



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“Pettifogger (noun):  
1. A petty, quibbling,  
unscrupulous lawyer.  
2. One who quibbles  
over trivia.”***

*-American Heritage Dic-  
tionary of the English  
Language, 4<sup>th</sup> edition,  
2000*

A friend asked me recently if I had ever heard of the Millard Fillmore Trivia Hunt. No, what is it? I asked. Some kind of research contest, using libraries, I was told, and so I decided to find out more.

It turns out this is a yearly contest for schools all over the Peninsula. I found this year’s list of questions and answers, and the rules, which are extensive and seem to cover questions raised in past years. These include such statements as: “A team is prohibited from concealing, moving or damaging library materials to prevent other teams from finding the same information” and “All acceptable documentation must be legible. You may need to check the settings on the copy machine to make sure copies are readable” and “Typographical errors shall not be considered an acceptable argument for awarding credit for an otherwise correct answer.”

The rules also describe what are acceptable and unac-

ceptable sources and I was happy to see that all answers had to come from actual printed materials, as opposed to using on-line databases or the Internet. It is the kind of contest where you have to be able to find particular books and magazines and then find the facts they hold.

The Trivia Hunt consists of questions to be answered and specific items that must be brought in. This year’s contest included thirty question categories and five bring-in items. Some of the categories were: TV Shows - “What was the weekly salary of the bus driver Ralph Kramden on the sit-com *The Honeymooners?* and Numbers: “What is the smallest number evenly divisible by all the digits from 2-9?” Bring-in items included: “A ticket stub or program for an event held in 1954 or earlier - graduation events are excluded” and “Autograph of person born on August 14, 1945. No faxes. Also need proof of birth date - photocopy of driver’s license, “birth certifi-

cate...” I discovered a notice on Craigslist (an online want ad list) looking for someone with this birth date – and the jubilant follow-up listing: “We found someone!”

One of the reasons my friend knew I would be interested in this contest was because I have been talking about what is called in library school “information literacy.” Basically, this means: Can you find the correct information you need? According to a presentation I heard, more and more college students are entering college without basic research skills and with a heavy reliance on the use of the Internet. Some schools are trying to remedy this problem; for instance, the Albany Middle School assigns an “I-Search” for the 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. Around this time every year we get students (and sometimes their parents) coming to the reference desk and asking questions like: Can you help me find a book on an-

imal testing or immigrant rights or ice cream? After a few, we all realize it is not just a group of curious teens but I-Search time again.

I’m glad the middle school does this, and I hope that each time I write down a call number and then demonstrate how it is used, that lesson will be remembered and that person will approach their next research assignment with an expanded idea of where information can be found.

This week’s book review is from Grey and the book is Robert Walser’s *Jakob Von Gunten*. Grey says this book is about “a boy who goes to a boarding school for butlers.” She recommends it because “It’s different from anything you’ll ever read; the plot is weird, but the writing is everything.”