

GROUCHO MARX



Groucho Marx was a comedian who rose to fame in the early 20th century. He's best known for performing in a comedy troupe with his brothers, known together as The Marx Brothers. His style of comedy is a major influence on many modern comedians.

Groucho Marx was born Julius Henry Marx in 1890. Groucho's uncle was a vaudeville performer, and his mother wanted to see Groucho and his brothers go into show business like him. At the age of 12, he began performing in a singing group with his brothers.

Groucho and his brothers were good singers, but they weren't great. On nights when they could tell the audience didn't like the show, they'd start making jokes to lighten the mood. Pretty soon, they discovered that people liked to hear them make jokes more than they liked listening to them sing! They started performing as a comedy troupe instead, doing funny skits and plays for people. They quickly became one of most popular vaudeville acts in the country.

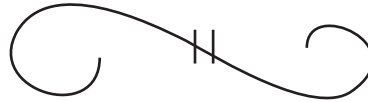
Around this time, movies with sound had just been invented and were becoming popular. The Marx Brothers made several successful comedy films, such as *Duck Soup*, *Animal Crackers*, and *A Night at the Opera*.

After that, his brothers left show business, but Groucho continued to do comedy on his own. In 1947 he was chosen to be the host of a radio show called *You Bet Your Life*, where he would ask players quiz questions. However, the show became more famous for Groucho's jokes than for the actual game! The show was turned into a TV game show in 1950 and was a great success. Though he was still very famous, Groucho retired from performing in the 1960s.

Groucho Marx is remembered today as being an all-around talented comedian. He could perform all styles of comedy – not only was he great at physical gags, he could also write very smart, witty jokes. His work has inspired countless other comedians and comedy writers, including legends like Mel Brooks and Woody Allen.

1. Groucho Marx's real first name was _____.
2. Groucho and his brothers got their start singing in these kinds of shows.

3. Name a movie that the Marx Brothers made together.



Vaudeville

Vaudeville was a popular form of entertainment in the late 1800s and early 1900s. A vaudeville show was made up of many types of performances: there were actors, singers, dancers, comedians, jugglers, even animals that did tricks! People would come to the theater to see all kinds of acts performed in just one show. In a time before movies, television and video games, a vaudeville show would have been considered a fun night out!

Think up a vaudeville act of your own! What talents do you have that people would like to watch you do? Write a description of your act here.

On the back of this page or on a new piece of paper, draw a poster advertising your act. Use bright colors and persuasive language! What would you put on a poster to encourage people to come to the show?

HARRY HOUDINI



Harry Houdini was born Ehrich Weiss in Budapest in 1874. His father was a rabbi, and when Harry was four the family moved to Wisconsin so his father could start a congregation there. After his father's congregation broke apart, the family moved to New York to start over.

In New York, Harry became fascinated by the performing arts. New York was a performer's paradise back then, with theaters all over town. In order to help bring in extra money, he started a magic act with a friend. Calling themselves The Brothers Houdini, they began picking up shows. For the stage, he changed his name from Ehrich Weiss to Harry Houdini, or sometimes just 'Houdini.'

However, just as they were getting started, his friend left the act. Harry's brother took his place for a while, but he soon found another person, a singer and dancer named Beatrice, to become his partner both on stage and in life. They got married and she became the assistant in his act.

Harry and Beatrice booked many shows, but hardly ever headlined. Harry decided that they needed something really special to make people notice them. He began working on ways to escape from a pair of handcuffs, thinking that would be his ticket to stardom. One night, after doing his handcuff trick in Minnesota, a talent manager who had been in the audience asked to work with him. In just a few months, Houdini became one of the hottest vaudeville acts in the country. He toured the world for almost five years.

After spending so long performing with handcuffs, he wanted to try something new. He changed his act to include something called his "Open Challenge": he asked the public to try and invent a device that he could not break free from. When it came time to perform, people would come to see if he could escape. He always did.

Soon after that, he began performing a new act where he escaped from a giant can filled with water. It was so popular, he began doing underwater escapes. In his first big underwater act, he was lowered into the East River in a crate. He got out in less than a minute.

Houdini's next idea was his biggest challenge of all: trying to escape from a straitjacket...while hanging upside-down by his feet from the top of a skyscraper. It was an amazing feat, but as movies became popular, fewer and fewer people wanted to come out to see Houdini perform. He tried performing his acts on film, but they were no match for the popularity of the movies. He moved back to New York and continued to perform in theaters.

Houdini is remembered not only for being a great magician, but a great showman as well. He always made sure the audience was not only amazed by his tricks, but entertained by his presence. In a time before TV and cell phones, he was able to become one of the biggest celebrities of his time, and is still a famous name today.



1. Why do you think Houdini became such a popular entertainer? Do you think he would've become as famous if he were a singer or actor instead of an escape artist?

2. Do you enjoy watching magic acts or escape artists? Why or why not?

Name _____

Date _____

Gertrude Stein Biography



Directions: Read the passage below. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Gertrude Stein was a writer, poet, and art collector. She was born in 1874 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, a town which later became part of Pittsburgh. When Gertude was three years old, her family moved to Vienna, Austria, and then to Paris, France. In 1878, they came back to the United States to live in Oakland, California.

The young life of Gertrude and her siblings, Michael, Simon, Leo, and Bertha, was marked by tragedy. Their mother passed away in 1888, and their father in 1891. Gertrude and Bertha went to live with their mother's family in Baltimore, Maryland. There, Gertrude made friends with a pair of sisters, Claribel and Etta Cone, who liked to collect and talk about art.

In 1903, Stein moved to Paris to live with her brother, Leo. There, she met Alice B. Toklas, a fellow art lover and writer, who became a lifelong friend. Their home became a center for art collection and conversation. Stein's friends included some of the most important writers and artists of the time. The Steins' collection included work by some of the most famous artists of the period, like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

In 1912, Stein published her first work of poetry, a book called *Three Lives*. She went on to write more books of poetry, novels, memoirs, and even *librettos*, the words that go along with opera music. She is remembered as an important writer, and also as an influential art collector. Along with her brothers, Leo and Michael, she helped support and make famous some of the most important European painters of the time.

1. Describe the tragedy Gertrude Stein experienced as a child.

2. How did Gertrude Stein influence the art community during her lifetime?

Name _____

Date _____

Gertrude Stein Biography

3. The text defines *librettos* as the words that go along with opera music. Use the word *librettos* in your own original sentence.

4. How did Claribel and Etta Cone influence Gertrude Stein? Cite the paragraph that gave you information.

5. Create a timeline of important events in Gertrude Stein's life. Use the line below. Be sure to include dates and a few words to describe the event.

6. Using the timeline you created, which is the most significant event in Gertrude Stein's life? Explain your reasoning.

BIOGRAPHY

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an American lawyer and jurist, was famous for being a trailblazer and champion for equal rights for women. She served on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1993 until her death in 2020.

She was born in a working class neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York in 1933. Her mother, Celia Bader, was dedicated to young Ruth's education, and took her to the library often. Ruth attended James Madison High School in Brooklyn, which was made up of smaller schools, called "Houses." Ruth studied in the House called the Law Institute. She majored in government at Cornell University. There, she met another student, Martin Ginsburg, whom she married in 1954. Both Ginsburgs went on to Harvard University to study law. There, Ruth was one of only nine female students in a class of five hundred.



When Martin got a job in New York, Bader Ginsburg transferred to Columbia University so that they, and their baby daughter, Jane, could stay together. At Columbia, she completed her law degree, and tied with another student for first in her class. New law school graduates often gain job experience by working as a clerk, or assistant, to a judge. Though she was highly qualified, the first judge Bader Ginsburg applied to rejected her because of her gender. Later that year, however, she found a clerkship with a New York judge. Next, she learned Swedish to help write a book on Swedish law.

She worked as a professor of law at Rutgers University, then at Columbia University. For this position, Ginsburg was informed she would be paid less than her male colleagues because she had a husband with a well-paid job. When she began working at the university she was one of fewer than 20 female law professors in the United States. In 1970, she co-founded the *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, the first law journal in the U.S. to focus on women's rights.

She also worked as a lawyer, arguing important women's rights cases in front of the Supreme Court. She quickly became well known for being a strong and vocal advocate for the equal and fair treatment of women. President Jimmy Carter appointed Bader Ginsburg in 1980 to the U.S. Court of Appeals, the second-highest court in the nation. In 1993, she was nominated and confirmed for the U.S. Supreme Court.

One of the most important Supreme Court cases she wrote the majority opinion for was the *United States v. Virginia* landmark case, which held that the Virginia Military Institute could not refuse to accept women. In 1999, she won the American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award for her contributions to gender equality and civil rights. She was the second female justice (after Sandra Day O'Connor) and the first Jewish female justice appointed to the position. In 2016 her memoir, *My Own Words*, came out and became a New York Times Bestseller.



Ruth Bader Ginsburg

1. What is the main idea of the text? Write it in your own words.

2. Describe an obstacle that Ruth Bader Ginsburg faced in her career and how she overcame it.

3. Find a quote from the text that supports the following statement:

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was an influential U.S. jurist because she fought against gender discrimination.

4. Choose a detail from the text and explain why you think it is important.

5. What inference could you make about Ruth's character based on the following sentence?

There (at Harvard University), Ruth was one of only nine female students in a class of five hundred.

Jewish-American History:

CARL SAGAN



Carl Sagan was an astronomer, astrophysicist, and cosmologist. He was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1934. He would later remember attending the 1939 New York World's Fair, where he was delighted by the science and technology on display. He was also fascinated with an exhibit that showed off a new broadcast technology: the television set!

Early trips to his local library increased little Carl's interest in outer space. He read about stars and the sun, what they were made of, and how far away they were. As he grew, Carl began to read science fiction, which also fed his imagination and his thirst for knowledge about space and science.

In college, Sagan studies physics, and graduated with a Ph.D. in astronomy and astrophysics. He taught at Harvard University, among others, and then went to work for NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. There, he helped with space missions to Venus, Mars, and Jupiter.

His work helped scientists understand the atmospheres of the planets Venus and Jupiter, and the seasons on Mars. As on Earth, the tilt and rotation of Mars create seasons much like the ones we experience. He hoped humanity would one day make contact with alien life, and worked on the "search for extraterrestrial intelligence," or SETI.

Sagan is probably best known as host of the television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*. He is also known for his novel, *Contact*, about contacting extraterrestrial life, which was made into a movie in 1997. He won numerous awards, and even has an asteroid named for him! An asteroid is a small, rocky body orbiting the sun. Carl's asteroid is named 2709 Sagan.

1. What is Carl Sagan best known for? _____
2. What does SETI stand for? _____
3. What first interested young Carl in science? _____