

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to have been invited to write a column in this wonderful AACLC newsletter. Join me here for a monthly book review from the best of modern literature and the classics. For my first selection, I have chosen a little light reading, something informative and amusing, to wile away the cold winter evenings by the fireside.

BOOK REVIEW: "THE A TO Z OF EVERYDAY THINGS" by Janice Weaver, 2004

Have you ever wondered about the little everyday things that we take for granted? Who invented them? What are they made of? Why do we need them? While browsing in the library, I discovered a book that answers these questions. There are twenty six short chapters, each one outlining the history of one topic. Clearly, Janice Weaver has done a lot of research and shares her gems of knowledge about mundane things we feel we cannot live without. Here are three topics that interest me:

**B IS FOR BLACK:**

Look around you. What do you see? Colors everywhere. But where do they come from? For a long time, people thought that colors were a variation of black and white. Then in the 1700's, scientists discovered the relationship between light and color. We can thank Sir Isaac Newton for his discovery that by passing a white light, which contains all the colors in the spectrum, through a glass prism, we can see individual colors. Remember the "ROY G BIV" acronym we learned in school to help us recall the colors red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet? So...guess what color is missing from the list? That's right! Black. Black, in fact, is the absence of color.

As Weaver says, we associate black "with evil, death, misfortune, and dark, depressing moods. We talk of blackmail, black markets, black magic, blackguards, and blacklisting. The bubonic plague's grim rampage through Europe was called the Black Death because it actually turned victims' skin black." Of course, the color black can make a statement too. We wear it for mourning. The Puritans, who first came to the U.S. in the early 17th century, favored black clothing because they wished to live simply by "purifying" the Christian church. The discerning modern fashionista will possess a "little black cocktail dress" for important occasions. Now, black is a mark of sophistication and style...and is also very slimming!

**J IS FOR JACK-O'-LANTERNS:**

Halloween has been and gone, along with the front yard scarecrows, and the costumed children begging for candy treats at the front doors. But, while walking in my neighborhood last Halloween Night, I noticed a number of large pumpkins, some painted with scary faces, still adorning the front stoops. Did you know that this tradition of carving pumpkins originated in Ireland and Scotland? The Irish and Scots carved turnips, and placed burning coals or candles inside to ward off evil spirits...or Stingy Jack.

According to the legend, "Jack was a notorious miser who also had a mischievous streak. He tricked the Devil into climbing a tree, then carved the sign of a cross into its trunk so the demon could not climb down again. Trapped, the hapless Devil bought his freedom by agreeing not to claim Jack's soul when he died, which, as luck would have it, was just a short time later. Spurned by God for his miserly ways and by the Devil by his constant pranks, Jack could not go to heaven or hell. Instead, he was sent to wander the earth for the rest of time, with only a burning coal to light his way. He put the glowing ember into a hollowed-out turnip, earning

himself the nickname Jack of the Lantern, which he probably considered an improvement on Stingy Jack."

K IS FOR KISSING: Valentine's Day is just Round the corner!

"Anthropologists call social kissing an 'access ritual.' Like shaking hands and hugging, it is a sign that the greeter is opening herself up - giving greater physical and emotional access to the person she's greeting."

So, who are the best kissers, and where did kissing originate? The Italians? The French? According to Weaver, the "normally reserved English were the masterminds of the social kiss." During the 15th and 16th centuries, the English kissed everybody - even strangers greeted each other with a lip to lip smooch. It was the modest, less demonstrative French who, in the 17th century, introduced the more refined bow to the English court. The result? The French extinguished the English social kiss. And now? Well...the tables have turned. The English and Northern Americans are very conservative when it comes to kissing in public...certainly in the workplace, where the less intimate handshake is the norm. And the French? They love to greet each other with daily kisses on the cheek. I think, in general, women are more comfortable with social kissing than men are. But...did you know that in Naples, Italy, in 1562, kissing "was even made a crime punishable by death?"

I must stop here.... Clearly, Janice Weaver's book will whet the appetite of the discerning, modern reader. What I love about this book is that a reader can dip into any chapter, in any order, and be amused and informed at the same time. In fact, this is the perfect book for your bedside table.

If you enjoyed this review, join me on Sarah's Great Reads ([www.facebook.com/sarahsgreatreads](http://www.facebook.com/sarahsgreatreads)) for book reviews, quotes, and audio extracts from the classics and modern literature.

Warmest regards  
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