

HARRY GORDON SELFRRIDGE



BIOGRAPHY

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Harry Gordon Selfridge was born in Wisconsin on January 11, 1858, although his family then moved to Michigan. His father fought in the Civil War, but never returned home to his family afterwards. His mother then worked as a teacher, with Harry delivering newspapers to bring in more money.

While he was still at school, Selfridge worked part-time at a dry-goods store. Then he left school and worked for a bank for a few years, before getting a job at a Field, Leiter & Company store in Chicago. Selfridge started out stocking shelves, but worked his way up to become personal assistant to one of the managers.

Selfridge had a skill for retail, and understood how to use advertizing and marketing to draw in customers and make them feel good. He helped popularize the idea that 'the customer is always right'. Before long, Selfridge was a junior partner of the company, and earning a lot of money.

In 1906, Selfridge went on vacation to England with his wife. While shopping in London he realized there was a gap in the retail market – department stores in Britain seemed far behind the United States in their selling techniques. So Selfridge invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in a department store in Oxford Street. The street was not known for shopping at the time, but Selfridge intended to change all that.

His new store, Selfridges, opened on March 15, 1909. Selfridge had paid for advertizing before the opening so there was great interest before the event. The store was a great success, and it is still there today. But Selfridge's own fortunes changed when the Great Depression struck in the 1930s, and he lost much of his money. He died in 1947.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'delivering'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'delivering' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'delivering'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'delivering'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'delivering' means.

Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: intended	aimed

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

While working in retail, Selfridge learned that making the customer feel good was important for sales.

Then Selfridge set up his own store, Selfridges, to bring American sales techniques to London.

Selfridge worked his way up until he was a junior partner.

Harry Gordon Selfridge was born in Wisconsin in 1858, but grew up in Michigan.

Selfridges was a success, but Selfridge himself lost his fortune during the Great Depression and afterwards.

After he left school Selfridge worked for a major store in Chicago.

In 1906, Selfridge traveled to England, and saw the shops in London.

Get to the facts

- 1 Where did Harry Gordon Selfridge work while still at school?
- 2 Which idea did Selfridge help popularize?
- 3 When did Selfridge go on vacation in England?
- 4 What did Selfridge call his new store?
- 5 Which street was Selfridges on?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Selfridges opening

I had heard about the new Selfridges store in the papers, so I decided to go to its opening day. As I walked into the crowded store, I was amazed...(now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

Understanding words:

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- b From that sentence, suggest what 'delivering' means.
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For example:

Key word – intended Synonym – aimed

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