

Style Invitational »

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 808:
Take Us
At Our Words

It's been awhile since we've done a word-bank contest, one that asks you to write some passage using only a particular set of words. Several readers did not exactly applaud our rearrangements of the Gettysburg Address, let alone the Book of Genesis, so here's a source a bit less sacrosanct: **This Week: Create a humorous poem or other writing using only the words contained in this week's Style Invitational column and results.** Anything longer than 50 words must be astonishingly good. You must use the exact word used (e.g., you can't turn it into a plural) and you can't use a word more than once unless it appears more than once here. You may change capitalization and punctuation.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives the scientific treatise "What's Your Poo Telling You?," donated by close-on-1,000-time Loser Tom Witte.

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 "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, March 23. Put "Week 808" 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 11. 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 Drew Bennett; the revised title for next week's results is by Andrew Hoenig.

REPORT FROM WEEK 804 in which we asked you to create a "typo" in an actual Washington Post headline by adding, deleting or substituting one letter, or transposing two letters, and then write a "bank headline" to match the revised main head. (Some of the entries below include the original word in brackets at the end.)

RECEDING HEADLINES:
HONORABLE MENTIONS

Back Home in Alaska, Palin Finds Clod Comfort Ted Stevens Greets Governor at Airport (Pie Snelson, Silver Spring)

President of Oblivia Stirs Fierce Debate People Still Undecided as to Whether Nation Even Exists (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn)

Save an Additional 200% [20%] Local Merchants Get Desperate (Beverly Sharp)

New Teat, Old Position [Team] Reconstructive Surgery Not Intended to Restore 'Perkinness' (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Obama Vows to Have Deficit by End of Term [Halve] Promise Is First That GOP Doesn't Call Unrealistic (Raishad Hardnett, Greenville, Del., a First Offender)

Miser Loves Company Skinflint Invites Friends In Just to Watch Him Count His Cash (Beverly Sharp)

In N.Y., Menswear Captures the Mood [Menswear] You Can Smell the Fear on Wall Street (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

In N.Y., Menswear Captures the Food [Menswear] Manhattan Guys Don't Bother With Napkins (John Kustka, Prince Frederick, Md.)

A Seven-Curse, Seven-Stop Manhattan Meal Carlin-Themed Dinner Deemed a %&# Success (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Alternative Energy Still Facing Herdwinds Downwind Residents Launch Protest Against Cow-Methane Project (Barrett Swink, Annandale)

Striving to Have a Vice in the Workplace Company's Sexual Harassment Workshop Has Unusual Purpose (Beverly Sharp)

U.S. Has Dull Task on Climate Change [Dual] Gore Just the Man for the Job (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

Dog Hits Lowest Level in Years Carries Foofy Sweater to Owner, Begs to Have It Put On (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

On the Carpet, Their Hips Are Sealed Butt Glue Is Secret to Runway Saunter (M. Lilly Welsh, Oakton)

The Toad Not Taken 'She's Just Not Into You,' Buddy Tells Ugly Guy (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

4 Once More, With Feeding *Kate Moss Launches New Career as Plus Model* (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

3 What Could Have Been Horse? *Travelers Ponder the Mysteries of Foreign Menus* (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

2 the winner of the book "Boring Postcards USA" Rwanda's Move Into Condo Fuels Suspicion (Congo) *8 Million Residents in Single Apartment May Be Code Violation* (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

In Steep and Swift Fall, Bow Lands at 6-Year Low *Aretha's Hat Now Covers Entire Face* (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Bad News About Unclear Arms Drop Seen in Tattoo Quality (Mike Ostapiej, Tracy, Calif.)

French, British Officials Confirm Nuclear Tubs Collided in Atlantic *Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker Face Admiralty Charges* (Ben Consilvio, Potomac, a First Offender)

Toxic Hair in Va. Restaurants [Air] State Enacts Strict Ban on Mulletts (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Vegas, Midwest Seek \$8 Billion for Fast Drains [Trains] They Can't Pour Federal Dollars Down Regular Ones Fast Enough (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

The Nation's Hosing From Fannie and Freddie, Here Come the Fee Increases (Dale Hill, Bethesda, a First Offender)

Stimulus Pill Now Goes to Obama President Now Prescribed Daily Amphetamines (Dave Prevar)

More Brides Are Saying 'I Don't' to a Normal Set [Formal] Implants Become Popular Wedding Gift (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

\$900,000 in Grunts Not Documented Las Vegas Brothels Hit With Tax Charges (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

After Voting Largely Along Party Lies, \$787 Billion Bill Goes to Obama *The Mendacity of Hope?* (Chris Doyle, vacationing in Mbabane, Swaziland)

Volcano Erupts in Child [Chile] 8-Year-Old Explodes After Gorging on Six Boxes of Frosted Flakes (Mae Scanlan)

Johnson Backs Off Request That Assembly Praise Taxes

State 'Death' Celebration Also Unlikely to Pass (Kevin Dopart)

Justice Dept. Defends Tush Rule on Guns [Bush] VPs Must Now Shoot Friends From Behind (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

United Eager to Select Kite [Site] Struggling Airline Takes Radical Step to Save Fuel Costs (Christopher Lamora; J. Calvin Smith, Greenbelt)

'A Bra Off' Scandal Yields More Charges Senator Struggles to Explain Victoria's Secret Bill as Business Expense (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

In Japan, Temporary Porkers Are First to Feel Fiscal Pain [Workers] Sumo Sparring Mates Face Layoffs (Chris Doyle)

Talks Could Clear Way for Congressional Testimony by Dove [Rove] Former Laureate Summoned to Explain What the Heck the Inaugural Poem Was About (Christopher Lamora)

Don't Miss the Sweat Spots FDA to Require Instructions on Deodorant Labels (Russell Beland)

Glimpses of Bribal Cultures Lecture Series to Focus on Russia, Zimbabwe, Congress (Christopher Lamora)

Smoking Bat Passes in Va. [Ban] Veterinarians Had Advised Mammal to Give Up Tobacco (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.; Beverly Sharp)

Factoring in the Cost of Getting Some [Home] Bachelors, Don't Forget Movie, Dinner, Wine (Jim Tierney, Fairfax Station; Beverly Sharp; Peter A. Siegwald, Arlington)

Driving Up the Cost for Public Dorks Quayle Still on Federal Payroll (Tom Bruner, Sterling)

GM, Chrysler Seek Billions More in Air Companies Figure That Maybe Money Does Fall Out of the Sky (J. Calvin Smith)

Spitzer Flies to Be Unsealed Former Governor's Wife Finally Relents After Imposing 12-Month Penalties (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Next Week: Brand Ecchs, or Gross Notional Products

Singular Tale of Life on the Line Hasn't Lost a Step

THEATER, From Page C1

only the fittest really do manage to survive.

Now, however, at a time when many Americans are being reminded of the all-too-finite nature of opportunity, "A Chorus Line" seems more than ever about the divide between those who hang on and those who fall away. As the 17 finalists stand frozen in the show's famous, linear tableau, all of them holding 9-by-12 head shots over their faces, you get the bitter sensation of how much is at stake — what it would mean, materially, psychologically, to be hired. And how devastating not to be.

This production is a sturdy touring version of the 2006 Broadway revival, a show so idiosyncratically faithful to the 1975 original it could have been a clone. Although it, like the current National show, was directed by Bob Avian — the late Bennett's co-choreographer — the Broadway revival came across as a cynical and robotic attempt to capitalize on the success of a musical that had run for 15 years and more than 6,000 performances.

Somehow, though, this new "Chorus Line" went out on the road and found its soul. Starting with Robyn Hurder's Cassie — the veteran dancer back trolling for chorus jobs after flubbing her chance at stardom

— the performers are able here to restore some of the musical's vivacity. The dance numbers, remounted by Baayork Lee, might be slick, but the actors themselves never seem so. And while some voices dip slightly below the ideal, the caliber of others, such as that of Gabrielle Ruiz, singing the trademark "What I Did for Love," remain swell.

Much of the musical, famously, is based on the experiences of real dancers, whose words were molded into a Tony-winning script by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante. (The score also won a Tony for composer Marvin Hamlisch and lyricist Edward Kleban.) The conceit of this audition-within-a-show is that in winning the chorus down to four men and four women, Zach (Sebastian La Cause) has to get each of them to open up, because their duties in the show will also require them to emote.

This provides an excuse for Zach to shoot questions at them, and for the dancers' confessions to tumble out: tales of loveless childhoods, broken homes, demeaning parents, homosexual awakenings and thwarted careers spill from their lips. A lot of the pity-me stuff can sound pretty dated, and a few sequences are cringe-worthy, including one in which La Cause has to pose the goopy leading question, what do dancers do when they



BY PAUL KOLNIK

"One," which closes "A Chorus Line," is the storied musical's signature number.

can no longer dance?

One of the strengths of the production is that many of the actors skillfully step around the patches of sugar. Kevin Santos creates a particularly fine account of Paul, the self-consciously effeminate Latino dancer who

tells the evening's longest and teariest story, about his unprepared parents' reaction after encountering him in a drag show.

In the showy roles of jaded, flirtatious Sheila and surgically enhanced Val, Shannon Lewis and Mindy Dougherty pull off their

requisite big moments. But it is, quite rightly, Hurder's at-wit's-end Cassie who occupies the production's center — and who best embodies the terror of this moment in time. Cassie has seen success and had it taken away. Unlike her competitors, she knows the meaning of failure, and what comes when one's expectations are shattered and confidence undermined.

She seems to need a spot in this chorus even more than the others, a desire Hurder ably expresses in Cassie's vibrant dance solo, "The Music and the Mirror." You can sense, too, as she explosively dances out her tension and anxiety, that her comeback will require a major infusion of that irreplaceable personal asset: sweat equity.

A Chorus Line, music by Marvin Hamlisch, book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante, lyrics by Edward Kleban. Directed by Bob Avian. Choreography restaged by Baayork Lee. Set, Robin Wagner; costumes, Theoni V. Aldredge; lighting, Tharon Musser; sound, Acme Sound Partners; music direction, John O'Neill. With Julie Kotarides, Colt Prattes, Derek Hanson, Anthony Wayne. About 2 hours 10 minutes. Through March 22 at National Theatre, 1321 Pennsylvania Ave. NW. Visit www.telecharge.com or call 800-447-7400.

Book World »

'A Jury of Her Peers': Making a Case About Women's Literary Work

BOOK WORLD, From Page C1

She is well-suited for this thorny task. As a literature professor at Princeton, she helped pioneer feminist criticism in the 1970s with works like "Toward a Feminist Poetics" and "A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing." Yet she also worked as a TV critic for People magazine. A translator between the academy and popular culture, she is capable of being less polarized and more nuanced than other feminist critics of her generation. At her best, she is a lively and incisive guide, the perfect Virgil for our quest; if her prose can seem hasty (Anne Bradstreet, she writes, penned "great poems expressing timeless themes"), that flaw is offset by her extraordinary comprehensiveness.

"A Jury of Her Peers" is longer on context than on textual interpretation. Showalter carefully traces the evolution of fiction, poetry and nonfiction written by women and analyzes their reception in the literary marketplace. In between short biographical sketches of the writers, she highlights features of their literature, noting, for instance, that many of the earliest works by women in America were captivity narratives like Mary

Rowlandson's. She charts the rise of the domestic novel in the 1850s and the concurrent rise in female readers. She demonstrates that women writers at the beginning of the 20th century saw the short story as the most authoritative form available to them, and she details the advent of Gothic-tinged fiction in the mid-20th century. (Think Carson McCullers's "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" and Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery.")

"A Jury of Her Peers" offers mini-biographical sketches not only of luminaries like Emily Dickinson and Willa Cather but also of lesser-known precursors like Catharine Maria Sedgwick, a 19th-century novelist who sought to "add something to the scanty stock of native American literature"; the unhappily married poet Julia Ward Howe, whose autobiographical "Passion-Flowers" shocked 19th-century critics with its frankness about marital unhappiness; and Zitkala-Sa, a Dakota Sioux writer of the early 20th century.

Along the way, Showalter raises complicated questions about how art and social circumstances intersect. Crucially, she shows how many talented female writers were discouraged from developing their abilities or died in childbirth before coming to maturity. The demands of housework were a partic-

ular trouble. Fanny Fern — a flowery novelist and columnist — put it succinctly when she wrote in the mid-19th century, "I am sick, in an age which produced a Brontë . . . of the prate of men who assert that every woman should be a perfect housekeeper." (In fact, "A Jury of Her Peers" is not only a history of women who wrote books but also of women who hated sewing — "that interminable thing," as Elizabeth Stoddard called it.) The sheer amount of domestic drudgery chronicled here helps explain why, unlike Britain, the United States produced no great female novelist in the 18th or 19th centuries. And those women who were writing, Showalter shows, were usually doing so to pay the bills rather than to fulfill artistic ambition.

But there are also writers, like Dickinson and Gertrude Stein, who became true artists despite the long odds against them. And when we encounter them, the difficulties with this project come to the fore. By combining all these writers under the subtitle "American Women Writers," Showalter implicitly suggests that gender is a crucial lens through which to examine writers as imaginatively distinctive as Dickinson and Cather. The limit of this approach is that, even if gen-

der helped shape Dickinson's or Edith Wharton's or Cather's work, it's not central to what made their work great. Showalter's reading of Dickinson is one of the weaker — and briefer — mini-essays in the book because the source of Dickinson's eccentric originality is elusive. By contrast, Showalter is much more incisive — and expansive — about the less talented (if more tragic) poet Howe, whose writing was suppressed by her domineering husband, and whose work does lend itself to being read through the lens of gender.

Indeed, throughout "A Jury of Her Peers" space goes disproportionately to those female writers who take on gender or related issues such as marriage, slavery or domestic tension. Perhaps that's why so many of the most original writers in this anthology felt anxious about being identified as "female." As Cynthia Ozick put it, to accept the term "women writers" would oblige "artists who are women . . . to deliver a 'woman's art,'" as if their other preoccupations were "inauthentic . . . or invalid, or worst yet, lyingly evasive." Elizabeth Bishop refused to be in an anthology of female poets, noting, "Art is art and to separate writings, paintings, musical compositions, etc., into two sexes is to

emphasize values that are not art."

Of course, what complicates Ozick's view, as Showalter points out, is that the history of art and the history of the marketplace are not the same. And it is undeniable that the host of women's anthologies and critical studies of female writers published since the 1970s has helped clear the way for today's poets and novelists (myself included) to feel free not to think of ourselves primarily as "women writers." As Lorine Pruette, a 20th-century psychologist, wrote: "If I were building a Utopia . . . I would leave feminism . . . even feminism; in place of principles I would give us all a magnificent and flaming audacity."

But we are not in that Utopia yet, which is why, in the meantime, we should be grateful for Showalter's generous, thought-provoking study.

O'Rourke is a poet and a cultural critic for Slate.

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM To hear an interview with Elaine Showalter from the Book World podcast, go to washingtonpost.com/books.