

Choosing a Supreme Court Justice

The US Senate has begun the formal confirmation process for Neil Gorsuch, the man chosen by President Trump to become the ninth *justice* (judge) on the US Supreme Court. Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016. Then-President Obama nominated Merrick Garland to replace him, but the Republican-controlled Senate refused to consider him, insisting that they wait till the November election. Americans will be watching this confirmation process carefully for several reasons:

It is important to understand that the Supreme Court's decisions have a profound and lasting impact on Americans' daily lives. Its job is to decide whether state or federal laws are consistent with the US Constitution, which is not a collection of laws but rather a collection of principles to be applied to an ever-changing array of social issues. For example, this year the Supreme Court will be deciding how much public schools must pay to support students with disabilities; how schools should support transgender rights; and what kinds of limits police and border control officers face. In short, the Supreme Court is one of the most important institutions in the US.

Supreme Court judges can keep their job for the rest of their lives; the impact of the choice will be felt for many years. Neil Gorsuch is 49 years old, and so could serve for 30-40 years. (The ages of the current justices range from 56 (Kagan) to 84 (Ginsburg).)

Supreme Court decisions must pass by a *simple majority* – that is, by a vote of at least 5 to 4. Justice Scalia, whom Gorsuch would replace, tended to vote with the conservatives

of the Supreme Court (Justices Thomas, Alito and Roberts). Gorsuch, generally seen as quite conservative, would do little to change the political composition of the Supreme Court from its recent past.

The process of confirmation is this: first the Senate Judiciary Committee reviews the nominee, by reading papers he has written and trying to learn about his philosophy of law. (You can read Gorsuch's application at judiciary.senate.gov - click on View Questionnaire.) The Judiciary Committee includes 11 Republicans (including the Chair, Republican Chuck Grassley) and 9 Democrats. They then hold interviews with Gorsuch, broadcast on television.

This committee can make a recommendation to the full Senate for either rejection or approval, or it can forward the nomination to the Senate without any recommendation. The full 100-person Senate then holds its own set of hearings, and then votes.

The full Senate must approve the nominee by a *simple majority* (51%). Of the 100 Senators, 54 are Republicans, 45 are Democrats, and one is an Independent who usually votes with the Democrats. So you might think the Republicans will easily win support for Gorsuch. *But*, the Senate has a rule that allows for *filibuster* (non-stop talking for hours or days, to avoid ending a vote being taken). 60% are needed to end a filibuster. This is a long-standing rule, but some Republicans are considering voting to change the filibuster-ending rule to 50%. You may hear this called the *nuclear option*, because of its long-standing consequences. You see what I mean about watching carefully?

Choosing a Supreme Court Justice	1
Easter	2
Easter Eggs and Bunnies	2
Passover	3
You Might Ask...	3
Phishing and Tax Scams	4
Paying US Taxes	4
How Much Do We Pay?	4
Spring Parent-Teacher	
Conferences	5
Wiretaps in the US	5
Rules of Baseball	6
Birthday Biography: Joseph Pulitzer	6
Free Press and Checks and	
Balances	7
That Crazy English: Baseball Idioms	8

Compliments of



BRIGHAM AND
WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

Office for Research Careers

Sharing strategies. Supporting careers.

Distribution restricted per
terms of educational site
license.

Easter Eggs and Bunnies

The egg is an ancient symbol of new life. Long before Jesus lived, eggs were a traditional springtime gift. For Christians, the egg is a sign of the new spiritual life that Jesus promised his believers. And the *hare* (like a large rabbit) was an ancient symbol of the moon and the goddess Eostre. (Hares are born with their eyes open. The full moon is said to be the open-eyed watcher of night.)

In the US, the rabbit (similar to a hare but more common here) has replaced the hare as a central image of Easter. Children call rabbits “bunnies,” so we have the Easter Bunny.

Unlike Christmas’ Santa Claus (about whom there is agreement), there is no one standard Easter Bunny. Is it a male or female? Rabbit-size or human-size? Does it wear clothes? How does it get into the house? Does it bring baskets filled with eggs, or does it hide eggs for children to find? Does it bring its own eggs or use the eggs the children decorated? You decide.

And why does an Easter bunny, a mammal, bring Easter *eggs*? The story goes that a German woman had hidden eggs in her garden for children to find. As they looked, a hare hopped by. The children thought the hare had laid the eggs...and a legend was born.



Easter

Easter is perhaps the most important Christian holiday of the year. While Christians celebrate the *birth* of Jesus on Christmas, at Easter, they remember his death and the story of his *resurrection* (coming back to life). Christians believe that Jesus, the Son of God, rose from the dead, offering spiritual rebirth (new spiritual life) to all his followers. Here is the Easter story:

Jesus had become a powerful Jewish teacher and leader. Although he was popular with his many followers, he angered many others. He went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with his 12 *disciples* (close followers). While there, an angry group of priests and elders took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. The crowds wanted Pilate to kill Jesus. Pilate agreed. Jesus was nailed to a cross on a Friday, now known as Good Friday. (Some say this name comes from “God’s Friday.” Others think “Good” refers to “holy.”)

After Jesus died, his body was taken to a tomb. A large round stone was rolled in front of the opening. On Sunday morning, two of his followers, Mary and Mary Magdalene, found his tomb empty. They received a sign that Jesus was alive. His rising from the dead is the central event of the Easter celebration. According to the Bible, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples before returning to heaven.

In many languages, the name of this holiday comes from the Hebrew word for Passover (*Pesach*). But the English name comes from the goddess of spring, Eostre. Eostre was honored in Germany and England in a celebration of the *vernal equinox* (the day when

both day and night are exactly 12 hours long). In Western Christian churches, Easter is the Sunday following the first full moon after March 21 (or the “ecclesiastical vernal equinox”). This year Easter is April 16.

It is traditional to dye eggs at Easter time and display them in a basket. German immigrants to the US brought this custom. To try it, buy a [food-safe] dye kit in any supermarket at Easter time and follow the very easy directions. Hard-boil the eggs first. Or punch a small hole in one end of an uncooked egg, piercing the yolk. Punch a larger hole (3-4mm) in the other end. Blow into the smaller hole, holding the egg over a bowl. The yolk and white will come out, into the bowl. Wash the shell carefully then dye it. It will last for years!

Good Friday (April 14 this year) is a government holiday in some states. Stores and businesses may be closed. Easter is not an official federal holiday (although it is always a Sunday, so government offices are closed anyway). The Monday after Easter is not generally observed as a holiday in the US as it is in some other countries. Gift- and card-giving are not traditional parts of the season (but the stores will certainly try to convince you otherwise). Many families gather for Easter dinner.

More Americans of Christian belief or descent go to church on Easter Sunday than on any other day except perhaps at Christmas. If you are interested in learning about the Christian religion in the US, Easter would be a good time to visit a church. There will be many visitors there, and you would be welcome.

Egg Alert!

You may be used to storing uncooked eggs on your counter, not your refrigerator. But beware! By US law, large egg producers must wash the eggs they sell, to get rid of any salmonella bacteria. But that washing also gets rid of a thin protective film that keeps bacteria out in the first place! Japan has a similar law, but in the European Union, the opposite approach is taken - washing eggs is not allowed, in order to protect that film. In the US, it’s best to refrigerate your eggs.

Passover

Passover is one of the most important Jewish holidays in the year. Passover begins on the 14th day of the month of Nisan in the Jewish calendar. This year it starts on April 11 (but note that in the Jewish calendar, days start at sunset on the previous day, so observation of Passover will begin at sunset on April 10). At Passover, Jews remember the story of their *exodus from* (going out of) slavery in Egypt 3000 years ago:

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt when God ordered Moses to lead them to freedom. God sent a series of plagues to the land — frogs, disease, locusts, and more. Each time, God stopped the plague when the *Pharaoh* (king, pronounced “FAY-roh”) promised to let the Israelites go free. But each time a plague ended, the Pharaoh broke his promise. Finally, Moses announced that the next plague would be the killing of all first-born children in Egypt. He told the Israelites to put some blood of a lamb on the door posts of their homes. This would be the signal to God to “pass over” their house and not kill their first-born children.

This time, the Pharaoh finally told the Israelites to go free. The people traveled toward the Red Sea. When they got there, the Pharaoh’s army (sent by the Pharaoh who had, again, changed his mind about freeing them) was close behind. The water parted so that the Israelites could cross through to safety. It closed again when Pharaoh’s army was crossing, drowning them all.

For several thousand years, the story of Passover has been told in this spring season. It is a story of the re-birth of life and of a people who find new political freedom and unity. At Passover, many Jews remember people of all religions around the world who still do not live in freedom.

Passover lasts seven or eight days (depending on the type of Jewish group).

Throughout Passover, Jews eat no food that has *leavening* (like yeast) in it. They may go to religious services on the first evening of Passover, then return home for a *seder*. A *seder* is a dinner, and an important, ceremonial part of observing Passover. It is not simply a family holiday meal. A *seder* includes many special symbolic foods (see below). The youngest person at the table asks a series of four questions about the meaning of Passover. The Passover story is told, along with prayers and songs of praise to God.

If you are not Jewish, you will not be expected to do any thing special during the Passover week. If you live in a town with many Jewish families, public schools may be closed for the first day or two of Passover. But most businesses and government agencies are not closed. For the first one or two days of Passover, many Jews, even those who are not very religious, will follow tradition. They may not be at work or school. In some Jewish families, inviting non-Jews to a *seder* is part of the tradition of telling the Passover story to those who do not know it. Go, if invited.

The Symbolic Foods of Passover

This food:	symbolizes:
Matzah (unleavened bread)	The Israelites’ quick departure, leaving no time for bread to rise
Lamb bone and egg	Festival sacrifice
Mild bitter greens (parsley or lettuce) dipped in saltwater	The Israelites’ tears, the sea and springtime
Bitter herbs (like horseradish)	The bitterness of slavery
Charoset (nuts, fruit and wine)	Brick/mortar used by slaves

You Might Ask...

Are you confused by the US political news? Here is some help:

Why is the failure to pass a new healthcare bill so important? First, of course, it is an embarrassment to the new administration. But there is a more complicated reason, too. The administrations’ next priority is to make major changes to the tax structure in the country. Usually, major tax changes need a 60% majority vote (which would require some Democrats to vote for it - unlikely). But there is an alternative route (called *reconciliation*) that only requires a 50% majority (which the Republicans have). However, with this route, the proposal is not allowed to add to the deficit over 10 years. The [failed] healthcare bill would have saved a lot of money, which could have been “counted” in this deficit reduction accounting. Without that savings, major tax changes will be more difficult to pass.

When will the President’s new budget take effect? It’s not so simple. His budget does not automatically become law. Think of it as a statement of his priorities. The Congress makes the final decisions about the budget. (We say, “The President proposes, the Congress disposes.”) You will be hearing more from Congress...

So then do the President’s visa ban and immigration priorities also require Congress’ approval? No. A President is allowed to make some *executive orders* as to how existing laws are enforced. However, his visa ban was disallowed by the *judicial* branch. You are getting a good lesson in our *checks and balances*.

Paying US Taxes

The annual deadline for paying federal (and state) income taxes is traditionally April 15. In 2017, though, it is April 18 because April 15 falls on the weekend, as does Emancipation Day (a holiday marking the end of slavery, observed in the national capital, home of the IRS). Here's where you can get some tax help:

- ♦ Post offices and libraries all have basic tax forms and instructions. The forms and publications are free.
- ♦ Call the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676) any time — they will mail you the forms, instructions, and publications you need, or tell you how to download them to your computer. Listen in English or Spanish.
- ♦ Go to www.irs.gov to:
 - a) download forms, instructions, and publications,
 - b) learn about electronic filing; refunds come faster if you do; see www.irs.gov/Filing
 - c) find out when you will get your refund (if any).
 - d) find the location of an IRS office near you, where you can ask questions in person (at www.irs.gov/uac/Contact-Your-Local-IRS-Office-1).

♦ Go to a volunteer walk-in tax advice site (in shopping malls, community centers, libraries, or churches). You may see services offered by IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program (for people with incomes less than \$54,000/year) or IRS' Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) (for people age 60+).

4

Phishing and Tax Scams

Around tax time, watch out for *phishing*, or internet-based tax scams (illegal attempts to get your money or personal financial information) (pronounced fishing — as in “fishing for information”). The thief uses your information to take money from your bank account, buy things with your credit card, or damage your credit rating.

For example, you might get an email that looks like it is from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) - like “tax-refunds@irs.gov” or “admin@irs.gov”. The message says you are eligible for a refund or credit and asks for your bank account information. You are directed to a website that is almost identical to the real IRS one, but is really a fake. Here, you are asked for personal and financial information that the real IRS page does not require (like your credit card number, mother's maiden name, and/or other personal information). These messages are scams. *The IRS never sends unsolicited (unrequested) email to people about tax matters.* The only way to get a tax refund is by filing a tax return.

Other scams involve telephone calls in which the caller offers you something wonderful - for example, a big *rebate* (refund) for filing taxes early. He asks for your bank account informa-

tion “for direct deposit of the rebate.” Or he says that the IRS sent you a check but you never cashed it, and asks for your bank account number. Don't give it! The IRS does not give rebates for early filers, does not gather bank information by telephone, and does not follow up on un-cashed checks.

The IRS recommends:

- ♦ Be skeptical of email or letters you are not expecting. Verify before replying.
- ♦ Do not tell anyone your PIN or secret passwords; legitimate organizations do not need or ask for this information.
- ♦ If you get an email that makes you suspicious, do not follow its links; instead, go independently to the IRS site — www.irs.gov.
- ♦ As is always the case, never open an attachment to an email unless you are very sure what it is; it may contain a computer virus.
- ♦ Shred paper documents with financial information on them before discarding.
- ♦ Don't be fooled by a local area code. With Voice over Internet Protocol, the caller could be anywhere in the world.

Here is more information: www.irs.gov/uac/report-phishing. Forward any suspicious email to phishing@irs.gov.

How Much Tax Do We Pay?

Here, from the OECD, are the tax rates for a single wage earner with no children. The number is the average all-in personal income tax rate for a person earning an average wage.

Belgium	42.0	France	28.9	Slovak Republic	23.0
Germany	39.7	Norway	28.4	Japan	22.0
Denmark	36.1	Portugal	28.3	Spain	21.5
Austria	34.9	Turkey	27.5	Ireland	19.7
Hungary	34.5	United States	25.6	Estonia	18.4
Slovenia	33.3	Sweden	24.7	New Zealand	17.6
Italy	32.6	Australia	24.1	Switzerland	17.4
Finland	30.9	Poland	23.7	Israel	17.3
Luxembourg	30.7	United Kingdom	23.4	Korea	13.8
Netherlands	29.9	Canada	23.4	Mexico	10.3
Iceland	29.1	Czech Republic	23.3	Chile	7.0

Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences

Are you satisfied with your children's education? Do you hope something will be different next year? In the spring, schools plan for fall. Many schools have parent-teacher conferences to discuss these plans. If your school does not, you may ask to meet with the teacher anyway.



be sure you understand what this means. It is fine to ask the teacher to talk more slowly, and to repeat what she/he has said. Some inter-national parents ask a friend whose English is very good to come to the conference with them.

If you think your child should have some extra services from the school (like more training in English, extra challenges in their strongest subjects, an assessment of special needs, extra help for their weakest subjects, or help in social areas) this is a good time to ask. You should be able to talk about your concerns at any time. But this is one of the times the school actually invites your input. Most schools welcome suggestions and involvement from parents. You should be respectful of the school's professional judgment. Remember that they must be concerned with the well-being of all the children in the school. But it is perfectly acceptable to make your ideas known. Here are some practical tips:

- ♦ It is best for both parents to go to the parent-teacher meeting, if possible. Ask the teacher to try to schedule some meeting times that allow for parents' work schedules. You will both have a better sense of your child's school experience, and the teacher will appreciate your support and interest.

- ♦ Be sure you understand all the teacher tells you. It is common for international and American parents to leave a school conference without really understanding the meaning of what the teacher has said. If the teacher talks about standardized test scores, be sure you understand what the tests measure, what the scores mean, and what the school does with the scores. If she/he talks about putting your child into a particular group based on academic level (such as a reading group or track)

- ♦ If you have complaints about something the teacher does, think ahead about how to discuss it. Americans certainly talk about their concerns with teachers, and you can too. Have one or two specific examples in mind to discuss. Give the teacher time to explain his/her views. Remember that, in the American system, you and the teacher are considered partners in your child's education. Explain what schools are like in your own country, if it seems important. Make it clear that you understand this is an American school, but that you think it would be helpful to explain your child's school history (and future, if you will be going home soon). Make specific suggestions if you can. Then, wait a week or two to see if the situation improves. If it does not, it is fine to talk to someone else in the school about your concern. You might try the guidance counselor, the principal, or the headmaster. But start with the teacher.

- ♦ Say something positive about the teacher and/or the school. Americans like an open expression of thanks. If you are pleased with how school is going, this will be easy. If you are unhappy with the school, saying something positive will help the teacher be more willing to listen to your criticism.

- ♦ Ask for test records, work samples, reading lists, or curriculum descriptions, if you think they will be helpful when you go back to your home country. Do this each year, even if you will not be returning home for some time. Your home school will appreciate having such clear information about what your child has studied.

Wiretaps in the US

Here is some information about *wiretapping* laws in the US, which I hope will help you understand today's news:

Wiretapping refers to secretly recording a conversation - originally a telephone conversation, but also an internet conversation.

It is a federal crime to make such a recording of American citizens without one (or in some states, both) of them saying it is OK, unless a court has approved it. It is also a federal crime to use or reveal information that was gotten through an illegal wiretap. (Similar laws exist to protect email communication.) If police think that listening to a conversation can help prevent a crime, they can request approval from a court to do so.

The situation is different for people from other countries. American intelligence agencies may monitor conversations of officials from countries they suspect are hostile. And, if they have approval from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (sometimes called the FISA Court), they may monitor foreign spies who are in the US.

So what if one of those foreign officials/spies is talking on the telephone to an American citizen? In that case, the American citizen is said to have been *incidentally* wiretapped. The US agency is supposed to hide the identity of that citizen.

Who was listening to whom, with what approval, and who knew what when. That's what the news is about.

Birthday Biography: Joseph Pulitzer

On April 10 you will hear the announcement of this year's Pulitzer Prizes. This is always a wonderfully surprising day, because finalists are not announced in advance. These prestigious awards in journalism, music, literature, and history, are named after Joseph Pulitzer, born on April 10, 1847. Pulitzer was born in Hungary but moved to the U.S. in 1864; he became an American citizen in 1867.

Pulitzer knew little English when he arrived, but got a job with a German language newspaper in St. Louis, Missouri. He did well as a journalist and was soon its manager. He married a wealthy American woman from Washington, DC, and joined high society.

In 1878 he became the owner of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. He printed many articles about government and personal corruption, which pleased his readers and increased sales. Pulitzer decided to try this strategy of increasing sales by exposing corruption with another newspaper. He bought *The New York World* in 1883. Readers loved his stories, and the cartoons and catchy headlines sprinkled throughout the paper. Within 10 years *The World* had the largest number of readers in the country.

Another American publishing giant, William Randolph Hearst, began to battle with Pulitzer over readership. Hearst's *Journal* and *The World* started publishing increasingly wild stories, based on little or no fact, just to get people to buy their

[continued on page 7](#)

Rules of Baseball

April brings the opening of the season for professional, or major league, baseball. Countless fans attend the games or listen to them on TV and radio throughout the summer. Most Americans, even unathletic ones, understand and have played baseball (or its cousin, softball). Here are enough rules to help you watch your first game. If you have more questions, ask any American!

- ◆ Two teams of nine players take turns being *up at bat* and *in the field*. An *inning* is one cycle of turns (Team A is up at bat, then Team B is up at bat). A game has nine innings.

- ◆ A baseball field has a diamond and an *outfield*. The diamond is the runway connecting four corner bases: home plate, and first, second, and third bases. The outfield is the space outside of the diamond.

- ◆ The team that is in the field has one player in each position: *pitcher* (who throws the ball to the batter on the other team), *catcher* (who is behind the batter at home base), *first*, *second*, and *third basemen* (one at each base), *short stop* (who stands between second and third base), and three *outfielders* (who stand far back, out in left, center, and right field).

- ◆ While the batter who is up at bat stands beside home plate, the pitcher must throw the ball directly over *home plate* at a height that falls between the batter's knees and shoulders. If the ball is outside this target area, the batter should not swing at it; it's called a *ball*. If the pitcher throws four such balls to one batter,

the batter gets to *walk* to first base without interruption. If the ball is inside the target area, the batter should swing at it. If he swings and misses, it's called a *strike*. If the batter does not swing at a ball that is in the target area, it's also considered a strike. If he gets three strikes in one turn, he has *struck out* and his turn is over. If he hits the ball in such a way that it goes high in the air, it's called a *fly ball*. If the other team catches a fly ball before it touches the ground, the batter is out and has to leave the field.

- ◆ If the batter hits the ball, he tries to run to each base before the other team can throw the ball there or touch the batter with the ball. He tries to run to as many bases as he can. Most often, he will only get to first base before the other team gets the ball there. If it is a close

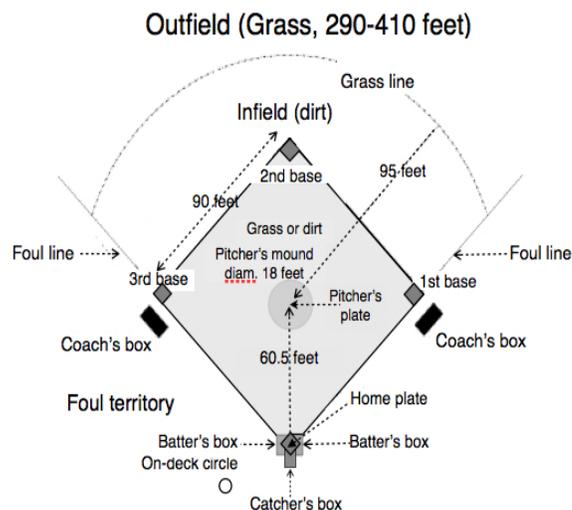
race, the batter stops at first base, and the next batter takes a turn. If the ball gets to the base before the batter, the batter is out and he leaves the field.

- ◆ When the next batter starts to run to first base, the first player

runs toward second base. The player on second base runs toward third. The player on third runs to home base. A batter scores a *run* (a point) when he gets back to home plate. Players in the outfield try to get the ball to a base before a batter gets there. If they succeed, the batter is out.

- ◆ Sometimes, of course, the batter can get to second or third base, or even all the way

[continued on page 7](#)



Free Press and Checks and Balances

You are seeing American democracy in action these days, in many [sometimes messy] ways. The chart below shows the importance Democrats and Republicans attach to some tools of democracy.

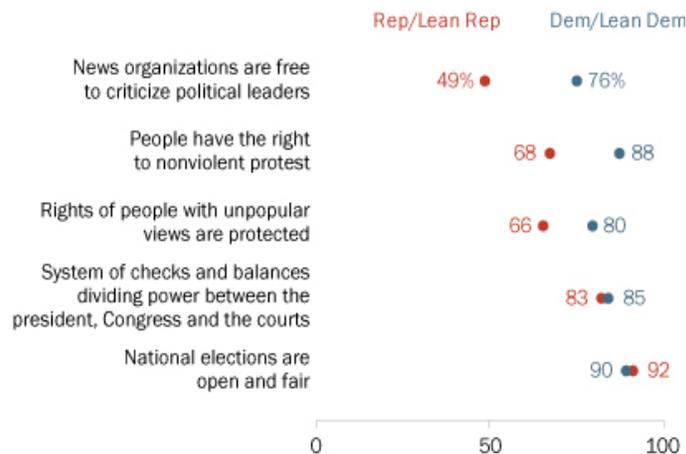
Notice that the topic for which there is most agreement is the openness and fairness of national elections. This is why President Trump's [unsupported] accusation of voter fraud was such big news.

See the sidebar on page 3 for a discussion about how the three branches of the US government hold power over each other (which we call *checks and balances* - each branch is able to *check* (stop) the power of each other branch).

There is most disagreement about the importance of news organizations criticizing political leaders. I would like to see this same data at different points in history...

Partisans differ widely on importance of freedom of press to criticize politicians

% who say ___ is very important to maintaining a strong democracy in the United States



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[continued from page 6](#)

papers. (Sound familiar?) After a frenzied support of the Spanish-American War in both newspapers, Pulitzer changed his editorial policy and focused again on restrained and careful reporting.

In 1909, *The World* published a story about an illegal payment by the US government to the French Panama Canal Company. The federal government and the banker J.P. Morgan sued *The World*, saying the story was untrue. When *The World* won the suit, Pulitzer rose as a champion of freedom of the press. In those years, a cartoon strip in *The World* called "Yellow Kid" was printed in yellow ink. The term *yellow journalism* came to refer to stories that distort or exaggerate the news in order to sell papers (*fake news!*). It is ironic that *yellow journalism* has this link to Pulitzer's paper; the Prizes that bear his name stand for unquestioned excellence.

Pulitzer Prizes are awarded in 21 categories. Most are in the field of journalism: local, national, and international reporting, *feature writing* (about an issue, idea, or phenomenon that is not necessarily "news"), editorials, photography, and political cartoons. Other Prizes are given for fiction, US history, drama, biography, poetry, non-fiction, and music. Prize-winners in 20 of the categories get \$15,000. The prize for Public Service is a gold medal instead of money; it is always given to a newspaper not an individual.

But the biggest prize for all is the honor that comes from being in this most distinguished group.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Pulitzer.

[continued from page 6](#)
THE RULES OF BASEBALL

around to home plate before the ball catches up with him. This is called a *home run*, or a *homer*. If a batter gets a home run when the *bases are loaded* (there is a player from his team on first, second, and third base when he steps up to bat), it is called a *grand slam*. All four batters score runs in that turn.

- ♦ A player is allowed to run from one base to another in between batters' turns up at bat. If he gets to the new base before the other team throws the ball there, he has *stolen the base*.
- ♦ When players on the team at bat have had three outs, the other team comes up to bat. The team with the most points at the end of nine innings wins.
- ♦ There are two Major Leagues in professional baseball — the National League and the American League. During the Major League season (April through September), teams compete mostly against other teams in their league. Then, each League has a series of play-off games within Divisions, in what is called the "Pennant race." The winners of each League's Pennant race then compete against each other in a seven-game "World Series."

Newcomer's Almanac is published monthly by The Interchange Institute, for people who have recently moved to the United States. Its goal is to promote international understanding by providing information about the American holidays, customs, values, social issues, and language that often confuse and surprise newcomers. It is written by Anne P. Copeland, PhD, who is a clinical psychologist and the Director of The Interchange Institute. She is an American and has lived and worked overseas with her family.

The Interchange Institute is a not-for-profit organization that studies the impact of intercultural transitions on individuals, their families, and the organizations for which they work. From the results of this research, the Institute offers seminars and workshops, produces publications, and provides consultative services to the international newcomers, their organizations, and to host communities, recognizing that change and insight on both sides facilitates smooth transition.

Subscriptions: Please contact The Interchange Institute for information about subscription fees, site licenses, and discount rates:

The Interchange Institute
Tel. 617.566.2227
www.interchangeinstitute.org
email: newcomer@interchangeinstitute.org



Copyright 2017.
Anne P. Copeland.
All rights reserved.
No photocopying
allowed except under
terms of site license.

That Crazy English: Baseball Idioms

American English is rich in idioms from the game of baseball. Read the [Rules of Baseball](#) on pages 6-7 to understand these better:

For years she watched the committee do its work without helping; now it's her turn *up at bat*. (*For years she watched the committee do its work without helping; now it's her turn to do the work and be the leader.*)

It began as a friendly chat but then he started *to play hardball*. (*It began as a friendly chat but then he started to ask difficult questions and make hostile remarks.*) (Professional baseball is played with a hard, small ball. The game of "softball" uses a larger, softer ball.)

When she suggested hanging balloons from the ceiling, they thought she was *out in left field*. (*They thought hanging balloons was nonsense, inappropriate, and/or unrealistic.*)

He never seemed to know *who was on first*. (*He never seemed to know what was going on around him.*) (This refers to "being on first [base].")

He went to job interview after job interview, but each time, he *struck out*. (*He looked many places for a new job, but never found one.*)

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ

Read *The Rules of Baseball* on page 6. Mark each of the following sentences True or False. Change all the sentences you mark False to make them correct.

- the other team is up at bat.*
- | | True | False |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. After one team has gotten three strikes, one inning is over. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. A player who makes a grand slam earns four points for his team. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The final game of the season is the Pennant Race. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Batters usually have time to run past first base after they hit the ball. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. If a batter hits a fly ball and the other team catches it before it hits the ground, it is considered a strike. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. The only way to get a strike is to swing at a ball and miss. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. If a player steals a base, he is out. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. If the pitcher throws a ball outside the target area four times to one batter, the batter may walk safely to first base. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. A short stop stands between first and second base. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. It is possible for a player to be on third base when no player is on first or second base. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. It is good to hit a homer when the bases are loaded. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

HOMEWORK

WITH A PEN

1. Read [The Rules of Baseball](#) on pages 6. Write the rules to a popular sports game in your home country. How does the game begin and end? Do the players have different jobs?

2. Read [Passover](#) on page 3. Write a description of the food (and its symbolic meaning) served at an important holiday in your country.

3. Read [That Crazy English](#) on page 8. Write a list of three idioms in your home language that are based on a sport. Translate them into English and explain what they mean.

4. Read [Easter Eggs and Bunnies](#) on page 2. Think of an animal or mythical character that is associated with a holiday in your home country. Is there ancient meaning or symbolism to the creature? Write a brief paragraph to describe it.

5. Read [Choosing a Supreme Court Justice](#) on page 1 and [You Might Ask...](#) on page 3. Write a description of how different parts of your home country's government are related to each other. Does a court system have any power over the head of government? over the law-making body?

TAX VOCABULARY

Read [Paying US Taxes](#) on page 4. Below is a simplified copy of the beginning of the US income tax form, followed by some vocabulary words. Complete the form for yourself or an imaginary friend. Pick the correct meaning of each word, in the context of a tax form.

1040		Department of the Treasury — Internal Revenue Service															
U.S. Individual Income Tax Return																	
Label Use the IRS label. Otherwise, please print or type.	L A B E L H E R E	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Your first name and initial</td> <td style="width: 20%;">Last name</td> <td style="width: 30%;">Your social security number</td> </tr> <tr> <td>If a joint return, spouse's first name and initial</td> <td>Last name</td> <td>Spouse's social security number</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Home address (number and street). If you have a P.O. box, see page 19.</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">City, town or post office, state and ZIP code. If you have a foreign address, see page 19.</td> </tr> </table>	Your first name and initial	Last name	Your social security number	If a joint return, spouse's first name and initial	Last name	Spouse's social security number	Home address (number and street). If you have a P.O. box, see page 19.			City, town or post office, state and ZIP code. If you have a foreign address, see page 19.					
	Your first name and initial	Last name	Your social security number														
	If a joint return, spouse's first name and initial	Last name	Spouse's social security number														
	Home address (number and street). If you have a P.O. box, see page 19.																
City, town or post office, state and ZIP code. If you have a foreign address, see page 19.																	
Filing Status <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 5%;">1</td> <td style="width: 5%;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Single</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Married filing joint return (even if only one had income)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Married filing separate return.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Head of household (with qualifying person) If the qualifying person is a child but not your dependent, enter this child's name here.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child (year spouse died)</td> </tr> </table>			1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Single	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married filing joint return (even if only one had income)	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married filing separate return.	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Head of household (with qualifying person) If the qualifying person is a child but not your dependent, enter this child's name here.	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child (year spouse died)
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	Single															
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married filing joint return (even if only one had income)															
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Married filing separate return.															
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Head of household (with qualifying person) If the qualifying person is a child but not your dependent, enter this child's name here.															
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Qualifying widow(er) with dependent child (year spouse died)															
Check only one box.																	

word	meaning (a)	meaning (b)
1. return	go back	form for paying taxes
2. postmarked	received by the IRS	received by the Post Office
3. refunds	taxes you overpaid	extra taxes you owe
4. filing	tax-paying	making smooth
5. cautious	trusting	careful
6. reputable	known for honesty	famous
7. ultimately	in the end	partially
8. audit	official check on accuracy	trial for wrong-doing
9. affiliated	friendly with	connected to officially

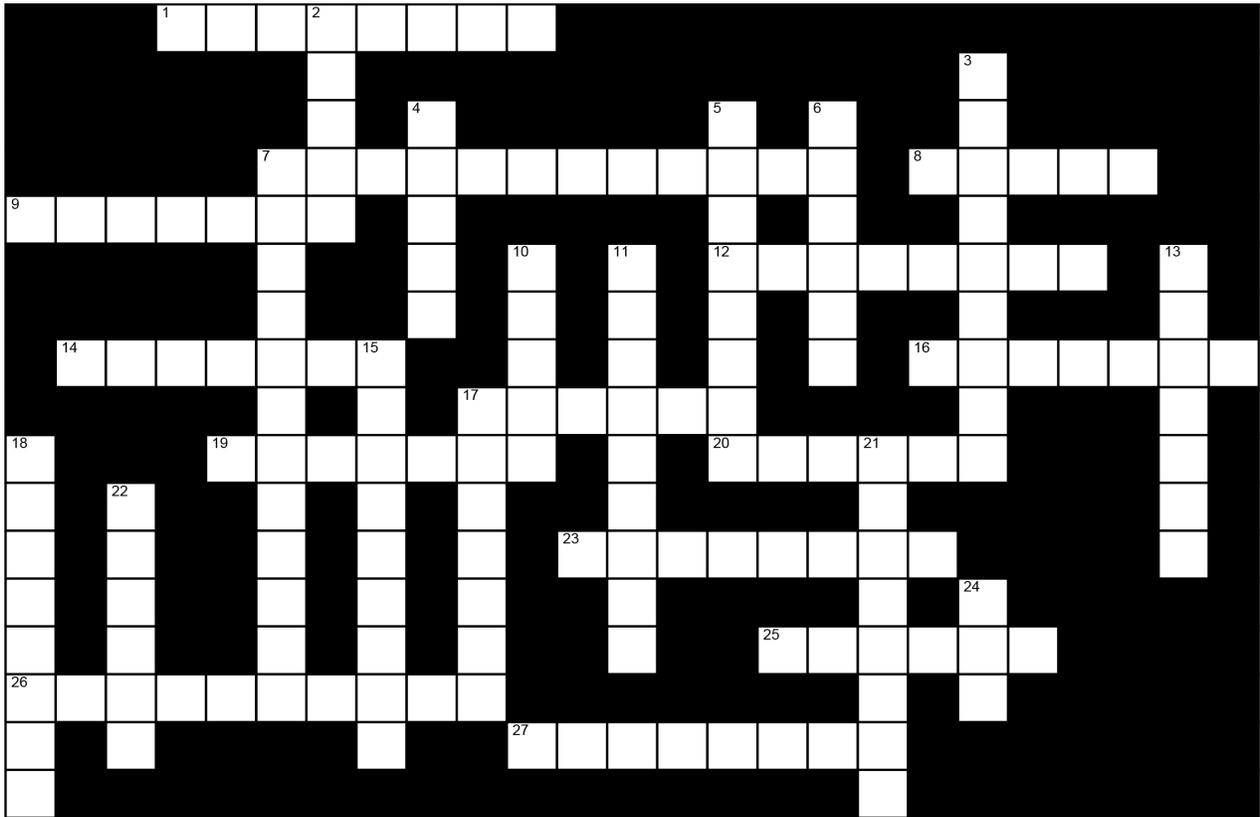
BASEBALL IDIOMS

Read [That Crazy English](#) on page 8. Re-write these sentences using a baseball idiom:

1. I tried to make a reservation at many restaurants but did not succeed. _____

2. Their new tax proposal is completely absurd. _____

3. It's your turn to lead the group in the direction you think is best. _____



Across

- 1. At ____, Jews remember the story of their leaving Egypt.
- 7. At Easter, Christians remember the ____ of Jesus.
- 8. out in left ____, an unusual idea
- 9. person who throws a baseball to be hit by the other team
- 12. internet-based tax scam
- 14. another word for 'judge'
- 16. a secret recording of a telephone conversation
- 17. ____ out, have no success
- 19. Don't ignore the Internal ____ Service.
- 20. a ____ majority, one more than 50%
- 23. play ____, ask difficult questions
- 25. unleavened bread, part of a Passover meal
- 26. A parent-teacher ____ is a good time to learn about your child's progress in school.
- 27. close follower of an important, influential leader

Down

- 2. a ceremonial Passover meal
- 3. Democrats and Republicans differ in their views about news organizations being free to ____ political leaders.
- 4. The Easter ____ brings (or hides) eggs.
- 5. The President proposes (a budget), the Congress ____.
- 6. one ninth of a baseball game
- 7. In the US, you should keep your eggs in the ____.
- 10. A baseball player earns a point for his team when he returns to the home ____.
- 11. The Senate ____ Committee considers Supreme Court nominations before the whole Senate does.
- 13. a baseball field
- 15. It is important to both Republicans and Democrats that the US have open and fair ____.
- 17. The ____ Court is the highest court in the US.
- 18. checks and ____, a system that maintains power across different branches of government
- 21. important journalism prize
- 22. The only way to get a tax ____ is by filing a tax return.
- 24. to have a turn up at ____, to be the leader

OUT AND ABOUT

- 1. Read [The Rules of Baseball](#) on page 6. Watch at least 2 innings of a baseball game (on TV or in a playground). Observe a strike, a fly ball, an out, and a ball. Identify the pitcher, catcher, and short stop.
- 2. Read [Choosing a Supreme Court Justice](#) (page 1), [You Might Ask...](#) (page 3), [Free Press and Checks and Balances](#) (page 7) and [Wiretaps in the US](#) (page 7). Pick one of these US news stories and follow it, using several news sources.
- 3. Read [Easter Eggs and Bunnies](#) on page 2. Look at the different images of an Easter bunny in your community — are they male or female? clothed or not? large or small?
- 4. Read about [Passover](#) on page 3. In your supermarket in early April, look for special Passover foods.

IF YOU USE THE WEB

1. Read *The Rules of Baseball* on page 6. Go to www.mlb.com to find a list of teams and their schedules. Click on Schedule. Pick the team closest to where you live in the US as "your team." Can you go??
2. Read *Choosing a Supreme Court Justice* on page 1. For more information about how the Supreme Court works, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfXAWURpc. Note: this video was made before Justice Scalia (second from right in photo) died.
3. Read *Birthdays Biography: Joseph Pulitzer* on page 6. Go to www.cnn.com/2016/01/06/photos/pulitzer-prize-winning-photographs/ to see some Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs. Ask an American to look at the site with you and talk about the history captured in the photos.

WITH A FRIEND

1. Read the articles about taxes on [page 4](#). Describe to a partner how the government in your home country gets the money it needs. How is this process different from in the US? Discuss any things an individual has to pay for in the US that are provided free in your home country.
2. Read *Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences* on page 5. With a partner, take one of the following roles of a parent or a teacher. Pretend you have just started a parent conference.

Parent: Your daughter Anna is in fourth grade. When you see her teacher, the teacher always smiles and says what a wonderful student Anna is. So you were surprised when Anna did not get all A grades on her latest report. You have increased the amount of time Anna must spend on her homework, but you plan to ask the teacher to be more strict, and to give you more honest feedback about Anna's work.

Useful Phrases

There is one thing I wanted to discuss with you...

I see what you mean. But from my point of view...

My most important goals for Anna are...

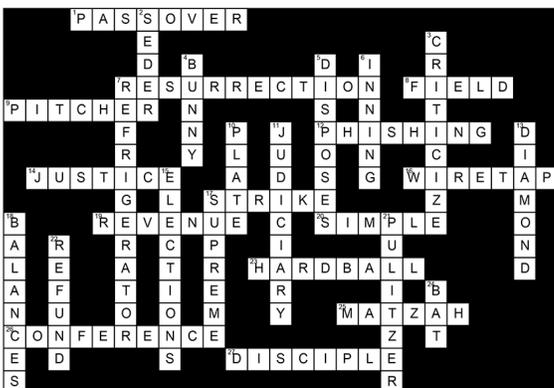
Did you know that Anna...

I appreciate that you...

Teacher: Your student Anna is a delightful child. She seems happy, has many friends, works hard, and seems to be learning well, even though she has just been speaking English for one year. But in the past few weeks you have noticed that Anna seems tired and sad. You plan to ask her parents to relax a little and not be so strict with Anna.

Talk together for 2-3 minutes then switch roles. Which role was easier for you? Why?

3. Read about *Phishing and Tax Scams* on page 4. Compare the issue of fraud and cheating, and how to protect against it, in the US and your home country.



ANSWER CORNER

Understanding What you Read

2. T
3. F The final game ... is in the World Series.
4. F Batters usually do not have time...
5. F If a batter hits a fly ball ... the batter is out.
6. F One way to get a strike is to
7. F If a player steals a base, he is not out.
8. T
9. F A short stop stands between 2nd and 3rd base.
10. T
11. T

Tax Vocabulary

- 1b
- 2b
- 3a
- 4a
- 5b
- 6a
- 7b
- 8b
- 9a

Baseball Idioms

1. I tried to make a reservation at many restaurants but I struck out.
2. Their new tax proposal is out in left field.
3. It's your turn up at bat



© The
Interchange
Institute,
2017