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bernstein on words

Combining 'ough' is not too tough



By Theodore M. Bernstein

Deep in thought. Recently this rectangle printed an item from a reader who noted various possible pronunciations of the "ough" combination in words such as through and though, for example. Now a London reader, Sir John B. Hall, finds that the previous listing by no means exhausted the possibilities.

He cites four additional words: cought, ought, lough and hough, the last two being pronounced "loch" and "hok." It all goes to show that when it comes to "ough" words there is no drought, nor are we at the bottom of the trough; of such words

there are more than enough.

Word oddities. The word "bodacious," which appears frequently in the comic strip "Snuffy Smith," arouses the curiosity of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin P. Steeble of Elkins Park, Pa., who ask about its meaning and origin.

Candidly, we have not encountered the word, but the American Heritage Dictionary defines it as a slang term meaning intrepidly bold or daring, audacious. It apparently is what your host likes to call a centaur word, in this instance a blend of "bold" and "audacious."

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