

SAN ANTONIO TALK

All right pretend you're a kid again. Or look out the window at the kids who are kids now. Here's the situation: the kids are walking down the street and come to a playground. Instead of walking all the way to the corner and then turning (keeping on the sidewalk, you see, like responsible adults), the kids decide to cut diagonally across the playground.

What do you call that diagonal cut? I mean, if you're a kid or thinking like a kid, what would you call it? (Only adults and show-off kids would say "walking diagonally.")

The majority of native Texas kids would say *catty-cornered* as in "Those kids are walkin' *catty-cornered* 'cross that playground."

A token number would substitute "...wampus." They're cuttin' *catty-wampus*."

A significant number of Texans, albeit a minority, prefer *antigodlin*: "Look at 'em *antigodlin* 'cross that lot." (Some would say *antigoglin* instead.)

A fourth alternative, albeit another token one, would say *anglin'*: "Yep. They're *anglin'* 'cross the grounds."

So. What kind of Texan are you? A catty-corner one, a catty-wampus one, an *antigodlin*, *antigoglin*, or an *anglin* one?

Hey, look. I know you're all *diagonal* Texans. I was referring to the kid in you. What kind of kid were you? Are you?

I don't know what to say to you *antigodling*, *antigogling*, *angling* or *wampus* types. But I wish to salute those of you who like catty-corners. You guys and gals know your English well. A certain

type of English anyway. The gambling kind.

People liked to gamble, you see, even in Middle English days. During those days, roughly from 1100 to 1500, the English gambling language had a special word for the number *four*, whether that number showed up on playing cards or upon dice. That word was *cater*, pronounced KAYder.

Even in Middle English times, English speakers extended the word *cater* into the everyday world. They were the one who combined *cater* with *corner*. A middle English building, for example might be diagonally across the street, on a corner. Middle English folk would say the building was "*cater-corner* across the street"--or *cater-cornered*.

Cater is now archaic or obsolete--except in our phrase of the day: *cater corner*. The pronunciation for *cater*, has now changed, though. Now we say *CATER*. You know: "Those crazy kids are walking *CATty-cornered*."

Now one reason I salute those of you who say *catty-corner* is that you know English better than some folks who live up north--up north as in places like Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. I don't want to be *catty* about this, but those folks misunderstood the vowel change that changed *KAYter-corner* to *CATuh-corner*. As a result they thought *Cater* meant *Catty* meant *Kitty*! So, they still say *kitty-corner*! Imagine!

-#-

Scott Baird
7/15/95