



Verbarium

On May 12, 1875, Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford held a fund-raising spelling bee with many prominent members of the community as participants. The church's minister, Reverend Joseph Twitchell, asked his best friend Sam Clemens to open the event with a speech. Sam's thoughts on the importance of good spelling were as irreverent as you would expect. He declared that when it came to the spelling of words, "sameness is tiresome; variety is pleasing."

During his speech, he explained the rules to a word game—one that you can play at home!

*There is a game called Verbarium. A dozen people are each provided with a sheet of paper, across the top of which is written a long word like kaleidoscopic, or something like that, and the game is to see who can make up the most words out of that in three minutes, **always beginning with the initial letter of that word.***

You can play with any number of people, of course. Once you've tackled "kaleidoscopic," here's a list of words from Twain's spelling speech that you can use:

ORTHOGRAPHICAL

ORANG-OUTANG

TEMPERANCE

PHOTOGRAPHED

CORRESPONDANT

UNTRAMMELED

VARIEGATED

NECESSITATES

And here are some of the words from the spelling bee itself that you can also use:

PORTEMONNAIE

TRANQUILITY

VERDIGRIS

ACHIEVEMENT

METONYMY

CAISSON

From "[Clemens's "Spelling Match" Speech, \(MTDP 00150\).](#)" In *Mark Twain's Letters, 1874–1875*. Edited by Michael B. Frank and Harriet Elinor Smith. [Mark Twain Project Online](#). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. 2002, 2007. Accessed 2020-03-25.