

Name: _____

Date: _____

Harry Houdini: Master of Escapes

On an evening in 1918, a 10,000-pound elephant named Jennie was led into a cabinet on the stage of the Hippodrome, a theater in New York City. Harry Houdini, the world-famous magician, closed the cabinet's curtain. Several seconds later, he whipped open the curtain. Jennie had **vanished**! The theater **resounded** with the audiences' cheers and applause.

Houdini's real name was Ehrich Weiss. He was born in Hungary but moved to America with his family when he was quite young. To help pay family bills, he shined shoes and delivered newspapers. When he was 14, Weiss took a job cutting fabric for neckties. At night, he read books on magic and practiced tricks. A few years later, he quit this job to **pursue** his dream of becoming a magician. It was then that he changed his name to Harry Houdini, in honor of his hero Robert-Houdin, a **renowned** French magician.

Although he performed wherever and whenever he could, Houdini was not an instant success. In 1899, his luck changed when he made escaping from handcuffs a featured part of his show. He **extricated** himself from handcuffs fastened in front or back, from leg irons, and even from thick chains that locked his wrists to his ankles. Houdini, now billed as the Handcuff King, was becoming a star.

Houdini was always looking for new ways to **astound** his audiences. In 1908, he introduced a feature called The Water Can into his act. For this trick, he was handcuffed and squeezed into a large metal milk can that was filled to the top with water. The lid was fastened with locks and then a screen was placed in front of the can. To **dramatize** the danger, an assistant stood by with a fire axe, ready to smash open the can. The minutes ticked by on a large stage clock, increasing the audiences' nervousness. At last, a breathless and dripping Houdini **emerged** from behind the screen. The milk can, it was revealed, was still **intact** and locked. To prepare for this stunt, Houdini had **submerged** himself in his large bathtub at home and practiced holding his breath for increasingly long periods of time.

What were the secrets of Houdini's magic? Many of them will never be known. What we do know is that he had an extremely strong and **agile** body, a fearless spirit, and an unending drive to succeed. It was these **assets** and years of hard work that helped to make Houdini the greatest magician and escape artist of his time.

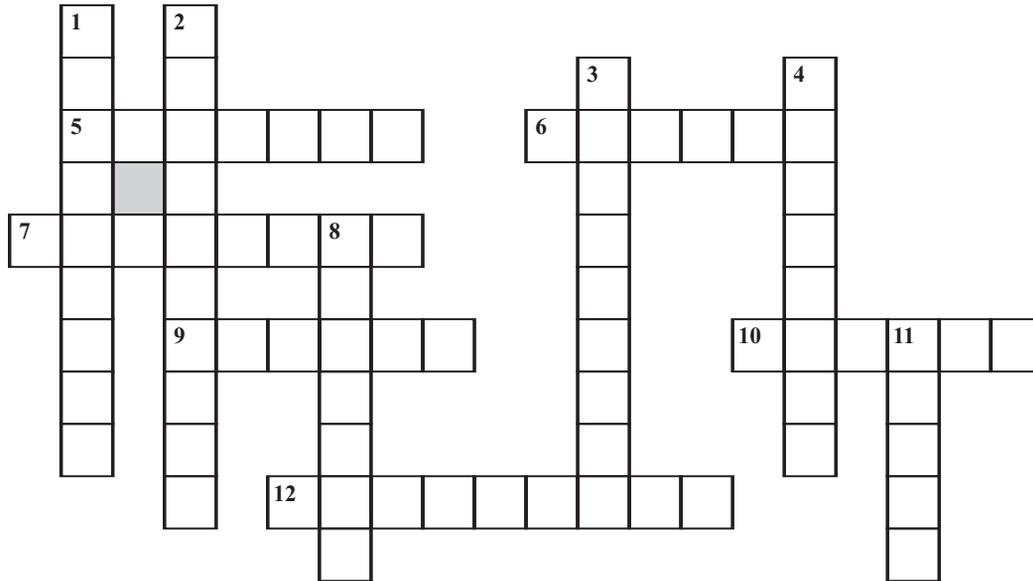


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Crossword Puzzle

Complete the puzzle by filling in the vocabulary words that fit the definitions.



Across

5. to surprise greatly, amaze
6. to follow, seek actively
7. disappeared, went suddenly out of sight
9. things having value, advantages
10. with no part missing
12. was filled with sound

Down

1. to show in a dramatic way, make seem very exciting
2. set free, released
3. put under water
4. having great fame
8. appeared, came out into view
11. able to move with quickness and ease

Word Whiz

The word **dramatize** ends with the suffix **-ize**. This suffix can mean "to make," "to become," or "to cause to be." Some other words that end with this suffix are

equalize: to make equal or even

verbalize: to make verbal, to express in spoken words

fantasize: to create fantasies or imaginative ideas, to daydream about

brutalize: to make or become brutal or violent, to treat in a cruel manner

The suffix **-fy** can also mean "to make" or "to become." Some words with this suffix are

purify: to make pure or clean or not mixed with anything else

simplify: to make simpler, to make easier to understand or do