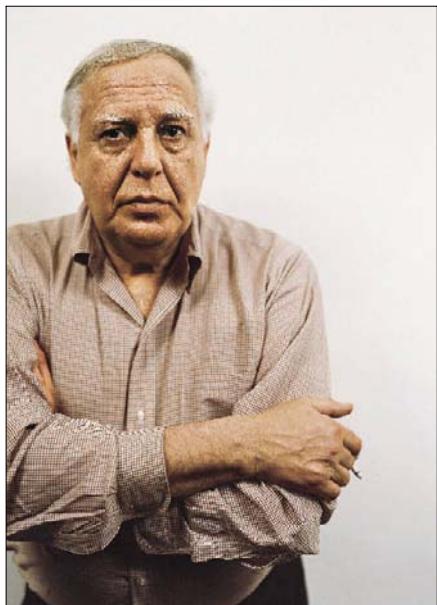
People had taken him seriously. He had the best credentials.

He'd come from far away. (Born poor in Montreal, the youngest of seven children, he'd been raised as Philip Goldstein in Southern California.) In 1931 he joined the John Reed Club, a Marxist group. In 1934, galvanized by the Mexican muralists, he put anti-fascist murals on Mexican walls. By 1935 he was working in Manhattan, painting public murals for the WPA. Also, he had suffered. He'd been broke in the Depression, and as a kid had found his junkman father's corpse hanging in the garden shed, and people liked to think that they sensed this in his pictures. The old existential shudder — a sure token of authenticity in abstract-expressionist circles — seemed to unsettle his art.

The man was pedigreed. Out in California he'd been Pollock's high school buddy (talk about connections); they'd been expelled from school together for satirizing the popularity of jocks.

Eventually the honors flowed, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1947, a Prix de Rome in 1948, a retrospective exhibition at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1962. Then he jumped.

Some of his colleagues (though not Bill



BY STEVEN SLOMAN, NEW YORK

Philip Guston, in 1976, was a contemporary of Pollock's and Rothko's, among others. He initially achieved fame as an abstract expressionist, but later work was cartoonish and heavy with pinks, reds and grays.

de Kooning) were certain he had lost it. How else to explain his plunge from aesthetic elevation? Old friends severed friendships. Some, responding as the folks had when Dylan went electric, saw a pathetic downfall, a willful insult or both.

In 1970, writing in the New York Times under the headline "A Mandarin Pretending to Be a Stumblebum," critic Hilton Kramer reacted as he might have to a stinky, disappointing, dishonest skid row drunk.

The Tower Gallery was long kept dim to protect five late "cut-outs" by Henri Matisse, which could stand the room's height but not its brightness, lest their colors bleach. Now they hang in subdued light downstairs in the concourse. "They want four candlepower, not 400," says curator Harry Cooper.

Matisse's scissored, glued-down papers were painted with watercolor, which can't take daylight. Oil paint is tougher. Oils look great in daylight. Guston's do especially. Under electric illumination, the colors he preferred — pinks and reds and grays — become tones more than colors, but not here. In daylight his deep grays look as deep as ashes in the ashtray, and his whitened pinks start pulsing like blood beneath an old man's skin. It turns out that Guston, unlike most New York painters, was a colorist. Who knew?

The sky was needed. So was something



"MIDNIGHT PASS ROAD"; NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

else. In 2007, when Cooper, who organized this small smart show, was hired from the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard to take charge of the gallery's department of modern and contemporary art, its orthodox displays were ready for a change. Well, here it is.

R. Crumb's "Keep on Truckin'," a kind of visual footnote to the wall text — with all its goopy vigor, its jaunty pointed elbows and its shoe-sole point of view — is among the first things that you see.

Guston's move toward cartooning didn't undo him. He came out on top.

It is clear, in retrospect, that his timing was right. The old notion that cartoons had no place in advanced art already was being blown away by pop and Crumb. The conviction, widely held in those days, that painting by its nature was certain to keep getting ever more abstract already had proved preposterous. To younger artists Guston wasn't a bum, but a liberator. He hadn't crashed, he had triumphed. If he hadn't he wouldn't be having this one-man exhibition in its high place on the Mall.

Still, we shouldn't be too hard on Kramer, whose wrinkled nose, correctly, had detected something foul. Guston's late oils do have a whiff of the gutter, or if not the gutter, something close. To get into his art is to go down in the dumps.

Look at "Rug" (1976). It's as if you're

sitting pantless in a small, bleak room, looking down, too depressed to lift your head. All you see is the bare wall, and the rug and the baseboard, and your thick shoes and your naked knees. Yesterday was hopeless, tomorrow will be, too, so the knees keep reproducing, replicating, throwing off suggestions of plumbing, and legs like Olive Oyl's, and stacked corpses, pointless thoughts.

"There is nothing to do now but paint my life," Guston wrote in 1972. "My dreams, surroundings, predicament, desperation . . ." Not much of a life. One of Guston's oils is called "Painting, Smoking, Eating" (1973), which pretty much sums it up.

In "Midnight Pass Road" (1975) he seems to be stuck at his studio table. What does he see? Not much: the green lampshade, a coffee cup, a sagging flower, a stretched canvas (waiting to be painted), a ghostly thought of his wife (distressed, of course, her hand over her eyes), a triangle, a ruler, his watch. Time passes. Nothing happens.

"The sense of being thrust into a scurvy internalized world is almost unbearable," wrote scholar Robert Hughes. "Guston may have been the first painter to paint that frame of mind so well known to artists and writers: slothful regression. You pee in the sink. You put out your cigarette in the coffee cup."

Guston may have been the first artist to depict the place, but Herman Melville had

been there, and so had W.B. Yeats. In 1939, at the end of his life, he had also lost what had worked so well before. He couldn't go up and out. Guston couldn't, either. So Yeats went in and down:

*Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the
ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the
heart.*

Guston, who smoked three packs a day, died of a heart attack at 66.

You might expect his pictures, the late ones in the tower, would turn out to be downers. They're not, of course, they're lifters. That's why they're art.

Courage shines out of them. Light shines out of them. And, right from the core of all that sad, dim wreckage, so does a saving nutty glee.

"If someone bursts out laughing in front of my painting," he wrote, "that is exactly what I want."

In the Tower: Philip Guston, which runs through Sept. 13, inaugurates a series of exhibitions in that space that will focus on developments in art since 1970. The East Building, at Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue NW, is open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sundays 11 a.m.-6 p.m. For information call 202-737-4215 or go to www.nga.gov. Admission is free.