

= Homer and Lisa Exchange Cross Words =

" Homer And Lisa Exchange Cross Words " is the sixth episode of The Simpsons ' twentieth season . It originally aired on Fox in the United States on November 16 , 2008 . In the episode , Lisa discovers that she has a talent for solving crossword puzzles , and she enters a crossword tournament . Lisa 's feelings are hurt when she discovers that Homer bet against her in the championship match .

The episode was inspired by Patrick Creadon 's 2006 documentary Wordplay , and was written by Tim Long , and directed by Michael Polcino . Crossword puzzle creators Merl Reagle and Will Shortz guest star as themselves in the episode while Scott Thompson has a cameo as Grady , a character he first voiced in " Three Gays of the Condo " . Reagle created all of the crossword puzzles that appear in the episode and as promotion for the episode , a special Simpsons @-@ related message (dedicated to this episode) that appeared in The New York Times Sunday crossword on November 16 , 2008 . The episode received generally positive reviews from critics , and finished fourth in its timeslot during its initial airing on Fox , with a 3 @.@ 9 Nielsen rating .

= = Plot = =

Bart and Lisa start a lemonade stand , but it is quickly closed due to them not having a vending permit . They get in line at the licensing bureau , only to find that the long line is standing still due to the clerk doing a crossword puzzle . Impatient , Lisa completes the puzzle herself , only to find herself addicted to the puzzles . Eventually , she becomes so obsessed with them that Superintendent Chalmers hands her a pamphlet for the Crossword City Tournament . Meanwhile , at Moe 's , Edna Krabappel offers to buy a beer for anyone who breaks up with Principal Skinner for her . Homer ends their relationship , and decides to take a second job in which he helps break up romantic relationships . Grady , one of his old roommates , calls Homer and asks him to break up Grady 's and his boyfriend 's relationship because he found a new and " better " man in Duffman . Homer successfully manages to break up the couple . After making a good deal of money , he dreams that he is pestered by the " ghosts " of the jilted lovers and thus quits the trade .

At the crossword tournament , Homer bets his money from his breakup business on Lisa and wins big . However , upon hearing Lisa saying that she is wary of the final round , he bets on the other finalist , Gil Gunderson . Gil plays Lisa for her sympathy and cons her into losing the round , which in turn lets Homer win his final bet . Upon realizing that Homer has come into some money by betting against her in the tournament , Lisa gets angry at him and refuses to acknowledge herself as Homer 's daughter , even going so far as to take Marge 's maiden name and start calling herself " Lisa Bouvier " . Feeling guilty , Homer commissions Merl Reagle and Will Shortz to create a special puzzle for the New York Times , with his apology to Lisa hidden in the clues and solution . The two of them make up , and Lisa is happy to call herself a Simpson again .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by Tim Long , and directed by Michael Polcino . James L. Brooks got the inspiration for the episode from the 2006 documentary Wordplay which chronicles the national crossword puzzle championships , and he thought that Lisa should go to a championship in the episode . Will Shortz and Merl Reagle , who both starred in the documentary , appear in the episode . " We felt both Will and Merl were very compelling , off @-@ the @-@ beaten @-@ track personalities [in Wordplay] , who would fit into our universe very well " , Brooks said .

Shortz was the first guest star the producers of The Simpsons approached . Long later asked Reagle to make puzzles for the episode . Reagle recorded his lines in a studio near his home . Reagle told the Arizona Daily Wildcat that " for me , to be such a total nut for animation since I was a kid , I never even dreamed [of being in a cartoon] . It 's like a dream I never had coming true . " He added that " you don 't see [the crosswords] in the episode for very long , but when crossword fans watch this show , we want them to think that we got it right . " Reagle designed every puzzle that

appears in the episode , including one that appears in a hopscotch court in Lisa 's daydream . There were certain lines in the script that had to be incorporated into Reagle 's puzzles , including one where Gil says " I think I 'll throw some Q 's around , " , and he enters a number of Q 's onto the grid . Reagle therefore had to create a puzzle which used words that included the letter Q more frequently than would be usual . Reagle said he saw the early script of the episode , " but they change it right up to the last minute . In a lot of ways , I 'll be seeing it for the first time right along with everyone else . " Scott Thompson has a cameo in the episode as Grady , a character that he first voiced in the season 14 episode " Three Gays of the Condo " .

The episode features three musical montages : the sequence of Homer helping couples to break up features " Farewell to You , Baby " by Carl Martin , Homer 's gambling on Lisa 's puzzle solving is set to " Word Up ! " by Cameo and " Fanfare for the Common Man " plays in the background of the montage of words removed from the dictionary .

= = = Promotion = = =

In order to promote this episode , guest stars Reagle and Shortz collaborated with the episodes ' writer Tim Long to create a hidden Simpsons @-@ related message (dedicated to this episode) that appeared in The New York Times Sunday crossword on November 16 , 2008 . The crossword , which was titled " Sounds Like Somebody I Know " , also appears as a plot point in the episode . Harry Shearer recorded a clip of Mr. Burns and Smithers telling the winner of the National Public Radio 's Sundays Puzzle on November 16 , 2008 , what they had won .

= = Reception = =

On the night it aired , the episode was watched in 8 @, @ 520 @, @ 000 homes and had a 3 @. @ 9 Nielsen rating , finishing fourth in its timeslot . The episode did finish first in the 18 @-@ 34 demographic with a 4 @. @ 7 Nielsen rating and a 13 % share of the audience , narrowly beating an episode of 60 Minutes featuring Barack Obama in the demographic . Tim Long was nominated for Writers Guild of America Award in the animation category for writing the episode .

The episode received generally positive reviews from critics . Robert Canning of IGN did not think there was anything " terrible " about the episode , but he did not think there was anything to get excited about , either . Canning thought there were a number of throwaway jokes in the episode that he felt worked well , " but the episode as a whole failed to grab me . As stated , there are a number of episodes that already fit this mold , and most of those are far superior . " Daniel Aughey of TV Guide thought the episode provided a " healthy balance " of humor , story and heart . " Exactly what makes a great Simpsons episode ! " Aughey would have liked to see Homer 's storyline explored as an A story in its own episode rather than cut short as a C story .

Erich Asperschlager of TV Verdict thought the puzzle @-@ solving storyline was " a lot of fun " , both for its references to the " highly entertaining " documentary Wordplay and the jokes it inspired . He thought the one problem with the final part of the storyline was that it took away from what could have been " one of the best Lisa @-@ centric episodes in a long time . Marrying her bookish sensibilities with cruciverbal skills is an inspired idea . They should have done more with it . At the very least , it would have left more screentime for Will Shortz and Merl Reagle . "