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When certain characters fall in love...

I know I'm being completely transparent when I say this, but I feel we have a lot in common.

I feel the same! And if you take the 2nd, 3rd and 4th letters of your five-letter name and shuffle them with the 1st, 5th, 6th and 7th letters of my nine-letter name, it exactly describes how I feel about us.

Mypassword= 123

The letters are P, A, C from SPACE and E, L, S and I from EQUAL SIGN. It's not quite a random anagram, because the word "shuffle" implies the letters must alternate like shuffled cards. The only single word to do that is **SPECIAL**. And after all, equal sign and space are "special characters!"

Other possibilities: LA SPICE, EPIC SAL and EAL PICS don't really make sense!

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1. Special Connections

When Samantha Espinoza, an equal sign, met Claire Thomas, a space, they knew right away they had a special connection. In fact, on their

first date, they were already talking quite openly about their life philosophies.

“Certain *things just go together.*” Sam declared, “You know, foods, relationships, inevitabilities.”

“I read you *like a dictionary,*” Claire replied, “and my *inclination* is always to deal with those relationships *directly, point to point, you know, as the crow flies...*”

“And..?” Sam asked, sensing Claire had more to say.

“And always remember,” Claire added, “to *focus on the big picture.* You know, the overall gestalt.”

What best sums up what these two were really talking about?

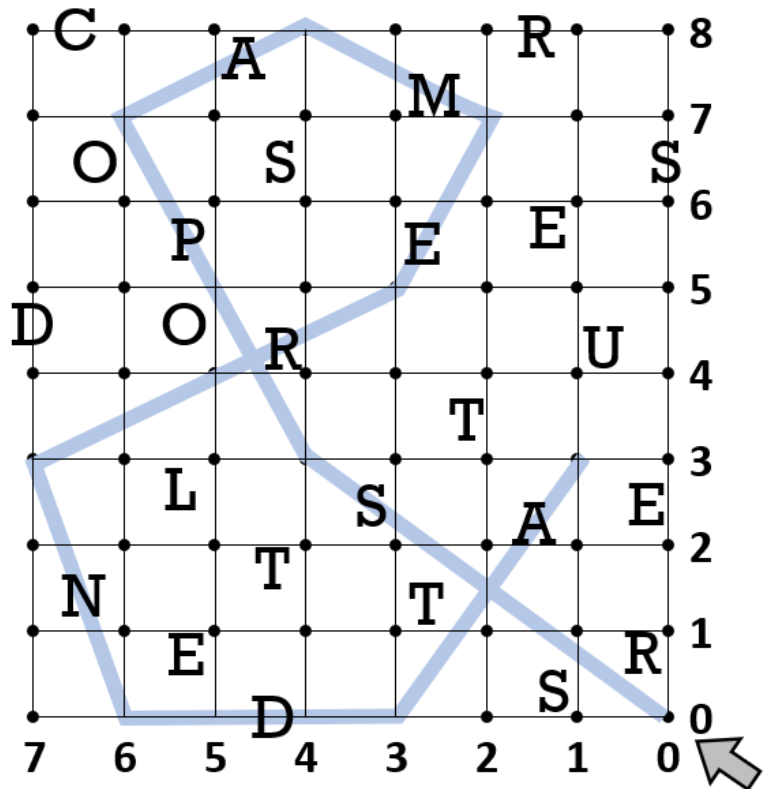


- ↑0 Hansel ←1 Ivory
- ↓1 Death →1 Tonic
- ↑1 Calvin ←2 Jerry
- ↓2 Ebony →2 Daedalus
- ↓2 Fish →2 Hobbes
- ↓3 Gin →2 Taxes
- ↑3 Anthony →3 Gretel
- ↑3 Icarus ←4 Chips
- ↑4 Ben ←4 Cleopatra

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The connections in alphabetical order by first member are shown below, right.

Starting at the arrow (lower right corner) and using “inclinations” (= angled lines) “as the crow flies”, the path it creates is shown at right. The shape is an AMPERSAND, and the letters it goes through read AMPERSAND if read in order left to right, top to bottom. Reading the left over letters redirects you to read the “CROSSED OUT LETTERS.”



- ↑3 Anthony ←4 Cleopatra
- ↑4 Ben ←2 Jerry
- ↑1 Calvin →2 Hobbes
- ↓1 Death →2 Taxes
- ↓2 Ebony ←1 Ivory
- ↓2 Fish ←4 Chips
- ↓3 Gin →1 Tonic
- ↑0 Hansel →3 Gretel
- ↑3 Icarus →2 Daedalus

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2. The Path to Spiritual Enlightenment

Samantha was feeling pretty stressed. Sure, her Windows XP desperately needed to be updated, but she knew she had saved that important work file somewhere; she just couldn't remember which drive or folder it was in. And then Claire walked in reminding her that they had to leave soon for their church social action committee meeting which Claire had just signed them both up for. Samantha felt like screaming, but instead she took a deep breath and tried to connect with her zen. "You know, Claire, our days are pretty busy as they are. I'm not sure why you always feel the need to *squeeze in just one more thing*."

"That's just me," Claire conceded with a smile, "But at least I'm good at keeping track of *what exactly I am adding, and where it is being added*." Samantha rolled her eyes. What exactly might help her find which folder and directory she put that file in?

Parasitic insect found in children's hair (singular)

L O U S E ⇒ B L O U S E

Long, loose shirt

Follower of market, Park, hundreds and 1st

P L A C E ⇒ P A L A C E

Buckingham abode

Type of skate

I N L I N E ⇒ I N C L I N E

Tilted plane

Strip the skin off, violently

F L A Y ⇒ F L A K Y

Like pastry or a dandruff sufferer's scalp

Large bird dog

S E T T E R ⇒ S E T T L E R

Colonist (perhaps in the land of Catan)

Scorsese, Van Buren or Luther

M A R T I N ⇒ M A R T I A N

Inhabitant of fourth rock from the sun

These are difficult to find in haystacks

N E E D L E S ⇒ N E E D L E S S

Unnecessary

Italian pasta dishes made with shrimp and garlic

S C A M P I S ⇒ S C A M P I S H

Mischievous, rascally

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Kitchen feature
- (a little extra - just for fun!)
B A C K L A S H ⇒ B A C K S L A S H ⇒ B A C K S P L A S H

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3. Tic-Tac-Toe... taken to the next level

Samantha and Claire enjoy playing tic-tac-toe (#classic game, #pointless pass-time), but they have made up some pretty crazy rules:

1. Rather than alternating turns, they flip a coin: if it comes up heads, it's X's turn; tails, it's O's turn. (Samantha always has X, Claire, always O.) This can make the games very lopsided!
2. Each game is played until the entire 3x3 grid is filled, so players can sometimes get several wins out of one grid.
3. The pattern of X's and O's must always end up symmetrical, with the line of symmetry running vertically, horizontally or diagonally. (Some patterns can have multiple axes of symmetry as the fourth example demonstrates.)
4. They play nine games at a time (in a 3 x 3 meta-grid, just for fun), and they keep track of the total wins and losses.

$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline O & O & O \\ \hline \end{array}$ Yes	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & O \\ \hline O & O & X \\ \hline X & X & O \\ \hline \end{array}$ Yes	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & X & O \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ Yes	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ Yes	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & O & O \\ \hline O & X & O \\ \hline \end{array}$ No
--	--	--	--	---

On this particular day, *it was a mess!* Samantha totally dominated, *hogging the pen* with all her X's and winning 32 games to Claire's 2! Of course, it helped that out of the 81 coin tosses, it came up heads 55 times!

- The axis of symmetry (or one of the axes) is shown with a dotted line for each 3x3 grid.
- One X (or one O) is filled in for you for each 3x3 grid.
- The small number next to that X or O indicates the # of wins that particular X or O was a part of.
- In the parentheses at the end of each row, column and diagonal is the X and O total number of wins for that row, column or diagonal. For example, (9,1) in the top row indicates that in the three games combined in that row, X had nine wins and O had just one.
- The large numbers below each set of parentheses represents the total # of X's in that entire row, column or diagonal. For example, the 17 for the top row means that of the 27 total spaces in that row, 17 contain X's and the remaining 10 contain O's.

In the solution grids below, only the X's have been added. All other spaces are filled with O's.

$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline O & O & O \\ \hline \end{array}$ (9,1) 17	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ (11,1) 19	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & & X \\ \hline & & \\ \hline & & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ (12,0) 19
$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ (5,1) 15 (13,0) 20	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ (11,0) 20	$\begin{array}{ c c c } \hline X & X & X \\ \hline X & O & X \\ \hline X & X & X \\ \hline \end{array}$ (8,2) 15 (14,0) 22

Fill in the rest of the grid to reveal what symbol Samantha used to show the thorough thrashing she had just given Claire.

Using pigpen ("it was a mess," "hogging the pen") code, this spells out the solution:

POUNDSIGN

\$*#&^)\



4. The Ballad of Flo and Ebb!

Claire and Sam were quite fond of ballads. This was one of their favorites:

Good ol' Flo and Ebb were SISTER and brother;
They FOUGHT sometimes but still loved one another.
When Flo asked for FAVORS, which was actually quite often,
Ebb was apt to OBLIGE – his old heart would SOFTEN.
Well, Flo owned an old cabin way down in the VALLEY,
And the towns-PEOPLE knew she was not one to dally.
Three times a week, old Flo'd have to TRAVEL
Down the steep path which had lots of loose GRAVEL
Speeding 'round the rim with her heavy supplies,
She used pack animals. It SHOULD not be a surprise
That Flo had already lost two HORSES and a mule.
So she went up to Ebb: "Ebb, don't think I'm a fool.
Could I BORROW Bob, your burro - I swear I'll be cautious?"
This time Ebb said, "NO! You're MAKING me nauseous...
T H E P A C E Y O U S E T
I S W A Y T O O B R I S K !
S O R R Y F L O , B U T B O B ' S
N O T Y O U R

A	S	S	T	O	R	I	S	K
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

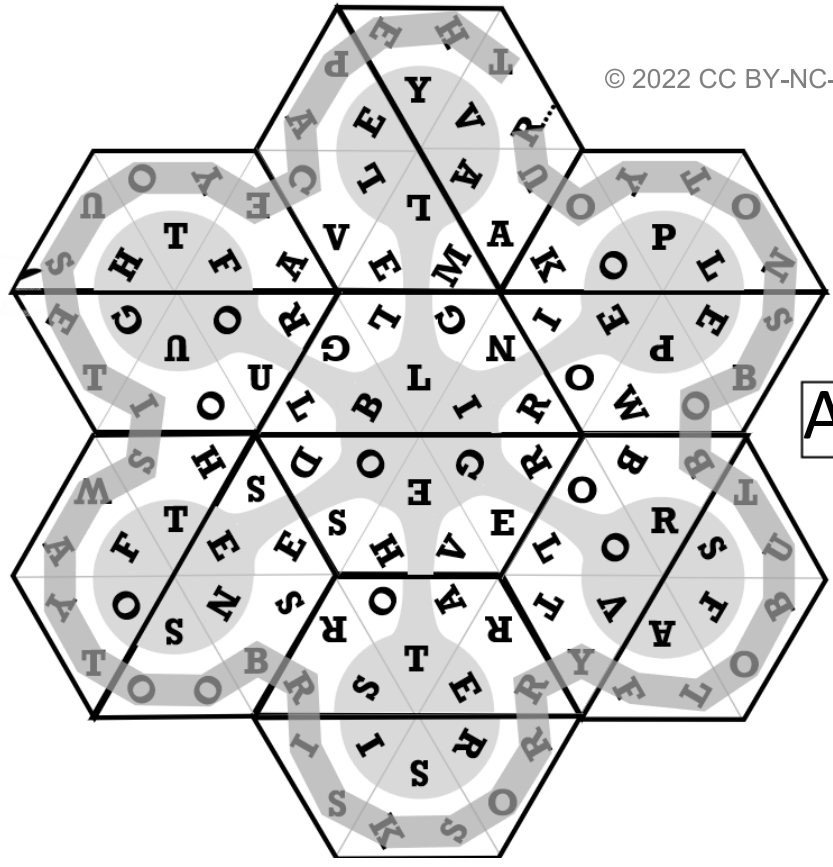
 =

*

!"

The thirteen six letter words are filled in at left. The properly assembled hexagon array is shown below. Note the light gray asterisk that is formed. (The revised version of this puzzle has only the gray circles, but the asterisk should still be evident.) "Round the rim" hints at reading the perimeter of the assembly. Starting at the arrow and highlighted in dark gray is the continuation of the poem: "The pace you set is way too brisk! Sorry Flo, but Bob's not your..." And the trick is to fill in the three final words with "ass to risk." Note, the solution really must be ASSTORISK and not actual name of the special character (ASTERISK). Otherwise solvers could get the answer without reading the perimeter – just by seeing the light gray shape they made.

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ASSTORISK = *

\$*#&^}\

Meta: Best Tag Sale Ever



It looks like Claire is really letting the expletives fly, but she and Samantha have actually just found an amazing tag sale taking place on *Index Avenue*, and Claire is just hinting at the best way (symbolically) to let all their social media friends know about it. What would that be?

\$!++ %/& \<&>#!+ >/!*!>%&* \, %/& +!\% ~*}
#^ %/#\ \&^%&^>& #\ *&!++| ~/&*& #%' \ !%.



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1. Special Connections

A	M	P	E	R	S	A	N	D
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 = & = 4

2. Path to Enlightenment

B	A	C	K	S	L	A	S	H
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 = \ = 8

3. Tic-Tac-Toe... Next Level

P	O	U	N	D	S	I	G	N
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 = # = 7

4. The Ballad of Flo and Ebb

A	S	S	T	O	R	I	S	K
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 = * = 6

The numbers represent the index letter that the special character codes for in the message. For example, & codes for the 4th letter in AMPERSAND = E.

Likewise, \ = S, # = I and * = R.

Once those are filled in, the rest of the message should be discernible:

“OF ALL THE SPECIAL CHARACTERS, THE LAST WORD IN THIS SENTENCE IS REALLY WHERE IT’S AT.”

The answer is the **AT SIGN** = @ (often used to “tag” people on social media).

The other coded letters are:

__ = O \$ = F ! = A + = L % = T / = H
< = P > = C } = D ^ = N | = Y ~ = W

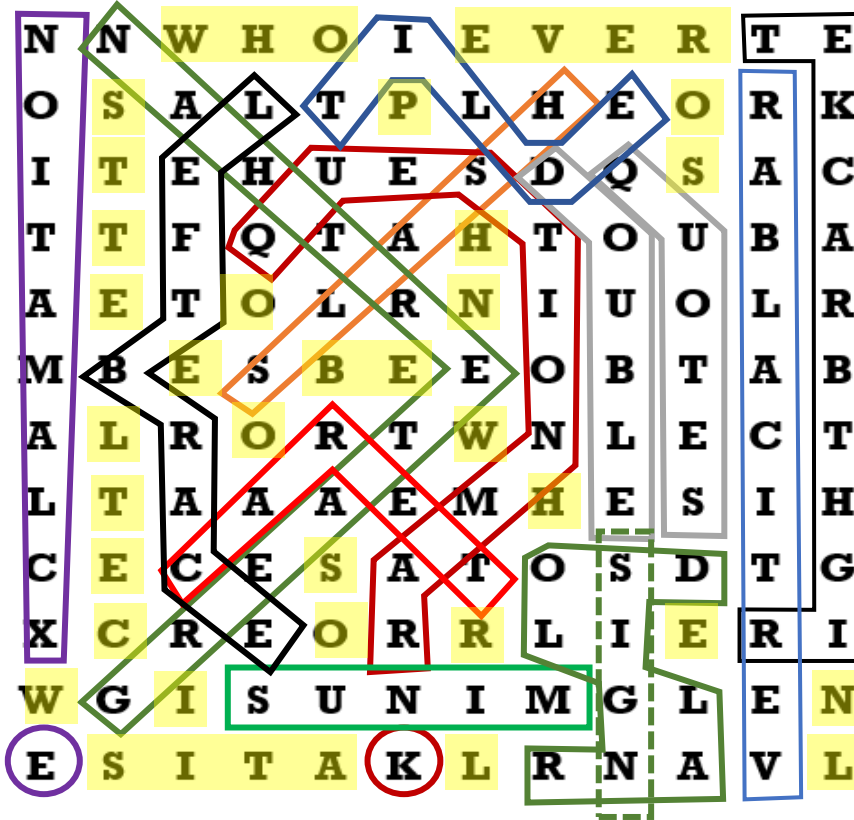
(and if this same code is applied to the word in the speech bubble on the Puzzled Pint logo – in the upper left corner of each page – \$*#&^}\ spells out **FRIENDS**.)

{*#&^}\

Bonus: A Little Friendly Competition



There are twelve special characters to find in the unusual word-search below. Just for fun, write your individual names in the "LEADERBOARD." Then keep a running score to see who finds the most! It's worth emphasizing: this is just for fun! (If you are solving this puzzle by yourself, then just write your name on the board; you have a very good chance of winning!)



- CARET
- DOLLAR SIGN
- DOUBLE QUOTES
- EXCLAMATION
- GREATER THAN
- LEFT BRACE
- MINUS
- QUESTION MARK
- RIGHT BRACKET
- SLASH
- TILDE
- VERTICAL BAR

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So, what special character determined the winner?

UNDERScore

LEADERBOARD	
NAME	SCORE

The special character words are circled above. Reading all the uncircled letters (high-lighted) reads: WHOEVER SPOTS THE ONE BELOW THE SCORE WINS IT ALL." Below the score is this special character known as an underscore!

Get it? Under score!