



The Poople Field Guide

How the daily word ladder works, and five real puzzles
that teach it.

One rule, and a dictionary that is smaller than it looks

Poople gives you one four-letter word each day. Change a single letter at a time until you reach POOP. Every word along the way has to be a real word.

That is the whole game, and it takes about a minute. What takes longer to learn is the shape of the board you are actually playing on: 2,398 words, connected to each other by single-letter swaps, funnelling down to one destination. Nobody tells you that only eleven words touch POOP, or that on most days at least one of the moves in front of you is worse than doing nothing.

Everything here is computed, not estimated. The figures come from the game's own dictionary and its pool of 1,137 daily start words. Where a number appears, it was counted.

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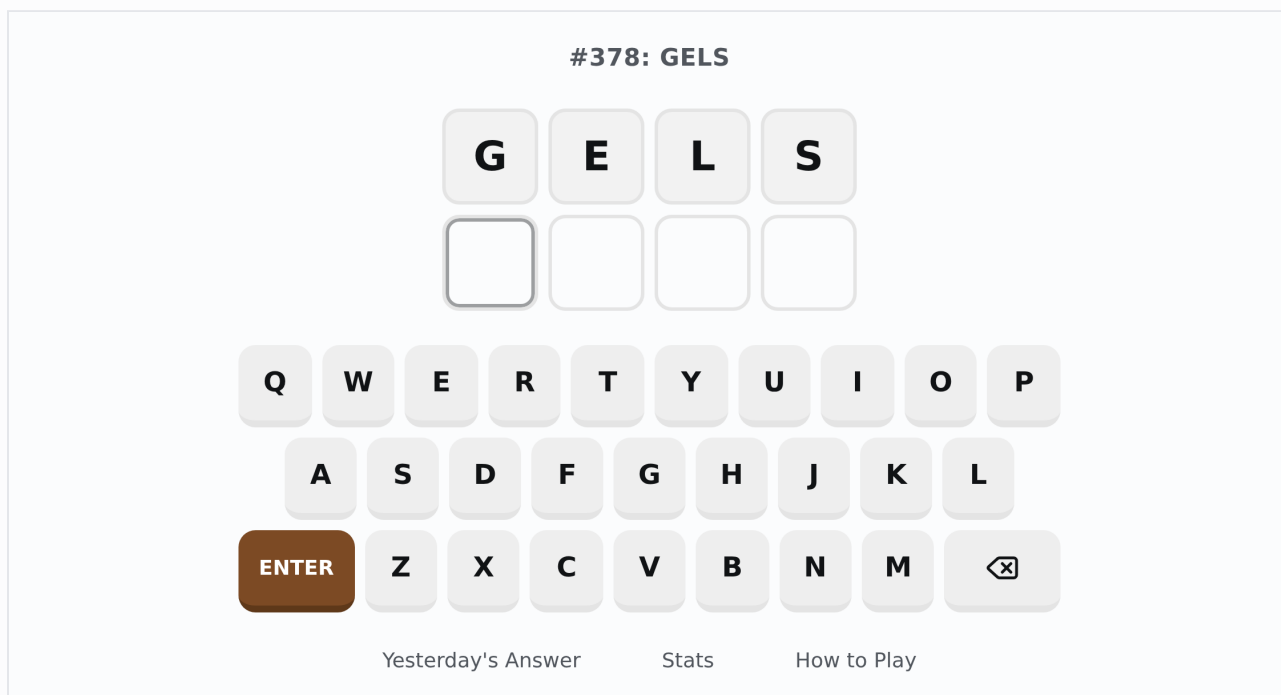
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The rules

Three things are on screen and nothing else: the puzzle number and its start word, the ladder you are building, and a keyboard.



Puzzle #378, before the first move. The start word is locked in the top row and the empty row below it is where you type.

You type a four-letter word and press Enter. If it is a real word and it differs from the row above by exactly one letter, it locks in and a new empty row opens underneath.

Change one letter. Land on a real word. Both halves have to hold at once.

GELS to GELD is legal. GELS to GOLD is not, because that changes two letters, even though GOLD is a perfectly good word.

There is no limit on how many words you may use. You can wander for twenty moves and still finish. What the game measures is how close you came to **par**, the shortest number of moves that exists for your start word. Par is not a guess: it is computed by searching the entire dictionary, so the game always knows the best possible answer before you start.

Brown means the letter is home

When a tile turns brown, that letter already matches POOP in that exact position. Brown tiles are progress you can see, and they are also worth a warning: a word can be covered in brown and still be a long way from home. Brown tracks letters, and the game measures moves.



The O in GOLD is brown because POOP has an O in slot two. Above the board, the response to a word that is not in the dictionary.

Getting it wrong costs nothing

Submit something that is not in the dictionary and you get **Not in word list**, the row shakes, and it clears. Submit a real word that changes two letters at once and the same thing happens. Nothing is lost except the couple of seconds it took to type.

The share grid gives away the shape, not the words

Finish and the game hands you a square for every letter you typed. Each row is one of your words, and brown marks the letters that were already in place. It shows how your solve went and none of the words you used, which is what makes it safe to post while the puzzle is still live.

Poople #372 5/5

<https://pooplegame.com/>

 **Filled** this letter already matched POOP

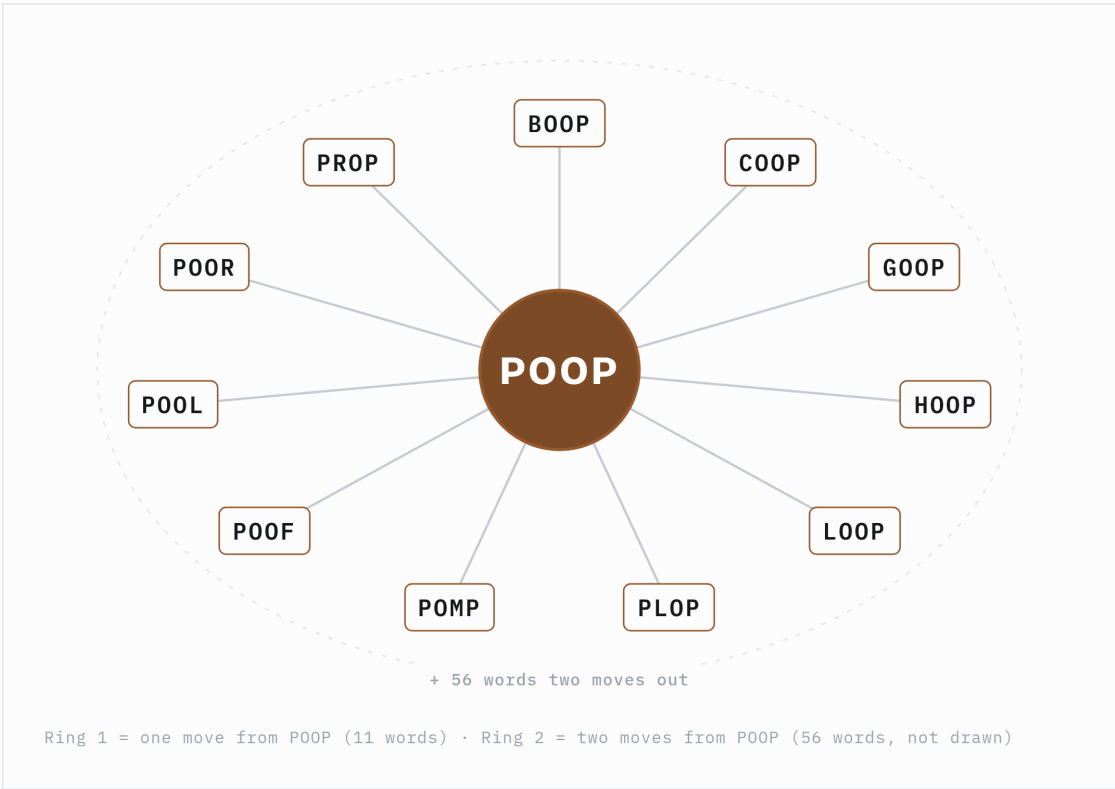
 **Empty** this letter still had to change

Six rows means six words were used,
and 5/5 means that matched par.

The block of text a finished puzzle puts on your clipboard, here for puzzle #372.

Every solve ends in the same eleven words

Exactly eleven words in the whole dictionary sit one move from POOP. Fifty-six sit two moves out. Your last move is always one of those eleven, on every puzzle, forever.



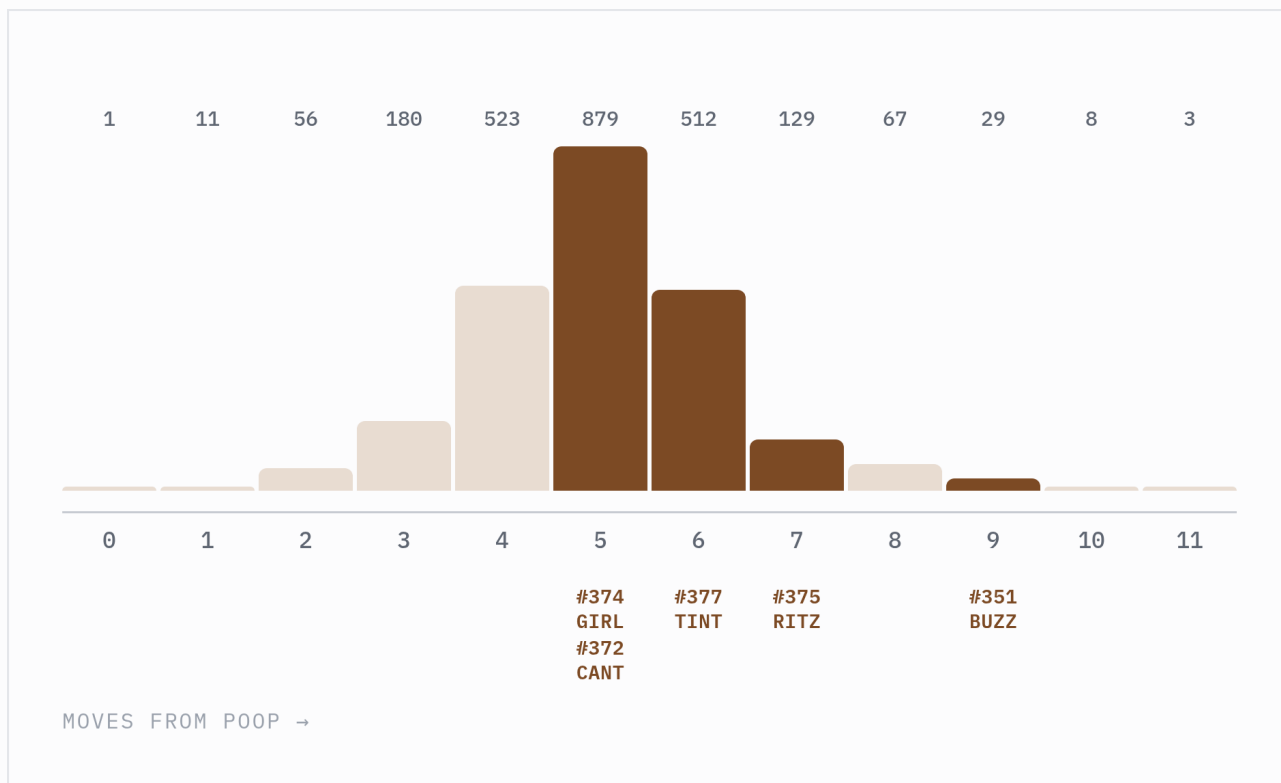
Memorising this ring pays for itself faster than anything else in the game, because it turns an open search into a target. You are not looking for POOP. You are looking for the nearest door into this ring.

Three of those doors carry most of the traffic. Counting every puzzle where a word lies on at least one shortest route:

WORD	DAYS OF 377	MOVES FROM POOP
BOOP	167	1
COOP	157	1
POMP	144	1
POME	112	2
POOL	107	1
HOOP	103	1
LOOP	96	1
BOOS	89	2

Most words are five moves out

The dictionary is not spread evenly. Distance five holds 879 words, more than any other. Distance nine holds 29, distance ten holds 8, and distance eleven holds 3.



That shape explains what a hard puzzle is. Each day's start word is drawn from a pool of 1,137, and the pool inherits the same lopsidedness.

PAR	START WORDS	SHARE OF POOL	RATED
5	634	55.8%	Easy
6	376	33.1%	Medium
7	66	5.8%	Medium
8	41	3.6%	Hard
9	16	1.4%	Hard
10	3	0.3%	Hard
11	1	0.1%	Hard

A par 5 puzzle is the ordinary day. A par 9 puzzle turns up roughly once every seventy days. Of the first 377 puzzles, five were par 9 and none were harder.

Every first move does one of three things

The board has no weights, so a single move can only change your distance to POOP by one. That leaves exactly three outcomes, and knowing which one you just picked is most of the game.

KEEPS PAR
still 5 moves

CANS +0CAST +0

COSTS A MOVE
now 6 moves

CANE +1CART +1

COSTS TWO
now 7 moves

CENT +2GANT +2PANT +2RANT +2WANT +2

OUTCOME	WHAT HAPPENED	FINISHING NOW TAKES
Keeps par	One step closer, still on a shortest path	par
Costs a move	Same distance out, nothing broken	par + 1
Costs two	One step further away. A trap word	par + 2

Traps are common. Of the first 377 puzzles, 216 had at least one trap opening, so on most days one of the moves in front of you is actively worse than doing nothing.

There is no fourth case, and there are no dead ends. Every word in the dictionary reaches POOP eventually, so no move can ever strand you.

What looks like a dead end is a bottleneck. NUMB has exactly one neighbour, DUMB, which feels like a cliff edge. It is five moves from POOP, the same as an average start word.

Hubs, bottlenecks, and four habits

Some words are junctions and some are corridors. The widest words in the dictionary have 23 to 25 neighbours each, and a route through one leaves you the most ways out. Ninety-nine words sit at the opposite end with a single neighbour each. Landing on one is not fatal, it just means your next move is chosen for you.

HUB	NEIGHBOURSHUB	NEIGHBOURS
WARE	25BOBS	23
PAPS	25CAPS	23
PATS	25CORE	23
CARE	24CARS	23

BOBS is the classic hub: it reaches POOP in three moves through BOOS and BOOP, and it connects to 23 words, so it is easy to reach from almost anywhere in the S-ending part of the dictionary. POME is the word worth learning early. It is a real word, a fleshy fruit with a core such as an apple, it sits two moves out, and players who have never met it lose moves on every puzzle that routes through it.

The four habits that follow

- 1 Work backwards.** Start from the eleven finish words and ask which one your start word is closest to. Solving forwards means searching the whole dictionary. Solving backwards means searching eleven words.
- 2 Move the vowel.** Vowel swaps open the most doors, and the OO family is where every solution ends up.
- 3 Get the P first when you can.** Once the first letter is P you are usually inside the last three moves.
- 4 Distrust the rhyme.** Changing the first letter feels natural because it makes a rhyme. Rhymes keep the last three letters fixed, and those are the letters POOP cares about.

#374 GIRL: one way up

DATE	PAR	RATED	FIRST MOVES	SHORTEST ROUTES
Aug 23, 2026	5	Easy	2	1

GIRL is the smallest complete lesson in the game. It touches exactly two words in the entire dictionary: GILL and GIRD. GILL is four moves from POOP. GIRD is five, the same as GIRL itself, so it burns a move and gives nothing back. That single fork decides the puzzle.

start	G	I	R	L	
1	G	I	L	L	MOVE 1 Two legal moves exist. Only this one shortens the distance.
2	P	I	L	L	MOVE 2 The first P lands. From here every word starts with P.
3	P	O	L	L	MOVE 3 Second O in place: three of four letters are already right.
4	P	O	O	L	MOVE 4 One letter from home.
5	P	O	O	P	MOVE 5 Par 5, and the only five-move route there is.

PAR 5 RATED EASY FIRST MOVES 2 SHORTEST ROUTES 1

How to think about it

With two options and no other information, compare them against the finish ring. GILL is one letter from PILL, and PILL is two letters from POOL, which is a door. GIRD leads nowhere near the ring. When a puzzle gives you almost no choices, the choices it does give you are the whole puzzle.

Take GIRL and the rest is forced. This is one of the 81 puzzles in the first 377 with exactly one shortest route, so there is no second-best line to find and nothing to compare.

#372 CANT: the rhymes are all traps

DATE	PAR	RATED	FIRST MOVES	SHORTEST ROUTES
Aug 21, 2026	5	Easy	9	2

CANT has nine neighbours, and the instinct they trigger is to change the first letter. WANT, RANT, PANT and GANT are all right there, all real words, all one keystroke away. Every one of them costs two moves.

The two moves that keep par, CANS and CAST, both change the **last** letter instead. That is the lesson in one line: POOP cares about the ending, and a rhyme is exactly the move that leaves the ending alone.

start	C	A	N	T	
1	C	A	S	T	MOVE 1 Change the last letter, not the first. Distance drops to 4.
2	C	O	S	T	MOVE 2 The vowel swap that opens the OO family.
3	C	O	O	T	MOVE 3 Both Os in place.
4	C	O	O	P	MOVE 4 On the finish ring.
5	P	O	O	P	MOVE 5 Par 5. One of exactly two shortest routes.

PAR 5 RATED EASY FIRST MOVES 9 SHORTEST ROUTES 2

How to think about it

Ask what the finish ring needs, which is a double O and a P. CANT already has the C that COOP wants. Changing T to S gives CANS, changing N to O gives CONS, and you are two moves from the ring.

The rhymes feel productive because the word keeps sounding like a word. Sounding right and moving right are different things.

Full solution and word definitions: pooplegame.com/answer/372-cant

#377 TINT: no wrong turns, only slow ones

DATE	PAR	RATED	FIRST MOVES	SHORTEST ROUTES
Aug 26, 2026	6	Medium	12	18

TINT is the opposite of CANT. Not one of its twelve neighbours is a trap: six keep par and six cost a single move. There are eighteen different six-move solutions, and no way to go badly wrong.



The map shows the shape of a well-connected puzzle. It widens to eleven possible words at step three, then collapses. That collapse is the finish ring doing its work: however wide the middle gets, everything has to come back through those eleven doors.

start	T	I	N	T	
1	H	I	N	T	MOVE 1 Any of six openings keeps par. This is one.
2	H	I	L	T	MOVE 2 Set up the L so the vowel can move next.
3	H	O	L	T	MOVE 3 The O arrives.
4	H	O	O	T	MOVE 4 Second O in place, two letters from home.
5	H	O	O	P	MOVE 5 On the finish ring.
6	P	O	O	P	MOVE 6 Par 6, and 17 other routes would also have worked.

PAR **6** RATED **MEDIUM** FIRST MOVES **12** SHORTEST ROUTES **18**

How to think about it

On a puzzle this open, stop searching for the best route and take the first one you can see all the way to the end. Eighteen routes are tied for shortest, so the time you spend comparing them is the only thing that can cost you anything.

TINT to HINT to HILT to HOLT to HOOT to HOOP is one line. TINT to TINS to TONS to CONS to COOS to COOP is another. They score the same, and so do sixteen more.

This is the puzzle that teaches the difference between playing well and playing slowly. A player who knows the finish ring commits in a few seconds. A player who does not will keep second-guessing a decision that has no wrong answer.

#375 RITZ: a locked door, then a wide room

DATE	PAR	RATED	FIRST MOVES	SHORTEST ROUTES
Aug 24, 2026	7	Medium	2	33

A Z on the end is a wall. RITZ has two neighbours: RITE, which keeps par, and DITZ, which costs two. The puzzle opens with a coin flip where one side is wrong. Then RITE turns out to have seventeen neighbours and the room opens up completely, into 33 different seven-move solutions.

start

RITZ

1

RITE

MOVE 1 The only move that helps. DITZ, the alternative, costs two.

2

BITE

MOVE 2 RITE reaches 17 words. The gate is open.

3

BITS

MOVE 3 Switch to the S ending that feeds the OO family.

4

BOTS

MOVE 4 The first O.

5

BOOS

MOVE 5 Both Os in place.

6

BOOP

MOVE 6 On the finish ring.

7

POOP

MOVE 7 Par 7, one of 33 equally short lines.

PAR 7

RATED MEDIUM

FIRST MOVES 2

SHORTEST ROUTES 33

How to think about it

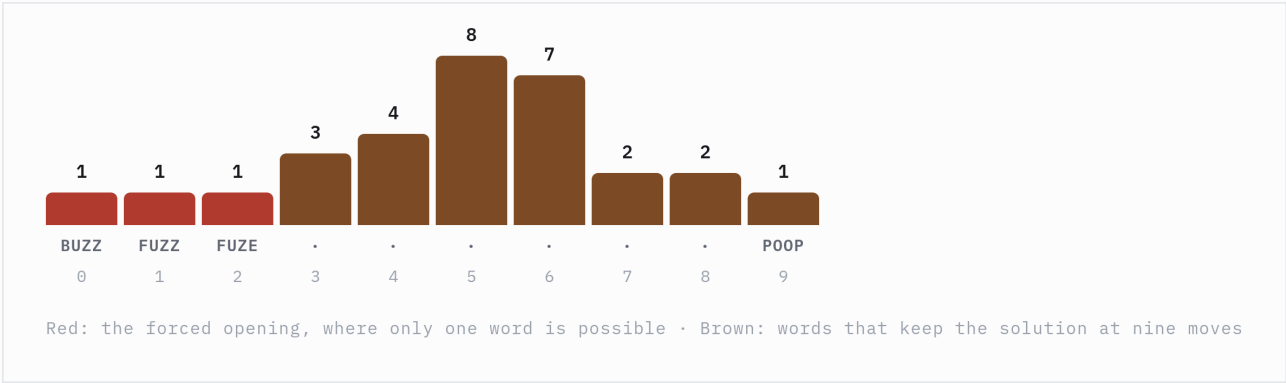
A rare letter (Z, Q, X, J) is almost always the first thing to remove, because it is the thing limiting you.

Do not try to plan the whole ladder from RITZ. You cannot see far enough to plan from a word with two neighbours. Clear the Z, then look again from a word that can actually see the board.

#351 BUZZ: the longest walk on the board

DATE	PAR	RATED	FIRST MOVES	SHORTEST ROUTES
Jul 31, 2026	9	Hard	1	21

Par 9 landed five times in the first 377 puzzles. BUZZ is one of them, and it has the most intimidating opening in the game: exactly one legal move exists, and then FUZZ has only one useful continuation as well.



Three moves in and you have made no decisions at all. Then FUZE opens onto FAZE, FUME and FUSE, the count peaks at eight, and the puzzle becomes ordinary.

start	B	U	Z	Z	
1	F	U	Z	Z	MOVE 1 The only legal move on the board.
2	F	U	Z	E	MOVE 2 Still forced. FUZE is the sole continuation.
3	F	A	Z	E	MOVE 3 First choice of the puzzle: FAZE, FUME or FUSE.
4	D	A	Z	E	MOVE 4 Walk the vowel down the AZE family.
5	D	O	Z	E	MOVE 5 The Z finally leaves.
6	D	O	M	E	MOVE 6 M replaces Z and the word turns ordinary again.
7	P	O	M	E	MOVE 7 The P arrives with two moves to spare.
8	P	O	M	P	MOVE 8 Both Os are still missing. This is the last hard step.
9	P	O	O	P	MOVE 9 Par 9. Only 21 routes on the whole board are this long.

PAR 9 RATED **HARD** FIRST MOVES 1 SHORTEST ROUTES 21

How to think about it

The hard part is trusting the forced opening. A player who does not know FUZE exists will sit on FUZZ convinced they have made a mistake, when the board has simply not given them a choice yet. Type the only move available and keep going. Nine moves is what this puzzle costs.

The middle of the ladder is a vowel walk: FAZE, DAZE, DOZE, DOME. Four moves that each change one letter in a word ending the same way. That pattern is what long ladders are made of, and it is the thing to look for whenever a puzzle stops being about clever single moves.

REFERENCE

Keep this page

The eleven words one move from POOP

BOOP COOP GOOP HOOP LOOP PLOP
POMP POOF POOL POOR PROP

Difficulty bands

PAR	RATED	HOW OFTEN
5 or less	Easy	More than half of all puzzles
6 to 7	Medium	About two days in five
8 or more	Hard	About one day in twenty

The hardest start word in the pool is par 11. It has not come up yet in the first 377 puzzles.

Where to play

Today's puzzle	pooplegame.com
Unlimited practice	pooplegame.com/unlimited
Every past answer	pooplegame.com/answer
Word ladder solver	pooplegame.com/word-ladder-solver
Strategy guide	pooplegame.com/guide

About the numbers in this guide. Every figure and table was computed from the game's own dictionary of 2,398 four-letter words and its pool of 1,137 daily start words, covering puzzles #1 to #377. The five solutions shown are the ones published on each puzzle's answer page.

Poople is free, needs no account, and runs in any browser.
A new puzzle unlocks every day at 08:00 UTC.