

Puzzles



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The History of Anagrams As long as humans have used letters and words, people of all cultures have enjoyed creating games and puzzles with their languages. While the first use of anagrams might never be known, historians and linguistics do know that anagrams have been used by all ancient cultures. As Ephraim Chambers notes in Cyclopaedia, the Jews are often credited with inventing the anagram. However, it is also known that the ancient Greeks and Romans used anagrams in their writings.

The Greek poet Lycophron used anagrams in a poem about the siege of Troy entitled “ Cassandra” in which he used anagrams for the names Ptolemy and Arisonë (Anagrams FAQ).

Other uses of anagrams are attributed to Pythagoras, Plato, and Alexander the Great. It is believed that Pythagoras used anagrams to determine philosophical meanings, while Plato believed that anagrams revealed divinity and destiny (Anagrams FAQ). The Romans believed that anagrams actually had mystical and prophetic meanings (Wikipedia).

In spite of their popularity in ancient times, anagrams seemed to disappear until the middle ages when Jewish mystics called Cabbalists believed that reciting letters from the Hebrew alphabet in various orders could work miracles and create humans from dust (Sydney Morning Herald). In 17th Century France, Louis the XIII appointed a Royal Anagrammist to whom he paid a reportedly exorbitant salary. By 1988, the first stand-alone anagram generating software was produced underscoring a fascination with this puzzle form that has existed for several thousand years. (Sydney Morning Herald).

Throughout history, anagrams have gone in and out of popularity, and they have been used in several applications in addition to providing

entertainment for puzzle solvers. Authors have used anagrams of their own names to create pseudonyms for their writing. Writers have also been known to use anagrams of actual people as the names of unpleasant characters. In addition to literature, anagrams have appeared in song lyrics. Jim Morrison used an anagram of his own name, “ Mr. Mojo Risin” in the song “ L. A. Woman.” Other songwriters have used anagrams for titles of songs or for band names. Galileo and other scientists used anagrams to protect their discoveries from being claimed by others. Cryptic crossword puzzles use anagrams as clues to add another dimension to crossword puzzles.

(Wikipedia).

Before the advent of computers, anagrams were created using pen and paper or letter tiles. Individual words have been anagrammed as well as entire sentences. With the creation of computer programs for anagramming, not only are there more possibilities for the numbers and kinds of anagrams that can be created, but also the games that can be played using anagrams, particularly on the computer. Many newspapers have daily anagrams or “ jumbles,” and anagrams are always included in word puzzle books.

Anagrams, like other word puzzles will always be popular. People have always enjoyed manipulating their language to create word play. Word puzzles tend to stretch the verbal imagination, and can be as simple or as complex as the puzzle solver chooses. One of the appeals of puzzles like anagrams is that not only can people solve those created by others, but that they can also create their own for their own amusement. Finally, anagrams cross the boundaries of languages and cultures, as they can be created in any language at any level of literacy.

Works Cited

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