

All About American Crosswords

Description:

You've probably done, or at least seen an American-style crossword sometimes in your life, but have you ever stopped to think about how they became so ubiquitous? Come learn all about the history of crosswords, from their humble tiny diamond-shaped origins, through a surprisingly starring role during WWII, all the way up to the modern history of computer-assisted cruciverbalism! Along the way, hopefully you'll pick up a few resources and jargon across all of crossword-dom.

Goals:

Understand history of crosswords

Know modern and historical forms

Gain skills and resources for solving and writing

(Re)discover a love of crosswords!

55 minutes

Plan:

(not a complete list of all topics)

0-10 minutes:

Welcome people in and solve a few quick New York Times Mini crosswords to get a sense. (we'll prepare a few specific puzzles of different shapes and sizes)

10-17 minutes:

A brief look at the invention of crosswords and the early era, 1913--1940. Invented by Arthur Wynne in a totally unrecognizable form, and it bounced around as a random puzzle for a few decades. By WWII, the crossword was a known feature of newspapers everywhere.

17-25 minutes:

A look at Margaret Farrar's editorship of the New York Times crossword (~1940-1969). This was a time when basic puzzle conventions and terminology was being set, and this would be a good excuse to cover some of that.

25-33 minutes:

A look at the quickly proliferating crossword market, including other crossword producers and the advent of computer-aided construction.

33-40 minutes:

Will Shortz's editorship of the NYT crossword until the present day (1993-now), mass-production and creation of crossword compendia. While a best-selling crossword book was

written as early as the 1920s, the realization that companies could simply reprint collections of crosswords, possibly with gimmicky computer-aided ones was a game-changer.

40-50 minutes:

A super quick glance at all the weird forms of crossword that have also wriggled their way into the public. Perhaps a brief glance at the history of cryptics as well, which developed in tandem on the other side of the Atlantic. Other variants will be discussed as well. Can be increased in size or shrunk depending on the rate of the previous sections.

50-55 minutes:

A mention of some modern construction tools and random crossword-world stuff to know about.