

OPINION

The Best Sentences of 2024

Dec. 26, 2024, 12:00 p.m. ET



Jamie Lee Taete for The New York Times



By [Frank Bruni](#)

Mr. Bruni is a contributing Opinion writer who was on the staff of The Times for more than 25 years.

This year more than usual, those of you who wrote to me asked where you should find hope. Where you should find joy. Where, at a minimum, you should find a reprieve.

In language. That's one of my answers. To read what some of the most talented writers can do is to be reassured of human ingenuity, human sensitivity, human spark. We're a cunning and capable species, even if we spend much of our time (and many of our elections) trying to prove otherwise.

As I reviewed the passages of journalism featured in the For the Love of Sentences section of my [Times Opinion newsletter](#) in 2024 so that I could showcase anew (and put a holiday-season bow on) some of the best ones, I had my faith in humanity restored. Well, somewhat. I smiled. I laughed. I also cursed a few of the authors for a verbal wizardry denied most of us mortals, but it was an appreciative cursing. It was envy alchemized into glee. And paired with gratitude to the newsletter readers who spotted and submitted these gems and so many others. Thank you very much.

Without further ado, here they are: words worth revisiting. Words worth keeping. Their forebears appeared in the [Best Sentences of 2023](#). I'll start rounding up their descendants in 2025. Meantime, happy reading — and Happy New Year.



Credit...Will Matsuda for The New York Times

Donald Trump vs. Kamala Harris

In his newsletter, Sam Harris [marveled](#), back in early July, at the reluctance of President Biden and his closest advisers to end his re-election campaign: “They are not merely courting disaster now — they are having tantric sex with it.”

In The Atlantic, Charles Sykes [analyzed](#) Democrats’ subsequent embrace of the vice president as their nominee: “Harris is far from their first choice, but when your kitchen is in flames, you reach for whatever extinguisher is at hand. You can worry later about washing the dishes or whether you need a new garbage disposal.”

In The Washington Post, Kate Cohen [theorized](#) why there was less talk about Kamala Harris potentially shattering the highest glass ceiling than there had been about Hillary Clinton’s chances of that in 2016: “This time, we’re quiet — from superstition, maybe, or from knowing how hope can plant a land mine in your heart.”

Also in The Washington Post, Robin Givhan [rued](#) the Democratic consensus that Harris, a Black woman, needed to balance the Democratic ticket with a white man: “When will America be ready to wade into the deep end of diversity without kickboards and floaties?”

In The Star Tribune of Minneapolis, in advance of Harris’s veep pick, Sheletta Brundidge [reflected](#) on an unusual challenge confronting whichever finalist would end up in the winner’s circle: “Being strategically invisible or staying in the background will require a humility that many white men have never had to demonstrate. She’s going to be Gladys Knight; he will be a Pip.”

In The New Yorker, Anthony Lane [studied](#) Donald Trump’s bearing and mien as he listened to tributes at the Republican National Convention: “Occasionally, he stood to applaud, but most of the time he was pleased to wear an expression of froggy beatitude — a soft wide grin, ascending far above smugness to achieve a kind of gratified peace. Thus would a medieval liege lord have accepted obeisance from his vassals; all that was missing was the flicker of torchlight and the haunch of venison turning on its spit.”

In The Washington Post, Matt Bai [traced](#) JD Vance’s boundless sycophancy, including his appearance at Trump’s Manhattan trial: “I can’t say from experience how you’re supposed to know when you’ve officially become part of an organized crime family, but if you feel it necessary for your professional

advancement to show up at a courthouse and pay respect to a patriarch charged with fraudulent payments to a porn star, chances are you check all the boxes.”

In The Times, Maureen Dowd [took issue](#) with the Republican ticket’s chauvinism: “As a cat-loving, cosmopolitan type myself, I do not want Trump and Vance making intimate decisions for American women or judging us or disparaging us for our lives — all nine of them.”

In The Atlantic, Helen Lewis [tracked](#) Vance’s performance as a running mate and noted the wan reception to a joke he made about liberals probably finding his consumption of Diet Mountain Dew racist: “The room did not go wild. It went semidomesticated at best.”

In The Baltimore Sun, Dan Rodricks [explained](#) the absence of any encore to the presidential candidates’ onstage encounter: “Donald Trump saying he won’t debate Kamala Harris a second time is like the Thanksgiving turkey saying he won’t be available for Christmas dinner.”

At Defector, David Roth [recapped](#) The Washington Post’s interviews with Trump rallygoers who weren’t staying for the whole show: “Some of the people The Post spoke to left because they were sick of ‘the insults,’ which feels a bit like storming out of a steakhouse dinner just before dessert because you don’t eat meat.”



Credit...Damon Winter/The New York Times

Donald Trump vs. the World

In The New Yorker, Benjamin Wallace-Wells [took stock](#) of Trump's behavior in the face of defamation charges by E. Jean Carroll: "Trump wasn't required to appear at the Carroll trial at all. But he found it politically advantageous to be there, not so much menacing the courtroom as Dennis-the-Menacing it."

In The Toronto Star, Vinay Menon [appraised](#) the MAGA king's hold on his subjects: "If Trump told his supporters Bigfoot just swiped his wallet outside a Burger King, millions of red hats would pile into jeeps and fan out across the Pacific Northwest with flashlights and shotguns. If Trump asked Marjorie Taylor Greene to surgically remove her arms and legs, her torso would be glued to a skateboard as she somehow still put her foot in her mouth."

In The Dispatch, Kevin Williamson [mulled](#) "The Anti-Americanism of Donald Trump": "Trump is a funny kind of patriot. He *loves* America — except for the cities, the people who live in the cities, about half of the states, the universities, professional sports leagues, Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Wall Street, the legal system, immigrants, the culture."

On the electoral-vote.com website, Christopher Bates [bemoaned](#) the absence of any discernible sense of humor in the monarch of Mar-a-Lago: "Trump couldn't make a joke if you spotted him a chicken and a road."

In USA Today, Rex Huppke [reviewed](#) the shimmering gold sneakers that Trump branded and brandished: "They're the go-to athletic shoe for people fleeing responsibility."

In a Times Opinion conversation with Gail Collins, Bret Stephens [skewered](#) the social media site affiliated with Trump: "I take it you're referring to Truth Social, which in an honest world would be renamed Lies Sociopathic."

In The Washington Post, Dana Milbank [questioned](#) Trump's likening of himself to Nelson Mandela: "Trump should stick with the Mandela comparison. After all, the similarities are uncanny! Mandela led the African National Congress. Trump led white nationalists to attack Congress. Mandela did 18 years of hard labor on Robben Island. Trump made the hard decisions for 14 seasons on 'The Apprentice.' Mandela won the Nobel Peace Prize with F.W. de Klerk for abolishing apartheid. Trump won both the Club Championship trophy and Senior Club Championship trophy at Trump International Golf Club."

Other Political Puzzles

In The Washington Post, Ron Charles [reviewed](#) Kristi Noem's maligned memoir, "No Going Back": "Far too many people have been obsessing about Noem's fantastical tête-à-tête with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. Come on — who among us hasn't mistakenly believed that we once faced down the leader of the Hermit Kingdom? As I told Joseph Stalin, 'We all make mistakes.'"

Also in The Post, Monica Hesse [examined](#) Senator Kyrsten Sinema's costumed adventures in the capital: "Washington is very accustomed to empty suits. It's less accustomed to empty batwing dresses."

And Casey Cep [recounted](#) the dynamic public-service career of Ronald E. Walters, pausing at one juncture: "Walters was principal deputy under secretary for memorial affairs — an incomprehensible collection of nouns parading as adjectives, but Walters was all verb."

In USA Today, Rex Huppke [examined](#) the folly and failure of Marjorie Taylor Greene's unsuccessful attempt to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson: "Like a dull-witted Icarus, she has now flown too close to the dumb."

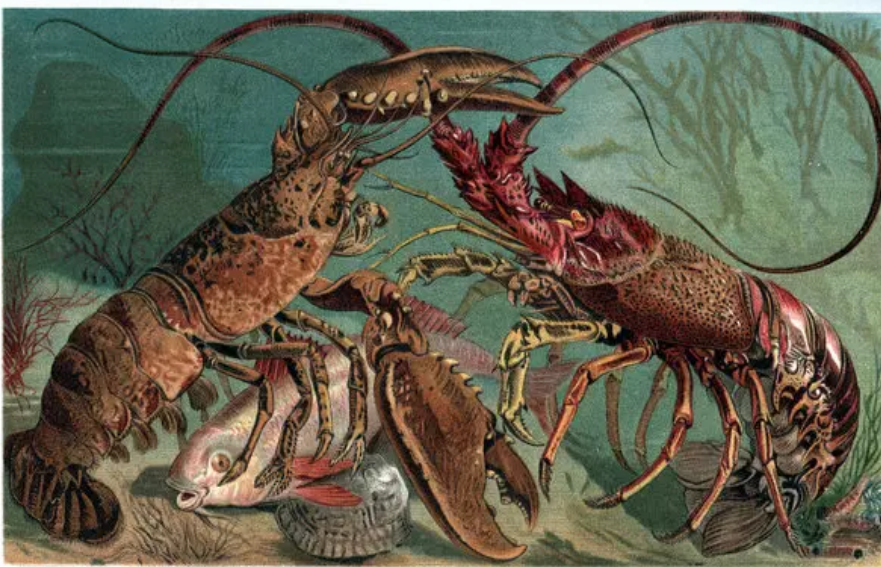
In The Bulwark, Andrew Egger [assessed](#) the House speaker's pitiable and futile task of trying to clean up Trump's hateful messaging about immigrants: "Trump is an industrial plant pumping sewage into a river; Mike Johnson is downstream with a kitchen strainer."

In The New Yorker, Adam Gopnik [identified](#) the fundamental flaw in a mob's rationale: "When you are 'taking democracy into your own hands,' what you have in your hands is not democracy, because democracy begins with the recognition that other people have hands, too."

In his newsletter, Everyone Is Entitled to My Own Opinion, Jeff Tiedrich [reveled](#) in the G.O.P.'s reckless decision to choose an inadequately vetted right-wing extremist as its nominee for North Carolina governor: "Sorry, Republicans, it looks like you're going to be forced to carry Mark Robinson to term — even if doing so endangers the life of your party."

In The Times, Paul Krugman [compared](#) the welfare of Europeans with that of Americans: "It should count for something that there's a growing gap between European and U.S. life expectancy, since the quality of life is generally higher if you aren't dead."

In The Philadelphia Inquirer, Will Bunch [honored](#) the six construction workers, all immigrants from Latin America, killed in the Baltimore bridge collapse: “They were doing a backbreaking job at a wretched hour, one many other Americans simply can’t or won’t do — all so their neighbors could drive safely to their warm, comfortable office cubicles in the dawn’s early light.”



Credit...Stefano Bianchetti/Getty Images

The Hunger Games

In The News & Observer of Raleigh, N.C., Bill Church [took friendly issue](#) with another journalist’s characterization of a meaty local fast-food chain that Biden visited on a trip to North Carolina: “A pool reporter described Cook Out as ‘a small eatery known for its shakes.’ That’s like describing the U.N.C.-Duke basketball rivalry as a ‘boutique indoor activity matching friendly neighbors in a vigorous board game involving crafts such as hoops and nets.’”

In The Guardian, Jay Rayner visited Public House, a new restaurant in Paris, and [savaged](#) a lobster pie that was light on lobster: “We push vegetables aside in desperate search of tail meat. It’s ‘Finding Nemo,’ only without a redemption arc.”

In The Times, Priya Krishna [poked fun](#) at the crustacean pretensions of the restaurant Carbone in Manhattan: “Servers boasted about how the langoustines — dressed in garlic, parsley, lemon and butter, with a subtle, briny undertow — had flown first-class from Norway that morning. The less exciting shrimp cocktail may have gotten stuck in economy.”

Also in The Times, Pete Wells [took righteous issue](#) with that infernal annual inventory of what are supposedly the premier dining establishments on the planet: “They are not restaurants, or not just restaurants. They are endurance tests, theatrical spectacles, monuments to ego and — the two most frightening words in dining — ‘immersive experiences.’ Whether the World’s 50 Best seeks out these spectacular spectaculars or has simply been hijacked by them is impossible to tell. The list’s website is a model that should be studied by anyone who wants to arrange words that sound important and don’t mean anything.”

And Lisa Donovan in The Times [hailed](#) pimento cheese as “a kind of grand and final submission to the mayonnaise gods.”

In The New Yorker, Leslie Jamison [found](#), in her kitchen, a metaphor for her marriage. “Our fridge was full of rotting aspirations: the salad-bound cucumber, now leaking brown fluid; the forgotten, softening strawberries; the marinara sauce furred with mold,” she wrote.

That’s Entertainment!

In The New Yorker, Justin Chang [summarized](#) key plot developments in “Twisters,” a cyclone-minded action movie: “A car bearing two unlucky (if not terribly sympathetic) passengers gets sucked up into the sky. We don’t see their fate, but we can assume they’re toast — or, rather, funnel cake.”

Chang separately [reflected](#) on how quizzically “Dune: Part Two” begins: “While the screen is black, a heavily distorted voice hisses something that we recognize as words only by the grace of subtitles: ‘Power over spice is power over all.’ The rare newbie to the Dune-iverse may be confused: Is this a story of cumin bondage?”

Also in The New Yorker, Bruce Handy [detailed](#) the stylist Michelle Côté’s ministrations to give Sebastian Stan, the star of the movie “The Apprentice,” the Trump coiffure: “Stan’s real hair was covered in part by a fake scalp, which was covered in turn by a wig — a tonsorial turducken.”

In Time Out, Adam Feldman [reviewed](#) a Broadway revival of “Cabaret” and questioned Eddie Redmayne’s performance in the role that Joel Grey played in the movie version. “The theory seems to be that increasing the Emcee’s power exponentially will make him more exciting: That energy, if you will, is equal to Emcee squared,” Feldman wrote.

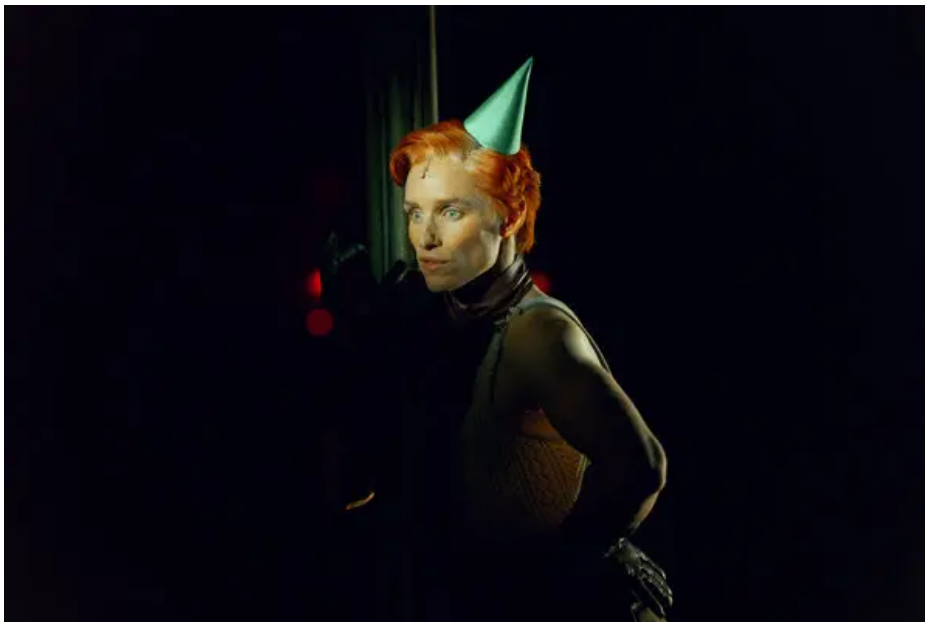
In his newsletter on Substack, Timothy Snyder [justified](#) his mock pitch for a sitcom tweak on “Gilligan’s Island” called “Oligarchs’ Island”: “No matter how dark the evil, there is always a corner for ridicule’s little lantern.”

In The Times, Wesley Morris [evaluated](#) a new music-and-movie extravaganza by Jennifer Lopez in the context of a superior artist: “When Beyoncé explored love-pain, she called her project ‘Lemonade.’ When Lopez does it, heartache becomes cardio, lots of sweating and suffering and boxing and panting and heaving. You admire the shape of her body as much as you mourn her emotional discontent. It’s ‘Lululemonade.’”

Also in The Times, Jason Zinoman [described](#) the particular physicality in the stand-up comedy performances of Richard Lewis, who died in February: “To say he talked with his hands seems insufficient. His whole body never shut up.”

And Jesse Green [reviewed](#) a new Broadway production: “Romantic musicals are as personal as romance itself. What makes you sigh and weep may leave the person next to you bored and stony. At ‘The Notebook,’ I was the person next to you.”

In The Santa Barbara Independent, Zak Klobucher [marveled](#) at one of Bruce Springsteen’s live performances: “He carped so much diem that when he called on the audience, ‘Can you feel the spirit?’ Robin Williams showed up to ask him to take it down a notch.”



Credit...Amir Hamja/The New York Times

Arts & Literature

In The Times, Jason Farago [defended](#) an artistic movement against its detractors: “If you find Monet, Renoir, Degas too pretty and popular — if you think Impressionism is the artistic equivalent of a pumpkin spice latte — I want you to taste the espresso beneath the foam.”

Also in The Times, Amanda Taub [mulled](#) fiction, finance and family: “If Jane Austen made a pretty good case that an economic system reliant on inherited wealth is a bad idea because it might pressure your brilliant daughter to marry her idiotic cousin, Agatha Christie added the compelling argument that the idiotic cousin is probably going to murder you next time you invite him to visit for a long weekend.”

In his newsletter, The Loaf, Tim Kreider [lamented](#) the self-trivialization of onetime titans. “I saw Hunter S. Thompson — once an important writer to me — speak after he’d become a professional Hunter S. Thompson impersonator: He sat onstage holding boozily forth drinking Chivas Regal and whacking things with a rubber squeak-toy mallet,” he wrote. “It was like seeing an animal that once could’ve skwapped your head off with one paw dressed in a tutu and riding a unicycle.”

In Jacobin, Alissa Quart [explored](#) the disappearance or shrinking of many publications: “Pitchfork, long my go-to for tart and encyclopedic endorsements or takedowns of music, has been folded, in a much-reduced form, into GQ — two media entities that, if they were people, would have never spoken to each other in high school.”

In The Washington Post, Ron Charles [sour](#)ed on a new novel by Matt Haig: “Charming moments and light touches of wit run throughout ‘The Life Impossible,’ but they’re overwhelmed by the story’s commitment to refrigerator magnet inspiration. The whole thing starts to taste like a tepid dish of coq au vin made from the plucked carcass of Jonathan Livingston Seagull.”

Charles separately [admired](#) the construction of “The Spoiled Heart,” a novel by Sunjeev Sahota: “Sahota throws so many disparate parts into this story that it’s something of a miracle when they begin to coalesce — like a box of gears and springs tumbling down the stairs and coming to rest in the shape of a clock.”



Credit...Sasha Arutyunova for The New York Times

Bodies at Rest, Bodies in Motion

In The Times, Tressie McMillan Cottom [rebelled](#) against the evangelists of a certain kind of wellness: “If I do any more mindful, radical self-care, I am going to exfoliate myself into not existing.”

In The Wall Street Journal, Dan Neil [bemoaned](#) the mismatch of his aged endoskeleton and his assignment to review a low-lying, physically inaccessible car by alluding to the god of Graceland: “After a lifetime of swiveling and gyrating, my pelvis has left the building.”

In The Times, Mark Harris [took physical stock](#) of the “Law & Order” franchise actor Christopher Meloni. “Balding, built like he’s made of a poured blend of fitness supplements and concrete, full of rage, corded with veins that look like they themselves have muscles, Meloni is a particular daddy type: a gym daddy, a rough daddy, a dangerous daddy, a daddy who seems like he’s woken up in strange places and said, ‘Did we...?’,” Harris wrote.

Also in The Times, Matt Labash [reviewed](#) a prominent senator’s jubilant moves onstage at the Democratic National Convention: “Watching Chuck Schumer

getting jiggy with it as he danced his way out to the lectern was a bridge too far. A bridge I want to burn, after bathing my eyes in hydrochloric acid.”

And Gail Collins [cracked](#) the appeal of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a buff fitness buff, when he was still making his White House bid: “If voters decide they want a president who can welcome foreign dignitaries at the White House naked from the waist up, he’s definitely your guy.”

In JoeBlogs, Joe Posnanski [noted the significance](#) of the baseball coach Don Mattingly’s rearing in the Hoosier State: “Don obviously grew up playing basketball; this being Indiana, after all, where both parents have to make consecutive free throws in order to take their baby home from the hospital.”

In The Athletic, Matthew Futterman [probed](#) the rooting section for the tennis player Danielle Collins at the Miami Open: “And then there’s Quincy, her poodle mix who came with her for the tournament and has been keeping her on an even keel in a service dog kind of way. ‘Mr. Q.’ she calls him. She’s been sticking ‘Mr. Q.’ in doggy day care during her matches and has some videos of him watching her play. Quincy is apparently very confused by it all, she said. He sees his mom. He sees a ball. He seems not to understand why he is not there and involved.”

In The Globe and Mail of Toronto, just before the Olympics ended, Cathal Kelly [pondered](#) the crying of athletes at the Games. “I suspect they are neither tears of joy nor tears of sadness,” he wrote. “They are the result of being totally overwhelmed by how big life can get sometimes. Yesterday, you were at a gym in Nanaimo or Trois-Rivières or Sussex. Today, you are in Paris writing the first line of your obituary. I’d cry, too.”

Peculiarities & Pathos

In Esquire, Mark Warren [plumbed the cruelties](#) of our digital age: “The story of the internet is of tribes hurling rocks over the horizon at targets they cannot see, doing damage that they do not care to measure.”

In The Washington Post, Alex Falcone [identified](#) the online review sweet spot: “We all know that one- and five-star reviews are useless; those are just crackpots and bots. Three stars are for cowards, obviously; if you can’t be bothered to have a courageous opinion, I can’t be bothered to read it. And four stars are for liberal arts majors who had a three-star experience but grew up with grade inflation. But a two-star review, that’s a thing of beauty. Somebody

who goes through the trouble of logging into an app and typing full sentences on a keyboard to give a place exactly two stars has a story to tell.”

Also in The Post, Rick Reilly [memorialized](#) the extraordinary baseball player Pete Rose, who died in late September, and Rose’s self-destructive ways: “I knew him well. He fascinated me. I’d never met a guy who looked at life like a door he had to knock down, even if there was a perfectly good doorknob waiting.”

In The Times, A.O. Scott [examined](#) the allure of allusions: “If our brains are foundries, they are also warehouses, crammed full of clichés, advertising slogans, movie catchphrases, song lyrics, garbled proverbs and jokes we heard on the playground at recess in third grade. Also great works of literature. There are those who sift through this profusion with the fanatical care of mushroom hunters, collecting only the most palatable and succulent specimens. Others crash through the thickets, words latching onto us like burrs on a sweater. If we tried to remove them, the whole garment — our consciousness, in this unruly metaphor — might come unraveled.”

Also in The Times, Margaret Lyons [perfectly described](#) the main character in “Baby Reindeer,” a Netflix series about an aspiring stand-up comedian and his stalker: “Donny recognizes and articulates the dangers of wanting fame, how it warps his judgment but also could solve his problems. (One person knowing your darkest secret is unbearable, but a million people knowing it is stardom.) Agony and attention are bound together here — Look at me! No, not like that! — twin snakes choking the life out of their prey.”

And in The Atlantic, David Frum [remembered](#) the death of Miranda, his daughter, in her early 30s: “The thought of my own death has never been a distressing subject. We live, we love, we yield the stage to our children. I hoped that when the time arrived, I would have the chance for farewells. If that wish were granted, I could with total content ride the train to my final destination. It never occurred to me that one of my children might board the train first, pulling away as her parents wept on the platform.”

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/26/opinion/best-sentences-of-2024.html>