Cancel is from Latin for ‘make like a lattice’, like crisscrossed wood fencing in our backyard where we safely dine with friends,
or like COVID-caused crossouts on calendars—
a cancelled appointment (dis-appointment) or music event (dis-concerting).

Teachers don’t like saying ‘cancel’ lest students get carried away, cancelling sixes of 26/65, which does equal two-fifths
but it’s ‘cause we multiplied by 1/13 over 1/13, another name for one.
And don’t say we ‘reduced to lowest terms’ lest students think it shrank.

But context factors into when cancelling simplifies:
2/5 is less clear than 26/65 for the chance of drawing a black card from a deck augmented by another deck’s diamonds

while with \(y = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x - 1}\), cancellation reveals the whole limit at \(x = 1\).

Now cancelling an \(x\) from both sides of \(x^2 = 3x\) yields one solution, but loses the other. Never cancel something that could be nothing.

My red-voting uncle says our national petri dish of polarization yields ‘cancel culture’ that cancels minority opinion not from a minority, forming a fractious fraction of conformity over free speech, to shut up and shout down undesired values.

Of course, algebraic structures allow cancellation from the left and from the right.

Just as we should be slow to write off students who casually make a cancelling error, who take something like \(\frac{x^2 - 8}{x - 2}\) and strike parts of the expression without considering whole factors,

I say don’t always cancel a person for the terms they use. Let’s first try calling them in, not calling them out, and help them see the error, learn what led them to make it, and help them outgrow and correct it as headphones make opposing waves to cancel noise and lower the volume of the world.