



CAROLYN HAX

Don't spoil the fantasy of your little princess

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dearest Carolyn:
My 3-year-old daughter has just been invited to a classmate's birthday party. The prickly part for me is that it is a heavily themed princess party ("bring your princess dress-up clothes!"), to be held at one of those all-inclusive sixth circle of Hell places for kids.

Aside from my personal aversion to the play/party place, our family has tried not to expose our daughter to the princess stuff. I have a very hard time with the fantasy part and the female expectations that subtly play upon girls from an increasingly early age, thanks to the media. From my position, I'd prefer not to expose my daughter to this party. My daughter would love it, no question. What do you think?

Stick in the mud

Your daughter would love it, no question. Why does it have to be more complicated than that?

Fantasy is part of childhood. Knights, dragons, superheroes, astronauts, explorers, Max in his wolf suit making mischief of one kind and another... and, princesses. The princess myths may traditionally offer girls more inert roles than the others — what with all those poisonings and tower-banishings — but time, society and the creative professions have been blasting away at that problem for decades. Please don't throw out the good exposure with the bad.

And please don't take away two hours of kiddie bliss just because it's not what you want for her during the other 22 hours of her day. Those other 22 hours x 365 x 18-21 years will have a much more lasting impression on her than a brief exposure to flashing lights and glitter.

I haven't yet heard anyone fret that a bowling party will turn girls butch or taint them with a lifelong yearning for used, color-block shoes, yet these parties produce delirious kids and over-stimulated parents just as reliably as the all-inclusive sixth circles — so I would advise applying the same lack of significance to this.

Re: Princess party:
"Your daughter would love it, no question. Why does it have to be more complicated than that?"

Thanks, Carolyn. And piling on: My daughter became enamored early on of an activity that not only bored me, but that I actively dislike. My wife backed me off of discouraging this activity, and I'm so glad she did.

Years later, I still don't like the activity. But that, I realize, is MY problem. My daughter absolutely blooms when she partakes, and her happiness is MY happiness.

Anonymous

Thanks, well put. A few people responded to the issue in a what's-the-big-deal kind of way, but it is a big deal. We do need to be mindful of how a culture's messages will affect our children.

However, there is a fine line between that and rigid parental thinking. The latter is so stifling to kids and really messes with the way they see themselves, which of course is their primary source of strength — and, it also happens to be the very thing most parents have in mind when they feel the need to protect against bad cultural influences.

Which is, like, trippy, man.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or tellme@washpost.com.

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BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 852
in which we asked, as we did four weeks earlier, for rhopalic sentences — except this time, each successive word had to be one letter shorter. (As we did last time, we let hyphenated compounds count as either single or multiple words.)



Abdulmutallab ("Crotchbomber," "Undiebomber"): Detonation backfired, yielding nothing except Umar's sore lap. (Jeff Contompassis, Ashburn)

- 2** the winner of the Thinker necktie: Adorable Chinese pandas going home: Boo Hu. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)
- 3** GOPistas' no-it-all stance bodes woes for Mr. O. (Michael Reinemer, Annandale)
- 4** Satiated, Oedipus slowly rolls over: "Mom!?" (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

SHIRT? NOPE. MUG? NO.: HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Washington fast-paced? [Laughter.] Beltway tie-ups slash your MPH to 0.** (Beverly Sharp, Washington)
- Student Hester works hard for an A.** (Chris Doyle)
- Miraculous invention restores economy — toilet paper pull tab!** (Joey Carlton, Roanoke, Va., a First Offender)
- Venerable soldiers forever eschew death; fade awa . . .** (Beverly Sharp)
- Poverty-stricken administration forehead-slaps: Coin-munching, inoperative, inaccurate, painfully outdated parking meters bring cash! 6:30! Ha!** (Barry Brennessel, Washington, a First Offender)
- Recently revised lineup: Peter, Paul and** (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)
- Sesquipedalian conversations disintegrate intercourse: Lovemaking expresses language sweeter beyond words.** (Kevin Coyne, Fairfax, a First Offender)
- Sightings continue! Reality lesson: Elvis DIED — get it?** (Beverly Sharp)
- Exceedingly perplexing countdown launches rockets: eleven, eight, four, one, um, 0.** (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)
- Good-looking. Youthfully exuberant. Sexually charged. Dupont manse. Real?! MTV!** (Barry Brennessel)
- Blue-skinned Pocahontas convinces ex-Marine: Pandora chicks worth risk (and 3-D).** (Randy Lee, Burke)
- Listlessly, conquered Napoleon wanders, saying again, "Able was, uh, I."** (Susie Wiltshire, Richmond)

- "Change," Obama said. Now? No.** (Russell Beland, Fairfax)
 - Masquerader apologizes regarding infamous "crashed" Indian event: "Sari!"** (Craig Dykstra)
 - Massachusetts' considerably disgruntled electorate delivered stunning message: Barack Obama just got an F.** (Neff, Joe, am I; Warrington, Pa.)
 - "Marital excess" means "exes."** (Beverly Sharp)
 - Unnoteworthiness notwithstanding, geographically disadvantaged unsuccessful nondescript Republican candidate evermore remains better known than you or I.** (Andy Basset, New Plymouth, New Zealand)
 - Offsetting customary coolness, Gilbert Arenas packs heat now.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
 - Ahmadinejad reprimands sissified athletes because "anyone Iranian isn't gay."** (Chris Doyle)
 - Un-Lady-like appendage revealed; tabloid exposé shows Gaga née "he."** (Craig Dykstra)
 - Coakley tanked. Obama wept.** (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)
 - And Last: DearTech Support: Help, my space bar's bad.** (Russell Beland)
- Next Week: Easy as DEF, or Threelogsisms

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

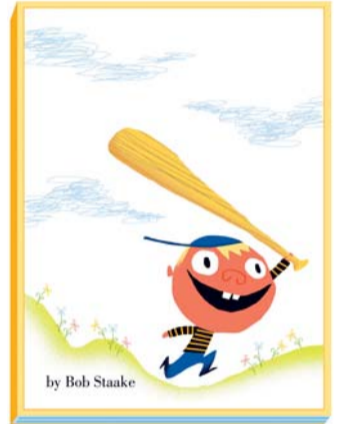
Week 856: Titled Puerility

When he's not defacing The Style Invitational and many other newspaper stories and magazine covers, artist Bob Staake is usually writing and illustrating a book or eight — he's done more than 40 children's books, with several more in the works. But Bob is an envelope-pusher ("Bob," the neighbors ask, "why are you walking around with an envelope in a baby carriage?") and sometimes his ideas are deemed not quite suitable for the Publishing Establishment. This week:

Here are some untitled book covers. For any of them, tell us a title and synopsis of a book that will never be published.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets an L-for-Loser hand-shaped bottle stopper, hand-molded in plastic resin by K-for-Loser Kyle Hendrickson. (See washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational for a photo.)

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 Loser Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). 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, Feb. 22. Put "Week 856" 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 March 13. 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 Tom Witte; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Roy Ashley.



BOOK COVERS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

In Act I, Canada embraces center stage

SHALES FROM C1

narrated a splendid featurette on our friendly neighbors to the North, made memorably and achingly beautiful by stunning HD photography of mountains, lakes, hills, valleys, ice, snow and, of course, Niagara Falls.

NBC News anchor Brian Williams and such first-string sportscasters as Dan Patrick, Al Michaels, Mary Carillo and the star of the show, Bob Costas (with an assist from Matt Lauer of "Today"), performed at their peaks — especially perhaps Carillo who, in a taped piece, was seen getting a turn at carrying the Olympic torch.

In the first half-hour, NBC showed commendable candor in reporting on the death of the 21-year-old luger Nodar Kumaritashvili, showing taped footage of the tragedy (at least three times, but that's standard for TV now — in fact, NBC showed restraint) and confronting the fact that the accident had certainly dampened spirits as the Games were to get under way.

Later, somewhat awkwardly, NBC unveiled the considerably ballyhooed 2010 update of the old "We Are the World" video, this time for Haiti relief. At least it added to the overall sense of event — as did the start, at 9 o'clock, of the Opening Ceremonies, with a skier sloshing down a long man-made slope in the stadium, right through the middle "O" in the five rings that make up the Olympic logo, and onto the floor of the humongously gigantic venue where the ceremonies took place.

At first, it looked as though entertainment would take over for the rest of the evening, albeit with a muted sort of sizzle. The first half-hour or so was an exercise in Cultural Correctness, with representatives of Canada's "indigenous peoples" taking the giant stage to dance about and hunker down. At such moments, one might be inclined to recall one of the late Jack Paar's favorite quotations: "Try everything once — with the exceptions



LUCY NICHOLSON/REUTERS

TIME TO SHINE: Canadian artists perform during the Winter Games' Opening Ceremonies, which included interpretive and folk dancing.

of incest and folk dancing." It did get a trifle dull after about five minutes.

Then came the Parade of Nations, a climax at Summer Games but, as Costas and Lauer explained, instead part of the curtain-raising at the Winter Games — the idea being that if you trot the athletes out at the beginning, they can sit and watch the spectacle of everybody else. It was a spectacle worth waiting for, full of amazing illusions and great glowing splashes of light and color — something that kids especially might enjoy, though it started too late

for many younger ones to see.

Whales were projected onto the stadium floor, totem poles seemed to rise from out of it and up to the rafters — as did a giant sparkling bear that turned out to be an elegant balloon. And that was only for openers. All of it was rendered splendid by NBC's HD cameras and enhanced by discreet commentary from the anchors.

The Winter Games conquered their omens, at least for now, and were off to an awe-inspiring start.

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Celebs remake 'World' in skewed image

BY CHRIS RICHARDS

"We Are the World" got a bad rap. Not the original charity anthem recorded in 1985, but the 25th-anniversary remake that debuted Friday night during coverage of the Opening Ceremonies of the Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

The updated take was horribly oversung, but it was largely faithful to the original tune written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie — save for the 21st-century rap verses added toward the end of the track. One group rap-along, penned by Will.i.Am and led by LL Cool J, ends with a particularly platitudinous couplet: "We are the world connected by a common bond: Love! The whole planet is singing along."

Just probably not to this version. The remake starts with a slew of well-endowed vocal cords hyperextending themselves during precious seconds in front of the microphone.

Guilty parties from the opening verse include Jennifer Hudson, Justin Bieber, Josh Groban and Jennifer Nettles of Sugarland, each of them cramming too many notes into not enough syllables. Take it easy, guys.

If the original cast assembled by producer Quincy Jones were "the children," this new ensemble that Jones and Richie summoned the day after the Jan. 31 Grammy Awards in Los Angeles are the grandchildren. It's a sprawling extended family of singers — more than 80 altogether. That's almost twice as many as the first cast, handfuls of them not even born when the original was recorded.

But despite the maxed-out guest list, quite a few future legends were absent. Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake, Alicia Keys, Britney Spears, Rihanna and Mariah Carey were some of the biggest names not at the recording session. Also, there were too few voices from the country, rock and Latin music communities.

And that's really what's most disappointing about this overblown redux. Nobody can argue with its worthy cause — the song's latest proceeds will go to earthquake relief in Haiti — but the recording's original thrill was due to the panoply of voices gracefully working together: a reedy Willie Nelson, a roaring Bruce Springsteen, an angelic Michael Jackson.

On the new version — its video will be simulcast around the world Saturday — Jackson's original vocal contribution was wisely left intact.

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DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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