

Lettery winners: Alphabetic writing

BY PAT MYERS

In Week 1512 the Empress asked the Losers to write something 26 words long in which **every word started with a different letter**. The one permitted exception: So we wouldn't have a whole page of X-rays and xylophones, you had the option to make your X-word one in which the X was in the middle, but pronounced like "ex." (Also, hyphenated compounds could count as either one or two words.) The results of this tough challenge: way more readable than we expected.

An inordinate number of the better entries referred to the Invite itself; see more of the "And Last" types in this week's Style Conversational.

4th place:

[An A-to-Z passage] A boastful cad dated every female, going, "Honey, I just know lots! Mansplaining? Not on point — quite ridiculous!" such that, unflinching, vexed women eXclaimed, "You zero!" (Karen Lambert, Chevy Chase)

3rd place:

An ominous movie nauseated weekend viewers, inducing projectile retching everywhere. Grownups: flashback — eXuding queasiness, upchucking zealously, yelling deliriously, kneeling lamely. Title? "Junior High Cafeteria: Beef Surprise." (Leif Picoult, Rockville)

2nd place and the "spider skeleton":

Conductor in rehearsal: "Violins, you're scratchy and flat! Trombones — don't bray like mating zebras! Kettledrums, what extraordinarily horrendous noise! Xylophone: unbelievably grotesque — just quit! Otherwise — perfect." (Jonathan Jensen, a bassist in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra)

And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

I'd like to follow Xiao Qi Ji virtually on National Zoo's giant panda cam. "Uh, why? You do know he merely eats bamboo and sleeps, right?" (Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.)

Alphageta about it! Honorable mentions

Quintessential humiliation: Observing triathletes wilting, Jack, eXhibiting graciousness (and pretentiousness), loudly yelled "Courgette!" until realizing: "Knucklehead! Damn my French! I've been shouting 'zucchini'—not encouraging 'valor.'" (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)

I have this very large zit on my nose, coffee's quite bitter, rain keeps falling. You eXclaim, "What a great day, everybody!" Just shut up, Pollyanna! (Hildy Zampella, Vienna, Va.)

Some Oddly Trivial Presidential Information

Assassinated: Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy
Questionable Election: Bush
Watergate: Nixon
Union Head: Reagan
Famous Virginian/Declaration Creator: Jefferson
Yemeni EXtraction: Zero (Louise Dodenhoff Hauser, Sarasota, Fla.)

Quick! Get ready — the holidays are coming! Expect buyfests, limited parking, very eXcited kids, many invitations, zealous overindulgence, no sleep. (Forget dieting; just undo your waistband!) (Beverly Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

For Thanksgiving, I might go all-out with ribs, sauteed zucchini, wagyu kabobs, quail loins, eggplant parmesan, jellied yams, eXtra uni, veal Nicoise. Or Chef Boyardee. Decisions! (Leif Picoult)

First we'll quaff some hearty, undiscovered California zinfandels. Next, a vat of eXpertly blended reds: juicy malbec, earthy pinot, young grenache. Last: Italian dolcetto. Then . . . klunk! (Jonathan Jensen)

Rules for Public Speaking: Arise, be direct; maintain eye contact with group, host, individuals; just keep letting natural openness quicken. Then (unless vain), eXamine your zipper. (Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

[A limerick]

"Caesar's" dead, likewise "Tsar," also "Kaiser"; "Humankind's just zoomed past 'em, grown wiser," Yammer eXperts. But news Makes idyllic, quaint views



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

New contest for Week 1516: Questionable Journalism

A. "I hadn't seen that kind of positivity in a while. It was really cool." (Quote in a Washington Post article) **Q. Why were you rubbing balloons all over the cat?** (Frank Osen)

A. "We're working our way happily and steadily through the process of production." (Post article) **Q. What did the mechanical engineer reply when his mother-in-law said, "We hope you'll soon make us proud grandparents"?** (Cathy Lamaze)

A. It's very rare to find a continuous curved plane like that. (Quote about the round Hirshhorn Museum) **Q. Why is there so much excitement about Boeing's new Frisbee-shaped aircraft?** (Mae Scamlan)

We've had lots of fun with this contest over the years: It's in our venerable "Jeopardy!"-style answer/question format, plus it lets you willfully misinterpret the news media! This week: **Choose any sentence (or the major part of a sentence) from any publication dated Nov. 23-Dec. 5 and invent a question it could answer**, as in the examples above from previous Questionable Journalism contests. It can be in an article or ad, but it should read like a sentence, not a headline. Tell us the name of the publication and the date and (if in print) the page number; for online publications, please include a link to the Web page. (Hmm, the "positivity" example is *two* sentences — well, that's okay, too, as long as it's short.)

Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1516 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday night, Dec. 5**; results appear Dec. 25 in print (delivered right down your chimney), Dec. 22 online.



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Fir in the future: This week's 2 1/2-inch second prize.

Other runners-up win their choice of our "For Best Results, Pour Into Top End" Loser Mug or our "Whole Fools" Grocery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, "A Small Jester of Appreciation" or "Close, but Ceci N'est Pas un Cigare." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/inviteFAQ. The headline "Lettery Winners" is by Jon Gearhart; Jesse Frankovich wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev; follow Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; follow @StyleInvite on Twitter (no check mark for us!).

● **The Style Conversational:** The Empress's weekly online column discusses the week's new contest and results. See classic Questionable Journalism winners this week at wapo.st/conv1516.

Smell of ultra-robust fertilizer. (Coleman Glenn, Huntingdon Valley, Pa.)

Boomers judged Xers "lazy slackers," who deemed the following youth cohort "quintessentially entitled kids needing unceasing praise." Okay, Millennials, have at it—vilify Generation Z's reputation! (Karen Lambert)

Everyone residing in Who-ville felt zealous concerning Xmas quite a lot. . . but the Grinch, you know, up on his snowy mountain perch, did NOT! Jerk! (Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.)

Stop using XamfirPM if you experience: headaches, joint pain, flaming discharge, wilted ribs, night quacking, glowing, cloven toes, kaleidoscopic vision, lycanthropy, Bea Arthur mimicking, or zombification. (Jon Carter, Fredericksburg)

Latest, greatest Star Wars offering by Disney Plus is "Jabba the Hutt's Uncle's Cousin's EXcellent Quest: Visiting Yavin and Naboo, Zapping Kylo Ren, Flogging Ewok Merchandise." (Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

Exciting hot quickies on weathered pine bleachers Can give new romance eXtra zing. Just know (very fast!) you'll discover, undoubtedly: Love is a many-splintered thing. (Jeff Shirley, Richmond)

Elon Musk owns Twitter! Now you downtrodden racists, xenophobes, gun zealots, QAnon

wackos, Putin vindicators, incels and Klansmen can join up. Let free (hate) speech bloom! (Chris Doyle)

Discerning blurry outlines in Himalayan mountain zones, gullible visitors uttered: "Just look! We've finally espied proof! The abominable snowman eXists!" Knowledgeable citizens responded: "Not quite yeti." (Karen Lambert)

Deep scars left by your vulgar, malevolent eX-president have not faded. Gross, unruly QAnon zealots jabber kooky, offensive propaganda. I won't even consume a "Right Twix." (Bill Dorner, Indianapolis)

And Last: God knows regular quipping's not very challenging, but making you use eXactly twenty-six words, each one having a different first letter, is just plain zany. (Jesse Frankovich)

And Even Laster: Before entering the Invitational, always first question yourself honestly: Does my joke responsibly eXhibit wisdom, underscore legitimate knowledge or zealously promote virtue? No? Great — click submit! (Karen Lambert)

More honorable mentions in the online Invite at wapo.st/invite1516; more "And Lasts" in *The Style Conversational* at wapo.st/conv1516.

Still running — deadline Monday night, Nov. 28: Our contest to join two or more European town names in a "joint venture." Ar wapo.st/invite1515