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# Michael Jackson

WORKSHEET A

Michael Jackson, who died in Los Angeles from a heart attack on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2009, aged only 50, was one of the most influential performers in the history of pop music. Born in 1958 near Chicago, Jackson had nine brothers and sisters. He started performing with four of his brothers in a boy band, the Jackson 5, before he was eight years old. They were signed by the famous Motown record label and had great success, with songs such as *I Want You Back* and *ABC* reaching number one in the US music chart before Jackson's twelfth birthday. Jackson's singing voice and dancing skills already stood out, so it was no surprise when he also began a solo career. Jackson's solo album *Off the Wall* (1979) sold more than 20 million copies, but it was his next album, *Thriller* (1982) that made him an international superstar. The videos for two songs in particular, *Billie Jean* and *Thriller* (which gave its name to the album) were played over and over again on MTV. The *Thriller* video was a memorable piece of work, with Jackson leading dozens of zombies (with such good make-up that they really did look quite scary) in a sequence of impressive dance moves. *Thriller* became – and still is – the most successful album of all time, selling around 110 million copies worldwide.

Although in future he would make other important albums, and go on successful international tours, Jackson's mid-20s were the height of his career. It was downhill from then on, in every sense.

As he got older, Jackson became as famous for his troubled personality as for his music. The bizarre change in his physical appearance – his African-American skin becoming much paler and his face changing shape – is well known. People wondered how much cosmetic surgery he had received, and whether or not he had some kind of skin disease.

In his 30s and 40s Jackson often seemed to prefer the company of children (or his pet chimpanzee, Bubbles) to that of adults, and regularly invited groups of children to spend time at his California ranch, *Neverland*, which included fairground rides and a zoo.

Moreover, Jackson himself behaved in a strangely childlike way. Many people suggested he was trying to compensate for not having had a childhood himself, because when he was a small boy his father had forced him to spend most of his time rehearsing and touring, so that he was rarely able to play with other children.

## Michael Jackson

WORKSHEET B

### Exercise 1

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

1. *Off the Wall* was Michael Jackson's first solo album.
2. The video for *Billie Jean* was played a lot on MTV.
3. The songs *I Want You Back* and *ABC* are from Jackson's solo career.
4. *Thriller* is the second most successful album of all time.
5. Jackson's father gave him a lot of freedom when he was a child.
6. Jackson said he had never had cosmetic surgery.
7. Jackson was ten when he started performing with the Jackson 5.
8. The *Thriller* video included dancing zombies.
9. *Thriller* was Jackson's last album.
10. Jackson had a rare skin disease.

### Exercise 2

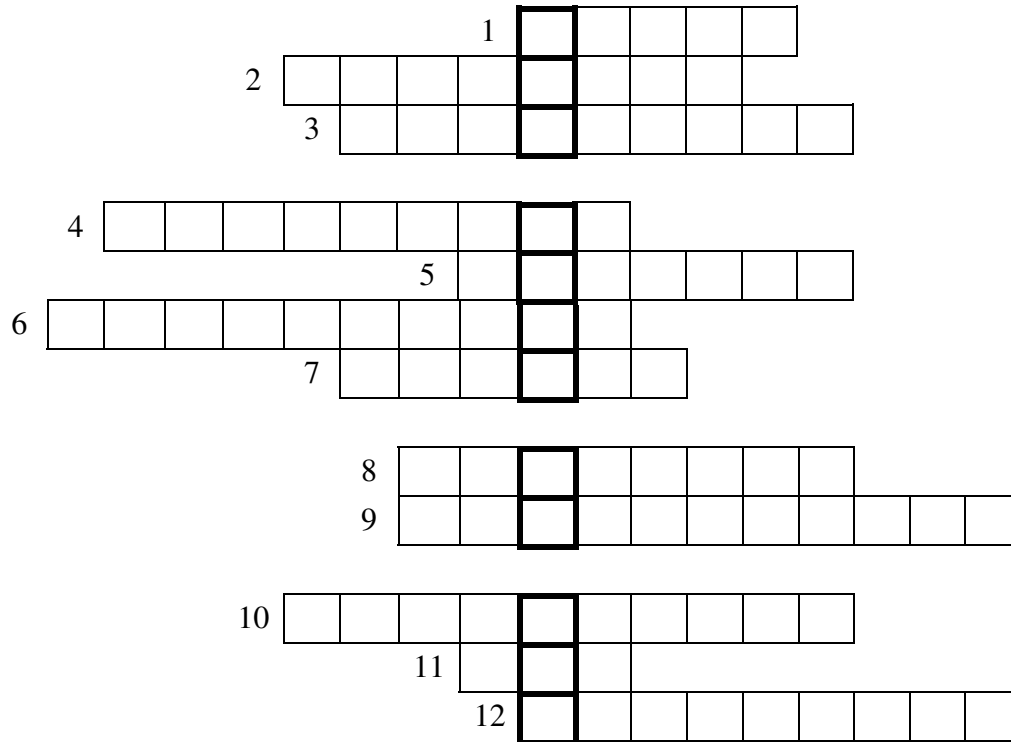
Answer the questions below.

1. What was *Neverland*?
2. Who was Bubbles?
3. How many copies did *Thriller* sell worldwide?
4. Who were the five members of the Jackson 5?
5. Why did the zombies in the *Thriller* video look quite scary?
6. What two changes to Michael Jackson's physical appearance are mentioned in the text?
7. In what way could it be said that Jackson didn't have a childhood?
8. According to the text, which of Jackson's talents were already obvious when he was in the Jackson 5?

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### Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the title people sometimes use to refer to Michael Jackson will read from top to bottom.



1. Michael Jackson went on successful \_\_\_\_\_ both as a member of the Jackson 5 and, later, as a solo performer.
2. According to the text, things began to go \_\_\_\_\_ for Jackson after *Thriller*.
3. Jackson was not just famous: he was a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The text describes Jackson as a \_\_\_\_\_ adult.
5. The text describes the changes to Jackson's physical appearance as \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Jackson had to spend a lot of time \_\_\_\_\_ when he was a member of the Jackson 5.
7. The text suggests that the period around *Thriller* was the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jackson's career.
8. Although extremely successful, Jackson was also a \_\_\_\_\_ person.
9. Jackson was extremely \_\_\_\_\_ in the history of pop music.
10. Jackson had a pet \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The Jackson 5 were a \_\_\_\_\_ band.
12. Jackson was a great \_\_\_\_\_.