

GEMS FROM JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY

LEONARD R. N. ASHLEY
Brooklyn, New York

English lexicographers, those "harmless drudges" as Dr. Johnson called them, go all the way back to the English Expositour (1617) and maybe farther, to lists of "hard" words compiled by curious logophiles. But Ursa Major himself is surely the dean of all dictionary-makers. Here are some of Dr. Johnson's own definitions. His famous definition of network as "any thing reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections" at least is intelligible to those who know some Latin ("I do not love Latin originals" he said under ferry, but his sesquipedalian vocabulary often denies this), but see what you can do to produce the words still in current speech that the good doctor explained like this:

1. A calm damp evening S-----
2. A vain belief of private revelation E-----
3. To strike with folly I-----
4. Hysterical passion M-----
5. An insect whose bite is only cured by musick T-----
6. Quick of scent S-----
7. An ornament, an embellishment G--
8. A sudden crack or noise B-----
9. Exasperate, embitter E---
10. An allowance made to anyone without an equivalent P-----
11. A rough dog S----
12. Not adulterated U-----
13. Not of mean birth, of good extraction G-----
14. A procurer, a pimp P-----
15. To chew, bite softly, eat with the closed lips M-----
16. Sower (sour) of taste, harsh A-----
17. Commit exorbitancies O-----
18. To smell out, to find out S----
19. Lies, falsehoods L-----
20. One who neglects to live at the proper place N-----
21. A morbid copiousness of urine D-----
22. Not equally
23. A man of more appearance of wit than reality F-----
24. Relief from toil R-----
25. The act or power of rolling V-----

Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of the issue.