

PUZZLES IN HISTORY

THE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

From the beginning, people have played with language both for entertainment and to improve communications. Once written language developed, it was inevitable that humans would begin playing word games.

While there is certainly more to puzzle history than the traditional crossword, this extremely popular word game is worthy of special attention. The crossword evolved from a long line of word games, from the simplest riddle or pun to the cryptic crosswords and acrostics, which delight so many puzzle solvers today. Some of the earliest evidence of crossword-like word play dates from the first century A.D.

THE WORD SQUARE

The earliest precursor to the crossword is the word square. A word square consists of a group of words, all equal in length, arranged to form the same words across and down. The first known word square, called the Sator Square, is carved in stone and dates from the first century A.D. in Pompeii.

R	O	T	A	S
O	P	E	R	A
T	E	N	E	T
A	R	E	P	O
S	A	T	O	R

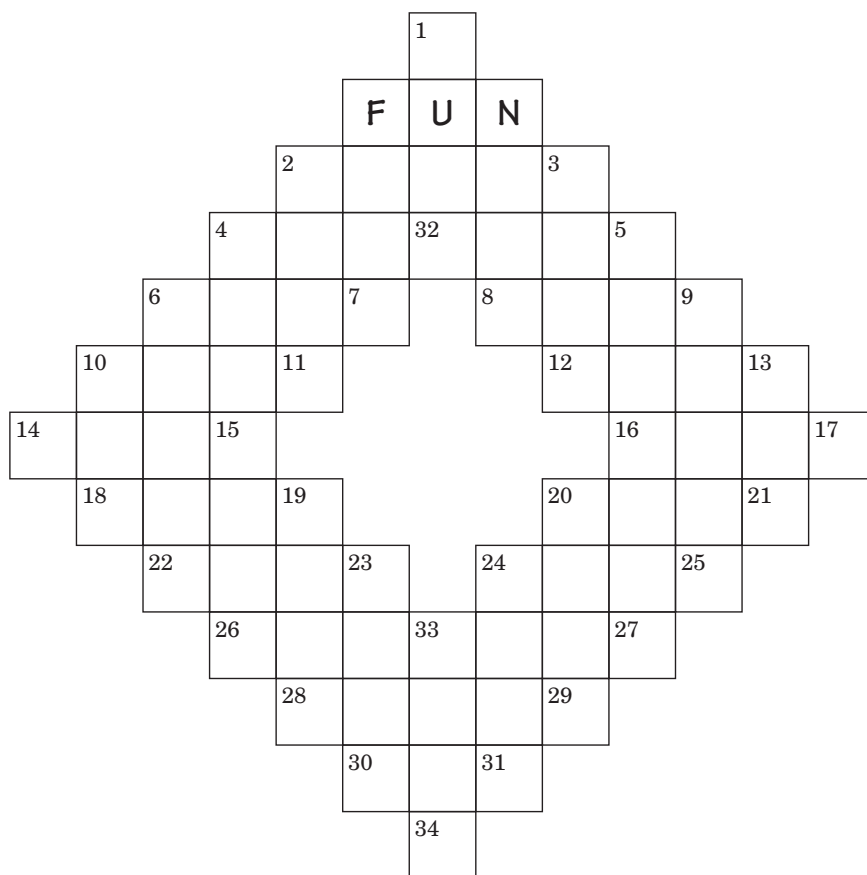
This particular square, which can be read four ways (left to right, right to left, top to bottom, and bottom to top), is often translated as "Arepo, the sower, watches over his works." (Its significance is unknown.)

Another early word square is the Moschion stele, circa A.D. 300; it is actually part crossword, part cryptogram, and part word seek. In the stele, Moschion, an Egyptian, is honoring Osiris (Egyptian god of the underworld) with this monument, which contains words and messages that can be read in different directions. One message on the stele is "Moschion to Osiris, for the treatment which cured his foot." In other words, a thank-you note! Word squares continued in this manner for centuries.

In the mid-1800's, the clue was introduced, although it was not a consistent feature. In fact, such clues were not "definitions" in the modern sense, but rather riddles. In 1875, *St. Nicholas* magazine ran a puzzle with a small grid in which, for the first time, the Across answers were different from the Down answers.

CROSSWORDS

In December 1913, Arthur Wynne took the idea of different Across and Down answers a step further, creating a diamond-shaped "word-cross" for the Sunday "Fun" section of the *New York World*. Wynne had created anagrams, riddles, rebuses, and word squares for the newspaper, but the word-cross was different. He added clues to the concept of the word square, borrowing from the acrostic, a popular puzzle of the day. The readers loved Wynne's new game (generally recognized as the first crossword) and soon were clamoring for more.



- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2-3. What bargain hunters enjoy. | 5-22. What we all should be. |
| 4-5. A written acknowledgment. | 4-26. A day dream. |
| 6-7. Such and nothing more. | 2-11. A talon. |
| 10-11. A bird. | 19-28. A pigeon. |
| 14-15. Opposed to less. | F-7. Part of your head. |
| 18-19. What this puzzle is. | 23-30. A river in Russia. |
| 22-23. An animal of prey. | 1-32. To govern. |
| 26-27. The close of a day. | 33-34. An aromatic plant. |
| 28-29. To elude. | N-8. A fist. |
| 30-31. The plural of is. | 24-31. To agree with. |
| 8-9. To cultivate. | 3-12. Part of a ship. |
| 12-13. A bar of wood or iron. | 20-29. One. |
| 16-17. What artists learn to do. | 5-27. Exchanging. |
| 20-21. Fastened. | 9-25. To sink in mud. |
| 24-25. Found on the seashore. | 13-21. A boy. |
| 10-18. The fibre of the gomuti plant. | |

The *New York World* continued to publish crosswords (the name changed from word-cross within a month of the first publication) for ten years without real competition. Then, in April 1924, Simon & Schuster, an upstart publishing company, decided to publish an all-crosswords book. They hired Margaret Petherbridge (later Farrar) and other editors from the *New York World* to compile and edit the book. Since it was a risky proposition, Simon & Schuster did not put its name on the book as publisher. Instead, they used the moniker Plaza Publishing. When the 3,900 copies in the first printing quickly sold out, Simon & Schuster knew they had a winner. By the end of the year, they had four books on the best-seller list, and the name Simon & Schuster appeared on the book along with Plaza Publishing.

CROSSWORDS IN THE NEWS

The success of the Simon & Schuster book made crosswords big news in 1924 and throughout the rest of the decade. University professors gave their opinions on the educational and health benefits, as well as the potential "risks" (gasp!) of solving crosswords. Solving competitions cropped up. One Cleveland woman claimed her husband's obsession with crosswords led to their divorce. Dictionary sales soared, and libraries limited the usage of dictionaries. Black and white clothing and jewelry became the rage.

Even Broadway musicals featured crosswords! *Puzzles of 1925*, a musical revue starring Walter Pidgeon, Cyril Ritchard, and Helen Broderick, included a skit focusing on crossword solvers.

In November 1924, the *New York Times* claimed the crossword phenomenon was causing "temporary madness." This same paper actually declared the "crossword epidemic" over in February 1927.

Many newspapers, not just the *New York Times*, were resistant to the success and popularity of the crossword. Eventually even the *New York Times* started publishing crosswords. Margaret (Petherbridge) Farrar became the editor for the *New York Times*, and on February 15, 1942, the first Sunday crossword appeared in the *Sunday Magazine*. The daily crossword puzzle made its debut in 1950.

CROSSWORDS TODAY

Of course, crosswords continue to be tremendously popular with solvers around the world today. There is the U.S.-style, symmetrical crossword with which we are so familiar, available in newspapers, magazines, and books. There are also cryptic crosswords and diagramless crosswords, as well as other variety-style crosswords. And, we still have the simple word square (available in puzzles such as Across & Down® Penny Press). With the increasing accessibility of technology, crosswords are also available as electronic games. It appears that these delightful word games will continue to entertain us for generations to come!

SUDOKU

The overnight success of Sudoku is actually more than 25 years in the making. It has its origins in Number Place, a popular feature that's appeared in Dell's puzzle magazines since 1979. A Japanese company brought the idea east, added symmetry, and named it Sudoku (*Su* is Japanese for number/digit; *Doku* means single). From Japan, Sudoku traveled to London, back to New York, and has stormed across the U.S., appearing in hundreds of newspapers.

Why is Sudoku so popular? It's a simple concept that can yield some intricate challenges. It uses numbers, but is solved through logical deduction. No understanding of math is necessary, so it's accessible to everyone.

Come back for upcoming information on other puzzles in history.