

Phraseology

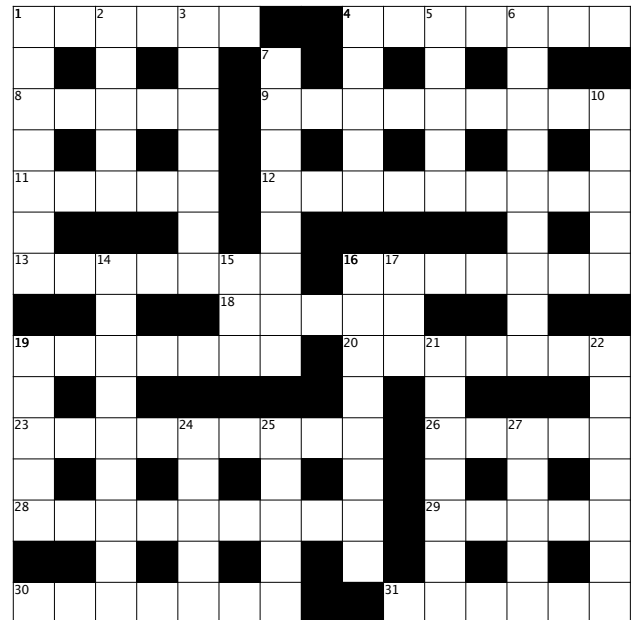
PUZZLES ARE A GOOD DISTRACTION DURING THE COVID QUARANTINE. We're ten months in, as I write this. The solution to this puzzle involves a three-word phrase, which you will need in order to arrive at a completed grid. If you find the phrase helpful otherwise, that would be a plus!

Each of the across clues leads to an answer that's one letter short. For the grid, you'll need to borrow a letter from the three-word phrase to make a new word. There is no reordering; the first letter of the phrase is added to the first across answer, the second letter to the second across answer, and so on. There is also no reordering going from answer to grid entry, just a simple insertion of the additional letter.

Including both sets of across words and all the down answers, there are six proper nouns and two more words that don't have to be proper nouns but are as clued. There is one hyphenated entry. Unusual words occur at 15D and 22D. Everything else is playable in Scrabble. Ignore punctuation, which is intended to confuse. Thanks to Bob Fink, Eric Klis, and Jerry Miccolis for test-solving and editorial suggestions.

ACROSS

1. Mandibles found in research insects
4. Broken rattle might be a second choice
8. Man-to-man alternative offered by unknown person
9. Smallest teen's tie is knotted
11. Those opposed to prisoners
12. Order pa's new medicine
13. Senators erupting at Mexican men
16. Counts Whoppers twice?
18. Except from the get-go those having antagonistic natures
19. Produces formidable bacteriophages on the carapace
20. They masquerade as alien spores
23. Erratic reversal by Penelope and some others
26. Calculate speed
28. Mis-adjusted, you said? And others shot back, "Fake"?
29. Nobelist treating griddle oddly
30. Angels playing positions
31. Struts all over the place with entitlement



DOWN

1. User data on wafers
2. Nightclub with a square energy
3. "Can't help but" denotes out-of-control (5, 2)
4. Michelangelo's work made by hollowing out Piedmont terracotta
5. So much melancholy for Mideast ruler
6. Going in there, Lou visited briefly a Paris attraction (3, 6)
7. Stats sit uncomfortably with those who believe in a strong central government
10. What big teeth displayed by Tuscaloosa's razorbacks!
14. Community receives arrangement of yarn
15. Starting a measure late on "Free Bird"
16. A speeder recklessly becomes a source of oil
17. Ideal lover turned record producer
19. Feats ordered by weavers
21. Recording artist takes a sip of whiskey from someone for whom one is never enough
22. Sit around constantly with a dose of radiation
24. Fundamentally, Elaine qualifies as nonpartisan
25. Tests, but none before noon!
27. Celia thrown by tart girl

Phrase: _____

TOM TOCE is a senior manager for actuarial services with Ernst & Young in New York and is a member of the Jeopardy Hall of Fame. Solutions may be emailed to him at ttoce@nyc.rr.com. In order to make the solver list, your solutions must be received by January 31, 2021.