

# The Style Invitational

Week CXXXIV: Get Your But in Here



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

“Trust but verify” is important-sounding but illogical, like “The Solipsists’ Society of America.”

Republicans promising to fight corporate greed is plausible, but really awkward to pull off gracefully—like putting on jeans over a formal gown.

Osama escaping to Tel Aviv is theoretically possible but unwise, like bowling with a cantaloupe.

**This Week’s Contest** is very complicated. As in the examples above, produce a line that fits this structure: (Real thing based upon current events) is (word or phrase suggesting some quality) but (other word or phrase suggesting a dissimilar or incompatible quality), like (funny analogy). Yes, we know, but we think it is easier than it seems. First-prize winner gets one of our finest prizes ever, “The Menace of Darwinism,” a vintage fulminating 1920s screed by William Jennings Bryan. First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other

runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com). U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, Aug. 26. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and 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.

Entries may be edited 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. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week’s contest is by Joseph Romm of Washington.

## Report From Week CXXX,

in which we asked for a well-known story retold by a famous person:

◆ Second Runner-Up: “Just sit right down and you’ll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip / Starting in a northern port aboard a whaling ship, aboard a whaling ship. / Oh, you can call me Ishmael, and the captain is A-hab, / We’re out to kill a big white whale, and sell off all his flab, and sell off all his flab . . .” —“Moby-Dick,” retold by Sherwood Schwartz, creator of “Gilligan’s Island” (Bird Waring, New York)

◆ First Runner-Up: “Young George Washington decided to chop down a cherry tree—a strong and purposeful act. However, when confronted, instead of standing up for his right to act against mindless convention, he abjectly apologized and sought mercy. After this, it is not surprising that, as an adult, he sought refuge in government jobs.” —Parson Weems’s biography, retold by Ayn Rand (Mike Genz, La Plata)

◆ And the winner of the bra-wearing stuffed gorilla that sings the macarena: “Hamlet and Ophelia were a good couple. Claudius and Gertrude were evil. Polonius was good and so was Horatio, but Laertes was evil. Clowns good, grave diggers evil. Then there was Fortinbras. We had a Fortinbras at Delta Kappa Epsilon. He was a major league bunghole.” —“Hamlet,” retold by George W. Bush (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

◆ Honorable Mentions: “Last night I dreamt of Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the gate, which could represent the separation of my life with Mrs. Hopper from that with Max. Or it could be symbolic of female genitalia. I wonder what my life would be today if Mrs. Hopper had not been a surrogate mother-image, drawing off the unresolved love-hate fixation I had for my own mother. ‘What do YOU think?’ asked Max. He was never very helpful.” —“Rebecca,” retold by Sigmund Freud (Arthur Litoff, York Springs, Pa.)

“In the beginning, all the matter in the universe was compressed into a 10-dimensional black hole approximately 1 Planck unit in radius. The first 20<sup>-43</sup> of a second was characterized by a period of hyper-inflation that caused the universe to expand to the size of a grapefruit. This condition remained static for the next 320 microseconds, until perturbatory Feynman quantum fluctuations resulted in . . .” —Genesis 1:1, retold by Stephen Hawking (Joshua Miller, Sparks, Md.)

“A man sells his heirloom gold watch to buy tortoise-shell combs for his wife’s hair, while she, in turn, sells her hair to buy a platinum chain for his watch. In this we have an economic entity that has failed to coordinate the evaluation and allocation of its long-term static assets and short-term renewable resources, dissipating its capacity to achieve growth.” —“The Gift of the Magi,” retold by Alan Greenspan (Mitch Mularz, Aberdeen, Wash.)

“Winston Smith, happier than even he was accustomed to being, given that he lived in the paradise that was Oceana, strolled merrily into the Ministry of Truth, his party-provided blue overalls giving him the all the warmth and security he needed . . .” —“1984,” retold by Kim Il Sung (Greg Krakower, Scarsdale, N.Y.)

“An ignorant girl invaded the habitat of a beautiful and powerful yet endangered wolf, who was cruelly murdered by a self-righteous woodsman for the crime of obeying its natural instincts and protecting its territory.” —“Little Red Riding Hood,” retold by PETA President Ingrid Newkirk (Beth Baniszewski, Columbia)

“Worried about their families, the townspeople went to the little blue train, and pleaded with him to carry the food up over the mountain. ‘I cannot, I am too small,’ said the train, crying. Then he ordered my eight-cassette personal empowerment training system . . .” —“The Little Engine That Could,” retold by Tony Robbins (Greg Krakower, Scarsdale, N.Y.)

“John Henry was born to be a steel-drivin’ man. But the Asians and Europeans dumped steel on the U.S. market, and John Henry got laid off. He had to put his hammer down and died of a broken heart.” —“John Henry,” retold by Patrick Buchanan (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

“There’s this dame, see? And she leads this guy to the top of a cliff and pushes him off. Then she rolls down after him so it don’t look like a hit, see?” —“Jack and Jill,” retold by Edward G. Robinson (Mike Genz, La Plata)

“Karenin’s wife dumps him for Vronsky. It doesn’t work out. She jumps in front of a train.” —“Anna Karenina,” retold by Ernest Hemingway (Mike Genz, La Plata)

“Now here we are in provincial Russia, in the exclusive habitat of the infamous Fyodor Karamazov. He’s rumored to be a grumpy little devil, and sloppy, too—look how he decorates his home with old vodka bottles, pestles and hundred-ruble notes. Oh, and here he is! My, you’re an ugly bloke. Notice the matted hair, the protruding Adam’s apple, the bloodshot eyes, the drool. Crikey! He’s trying to embarrass me because he doesn’t like being talked about. That’s his defense tactic, which is why his sheilas and his own offspring all leave him right quick.” —“The Brothers Karamazov,” by Steve Irwin (Julia Lozos, Falls Church)

“One morning after a restless sleep, Gregor Samsa awoke to find himself transformed in his bed into a giant radioactive superpowered insect . . .” —“Metamorphosis,” retold by Stan Lee (Julia Lozos, Falls Church)

“Sweet, sad harrumphing Humpty Dumpty (Yasssss! Yasssss! Always wanting to hump but always getting dumped!), the old dharma bum himself, waiting on the wall for a fall . . .” —“Humpty Dumpty,” retold by Jack Kerouac (Paul Kocak, Syracuse)

Next Week: Abusement Park



WORST SIDESHOW - Prince William Co. Fair.

MOST DESICCATED PIE - Arlington Co. Fair.

WORST ANIMAL BARN - Montgomery Co. Fair.

WORST GAME OF SKILL - Anne Arundel Co. Fair.

MOST INEXPLICABLE CANNED GOOD - Howard Co. Fair.

WORST BOOTH - D.C. County Fair.

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Party Favors

A certain amount of childish behavior is to be expected at parties given in celebration of the birthdays of minors. However, Miss Manners would just as soon hope that it not come from the parents.

Some of them she would not trust, even blindfolded, to play pin the tail on the donkey. They are already far too eager and inventive about skewering one another.

Of course she understands that everything parents do is motivated entirely by the desire to please their children. Can it be their fault that it makes their children happy for them to vie at outclassing other parents, to make a point of excluding certain children, and to encourage forms that foster social irresponsibility?

Only partly, Miss Manners acknowledges. Children do appear to be born with some scary social inclinations. It is a parental obligation to disabuse them of the idea that they can get away with this.

The chief excuse for the birthday party, one of the most hazardous social forms in existence, is as a laboratory for teaching counterintuitive, and therefore civilized, behavior.

The young host or hostess has the difficult job of pretending that the guests were invited for their company as much as for the packages under their arms, and that they are there to have a good time, rather than to form an audience for whom the birthday child can be the center of attention. All of this being against every natural human inclination, it takes a lot of training.

But there are parents who seem to be training their children, instead, in acquisitiveness and self-centeredness. The forms that have burgeoned put an increasing emphasis on presents, including not just the present-opening ritual, but posting wish lists, and on glorifying and indulging the birthday child, regardless of the effect on guests. A particularly nasty innovation, for example, is to award the host prizes in any competitive games, regardless of performance.

Whatever this training is supposed to prepare them to become, it could not be decent, hospita-

ble, considerate people. Maybe it is to become medieval lords, whose relationships with others consist of extracting tributes and exercising privileges.

In their own future interests, and that of the society on which these people will be unleashed, Miss Manners recommends parents' reining things in. Children being traditionalists, it would be wise for parents in the same neighborhood and school circles to set some limits.

Well-meaning ones have already made some moves toward doing this in regard to the guest list, for example, decreeing that everyone in a child's class be invited. (The less altruistic form, of demanding that all one's own children be invited regardless of acquaintanceship, is a bad one; a Gentle Reader whose parents demanded that said that the result was that the entire family was dropped socially.) Another method is reverting to the old rule of inviting only the number of guests equal to the child's age, thus limiting it to so few that being left out is no distinction.

Care should be taken that parties do not get big enough or expensive enough to put an undue burden on the hosts (and frighten the children). One solution is joint parties for children born in the same month, but then, care has to be taken not to put a burden on guests in supplying multiple presents when they might not be acquainted with all the honorees. An agreement on low-key parties and a low ceiling on present expenditures would help.

If parents replace competition with cooperation, they may find they can also make rules for their own convenience in regard to transportation, for example. If anyone is entitled to have a special day, they are the ones who earn it.

*Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at [MissManners@unitedmedia.com](mailto:MissManners@unitedmedia.com), or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.*

© 2002, Judith Martin

## BRIDGE

Both sides vulnerable

<b>NORTH</b>		<b>EAST</b>	
♠ A 6 3	♥ 10 9 8 2	♠ Q 10 9 4	♥ 7
♦ Q	♣ A Q J 4 2	♦ K 10 8 4	♣ 10 9 6 3
<b>WEST</b>	♠ J	<b>SOUTH (D)</b>	
♥ K 5 4	♦ J 9 7 6 3 2	♠ K 8 7 5 2	♥ A Q J 6 3
♦ J 9 7 6 3 2	♣ K 8 5	♦ A 5	♣ 7

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♥	Pass
6 ♥	All Pass		

Opening lead: ♦ 6

In the midst of the Depression, many people had time on their hands—and spent it exploring the possibilities of the new rage, contract bridge. In 1933, an Indianan named Easley Blackwood wrote to the Ely Culbertson organization, the dominant force in the game, proposing a new convention—an ace-asking bid with a simple set of responses. He got a reply saying his method was impractical: Culbertson's 4NT-5NT method held sway, and challengers were unwelcome.

Blackwood's convention, of course, became the game's most widely played gadget. Some players think it's a rule violation to bid a slam without asking for aces.

If today's North showed one ace in response to Blackwood, South wouldn't know what to do. If North's spades were 9-6-3 or J-6-3,

South would be in bad shape. If North had A 3, K 9 8 2, 8 3, K Q 8 4 2, a diamond lead might beat six hearts. If he had Q 3, K 10 8 2, 8 3, A K Q 4 2, South would be a favorite.

South tried 4NT anyway—players often do even though Blackwood won't provide the right information—and bid slam when North obliged with two aces.

South took the ace of diamonds, ruffed a diamond in dummy, lost a trump finesse and won the trump return. What next?

Since South needs four club tricks to avoid losing a spade, he must find West with K-x-x. South finesesses with the jack, throws a spade on the ace and ruffs a club. When the king falls, South throws two more spades on the Q-4 of clubs.

© 2002, Tribune Media Services