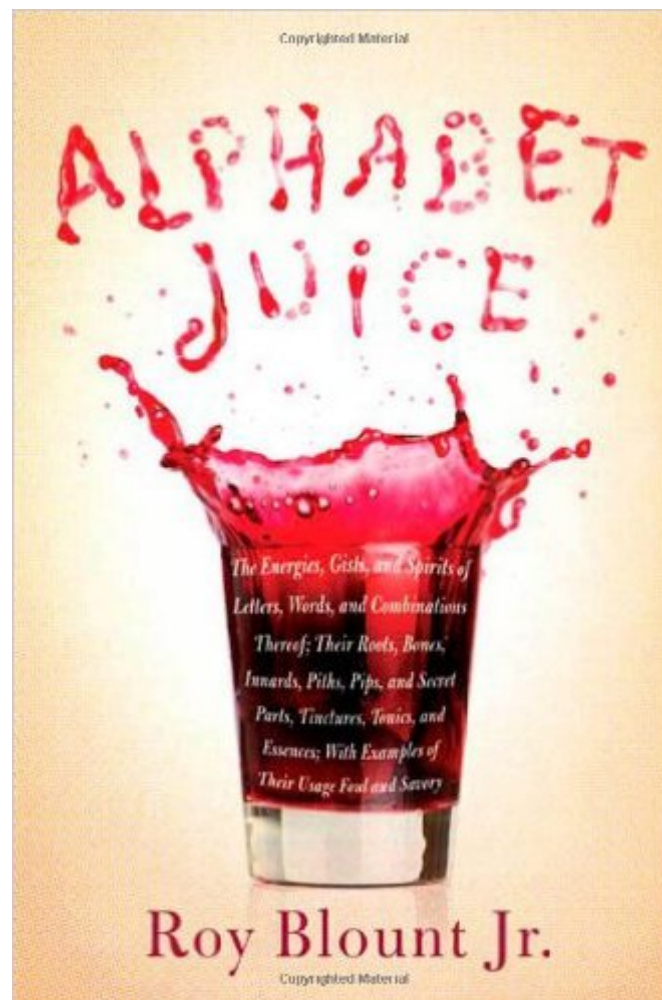


The book was found

Alphabet Juice: The Energies, Gists, And Spirits Of Letters, Words, And Combinations Thereof; Their Roots, Bones, Innards, Piths, Pips, And Secret ... With Examples Of Their Usage Foul And Savory





Synopsis

Ali G: How many words does you know? Noam Chomsky: Normally, humans, by maturity, have tens of thousands of them. Ali G: What is some of 'em? "Da Ali G Show" Did you know that both mammal and matter derive from baby talk? Have you noticed how wince makes you wince? Ever wonder why so many h-words have to do with breath? Roy Blount Jr. certainly has, and after forty years of making a living using words in every medium, print or electronic, except greeting cards, he still can't get over his ABCs. In *Alphabet Juice*, he celebrates the electricity, the juju, the sonic and kinetic energies, of letters and their combinations. Blount does not prescribe proper English. The franchise he claims is "over the counter." Three and a half centuries ago, Thomas Blount produced *Blount's Glossographia*, the first dictionary to explore derivations of English words. This *Blount's Glossographia* takes that pursuit to other levels, from Proto-Indo-European roots to your epiglottis. It rejects the standard linguistic notion that the connection between words and their meanings is arbitrary. Even the word arbitrary is shown to be no more arbitrary, at its root, than go-to guy or crackerjack. From sources as venerable as the OED (in which Blount finds an inconsistency, at whisk) and as fresh as *Urbandictionary.com* (to which Blount has contributed the number-one definition of alligator arm), and especially from the author's own wide-ranging experience, *Alphabet Juice* derives an organic take on language that is unlike, and more fun than, any other.

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Customer Reviews

ALPHABET JUICE is a potpourri of comments on words and the English language, arranged in alphabetically-ordered entries and presented with Blount's characteristic good humor. It is somewhat akin to books on the proper use of words and language, but it should not be pigeon-holed as simply a user's guide. While it does contain a fair measure of advice and commentary on usage (Blount is not particularly uptight, but he does have a prescriptive bent), it also has generous doses of etymology, word play, jokes, and personal experiences and anecdotes. It appears likely that Blount has been collecting material for this book over many years of his career as a writer and somewhat populist man-of-letters. Blount does push one particular thesis in the book. Contrary to those scholars who hold that the relationship between a word and its meaning is arbitrary, Blount insists that the sound of many words "somehow sensuously evoke[s] the essence of the word." To characterize this quality, he coins the word "sonicky." A few miscellaneous examples (out of hundreds) of sonicky words from the book: "crunch," "gallop," "grunt," "mum," and "squelch." Blount: "If linguisticians can't hear any correspondence between sound and sense in those words, they aren't listening. Even when words aren't coined with sound and sense conjunctively in mind, the words that sound most like what they mean have a survival advantage." And throughout the book, Blount marshals plenty of evidence for this thesis. But please don't get the idea that ALPHABET JUICE is some sort of high-brow, academic tome. To fully appreciate it, one certainly needs to be generally literate and to care about words and language, but one does not need to hold a graduate degree in English or in linguistics.

People usually don't regard reference books as very much fun. Useful, sure, but as Mark Twain said when he looked up the dictionary's definition of an inflammation he suffered, "The dictionary says a carbuncle is a kind of jewel. Humor is out of place in a dictionary." Twain, though, didn't know Roy Blount Jr., but I think even he would have appreciated the fun in Blount's *Alphabet Juice: The Energies, Gists, and Spirits of Letters, Words, and Combinations Thereof; Their Roots, Bones, Innards, Piths, Pips, and Secret Parts, Tinctures, Tonics and Essences; With Examples of Their Usage Foul and Savory* (Sarah Crichton Books). It's not really a dictionary, but it partially is, with definitions and comments on plenty of words Blount likes and some he does not; and it is in alphabetical order. It's long on etymology, too, but it also emphasizes the feel of words as they are formed by our organs of diction, and it has plenty of funny stories, puns, hilarious doggerel, history, social commentary, and movie recommendations. Blount obviously loves words (and it's a good thing, too, since there is a long list of books opposite the title page headed "Also by Roy Blount Jr.") and his enthusiasm is catching. Your reviewer had to start with the A words and read through the

Zs, but this is not easy, because most of the words here have references to other words here, and only by a zig-zag course was the end achieved. Take, for instance, _zigzag_, which Blount finds is from the French _ziczac_ and German _zickzack_. "I have to say, ours is better. Those _ck_ or hard _c_ sounds are hitches that hold too long; our _g_ takes just long enough to evoke a change in direction that's marked but quick.

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