

Cryptic Classroom #2: Double Definitions

By Average Games Historian

Welcome to the second installment of the cryptic classroom, where I will explain the different types of cryptic clues. In the cryptic classroom, you will find straightforward lessons, examples broken down from the constructor's perspective, an inside peek at clue writing, and opportunities to practice solving clues, all focusing on one type of cryptic clue per issue. If you read the inaugural column in the September issue, you learned how to identify and solve anagram wordplay in cryptic clues. In addition, I shared some general tips that are worth repeating here:

1. Cryptic clues are part literal, and part wordplay.
2. The literal and wordplay segments, when combined effectively, appear to have surface meaning.
3. It's up to the solver to determine the dividing point between the literal and wordplay parts.
4. Sometimes the literal part is at the beginning of the clue, and sometimes the wordplay comes first.
5. Punctuation or capitalization can usually be ignored.
6. The length of the answer (shown in parentheses) is sometimes a helpful hint as to what type of wordplay is being used.

In today's column, we will focus on double definitions. This type of clue breaks the first rule on the above list: Rather than having a wordplay component, a double definition clue consists of two literal definitions of the answer. Homographs (words with the same spelling but having more than one meaning) are popular subjects for double definitions. In fact, a popular feature in this magazine, "Mixed Doubles," by Mike Nothnagel, is a great example of double definitions, where two unique clues are paired for every answer in the grid.

Let's write a double definition clue for the word LEAD. It can be pronounced two different ways, and our clueing can take advantage of that. First, let's brainstorm some facts about lead. Lead, the chemical element, has the symbol Pb, and is a toxic heavy metal with an atomic number of 82. It once was added to paint, and it is still used to make pipes and bullets. Lead, the verb, means "to guide or usher." Lead, the noun, can mean "the first position." By combining any two of these tidbits, we should be able to make a decent double definition clue. The first idea that comes to my mind is "#82 in first place." I like how it retains surface meaning (it makes me think of NASCAR), but I don't like how it assumes the solver has a better-than-average knowledge of the periodic table. Another clue could be "Pb: 'pipe' and 'bullet', initially." I believe more solvers would know that the symbol for lead is Pb, and most people probably know that pipes and bullets start out as lead. Plus, it retains some misleading surface meaning. But I'm not satisfied with these. "A heavy metal advantage" is the clue I'd probably go with. Both parts of the clue are fair and it reads the best of the three clues.

Unlike anagram clues, double definitions don't have an indicator word. But there is one way of knowing that you are dealing with a double definition clue. Often, a double definition clue can be as short as two words, like "Educate locomotive" for TRAIN, or "Reasonable carnival" for FAIR. It's difficult (or impossible) to create most other types of cryptic clues using only two words.

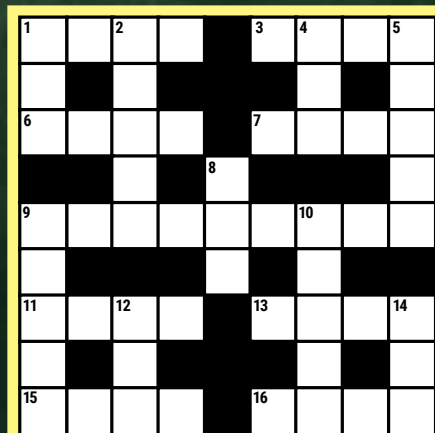
It's practice time! Try your hand at solving this mini cryptic. Every clue is a double definition. If you want further help, join us on Facebook at Games Magazine Enthusiasts. You'll find hundreds of helpful members there who would be more than happy to share their cryptic solving tips.

ACROSS

1. Apartment with a loo under pitch (4)
3. Burden our treat (4)
6. Rip well (up) (4)
7. Sandwich Superman, for one (4)
9. In this magazine, this puzzle is one of many curses, e.g. (9)
11. Goads chicken output (4)
13. ASAP RBI, e.g. (4)
15. West African country fast food option (4)
16. Easy start of a breakfast trio (4)

DOWN

1. Accommodate Honda hatchback (3)
2. Texas mission: rental car chain (5)
4. Bill the Science Guy on Dec. 31st (3)
5. Sharp weapon "slices," for example (5)
8. Grayish-colored wood (for bats) (3)
9. Top toothpaste brand (5)
10. Frequently decimal (5)
12. Joke to cover one's mouth (3)
14. Helpful hint: topple (3)



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