

- a William James Sidis may have been the most intelligent person who ever lived, yet history hardly remembers him. The facts are true. His IQ was assessed at between 250 and 300. Complete the text with the simple past or past perfect (simple). Two verbs require the passive.

William James Sidis **was** born in 1898 to Russian immigrants, Jewish intellectual refugees with brilliant minds. His mother **gave up** her own ambitions to promote the intellectual abilities of their young son. By the time young Sidis **was** 18 months old, he **had learnt** to read – even the *New York Times*. By this time he (1 also – learn) ... to count. He (2 teach oneself) ... Latin when he was two. As soon as he (3 learn) ... Latin, he (4 teach oneself) ... Greek. He was now three – and was already typing letters in English and French. After only seven months in grade school he (5 complete) ... all seven grades. At the age of seven he (6 take) ... an interest in maths. By the time he was eight, he (7 already – write) ... four books. At eight he (8 pass) ... the Harvard Medical School anatomy examination and the entrance exam for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. By this time he (9 also – learn) ... eight languages.

In high school he (10 take) ... six weeks to complete the four year curriculum¹. From then on, William (11 stay) ... at home, because he (12 learn) ... everything there was to learn in school. He (13 read) ... Einstein and may have corresponded with the great man. By the time he was eleven, he (14 master²) ... advanced mathematics, so he (15 enrol³) ... as a 'special student' at Harvard. After he (16 study) ... at Harvard for a year, he (17 give) ... a lecture⁴ on 'four-dimensional bodies' to the Harvard Mathematical Club. After that, the press (18 follow) ... his every move – and his classmates (19 avoid) ... him. By the time he was sixteen, he (20 already – graduate) ... from Harvard. He then (21 go) ... to the Rice Institute, Houston, Texas, as a maths professor, where he increasingly (22 become) ... a social misfit⁵. After his students (23 ridicule⁶) ... their child professor for eight months, Sidis finally (24 give up) ... He (25 go) ... back to Harvard to study law. By the time he was eighteen, he (26 already – study) ... more than forty languages.

Up to now Sidis (27 drive) ... by his parents to become a mental giant, but he now (28 lead) ... a totally isolated life. A few years later he (29 disappear) ... from society.

In 1983 the physicist Chandra (30 win) ... the Nobel Prize for his work on the existence of black holes. Sidis (31 already – predict) ... their existence in 1925, in his remarkable book *The Animate and the Inanimate*. But his work (32 ignore) ... Sidis (33 die) ... of a stroke⁷ at age 46. He (34 spend) ... all his adult life running away from the media – and from his parents.

Adapted from 'William James Sidis' by John H. Lienhard; 'William James Sidis' by Jim Morton; 'The greatest mind ever – a lesson from history' by Dave Slater

- b Answer the questions in a few sentences, using the simple past and past perfect.

- 1 Why do you think Sidis became a social misfit?
- 2 What had Sidis probably never done in his childhood or as an adult?
- 3 Why had he probably tried to 'escape' from his parents as an adult?

1 curriculum *Lehrplan* 2 master *beherrschen* 3 enrol *sich einschreiben* 4 lecture *Vortrag* 5 misfit: person who does not fit in with society 6 ridicule: make somebody look stupid in public 7 stroke *Schlaganfall*