

The Style Invitational

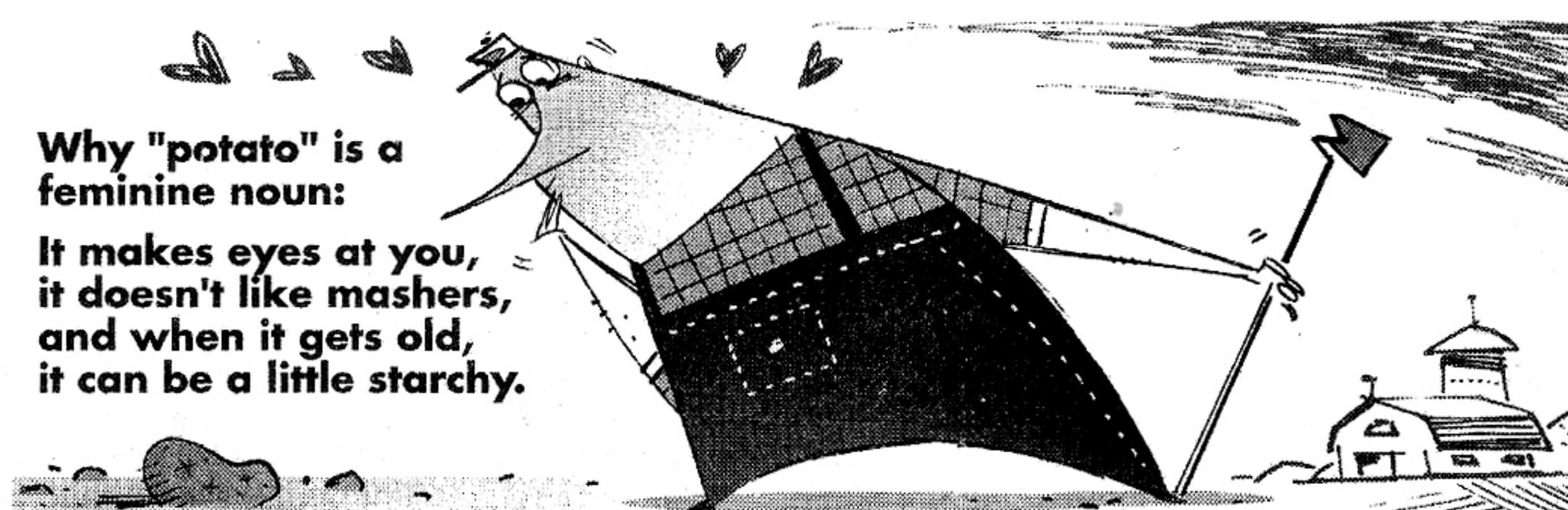
Week L: A Kinder, Gender Nation

Why "computer" is a feminine noun: Because only its creator understands its internal logic, and because once you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

Why "computer" is a masculine noun: Because in order to get its attention, you have to turn it on, and because as soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you'd waited a little longer, a better model would have come along.

Why "potato" is a feminine noun:

It makes eyes at you, it doesn't like mashers, and when it gets old, it can be a little starchy.



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's contest: Unlike French and Spanish, English does not have masculine and feminine nouns. But what if it did? Take any noun and give us a reason or two why it should be either

masculine or feminine, as in the examples above. First-prize winner gets "Oh Deer," a plastic deer that poops out brown jelly beans. It is worth \$10.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-Shirt. The Uncle's Pick wins the shockingly ugly "The Uncle Loves Me" T-shirt. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com, or by U.S. mail to The Style Invitational, Week L, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. Deadline is Monday, Jan. 15. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and a daytime or evening telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Editors reserve the right to edit entries for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK XLVI,

in which we asked you to come up with examples of Ratherspeak, the CBS anchor's cloyingly folksy analogies to describe the recent election fandango. We thank you all for the many fine variations of the old expression "He was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs." Many of these efforts were quite inventive, but when a contest knowingly rewards knockoffs it starts down a slippery slope, the bottom of which is the sort of everyone-wins, feel-good cutest-baby-picture contest sponsored by newspapers like the Bugle-Harrumph of Lenoir, N.C. We had our suspicions about the originality of several entries, and—fairly or not—disqualified them, exercising our prejudices without compunction: Accordingly, "This whole event has been as organized as a bucket of minnows," submitted by Roy Burrow, was discarded on the theory that Roy comes from a place called "Nokesville," where people probably talk like that. Likewise, we trash-canned "Al Gore has to be more frustrated than a three-legged dog with fleas" by Jim McWilliams, who, we will dryly point out, hails from "Shepherdstown, W.Va." On a related note, we thank Cindi Rae Caron of Lenoir, N.C., for fessing up that this entry of hers is actually spoken down there: "He's busier than a one-legged man in a pickle seed kickin' contest."

◆ Fourth Runner-Up goes to an entry in the subcategory of Dennis Miller sports pretentiousness:

"This game has undergone so many emotional bounces, they'll call the movie 'Son of Flaubert.'" (Mark Eckenwiler, Washington)

◆ Third Runner-Up:

"Gore's hubcaps are gone, he's all out of chaw, and there's a chicken head in his McNuggets." (Chris Winters, Alexandria)

◆ Second Runner-Up:

"This election is dicier than the rearview mirror of a '63 Impala." (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

◆ First Runner-Up:

"The voters were as torn as a Sears catalogue in a three-holer." (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

◆ And the winner of the "Leading With Laughter" tape, devoted to the humor of former president George Bush:

"Sorting out this election is going to be harder than suckin' grits through an ear trumpet." (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

"We networks backed out of that Florida prediction faster than a unicyclist facing the wrong end of a shotgun."

(Carolyn Bickford, San Jose, Calif.)

"Put on the po-lice scanner, mama, we're gonna be up mighty late *this* prom night."

(Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

"Freshen your chaw and get a new spit cup, cause this election's gonna grind on longer than Little Egypt on dollar beer night."

(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

"Gore is going backwards faster than an odometer on a used-car lot."

(James DiBenedetto, Arlington)

"This election's like a tipped-over outhouse. Noisy, smelly, and only funny to the people who ain't in it."

(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

"Colin Powell has got hisself on more short lists than bread and milk."

(Mel Loftus, Holman, Wis.)

"The Supreme Court looked about as disinterested as a Spam-eating dog under the dinner table."

(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

"The Supreme Court ruling was as confounding as a square dance called by an auctioneer."

(Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

"This election has about as much of a chance of working itself out easily as a bowling ball swallowed by a constipated mule."

(Robin D. Grove, Pasadena, Md.)

"Well, we're retracting the Florida projection, and I'm about as embarrassed as a horned toad gettin' romantic with an oatmeal cookie."

(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

"Gore is as stiff as a wet shirt on a clothesline in February." (Katharine M. Butterfield, Potomac)

"The plane's on fire, he's jumping out from only 100 feet, and Dan Quayle packed the parachute."

(Roger and Pam Dalrymple, Potomac Falls)

◆ Dennis Miller subcategory:

"This is one hell of an election. The coin's in the air, and it's gone down the back of the ref's pants."

(Fred S. Souk, Reston)

"The wide receiver is as isolated out there as a pupa."

(Howard Walderman, Columbia)

"The Jaguars are like a litter of Schroedinger's cats—you can't tell whether they are dead or alive."

(Chris Doyle, Burke)

"Redskins fans are like Uncle Vanya finding out Professor Serebryakov is a fraud." (Chris Doyle, Burke)

"Tiger Woods is Achilles without the heel problem."

(Joseph Romm, Washington)

◆ The Uncle's Pick:

"Gore was as nervous as a long-tailed cat on the court during a game of wheelchair basketball."

(Carolyn Bickford, San Jose, Calif.)

The Uncle Explains: *His tail might get run over.*

Next Week: Neology 101