

Entertainment

Style Invitational Week 1250: Poems of the year(s)— ‘time-travel’ with Merriam-Webster

Write a poem including some words that were first used in the year of your choice



(Bob Staake for The Washington Post)

By Pat Myers October 19, 2017 [Email the author](#)

(Click [here to skip down](#) to this week's Questionable Journalism winners)

1917, by Gene Weingarten:

*A sociopathic columnist from Nowheresville, America,
 Was prone to violent topics that would make his readers wince,
 Like mustard gas and ack-ack guns and other esoterica.
 But "cooties" got him fired, and he's not been sighted since.*

This week's contest focuses on [Time Traveler](#), a fascinating new online feature from Merriam-Webster, the dictionary folks. If you go to [merriam-webster.com/time-traveler](#), you can search on any year (or era) from "before 12th century" to 2010 to see a list of words and phrases whose "first known use" in writing occurred that year. (Of course, the Empress checked out her birth year and was surprised that terms as old-sounding as "short fuse" and as new-sounding as "hive mind" both were babies when the E was.)



Most Read Entertainment

1 First glimpse of Kennedy Center's much delayed expansion unveiled



This week: Write a humorous poem incorporating three or more terms from a particular year or era listed on Time Traveler, as in the example above by The Washington Post's Joke Poet Laureate, who managed to get *six* words from 1917 — no, that's not his birth year — into four lines. Note, however, that the humor and readability of the poem are more important than cramming it with words from the list. As always with Style Invitational poetry contests, longer entries have to merit the space they take up; shorter is often better, though we'll probably run a mix of lengths. **Because our entry form won't show boldface, please CAPITALIZE your year-words. And, duh (first known use: 1943), tell us what year.** As always, you may enter up to 25 poems, any of them from any year.

Submit entries at this website: wapo.st/enter-invite-1250 (all lowercase).

Winner gets the **Lose Cannon**, our new Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives some genuine swag: a Merriam-Webster tote bag, part of the [company's new line](#). The bag is labeled with the hashtag #BringBackFortnightly; below it are the M-W definitions for "biweekly": 1. Occurring twice a week. 2. Occurring every other week, a.k.a. "fortnightly." In other words, "fortnightly" is a word we need because we ruined "biweekly."

Other runners-up win our "You Gotta Play to Lose" Loser Mug or our Grossery Bag, "I Got a B in Punmanship." Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, "No Childishness Left Behind" or "Magnum Dopus." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (**FirStink** for their first ink). Deadline is Monday night, Oct. 30; results published Nov. 19 (online Nov. 16). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/InvRules. The headline for this week's results is by Jon Gearhart; Jesse Frankovich wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. This contest was suggested by Jeff Shirley. Join the Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev. "Like" Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.

The Style Conversational The Empress's weekly online column, published late Thursday afternoon, discusses each new contest and set of results. Check it out at wapo.st/conv1250.

[And from The Style Invitational four weeks ago . . .](#)

MULTI-ASKING: 'QUESTIONABLE JOURNALISM' WINNERS FROM WEEK 1246

In [Week 1246](#), as we do about once a year, we invited you to choose any sentence in The Post that week (and this year we extended it to other publications), then write a question that the sentence might answer (if it were, say, used in a humor contest).

4th place:

Sentence from The Post: **Blasting will be done during the day and "very rarely" at night or on weekends.**





Question it could answer: How will the Purple Line construction differ from the president's use of Twitter? (Jesse Frankovich, Grand Ledge, Mich.)

3rd place:

The words for wear: A tote bag with this logo — use it biweekly — is this week's second prize.

A. Two people walk by, speaking Swedish.





Q. What is a sure sign that my wife picked the movie we are watching? (John

- 2 **Perspective**
President Trump's power to pardon himself, as skewered by cartoons 
- 3 **Celebrities, fashion insiders react to death of Kate Spade** 
- 4 **Review**
Sex, politics and art painted in broad strokes in 'Botticelli in the Fire' 
- 5 **Perspective**
Trump's Super Bowl party without the Eagles, as mocked through cartoons 



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2nd place

A. "I would say I don't usually love red and browns together."

Q. What Donald Trump comment got the U.N. Security Council meeting off to a terrible start? (Steve Honley, Washington)

No-thank Q: Honorable mentions

A. Sooner or later, Mueller is going to have to start dropping shoes.

Q: Is it just me or is this the lamest striptease you've ever seen? (Todd DeLap, Fairfax, Va.)

A. The finale was simply a parade of short dresses exploding with

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Q: How did Chief of Staff Kelly revise the traditional morning briefing in order to hold the president's attention? (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

A: It's harshly worn, as if eroded over millennia, yet it retains strength and grace.

Q: Why do you still have that ratty bra? (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)

A. Prepare to make lots of friends in the coming days.

Q. What did the president say after viewing the eclipse? (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.)

A. Each hard check drew a collective "ooh" or "aah."

Q. What was the reaction among Republican lawmakers when the Koch brothers visited Capitol Hill? (Mark Raffman)

A. A year later, they moved into a 300-square-foot studio in Manhattan.

Q. When did the Joneses realize they'd made it into the 1 percent? (Mary Kappus, Washington)

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A. There is not \$1 trillion of federal money available.

Q. Why did several Cabinet members recently change their vacation plans?
(Jesse Frankovich)

A. "What is your impression of President Xi Jinping?"

Q. What question strikes terror in the hearts of Chinese comedians? (Steve
(John Hutchins)

A. If you don't feel up to digging all that out, that's reasonable.

Q. What would be a polite but ill-advised thing to say to your cancer
surgeon? (Duncan Stevens)

A. "That's a tribute to how hard our guys are playing."

Q. Dean, what's your response to the charges that your college is a party
school? (Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

A. The short answer is yes.

Q. Do politicians often give long, rambling responses to simple questions?
(Duncan Stevens)

**A. My hope was it would attract that piece of the population that's
ambivalent.**

Q. Who on earth would join the Whatever Society for the Advancement of
Apathy? (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf, Md.)

A. Just go easy on the poor soul who thought they could fool you.

Q. What advice is a grammar pedant not likely to listen to? (Chris Doyle)

**A. The first thing to consider is whether you want privacy in that
area.**

Q. What should you keep in mind when buying yoga pants? (Kevin Dopart,
Washington)

**A. They're a must-order, especially after being dunked in the
restaurant's slightly sweet ponzu citrus soy sauce.**

Q. Why does that new sushi place charge diners for towels? (Frank Osen,
Pasadena, Calif.)

**A. The models emerged wearing enormous court dresses with
panniers and hoops.**

Q. How did the Miss USA contestants guard against unwanted advances?
(John Hutchins)

A. "He might get ran over a little bit."

Q. What might happen to a guy who's texting as he walks in front of the hay
wagon? (Beverley Sharp)

A. Press the stem end, and if it's soft to the touch, it's ripe."

Q. I'm impressed with our new applicant, sir, but I'm not sure if she's really
ready for the job. What do you think?" (William Kennard, Arlington, Va.)

A. The collection wasn't surprising or delightful or even wildly bewildering.

Q. Why don't hipsters ever last more than a day or two as garbagemen? (Brendan Beary)

A. You find it in you because that's what you signed up for.

Q. How did you suddenly end up with a microchip implant after updating your iPhone? (Kevin Dopart)

A. I wake up every day well aware of my good fortune, loving the work I do, loving my life, realizing that life is a crapshoot and I'm on a roll second to none.

Q. Mr. President, what do you think about people selling toilet paper with your picture on it? (Frank Osen)

A. Because he would have killed them.

Q. Why did no one ever tell Chuck Norris any Chuck Norris jokes? (Duncan Stevens)

A. "Their culture is incompatible with ours."

Q. Why did Dannon's chairman say he nixed a merger with Chobani? (Mark Raffman)

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A. "Obviously there's great division in this nation right now."

Q. Secretary DeVos, why do you think your programs have improved third-graders' proficiency in math? (Mark Raffman)

A. Whatever the actual number is, we know it's in the trillions.

Q. How many hours did Losers waste reading articles for this contest? (Jesse Frankovich)

Still running — deadline Monday, Oct. 23: our Ask Backwards contest. See wapo.st/invite1249.

0 Comments



Pat Myers is editor and judge of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's page for clever, edgy humor and wordplay. In the role since December 2003, she has posted and judged more than 700 contests. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook. [Follow @patmyersTWP](#)

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