

# jokes and riddles

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**J**okes and riddles can serve as short, simple dialogues for listening practice with students of various ages and proficiency levels. They have proved intrinsically motivating because they give students a reason to listen and guess/listen and laugh.

In American language and culture, many adult jokes and most children's jokes consist of "playing" with language. The humor depends on words or phrases that sound the same (or almost the same) but have different meanings, or else on a word that has several meanings.

For foreign language learners, the inherent risk in this word-play is that the double meanings will not be as immediately apparent to them as to native speakers; and without that sudden "light bulb" realization, the joke may not seem so clever or funny. When a joke has to be explained, that mental "click" or sudden enlightenment doesn't happen, and the joke falls flat.

**TEACHING TECHNIQUES.** Teachers should prepare their students with necessary vocabulary before telling the jokes or asking the riddles so students may have the fun of catching the humor without needing further explanation. Teachers can help their students retell the jokes by writing key words or phrases on the blackboard to help them recall the details. They should pay attention to how they can vary their tone of voice or use pauses to make their joke telling more effective.

For the jokes and riddles on pages 143-150, the teacher might stop before giving the "punch line" (the statement which contains the answer or resolution to the "problem") and ask the students to provide the ending or the answer. After getting their input, the teacher should give the answer provided in the text and compare it to the suggestions made by the students. The riddles on pages 151-153 will require some time for thought. Teachers could duplicate these pages or dictate each item. The students then work in pairs or small groups to determine the answers to the riddles.

Language notes have been included for "Listening to Jokes and Riddles" to explain what makes the joke or riddle funny.

# Listening to Jokes and Riddles

USE THE ACCOMPANYING AUDIO FILE TO PRESENT THIS MATERIAL.

**1**

*The class is studying astronomy. The teacher points to a photograph, and says,*

Does anyone know what this is? It's a comet.

A what?

A comet, Eddie. Don't you know what a comet is?

No.

Don't you know what they call a star with a tail?

Sure. Mickey Mouse.

**2**

*The teacher is asking an arithmetic question:*

Frank, if you found three dollars in your right pocket and two dollars in your left pocket, what would you have?

I'd have somebody else's pants on.

**3**

*The teacher is asking a geography question:*

Mary, where is the English Channel? I don't know. We can't get it on our TV.

**4**

*All the kids were trying to impress Grandpa, who had come for a visit. Timmy boasted,*

I'm first in arithmetic, Grandpa.

Sally said she had come in first in the spelling bee. Grandpa asked little Billy, What are you first in, Billy?

Well, I'm the first one out the door when the bell rings.

**5**

*The little boy had just started school. When he returned home the first day, his mother asked,*

Billy, what did you learn today?

I learned to write.

Oh, what did you write?

I don't know. I haven't learned to read yet.

**6**

*The psychiatrist was asking questions to test his patient.*

Do you ever hear voices without knowing who is speaking or where the voices are coming from?

Yes, sir, I do.

And when does this occur?

When I answer the telephone.

**7**

*A doctor had an urgent call.*

Can you come immediately, doctor?

My little son has just swallowed a fountain pen.

I'll be there right away. What are you doing in the meantime?

Oh, I'm using a pencil.

**8**

*A man bought a parrot that could speak five languages. He paid a thousand dollars for it. The pet-shop owner said that he would deliver the bird that afternoon. When the proud owner got home, he asked his wife if the parrot had been delivered. She answered,*

Yes, it has.

Where is it?

It's in the oven.

In the oven? But he could speak five languages!

Well, then, why didn't he speak up?

**9**

*A man in a restaurant said to a stranger sitting at the next table,*

Do you realize that you are reading your newspaper upside down?

Of course I realize it. Do you think it's easy?

**10**

I used to snore so loud I would wake myself up.

What did you do about it?

I cured myself.

Oh? How did you do that?

Now I sleep in the next room, and I don't hear a thing.

**11**

*A boy was talking to his mother.*

Gee, Mom, I'm really glad you named me Albert.

Why?

Because that's what all the kids at school call me.

**12**

*After everyone was in bed the telephone rang.*

Is this one one one one?

No, this is eleven eleven.

Are you sure this isn't one one one one?

Yes, I'm sure. This is eleven eleven.

Well, I'm sorry to have gotten you up.

That's all right. I had to get up anyway. The phone was ringing.

**13**

Sam, why are you standing in front of the mirror with your eyes closed? Well, I want to see what I look like when I'm asleep.

**14**

Why can you never starve in a desert? Because of the sand which is there.

## sense within NONsense

## THE JOB

A woman was being interviewed for a job. “You understand that before we can offer you a position, you must take a short test.”

“Of course,” she answered.

“Well, how much is two plus two?”

“Four.”

A second applicant entered the room. After a short interview, the recruiter asked, “Are you ready for the test?”

“Yes.”

“Well, how much is two plus two?”

The applicant answered, “whatever the boss says it is.”

The second applicant got the job.

## THE REBEL

A big guy walked into the crowded bar and yelled, “Is there a fellow by the name of Murphy here?”

A little fellow stood up and said, “I’m Murphy.”

The big guy grabbed him and beat him up. He cracked five of his ribs, broke his nose, and gave him two black eyes. He flung him down on the floor and stomped out.

After he had gone, the little fellow propped himself up, saying softly, “I sure made a fool of that guy. I’m not Murphy! Ha ha!”

## IGNORING THE OBVIOUS

Nasreddin Hodja earned his living selling eggs. One day someone came into his shop and said, “Hodja, guess what I have in my hand.”

“Give me a clue,” said the Hodja.

“I’ll give you several,” the visitor answered. “It has the shape of an egg, the size of an egg; it looks like an egg, tastes like an egg, and smells like an egg. Inside it is yellow and white. It is liquid before it is cooked and becomes thick when heated. The last clue I’ll give you is that it was laid by a hen.”

“Aha,” said the Hodja. “I know what you’ve got. It must be some sort of cake!”

## NO AMATEURS

A native king of an island in the South Pacific was giving a banquet in honor of a distinguished visitor from the West.

When it was time to say a few words in praise of his guest, the king remained seated while a professional speaker spoke glowing words about the guest and his contributions to international understanding.

After the speech, the guest started to get up from his chair to give a response, but the king gently restrained him. “Don’t get up,” he said. “I have another orator to speak on your behalf. In our kingdom, we don’t leave public speaking to amateurs.”

## THE GOLDEN EAGLE

A man found an eagle’s egg and put it in the nest of a backyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them.

All his life the eagle did what the backyard chickens did, thinking he was one of them. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He clucked and cackled. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above. It glided majestically with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.

The old eagle looked up in awe. “Who’s that?” he asked.

“That’s the eagle, the king of the birds,” said his neighbor. “He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth—we’re chickens.” So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that’s what he thought he was.

These stories are adapted from Anthony de Mello 1982, *The Song of the Bird*. New York: Doubleday

*Can you think of the answers to these riddles?*

**15**

What am I? I may have the face of a great man or a great woman. When I am very young, I make my first and only journey. The day I set out, I am bright and colorful and look my very best. I travel from one city to another. I may go halfway around the world to reach my destination. This trip is my great adventure, but within a few days or weeks it is over. By the time I arrive, I am no longer very attractive. My face is smudged with dirt and ink, and usually I am thrown away without a second glance. What am I?

**16**

What am I? I have a head, but I do not have eyes or ears. I foam at the mouth, but I never bite. I roar, but I have no tongue. I lie in a bed, but I have no back. I rise, I fall, I rush and run, but I have neither legs nor feet. I was born in the mountains, but I go down to the ocean whenever I can. I cannot keep still for a moment. I am as restless as can be. What am I?

**17**

What am I? Of all the things in the world, I am the shortest and the longest, the swiftest and the slowest. I am the thing people waste the most. Yet they need me more than anything else, for without me nothing can be done. What am I?

**18**

I have seven letters.  
The first two stand for a boy.  
The first three stand for a girl.  
The first four stand for a brave boy. But all my letters stand for a brave girl. What word am I?

**19**

Which is heavier, a full moon or a half moon?

**20**

Which is correct, "Six and five are thirteen" or "six and five is thirteen"?

**21**

What can you never eat for breakfast?

**22**

A hungry donkey was tied to a rope eight feet long. About thirty feet away there was a pile of fresh carrots. The donkey wanted to eat those carrots. How did he reach them?

**23**

A barrel weighed twenty pounds. But after a man put something in it, the barrel weighed only fifteen pounds. What did he put in it?

**24**

What can you hold in your left hand, but not in your right hand?

*Knock-knock Jokes*

**25**

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Dewey.  
Dewey who?  
Do we have to go to school today?

**26**

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Justin.  
Justin who?  
Just an old friend here to see you.

**27**

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Who.  
Who who?  
What are you, an owl?

**28**

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Gopher.  
Gopher who?  
Go for a long walk, and don't come back!

**29**

Knock, knock.  
Who's there?  
Boo.  
Boo who?  
What are you crying about?

*Elephant Jokes*

**30**

How do you get six elephants into a Volkswagen?  
I don't know, how?  
You put three in the front seat and three in the back seat.

**31**

Why was the elephant looking through the window?  
I don't know, why?  
Because he couldn't see through the wall.

**32**

How do you talk to an elephant?  
I don't know. How do you?  
You use BIG words.

**33**

How does an elephant get out of a telephone booth?  
I don't know. How?  
The same way he got in.

**34**

How can you tell when an elephant is going on vacation?  
Oh, I know that one. He packs his trunk.

**35**

What's the difference between a mailbox and an elephant's trunk?  
I don't know.  
You don't know? I'll never send you out to mail a letter.

## Notes on the jokes and riddles

1

■ **A what?:** The inclusion of the article in this question shows that he is not asking a repetition of the whole sentence but only for the part that came after “a”, i.e., *comet*. He apparently did not recognize the word. ■ **Don't you... :** The teacher's questions beginning with the negative *Don't* imply that the student should know the answer and that the teacher is surprised that Eddie doesn't know. Her first question (beginning with *Does*) was, on the other hand, a neutral question.

2

■ **arithmetic question:** a compound noun, a common structure in English, in which the stronger stress is on the first of the two words: *arithmetic question*. It means a question about arithmetic. (cf. *geography question*, *history question*, *multiple-choice question*, etc.) ■ **left... right:** Notice the contrastive stress on the words *left and right*.

■ **have... on = wear** (I'd be wearing somebody else's pants). Notice that this is a separable two-word (or phrasal) verb. One can say either *I'd have on somebody else's pants* or *I'd have somebody else's pants on*. However, if the object is a pronoun instead of a noun, the two parts of the verb must be separated: *I'd have them on* (not *I'd have on them*).

■ **if... :** Notice the past-tense verbs (*found*, *would*) in the first and second clauses of this contrary-to-fact conditional sentence.

3

■ **geography question:** a compound noun (see #2 above).

■ This joke is a play on two different meanings of *channel*. In actuality the stress patterns would be different. The English Channel (main stress on *Channel*) means the body of water between England and France. The *English channel* on a television set (main stress on *English*) would probably be a station that provides programs in the English language. *TV* is an abbreviation for television.

4

■ **kids:** informal for *children*. ■ **Grandpa:** a familiar or child's name for *grandfather*. In speech it is usually assimilated to “**Grampa**.” (Similarly, *Grandma*, or “**Gramma**” for *grandmother*.) ■ **had come:** past-perfect tense, since the time of the coming was previous to the time of the past-tense “were trying” (past of the past). ■ **had come in first = had won**, had been the best student. Notice the past-perfect tense, since the time of the coming in first was prior to the time of the past-tense *said* (sequence of tenses in reported speech). ■ **spelling bee:** a contest in which individual schoolchildren have to spell aloud words that are read to them. The winner is the child who has made no mistakes after all the other contestants have dropped out by misspelling a word.

5

■ **had just started:** Notice the use of the past perfect *had started* to indicate action completed prior to the past action that the story is telling about (*returned*). This short dialogue includes four tenses used in typical ways; in addition to the two above, there are *don't know* (present) and *haven't learned* (present perfect).

6

■ Notice the past progressive *was asking* to indicate a past action that was in progress when the joke began, (cf. jokes #4 and #11, also the present progressive in #1, #2, and #3.)

■ **without knowing = and do not know.**

7

■ **call = telephone call.** ■ Many students today may never have seen a *fountain pen*, which is an “old fashioned” pen containing a reservoir of liquid ink, used before the ball-point pen (or biro) was invented. ■ **just:** Notice the use of this word here and in #5, meaning very recently. (The recentness is relative. In #5 it means within the last day or two. In #7 it means within the last few minutes.) ■ **I'll be there = I'll come (arrive) there.** This expression is used often in conversation. ■ **What are you doing... ?:** The doctor means, of course, “What are you doing for the child?” The father answers as if the question were “What are you doing without the fountain pen?”

8

■ **parrot:** a brightly colored tropical bird that can be taught to say (mimic) words and sentences. ■ **pet-shop owner:** Notice the double compound noun. A *pet shop* is a shop where pets (small domestic animals) are sold. A *pet-shop owner* is the owner of such a shop. ■ **would deliver:** Notice the past tense in reported speech after the past-tense introductory verb *said*. ■ **that afternoon = the same afternoon** (cf. He *will deliver* it *this* afternoon). ■ **got home = arrived home.** • **had been delivered:** Notice the past perfect in the “if” clause to indicate time prior to the past tense introductory verb *asked*. ■ **Yes, it has:** a typical short-answer form for *Yes, it has been delivered*. ■ **could speak:** Use of the past tense indicates the husband realizes the bird is no longer alive. ■ **In the oven?:** The intonation indicates surprise, perhaps disbelief and even horror. ■ **Well, then = in that case; if that is so.** ■ **speak up = say something; not remain silent.**

9

■ **upside down:** the bottom (of the newspaper) is at the top and vice versa.

10

■ **so loud I...:** Note that the optional introductory *that* (*so loud that I...*) has been omitted from the result clause as it often is in conversation. ■ **wake myself up:** a separable two-word verb that must be separated here because the object is a pronoun. ■ **would:** expresses habitual or repeated action

(like *used to*). ■ **do about it** = do to remedy it. ■ **a thing** = anything.

11

■ **Gee**: a mild expletive that may express surprise or enthusiasm or simply be used as an introductory word. ■ **Mom**: a child's word for *Mother* (also sometimes *Mama* or *Ma* or *Mommy*). ■ **Why?**: Why are you glad?

12

■ **to have gotten you up** = to have caused you to rise from bed. *Get up* is a separable two-word verb, here separated around the object pronoun *you* (pronounced here, as often, with very little vowel sound before *up*: *y'up*). Notice that *get up* is used as an intransitive verb (= rise from bed) in the last line of the dialogue. ■ **Because** is understood between the last two sentences (because the phone was ringing).

14

■ This is a play on words: *sand which is / sandwiches*.

15

■ **set out** = begin my journey. ■ **over** = finished, ended. ■ **smudged** = streaked or stained with dirt. ■ **without a second glance** = without anyone even looking at me again. ■ The answer: A postage stamp.

16

■ Like so many riddles, this one depends on the use of words in a meaning different from the more common meaning that first comes to mind. Thus, the *head* of a river is its source or spring, its *mouth* is its terminal point, it *roars*, but not through a mouth or vocal cords, etc. ■ **still** = quiet, motionless. ■ **restless** = unquiet, constantly moving. ■ **as... as can be** = extremely. ■ The answer: A river.

17

■ The answer: Time.

18

■ **have** = am composed of. ■ **stand for** = represent; mean. ■ The answer: Heroine.

19

■ **full moon**: the appearance of the moon when its whole apparent disk is illuminated. ■ **half moon**: the appearance of the moon when about half of its apparent disk is illuminated. The answer: A half moon is heavier, because a full moon is *lighter* (more of it is illuminated). This joke depends on the two meanings of *lighter*: (a) more fully illuminated, (b) less in weight.

20

■ Note the contrastive stress on *are* and *is*. ■ The answer: Neither; six and five are (or is) eleven.

21

■ Notice the speaker's heavy Boston Irish accent, noticeable especially in the vowel of *can* and the obscuring of the *r* at the end of *never* and *for*. ■ The answer: Lunch or dinner.

22

■ **eight feet** = a little less than three meters. ■ **thirty feet** = a little less than ten meters. ■ **wanted to eat**: Notice the natural obscuring of the vowel in *to*: /tə/. ■ **reach them** = go to where they were. ■ The answer: He just walked over to them. He was tied to a rope, but it does not say that the other end of the rope was tied to anything.

23

■ **barrel**: a container shaped like a cylinder that bulges in the middle, made of wooden slats. ■ **twenty pounds** = about 9 kilos. ■ **fifteen pounds** = about 7 kilos. ■ The answer: He put holes in it.

24

■ Notice the contrastive stress on *left* and *right*. ■ The answer: Your right elbow.

Knock-knock jokes were popular in the 1930s. They have a set pattern in which the joke teller says "Knock, knock" (as someone knocking on a door requesting admission); the responder says "Who's there?"; the joke teller says a word or a name; the responder repeats the word followed by "Who?" (This is the form regularly used to ask for someone's surname when only the first name has been given; e.g., "That's Mary." "Mary who?" "Mary Smith.") The joke teller then adds a phrase to the word or name already given to make a sentence—a play on words, in which the original word or phrase is changed to a different word or phrase with the same pronunciation. Like so many jokes, especially children's jokes, these depend on homophones—words or phrases that sound alike but have different meanings.

25

■ **Dewey**: (1) a name, (2) a homophone for *Do we*. ■ **have to**: pronounced /hæftə/ as is usual in conversation; notice also *to* /tə/ and *today* /tədeɪ/.

26

■ **Justin**: (1) a name; (2) a homophone for *Just an*. Note that the two are identical in pronunciation, including juncture.

27

■ This is a variant of the usual knock-knock joke. Here the responder, following the pattern, says "Who who?"—which sounds like an owl's call, "Hoo-hoo." This kind of joke should be used after enough regular knock-knock jokes have been told to establish the pattern of response. (See also #29.)

28

■ **Gopher**: (1) the name of an animal; (2) a homophone for *Go for*. Note that in unstressed position, *for* is usually pronounced /f r/.

29

■ **Boo-who**: a homophone for *boo-hoo*, the standard representation in English of the sound of crying. (Note the similarity to #27.)

Elephant jokes were popular in the early 1960s. Their appeal depends on a sense of nonsense, blatant lack of cleverness, absurd obviousness, or such. People looking for the usual surprise ending, play on words, etc., sometimes find them completely unfunny. Like knock-knock jokes, elephant jokes depend on a set pattern in which the second speaker plays “straight man” by asking for the answer or punch line.

30

■ **you:** Notice unstressed pronunciation /yə/. ■ **get** = put.

31

■ Most speakers would not stress *Why* as strongly as is done here.

32

■ Again, the *How* would not usually be stressed as strongly as this. ■ **B-I-G** is said in a B-I-I-I-G way for humorous emphasis.

33

■ **out:** Notice the anticipatory contrastive stress. The *in* at the end might well be stressed a little more than it is here.

■ **telephone booth:** a small enclosed space equipped with a pay telephone, providing privacy for the telephone user (= British *telephone box*).

34

■ **packs** = fills luggage, boxes, etc., with clothing or other objects. ■ **trunk:** (1) a large rigid piece of luggage; (2) the long nose-like part of an elephant.

35

■ **mailbox:** a large metal receptacle for the public deposit of mail. In cities in the United States, these “boxes” are positioned, usually on street corners, about two or three blocks apart (= British *postbox*). ■ **You don't know:** The intonation indicates disbelief or, perhaps better, mock disbelief tinged with a childish contempt for the responder's ignorance.



## Energy Jokes and Puns

(by George Sholin of the California Energy Commission)

1. Why is wind energy so popular?  
*Because it has a lot of fans.*
2. Did you hear about the foolish gardener?  
*He planted a light bulb and thought he would get a power plant.*
3. What would a barefooted man get if he steps on an electric wire?  
*A pair of shocks.*
4. What do you call a silly old man?  
*A fossil fool.*
5. What do cars driven late at night burn for fuel?  
*Midnight oil.*

## More jokes and riddles

USE THE AUDIO FILE TO PRESENT THIS MATERIAL TO THE CLASS.

**L**ittle Timmy was visiting his grandfather. In the morning, Grandpa decided to make a big pot of oatmeal. He put some oatmeal into a bowl for Timmy. "Do you like sugar?" Grandpa asked.

"Yes," said Timmy. So Grandpa put sugar on the oatmeal. "Do you like milk?"

"Yes," said Timmy. So Grandpa put some milk on the oatmeal. "Do you like butter?"

"Yes," said Timmy.

So Grandpa put some butter on the oatmeal. Then he placed the bowl of oatmeal in front of Timmy.

"YUKK!" said Timmy.

"What's the matter? I asked you if you like sugar, milk, and butter and you said yes, so I put them on," said Grandpa, getting angry.

"You didn't ask me if I like oatmeal," said Timmy.

**S**everal men were sitting around bragging about how smart their dogs are.



"My dog is so smart," said the first one, "that I can send him out to the store for eggs. He sniffs around the boxes and refuses to accept any boxes unless they are fresh."

"My dog is so smart," said the second man, "that he goes out for cigars, and he always comes home with my favorite brand."

The two men turned to a third man who had been sitting quietly. "Have you ever heard of any dog that is as smart as ours?" asked the first man.

"Well, only one dog, Mine."

"How is that?"

"My dog runs\* the store where your dogs go shopping."

\*manages

**H**e: My dog is lost.

*She:* Why don't you put an ad in the paper?

*He:* Silly, that won't do any good. My dog can't read.

"**D**octor, when my hands are out of the casts,\* will I be able to play the piano?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones."

"Oh goody. I could never play before!"

\* molds used to set broken limbs

"**W**aiter, is this apple pie or peach pie? It tastes like glue!"

"Well then, sir, it's peach pie. Our apple pie tastes like cardboard."

**T**eacher: Can you tell me how fast light travels?

*Student:* No, but I know that it gets here too early in the morning.

**T**eacher: Is there any word in the English language that contains all the vowels?

*Student:* Unquestionably.

"**I**'ve invented a computer that is almost human."

"How is that?"

"When it makes a mistake it blames another computer."

**A** very large lady finished her dinner in a restaurant and asked for dessert. "I'd like a banana split, with three scoops of ice cream, hot chocolate sauce, walnuts, and whipped cream."



"Very good, Madame," said the waiter. "Would you like a cherry on top?"

"Heavens, no! I'm on a diet!"

**T**wo boys were on a bicycle-built-for-two. They had a very hard time going up a steep hill, but they finally got to the top.



"Whew," said the first boy. "I didn't think we'd ever make it."

"Well, I helped," said the second boy. "I kept the brakes on so we wouldn't roll back down."

**S**tudent: I don't think that I deserved a zero on this paper.

*Teacher:* Neither do I, but it's the lowest grade I can give.

**T**eacher: Jerry, give me the formula for water.

*Jerry:* H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O.

*Teacher:* What kind of a crazy answer is that?

*Jerry:* You told us water was H to O.

**A** boy was carrying a box and he met his friend. "Guess how many chickens I have in this box, and I'll give you both of them," he said.

**W**hat is that you can't see but is always before you?

Why is "two plus two equals five" like your left foot?

If you threw a gray rock into the sea, what would it become?

Why are you tired on April 1?

What belongs to you but it used by other people?

What comes down but never goes up?

What question can't be answered by yes?

What is the end of everything?

## Time for a smile



1. One night a man came upon a boy looking for something under a streetlight. The man asked the boy what he had lost. The boy said that he had lost his watch. Since it was obviously not there, the man asked the boy if he was sure that he had lost his watch in that spot. The boy said that he had lost the watch at another place, farther down the street. The man then asked the boy why he was looking for the watch under the streetlight. The boy replied, **“Well, sir, the light is much better here.”**
2. A man was carrying a grandfather clock through the streets of the city. He was obviously doing it with a lot of difficulty. Finally, another man came up to him and asked, **“Pardon me, it’s none of my business, but don’t you think a wristwatch would be far simpler?”**
3. As I was walking along a street in a small town a man came up to me and asked, “What time is it?” I looked at my watch and answered, “It’s five o’clock.” “I must be going crazy,” said the man. **“All day long I keep getting different answers.”**
4. The policeman rang the doorbell, not knowing quite how he was going to break the news. The door opened and a woman stood there gazing anxiously into the policeman’s eyes. “I’m sorry to tell you this, but your husband’s new watch is broken.” “Broken?” she said. “How did it happen?” The policeman replied, **“A piano fell on him.”**
5. What time is it when an elephant sits on a fence? **Time to get a new fence.**
6. Fill in the blanks with the correct word, each containing the same four letters.

## A TIMELY VERSE

A clock is an \_ \_ \_ \_

That’s used to tell \_ \_ \_ \_

(Though I’m a \_ \_ \_ \_ embarrassed

To \_ \_ \_ \_ such a rhyme.)

# p u z z l e r s

## jug of water—

A soldier is stranded in a desert with no water and comes across a native boy who has half a jug. The boy says, “You can have the water on three conditions; 1) You do not take the cork out of the jug; 2) you do not make a hole in the cork; and 3) you do not break the jug or put a hole in it in any way.” The soldier then proceeds to drink the water. How?

## the missionary—

A Missionary visits an island where two tribes live. One tribe’s members always tell the truth. The members of the other tribe always lie. The truth-tellers live on the western side of the island, and the liars live on the eastern side. The missionary’s problem is to determine the truth by asking one native only one question.

The missionary, seeing a native walking in the distance, tells a nearby native: “Go ask that native in the distance which side of the island he lives on.” When the messenger returns he answers, “He says he lives on the western side.”

Is the messenger a truth-teller or a liar? How can you be sure?

## plane crash—

A plane is flying from Madrid to Paris. Just over the Pyrenees it falls down and crashes on the border between Spain and France. Where would you bury the survivors? In France or in Spain? Why?

## the ark—

How many pairs of animals did Moses take with him into the Ark?

## the apple—

Is there anything else worse than finding a worm while eating an apple? Why?

## the ice cream soda—

Six kids went to the ice cream parlor. They sat in a booth, three on each side of the table. They ordered six different things. Paul sat next to Lucy. Lucy sat opposite the boy who sat next to Karen. Don ordered cola and sat across from Peggy. The boy who had the milkshake sat across from Karen. The girl who ordered sherbet sat between Don and Stan. Stan didn’t order a sundae or a banana split. The girl who ordered the sundae sat across from Don, and the girl who sat next to Paul had a banana split. Who had the ice cream soda?

## the photograph—

A man was looking at a photograph and somebody asked him, “Who is the one in the photo?” He answered, “I have no brothers or sisters, but this man’s father is my father’s son.” (By “this man’s father”, he meant the father of the man in the photograph ). Who was the one in the photograph?

## grammar—

How much grammar do you know? A lot? Let’s see. Must we say “the yolk *is* white” or “the yolks *are* white”?

## the chicken, fox, and seed—

A farmer is going to market and on the way to the market he has to cross a river. The farmer is carrying a fox, a chicken, and a bag of seed. The boat he has to use will only transport himself and one of the three. The farmer has a problem, he can’t leave the fox with the chicken because the fox will eat the chicken and he can’t leave the chicken with the seed because the chicken will eat the seed. In what order can the farmer cross the river to get all the items across?

*Excerpts from an article by*

Ricardo S. Martin Vadillo, *Alcala la Real, Spain.*



## Joke time

1. Although the little boy was only three years old, he already knew the alphabet. His proud parents were showing off his accomplishment to a friend.
 

“My, you’re a smart young man,” said the visitor. “And what is the first letter?”

“A,” said the little boy.

“That’s right,” said the visitor, “and what comes after A?”

**“All the rest of them”** said the little boy.
2. The teacher gave the little boy a tough problem. “Now,” she said, “if your father gave you ten cents and your mother gave you twelve, and your uncle gave you six more, what would you have?”
 

The little boy immediately slipped into deep thought.

“Come on,” said the teacher, “certainly you can figure out a simple little problem like that.”

“It isn’t a simple problem,” the boy said. **“I can’t decide whether I’d have an ice-cream cone or a hamburger.”**
3. “How do you spell ‘extravagance,’ the teacher asked the little boy.”
 

“E-x-t-r-a-v-u-g-a-n-c-e,” he answered.

“No,” she said. “The dictionary spells it e-x-t-r-a-v-a-g-a-n-c-e.”

**“But you asked me how I spell it,”** said the boy.
4. A modern artist was showing off his work. He pointed to a blank canvas and said, “That is a cow grazing.”
 

“Where is the grass?” the visitor asked.

“The cow has eaten it,” the artist said.

“Well, then, where is the cow?” the visitor wanted to know.

**“You don’t suppose,”** said the artist, **“that she’d stay there after she’d eaten all the grass, do you?”**
5. The summer visitor asked the farmer, “What happened to the other windmill that was here last year?”
 

**“There was only enough wind for one,”** said the farmer, **“so we took it down.”**
6. Little Susie, her parent’s first child, didn’t begin to talk until she was four years old. The first time she spoke was at the breakfast table, when she said, “This cereal has lumps in it.”
 

Her parents were astounded. They asked her why she had never said anything before.

The child replied, **“Until now, everything has been O.K.”**
7. A couple of country boys rented a boat and went fishing. In a remote part of the lake they found a spot where the fish were really biting.
 

“We’d better mark this spot so we can come back tomorrow,” one of them said.

“O.K., I’ll do it,” the second one said.

When they got back to the dock, the first one asked, “Did you mark that spot?”

“Sure,” said the second. “I put a chalk mark on the side of the boat.”

**“You nitwit,”** said the first. **“How do you know we’ll get the same boat tomorrow?”**

8. The students in the composition class were assigned the task of writing an essay on “the most beautiful thing I ever saw.” The student who, of all the members of the class, seemed the least sensitive to beauty, handed in his paper first, with astonishing speed. It was short and to the point. He had written: **“The most beautiful thing I ever saw was too beautiful for words.”**
9. The lion was stalking through the jungle looking for trouble. He grabbed a passing tiger and asked, “Who is the king of the jungle?”  
 “You are, O mighty lion,” answered the tiger.  
 The lion then grabbed a bear and asked, “Who is boss of the jungle?”  
 “You, O mighty lion,” answered the bear.  
 Next the lion met an elephant and asked, “Who is boss of the jungle?”  
 The elephant grabbed him with his trunk, whirled him around and threw him up against a tree, leaving him bleeding and broken.  
 The lion got up feebly and said, **“Just because you don’t know the answer is no reason for you to get so rough.”**
10. A lady had hired an artist to paint her portrait.  
 “Will it be pretty?” she asked.  
**“Of course,”** said the artist. **“You won’t know yourself.”**



## Brain teasers

1. How can you throw a tennis ball with all your strength and, without it hitting a wall or other obstruction, have it stop and come right back to you?

**(Throw it straight up in the air.)**

2. How close a relative would the sister-in-law of your father's only brother be?

**(Very close; it would be your mother.)**

3. It takes 4 1/2 hours for a jet plane to fly between the east and west coasts of the United States. One plane leaves Los Angeles for New York at 4:40 o'clock, while another plane leaves New York for Los Angeles at 6 o'clock. Which plane will be closer to New York when they pass each other?

**(When they pass each other they will both be the same distance from New York.)**

4. A rope ladder is hanging over the side of a ship. The ladder is twelve feet long, and the rungs on the ladder are one foot apart. The lowest rung is resting on the top of the ocean. The tide rises four inches an hour. How long would it take before the first four rungs of the ladder are under water?

**(They will never be under water since the ship and the ladder both rise with the tide.)**

5. There are ten black stockings and ten white stockings in a drawer. If you reach into the drawer in the dark, what is the least number of stockings you must take out before you are sure you have a pair that matches?

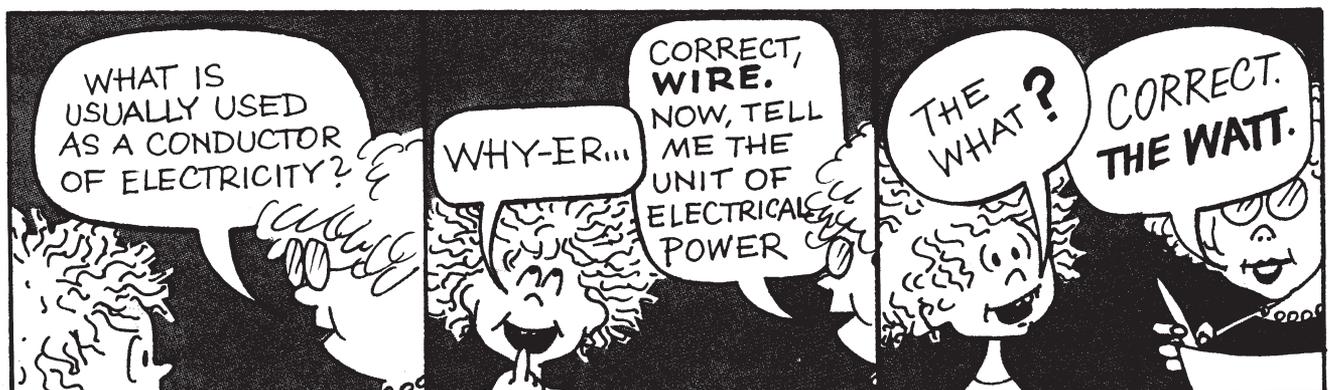
**(Three)**

6. Give a letter of the alphabet that, when you say it, sounds like the name of each of the following:

- a. a part of the body
- b. a body of water
- c. a drink
- d. an insect
- e. a pronoun
- f. a vegetable
- g. an exclamation
- h. a hint
- i. a blue bird

(a. I, eye; b. C, sea; c. T, tea; d. B, bee; e. U, you; f. P, pea; g. O, Oh; h. Q, cue; i. J, jay)

7. What is it that occurs once in a second, once in a month, once in a century, yet not at all in an hour, or a week or a year?  
**(the letter N)**
8. Five automobiles were lined up bumper to bumper. How many bumpers were actually touching each other?  
**(eight)**
9. How many parts of the human body can you name that have only three letters? (there are ten)  
**(eye, ear, rib, jaw, toe, lip, arm, leg, hip, gum)**
10. How far do you have to count before using the letter A in spelling a number? **(one thousand)**
11. Name as many articles as you can think of that start with the letter S that are worn on the feet.  
**(shoes, socks, stockings, sandals, skis, slippers, skates, sneakers, snowshoes)**
12. What continent do you see when you look in the mirror in the morning?  
**(Europe — You see you're up.)**





## Can you guess these?

*See if you can figure out the answers to the following questions. The questions are designed to be tricky, so think before you answer.*

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1. How can you stand behind someone while he or she stands behind you?
2. Bob's mother had three children. One was named April. One was named May. What was the third child named?
3. What has four fingers and a thumb but isn't a hand?
4. What's white when it's dirty and black when it's clean?
5. What gets higher as it falls?
6. What do you give a bald rabbit?
7. How do you make a slow horse fast?
8. Where do you find a square ring?

## Silly questions

1. What is found in the very center of both America and Australia?  
(the letter **R**.)
2. What relatives are dependent on you?  
(your a**U**nts, **U**ncles, and co**U**sins. (They all need **U**.)
3. Why is the letter T like an island?  
(**B**ecause it is in wa**T**er.)
4. What part of London is in France?  
(the letter **N**.)
5. Which is the loudest vowel?  
(**I**. It's always in the midst of no**I**se.)
6. What is it that no man ever yet did see, which never was, but always will be?  
(**T**omorrow.)
7. You saw me where I never was,  
And where I could not be;  
And yet within that very place,  
My face you often see.  
(**Y**our reflection in the mirror.)
8. What is it that has a face, but no head; hands, but not feet; yet travels everywhere and is usually running?  
(**A** clock.)
9. How many birthdays does the average person have?  
(**O**nly one.)
10. Nine crows sat on a limb of a tree. Farmer Jones shot three of them. How many crows remained?  
(**N**one, the surviving crows flew away.)



## Rhyming words

The answers to these riddles are two words (an adjective and a noun) that rhyme.

EXAMPLE: What is an overweight rodent? ANSWER: A fat rat!

1. What is a beautiful cat?
2. What is an unusual seat?
3. What is a comical rabbit?
4. What is an angry boy?
5. What is an irritated employer?
6. What is a bashful insect?
7. What is a large hog?
8. What is an uncontrollable boy or girl?
9. What is a joyful father?
10. What is a noisy group of people?



## Riddle rattle

(DON'T LET RIDDLES RATTLE YOU!)

- I. The first two lines of each riddle serve as a definition for a specific four-letter word. Rearrange the letters of that word to get a new word, which is defined by the last two lines.
  - a. Something that shines in the sky at night  
Changes to rodents that gnaw and bite.
  - b. A fruit that's green and often sour  
Becomes a distance you walk in an hour.
  - c. Something that frogs do very well  
Can be the sound of a ringing bell.
  - d. An animal that eats a paper or can  
Becomes the cloak of a Roman man.
  
- II. Teachers should write the problem sentences on the blackboard to let the students find the solution.
  - a. By inserting the same letter 16 times in appropriate places, this jumble of letters will be transformed into a sentence of some sense:  
  
 VRY VNING RNST ARND IGHNT CNTS XCDINGLY ASILY.
  - b. **Their is four errors in this sentence.** Can you find them?

## Riddle metaphors

1. In the night a mountain, in the morning a meadow. What is it?
2. The more you take, the more you leave behind. What are they?
3. What can you cut with a knife and never see a mark?
4. What is the best eavesdropper?
5. What asks no questions but receives a lot of answers?
6. What gets wetter the more it dries?
7. What grows bigger the more you take from it?
8. I saw a nutcracker up in a tree. What was it?
9. What goes up but never comes down?
10. If you feed it, it will live. If you give it water, it will die. What is it?



## RIDDLES

1. Why should bowling alleys be quiet?
2. What is the hardest thing about learning to ride a bicycle?
3. What is the coldest row in the theater?
4. Why do snowflakes dance?
5. What flower comes up with the dawn?
6. Seven is an odd number. How can it be made even?
7. When are the roads unpleasant?
8. What kind of house weighs the least?
9. What kind of cans may be found on the floor of the United States Congress?

