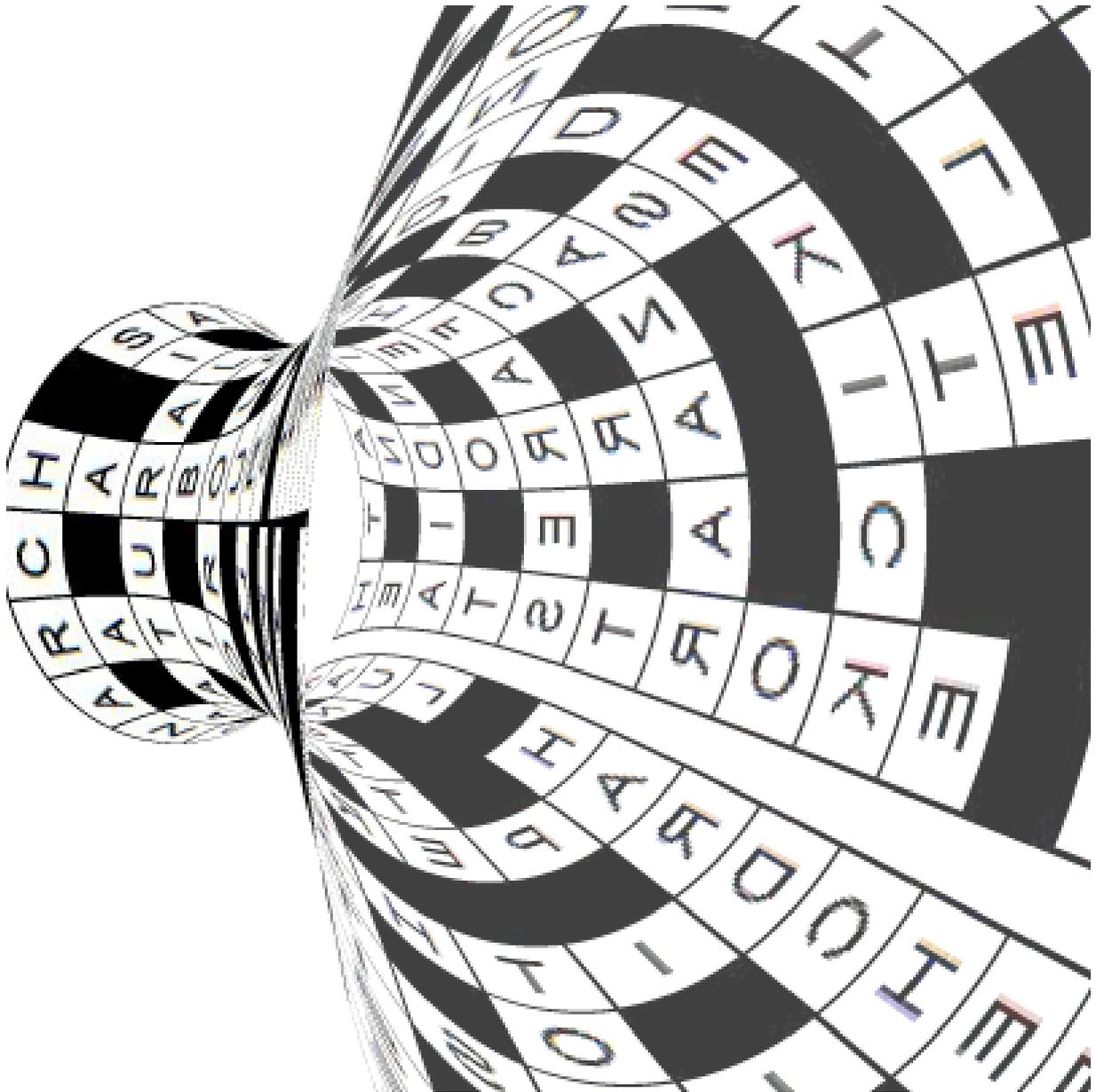


# Cryptic Crosswords for Bright Sparks



A beginner's guide to cryptic crosswords for  
Gifted & Talented children

## Unit 3 - An Introduction to Clues

### What is a 'straight' clue?

In a regular crossword, the clue directly leads to the answer. In other words, it is a 'straight' clue. It could be a direct synonym for the answer, for example:

Town (4) = CITY

It could also be a clue that requires you to use your general knowledge, for example:

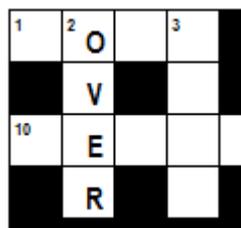
Capital of Italy (4) = ROME

Sometimes the simplicity of 'straight' clues can make them tricky to work out. For example, suppose you came across this clue:

City (4)

There is nothing to stop the answer from being 'TOWN', but nor is there anything to stop it from being 'ROME', or, for that matter, any other four-letter city in the world, such as 'BERN', 'OSLO', 'AGRA', 'KOBE' et cetera.

Now suppose that this clue is used for 1 Across in this grid:



Even though we know that 2 Down is 'OVER', we still cannot work out whether 1 Across is 'TOWN', 'ROME', 'KOBE' or any other four-letter city whose second letter is 'O'. Our only hope is to solve 3 Down and that will be all that the grid can possibly give us to help us solve 1 Across.

So, let's suppose the answer to 3 Down is 'EVEN'

:

1	2		3	
	O		E	
	V		V	
10	E		E	
	R		N	

We now have all of the information we can possibly have and we still don't know whether 1 Across is 'ROME' or 'KOBE'. (In fact, it could also be 'LOME', which is the capital of Togo or 'NOME', which is a city in Alaska. I'm sure there must be plenty of other cities that follow this letter pattern too.)

In this grid, therefore, the clue 'City (4)' is not a *fair* clue, because the solver cannot possibly be sure of the answer. This is the first golden rule of for setters of crosswords: **the clues must be fair**.

### DID YOU KNOW...?

The word 'clue' comes from the late Middle English word 'clew' which meant 'a ball of thread'. In Ancient Greek mythology, when Theseus had to find his way out of the labyrinth after killing the Minotaur, he quite literally followed the 'clew' that Ariadne had given him. This is why the word 'clue' came to mean any useful piece of information that helps you to get out of a sticky situation...

What is a 'cryptic' clue?

Straight clues always tell you directly what answer they are looking for. Cryptic clues, on the other hand, work in almost the opposite way: yes, they tell you what answer they are looking for, but they do it in a way that is indirect and not immediately obvious from the information given. This does not mean, however, that the setter can do whatever he likes. He cannot just string together a nonsensical list of words and decide that it leads to a particular answer. If he did this, the only way that you, the solver, would be able to complete the puzzle would be to read the setter's mind. No, the setter must follow a strict set of rules used by *all* cryptic crossword setters. As soon as you start to understand what these rules are and how they work in practice, you will be able to solve cryptic clues for yourself.

The easiest way to think of a cryptic clue is in the form of a mathematical equation:

$$\text{DEFINITION} + \text{WORDPLAY} = \text{ANSWER}$$

The **definition** is the meaning that you are trying to find. Straight clues only have a definition, so, for example, if we think back to the previous section, in the clue *capital of Italy* (4), the **definition** is 'capital of Italy' and the **answer** is 'ROME'.

In addition to the definition, cryptic clues add some **wordplay** to complicate matters. Word play means just what it suggests: playing with words to build the answer. Word play can involve creating anagrams (jumbling up letters), writing words backwards, removing or adding letters, using homophones (words that sound like other words), hiding words within other words, and numerous other possibilities.

## Exercise 3.1

**ANIMAL MAGIC**

Practise your wordplay skills by completing these activities:

**a) ANIMALAGRAMS**

Solve each of these anagrams to find the name of an animal. (If you can get the final five or six of these, you are an anagram genius!)

**HINT:** If you write an anagram out as a jumble of letters or in a circle on a rough piece of paper, it is usually easier to spot than if you just read it as a string of letters.

- ACT (3) .....
- LEAF (4) .....
- TUTOR (5) .....
- THRONE (6) .....
- PAROLED (7) .....
- THE PLANE (8) .....
- COOL CIDER (9) .....
- SOON RICHER (10) .....
- I'LL WALK HERE (6,5) .....
- GIRL'S EQUERRY (4,8) .....
- EATING RISOTTO (5,8) .....
- SALAD IN VIETNAM (9,5) .....
- EMBRYONIC SPOOKS (9,6) .....

**b) CAMOUFLAGED CREATURES**

The name of an animal from the list on the right can be placed into the gaps in the words on the left to create a new word.

For example: INDI.....E + CAT = INDICATE

Write the correct missing animal into each gap.

BENE.....NT

CA.....EL

CONT.....E

FOR.....ANCE

MA.....M

OBN.....IOUS

PRO.....ATION

SEL.....LY

SUN.....HE

S.....LING

BAT

BEAR

CLAM

COW

FISH

GNU

RAM

RAVEN

VOLE

OX

### c) ANIMAL NOISES

Find the word that means the same as the word on the left and sounds the same as one of the animals on the right, in other words a **homophone**.

e.g. Exist (2) = BE (sounds like 'bee')

Croaky (6) .....  
Cry (4) .....  
Drill (4) .....  
Expensive (4) .....  
Fur (4) .....  
Naked (4) .....  
Pulled (5) .....  
Revolt<sup>ing</sup> (4) .....  
Spirit (4) .....  
Town governor (5) .....

BEAR  
DEER  
FOWL  
HARE  
HORSE  
BOAR  
MARE  
SOLE  
TOAD  
WHALE

### d) ANIMALS IN THE UNDERGROWTH

In each of the sentences below, there is the name of an animal. It is hidden within the letters of the words and can involve two or more of the words.

e.g. "This animal became lonely." (5)      Answer: CAMEL  
"This animal beCAMELonely."

Now try these...

Her badge read: "I ♥ANIMALS" (6) .....

The honour was most richly deserved. (7) .....

We need to go down the other avenue. (5) .....

This Quidditch game is getting dangerous! (5) .....

He threw a spanner in the works. (4) .....

The robber ran into a dead end (4) .....

What a colossal monster that is! (6) .....

The new bridge will span the River Thames. (7) .....

There are bigger billionaires out there. (6) .....

She's been up and about for hours. (5) .....

How did you do? You probably found some of these easier than others, but I'm guessing that you got at least some of them without needing to look at the answers. Even with the ones that you might not have solved on your own, you probably now know how they worked.

All of these animal activities are basically the kinds of things that you have to work out when you are solving cryptic crossword clues. The answers won't always be animals, of course, but the work that you have to do to find the answers will nearly always be like these 'wordplay' activities. There are other types of wordplay that you will need to learn and practise, but let's start with one that you probably already very familiar with and see how it works within a crossword clue...