

First/last back into the classroom...

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Question 7 asked about the standard ways of completing the phrase in the title:

7 Do you say things like “First back into the classroom is a _____”, or “Last one to touch the shed is a _____”? If so, what words do you **usually** use to finish the sentences?

There were quite a large number of responses which were actually answers to the question that followed, which was designed to elicit *First the worst* etc. These were not appropriate responses to the question as asked in 7. However, in most cases, we received answers which were clearly appropriate answers to 7 as well. Almost universally, *rotten egg* was reported, although often this was associated with younger children. 142 of the 150 schools reported this traditional ending (which can be used in either phrase). We find this a little surprising considering that most children today will have very little experience of rotten eggs, if any. In the South Island, especially in Otago-Southland, *rotten egg* is found alongside the elaborated version *First one is a rotten egg and last one has to eat it* (or *Last one is a rotten egg and first one has to eat it*). This is the only form in this set of data which shows any sign of regional distribution.

In 55 schools, *rotten egg* was the only response. If an alternative was given to *rotten egg*, it was generally some other term of abuse. These ranged from fairly mild (e.g. *frumpy frog*, *dead hedgehog*, *fried tomato*) to the very rude. The only ones with any significant frequency (e.g. *dick*, *loser*) we know from other questions to be universally known. Some teachers wrote things like “some insult”, “something rude”, rather than specifying. In many cases, it was clear that what was recorded was “insult of the week”. It was not possible to grade the degrees of abuse: is it worse to be called *a girl*, or *a girl’s blouse*? However, 67 schools offered unquestionably rude forms of abuse as an alternative, and in most cases it was clear that these were used by the older children.

There were some positive answers provided (usually for coming first) e.g. *cool*, *da bomb*, but these were relatively rare.

Thus this question yielded little except for the extended version of *rotten egg*, and the very common spelling mistake *rotton egg*!

This is known in Britain (oral report), but not reported in the Opie’s *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*.

No statistical analysis was warranted, and no maps are needed.