

A Graveyard Mystery



¹ Harry Spitz seemed like an ordinary little boy. He had his father's looks, with blond hair and brown eyes. He liked to laugh and play with his toys. But was Harry really just an ordinary child? That's the question people began to ask in July 1975. By then, Harry had been dead for 63 years. But something happened that summer that made everyone remember him. It made them think perhaps there was more to the little boy than met the eye.

² Harry Spitz was born in 1909. He lived with his parents in Morgantown, West Virginia. There his father worked

Harry Spitz's grave, shown here as it looks today, is located next to his parents' graves. Harry's vault popped out of the ground on this same spot in 1975.

in a glass factory. The family did not have a lot of money. Still, by all accounts, Harry was a happy child. When he was three years old, though, tragedy struck. Harry came down with cholera, a deadly disease. Eight days after catching the disease, he died.

³ Harry's parents were crushed. With heavy hearts they made arrangements for the funeral. His body was dressed in a blue and white outfit. Flowers were placed in his hands. His favorite toy—a little stuffed lion—was put into the casket with him. The Spitzes had two engraved plaques made for the casket. Each read *Our Darling*. One went inside the casket. The second one was set on top.

⁴ Many of Harry's playmates came to the funeral. Afterwards a horse-drawn carriage took the casket to Oak Grove Cemetery. There an open grave lay waiting. Several feet down was a concrete vault. The casket was lowered into the vault. The engraved plaque was placed on top of the casket. Someone laid a single flower on it. Then workers sealed the vault with a three-inch-thick concrete lid. They shoveled several feet of dirt on top of

the vault to fill up the grave.

⁵ Everyone thought that was the end of Harry Spitz. And for 63 years, it was. But on July 2, 1975, Harry was back in the news. That morning the caretaker of Oak Grove Cemetery saw a small pile of dirt near Harry's tombstone. Walking closer, he saw a bizarre sight. The ground over Harry's grave had buckled. The burial vault was poking up through the grass. The caretaker could see that a corner of the vault had split open, and the lid was resting at an angle. It didn't look like someone had dug up the vault. All the earth had been pushed up from underneath the ground.

⁶ The caretaker wasn't sure what to think. He wondered if some kids had set off fireworks near the grave. Perhaps one backfired and ruptured the grave. In any case, he called the police. Chief Bennie Palmer and Officer Ralph Chapman took the call. Before seeing the grave, Palmer thought he knew what had happened. From time to time a strange group of people gathered in the cemetery. They tried to make contact with the spirits of dead people. He figured the group

had come again in the night. He suspected they had set off some kind of explosive device.

7 When Palmer checked out Harry's grave, however, he changed his mind. "There was no evidence of such a device," he said. In fact, there was no sign of an explosion at all. "We didn't find any evidence of charred earth or gunpowder residues."

8 Next Palmer wondered if there was a natural gas leak in the area. Perhaps that could have blown the vault up out of the ground. He called the gas company and asked them to check. Workers did check, but found no leaks.

9 Palmer and Chapman could not think of anything else that would have caused the vault to pop out of the ground. Yet that's what it had done. Clearly no one had dug up the grave. There was not a single spot where anything had cut into the ground. "It was a real mystery," Chapman said. "There just weren't any signs of tampering from the outside."

10 For the next few days many people tried to figure out what had caused Harry Spitz's grave to open. Scientists and professors were consulted. None of them had any answers. There had been no earthquakes or tremors in the region. There had been no build-up of gases in

the ground or in the vault. As Chief Palmer said, "It was really baffling."

11 At last officials decided to open the vault and take out the casket. Harry's body needed to be reburied anyway. When the lid was removed from the vault, the mystery just got deeper. The engraved plaque was still perched on top of the rounded casket. So was the single dried flower. This meant no explosion could possibly have pushed the vault up through the ground. Anything that shook the vault that much would have caused the plaque and flower to fall off.

12 The case was already an eerie one. But it got even spookier when workers opened the casket. Harry's body was indeed lying inside. But it did not look like it had been there for 63 years. "The body . . . was not in the bare-bones state, which it should have been after all that time," said Chapman. Everyone had expected to see little more than a skeleton. Instead, they saw a little boy who looked like he was sleeping. His hands still held a bouquet of dried flowers. "The body still had intact skin," said Chapman. That skin was a little leathery, but everything else about Harry was in remarkably good shape. "He even had lots of long blond hair."

13 No one could explain it. But many people were a bit frightened by it. They wondered what it all meant. They wondered what forces had been at work in the grave. And they wished they knew more about the little boy who was buried there.

14 On July 12, 1975, Harry Spitz's body was buried for a second time. His casket was put into a new, sealed vault. Since then the vault has remained where it belongs—deep in the ground. But no one knows how much longer it will stay that way.



If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 55 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 56.

Reading Time: Lesson 1

_____ : _____
Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea B—Too Broad N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. It remains a mystery why young Harry Spitz's vault popped up from the ground with his body still intact 63 years after his death.
- _____ 2. In 1975 people began to wonder if Harry Spitz had been just an ordinary little boy.
- _____ 3. When officials opened the vault of Harry Spitz's grave, they realized an explosion could not have pushed it through the ground.

_____ Score 15 points for a correct M answer.

_____ Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Finding the Main Idea

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. When Harry Spitz's body was buried for the first time,
- a. a single flower was laid in his hands.
 - b. an engraved plaque was attached to the casket.
 - c. a stuffed lion was buried with him.
2. On July 2, 1975, the caretaker at Oak Grove Cemetery saw
- a. Harry Spitz's body poking through the ground.
 - b. Harry Spitz's burial vault poking through the ground.
 - c. fireworks near Harry Spitz's grave.
3. One theory the policemen had about Harry's grave was that
- a. there was a natural gas leak in the area.
 - b. someone had set off fireworks near the grave.
 - c. someone had dug up the vault.
4. When Harry Spitz's casket was opened,
- a. the body was in remarkably good shape.
 - b. the little boy was sleeping.
 - c. only bones were found.
5. On July 12, 1975,
- a. Harry Spitz's vault popped out of the ground a second time.
 - b. Harry Spitz's body was buried for a second time.
 - c. Harry Spitz's casket was sealed.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Recalling Facts

C Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience with information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference F—Faulty Inference

- _____ 1. Harry was well-loved by his family and friends.
- _____ 2. Natural forces disturbed Harry's grave.
- _____ 3. It is unlikely that anyone will ever know what caused Harry Spitz's vault to pop out of the ground.
- _____ 4. Harry Spitz was buried alive.
- _____ 5. Harry Spitz had supernatural powers.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Making Inferences

D Using Words in Context

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key; do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite

- 1. His parents were crushed.
 - _____ a. very sad
 - _____ b. worried
 - _____ c. overjoyed
- 2. The ground over Harry's grave had buckled.
 - _____ a. remained unbroken
 - _____ b. been moved
 - _____ c. collapsed
- 3. There just weren't any signs of tampering from the outside.
 - _____ a. disturbance
 - _____ b. ignoring
 - _____ c. digging
- 4. It was really baffling.
 - _____ a. clear
 - _____ b. frightening
 - _____ c. puzzling

5. The body still had intact skin.

- _____ a. destroyed
- _____ b. attached
- _____ c. removed

_____ Score 3 points for each correct C answer.

_____ Score 2 points for each correct O answer.

_____ **Total Score:** Using Words Precisely

Enter the four total scores in the spaces below, and add them together to find your Reading Comprehension Score. Then record your Reading Comprehension Score on the graph on page 57.

Score	Question Type	Lesson 1
_____	Finding the Main Idea	
_____	Recalling Facts	
_____	Making Inferences	
_____	Using Words Precisely	
_____	Reading Comprehension Score	

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What do the authors imply by saying, "Harry Spitz seemed like an ordinary little boy"?
 - a. Harry Spitz was not an ordinary little boy.
 - b. Harry Spitz was like other little boys.
 - c. Harry Spitz was not an interesting boy.
2. Based on the information in the article, you can conclude that the authors want you to think that
 - a. Harry Spitz's burial vault might pop up from the ground again.
 - b. Harry Spitz is not really dead.
 - c. Harry Spitz had something to do with his own burial vault popping up from the ground.
3. Which of the following statements from the article best describes how the people of Morgantown felt about Harry Spitz's grave?
 - a. Police Chief Palmer thought he knew what had happened.
 - b. Clearly no one had dug up the grave.
 - c. "It was really baffling."

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 58.

Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Follow the directions provided for question 1. Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for the other questions.

1. Reread paragraph 2 in the article. Below, write a summary of the paragraph in no more than 25 words.

Reread your summary and decide whether it covers the important ideas in the paragraph. Next, decide how to shorten the summary to 15 words or less without leaving out any essential information. Write this summary below.

2. Choose the sentence that correctly restates the following sentence from the article: "Since then, the vault has remained where it belongs—deep in the ground."

- a. The vault has not moved since then.
 b. The vault is in the ground.
 c. The vault belongs in the ground.

3. Below are summaries of the article. Choose the summary that says all the most important things about the article in the fewest words.

- a. No one has figured out why the vault containing Harry Spitz's casket popped out of the ground and his body was found nearly intact 63 years after his death.
 b. Harry Spitz died when he was three years old, and 63 years later the vault he was buried in mysteriously popped out of the ground. When investigators opened the casket, they found his body nearly intact, even his hair. To this day, no one has been able to explain this mystery.
 c. The vault containing Harry Spitz's casket popped out of the ground, and no one could explain why.

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 58.

Critical Thinking

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer for questions 1–3. Follow the directions provided for questions 4 and 5.

1. Which of the following statements from the article is an opinion rather than a fact?
- a. Harry Spitz was born in 1909.
 b. No one knows how much longer [the grave] will stay [in the ground].
 c. The ground over Harry's grave had buckled.

2. Into which of the following theme categories would this story best fit?

- a. mystery
- b. science fiction
- c. drama

3. What was the effect of opening Harry Spitz's casket?

- a. The officials working on the case were frightened.
- b. The mystery got even deeper.
- c. Harry's body had not decayed.

4. Choose from the letters below to correctly complete the following statement. Write the letters on the lines.

According to paragraph 11, _____ because _____.

- a. Harry's body needed to be reburied anyway
- b. no explosion could have pushed the vault up through the ground
- c. officials opened the vault

5. Which paragraphs provide evidence from the article that support your answer to question 4?

_____ Number of correct answers

Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 58.

Personal Response

How do you think you would have felt if you had found Harry Spitz's vault poking up through the ground?

Self-Assessment

I can't really understand how
