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# Worksheet: The Silent Fortress of Harlem

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 1: Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions based on the text.

1. Why couldn't the police enter the Collyer house through the front door in 1947?

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2. Before isolating themselves, what were Homer and Langley's professions?

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3. What specific events and fears caused the brothers to lock themselves away from the outside world in the 1920s?

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4. Explain the irony of how Langley Collyer died.

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## Part 2: Vocabulary Practice

Choose the correct vocabulary word from the box to complete each sentence.

### Word Bank:

*Relic | Impenetrable | Squalor | Recluse | Labyrinth | Monumental | Derelict*

1. After being abandoned for decades, the old factory became a \_\_\_\_\_ building with broken windows and a caved-in roof.
2. The author lived as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the mountains, refusing to give interviews or see visitors for over twenty years.
3. The ancient coin found in the excavation site was a fascinating \_\_\_\_\_ of the Roman Empire.
4. Social workers were shocked by the \_\_\_\_\_ in which the neglected animals were forced to live.

5. Clearing out the 140 tons of debris from the mansion was a \_\_\_\_\_ task for the city workers.
  6. The castle's thick stone walls and iron gates made it completely \_\_\_\_\_ to enemy armies.
  7. The city streets were such a confusing \_\_\_\_\_ that the tourists quickly lost their way without a map.
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## Part 3: Grammar Spotlight (The Past Perfect Tense)

The Past Perfect tense (*had + past participle*) shows that one action happened before another action in the past. Combine the two past events below into one sentence using the Past Perfect for the action that happened **first**.

### Example:

- *Event 1 (First):* Langley built a tripwire.
- *Event 2 (Second):* The police discovered the traps.
- *Combined:* When the police discovered the traps, Langley **had** already **built** a tripwire.

1. *Event 1 (First):* The brothers locked the doors.

*Event 2 (Second):* The neighborhood changed.

**Combined:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. *Event 1 (First):* Homer passed away from starvation.

*Event 2 (Second):* The police finally reached him in 1947.

**Combined:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. *Event 1 (First):* Langley constructed intricate tunnels.

*Event 2 (Second):* The workman pulled at a suitcase.

**Combined:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Part 4: Critical Thinking & Psychology

Answer the following questions in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. **Understanding Diogenes Syndrome:** According to the text, how does Diogenes Syndrome differ from simple hoarding?

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2. **Analyzing Motives:** The text states that Langley's hoarding was a "defense mechanism." In your own words, explain how collecting junk made him feel safe, and why that feeling of safety was ultimately an illusion.

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## Answer Key: The Silent Fortress of Harlem

**Part 1: Reading Comprehension** (Note to instructor: Accept variations that convey the same meaning.)

- 1. Why couldn't the police enter the Collyer house through the front door in 1947?**  
**Answer:** The front door was completely blocked from the inside by a floor-to-ceiling, solid wall of junk, including old newspapers, broken furniture, and rusted metal.
  - 2. Before isolating themselves, what were Homer and Langley's professions?**  
**Answer:** Homer was a brilliant lawyer, and Langley was a talented engineer and a concert pianist.
  - 3. What specific events and fears caused the brothers to lock themselves away from the outside world in the 1920s?** **Answer:** Following the death of their parents and changes to their neighborhood, the brothers developed extreme paranoia. They believed the outside world was dangerous and that people were plotting to steal their family fortune.
  - 4. Explain the irony of how Langley Collyer died.** **Answer:** Langley was crushed to death by one of his own booby traps—a defense mechanism he had specifically built to keep intruders out and protect himself and his brother.
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## Part 2: Vocabulary Practice

1. After being abandoned for decades, the old factory became a **derelict** building with broken windows and a caved-in roof.
  2. The author lived as a **recluse** in the mountains, refusing to give interviews or see visitors for over twenty years.
  3. The ancient coin found in the excavation site was a fascinating **relic** of the Roman Empire.
  4. Social workers were shocked by the **squalor** in which the neglected animals were forced to live.
  5. Clearing out the 140 tons of debris from the mansion was a **monumental** task for the city workers.
  6. The castle's thick stone walls and iron gates made it completely **impenetrable** to enemy armies.
  7. The city streets were such a confusing **labyrinth** that the tourists quickly lost their way without a map.
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**Part 3: Grammar Spotlight (The Past Perfect Tense)** (Note: Sentence structures may vary slightly as long as the first event uses the Past Perfect tense [*had* + past participle] and the

*second uses the Simple Past.)*

1. **Combined:** The brothers **had locked** the doors before the neighborhood changed. (Or: *By the time the neighborhood changed, the brothers **had locked** the doors.*)
  2. **Combined:** When the police finally reached him in 1947, Homer **had** already **passed** away from starvation.
  3. **Combined:** Long before the workman pulled at a suitcase, Langley **had constructed** intricate tunnels.
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**Part 4: Critical Thinking & Psychology** (*Look for answers that hit these key concepts.*)

1. **Understanding Diogenes Syndrome: Answer:** Simple hoarding usually centers on a strong attachment to physical objects. Diogenes Syndrome goes much further; it involves extreme self-neglect, total social withdrawal, and a complete indifference or lack of shame regarding living in filthy conditions (squalor).
2. **Analyzing Motives: Answer:** Langley hoarded junk to build physical walls and tunnels, creating a barrier against a world he believed was hostile and trying to rob them. The feeling of safety was an illusion because his internal "defenses" created a deadly environment. The very traps meant to keep danger out are what ultimately killed him and left his brother to starve.