The Clockmaker's Study

The study door just locked behind you. You have one hour until midnight.

A printable Halloween escape room.

Best for teens and adults

3–8 players · about 45–60 minutes

A free printable from Kinundrum. Free for home and school use. Please don't post it publicly or sell it.

Host notes

Read before printing. You can still play.

Print single-sided. Black and white is fine:

- The story page
- The Apothecary Cabinet
- The Diary
- Under the Floorboards
- The Family Portrait
- The Ledger
- The Housekeeper's Statement
- Hint strips (cut apart)
- The Answer Page (fold and seal)
- Another way to play (optional, the last page)

If a player can't easily see the pictures or uses a screen reader, print Another way to play (the last page) too, or read it aloud.

Set up

1. Cut the Housekeeper's Statement into its six cards and shuffle them.
2. Cut the hint strips apart. Fold each strip twice so only the top label shows, then tape it shut. Each strip shows one hint at a time: unfold to Hint 1, then Hint 2, and the last fold is the answer.
3. Fold the Answer Page so its top flap closes over the rest, and tape it shut. Don't read it, so you can play.
4. Spread the four puzzle pages around the table or room, face down, with pens. Keep the Ledger with the Housekeeper's Statement cards: they're the last puzzle.
5. Optional: dim the lights, battery candles, a ticking clock playing somewhere.
6. Set a 60-minute timer, but don't start it yet.

Rules

- Read the story card aloud, then start the timer.
- Do the four puzzle pages in any order, and write each answer on its page. Split up and swap. When all four are solved, hand over the Ledger and the Housekeeper's Statement cards together.
- Stuck? Open one fold of that puzzle's hint strip. There's no penalty, it's a party.
- When you think you know the final word, say it aloud together, then open the Answer Page.

Good to know

- Setup takes about 10 minutes.

The story (read aloud)

It is eleven o'clock on Halloween night. You came to the old Vane house for a party, but the party isn't here. Instead you're standing in the study of Ambrose Vane, a clockmaker who vanished from this room on Halloween night, 1926.

The door has just clicked shut behind you. On the desk is a card in spidery handwriting:

> *Every Halloween, someone finds my study. The door opens for anyone who can say the word that ends the night. I hid its letters in four places: in my diary, under the floor, in my family's portrait and in my cabinet. My housekeeper will tell you their order, if you read her carefully. You have until midnight.*
>
> *— A.V.*

Somewhere in the house, a clock begins to tick.

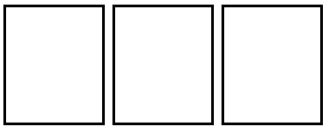
Start the timer.

The Apothecary Cabinet

A tall cabinet of nine small drawers, each with a brass number and a faded label. A three-dial lock holds them all shut. Only the right number opens. Taped inside the cabinet door is the cook's notebook page: four tries at the lock, each with a note in Vane's handwriting beside it.

The cook tried it the night Vane vanished and never got it open. Whatever is in the right drawer, Vane didn't want it found.

"No digit is used twice," Vane has written at the top.

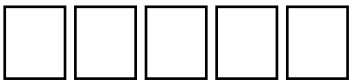


The cook tried	Vane's note
3 9 1	One number is right and in its place. One is right but in the wrong place.
7 4 6	One number is right but in the wrong place.
1 3 0	Two numbers are right, but both are in the wrong place.
9 4 7	One number is right and in its place.

The drawers

152 · Myrrh	**307** · Ergot	**486** · Tansy
901 · Clove	**317** · Anise	**620** · Thyme
758 · Rowan	**961** · Cumin	**314** · Senna

The drawer holds:



The Diary

The last page of Vane's diary. The ink is smeared, as if he wrote in a panic. The handwriting is his, but the words are nonsense: he hid it in code, even from his own housekeeper. At the top of the page, underlined twice:

Wind it back five.

N QTXY RD UTHPJY BFYHM. BNYMTZY NY N HFSSTY KNSI RD BFD GFHP YT RTWSNSL.

Along the edge, someone has ruled a strip:

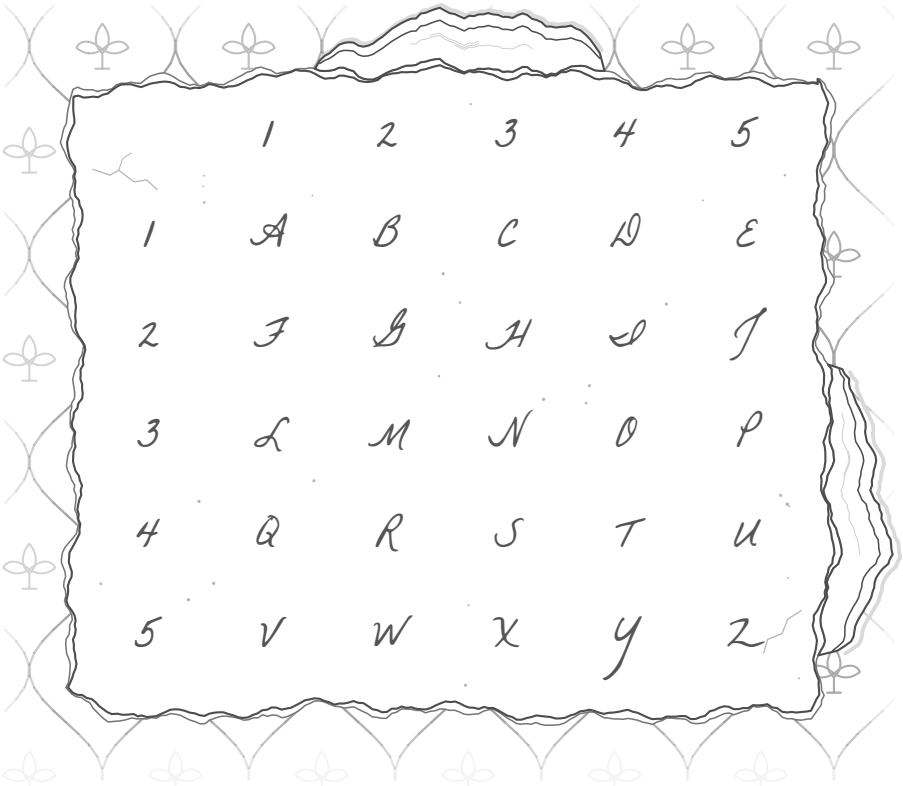
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Vane lost his:



Under the Floorboards

Low on the wall, just above the floorboards, someone has peeled back a strip of wallpaper. On the bare plaster underneath, they pencilled a key: a grid of letters, numbered along the edges.



Kneel down and you can hear it: knocking, from under the floor. It started the moment the door clicked shut: the same pattern, over and over, with short pauses, and one long pause in the middle. This is what you hear:

👊👊 👊👊 👊👊👊 👊👊👊👊 👊👊👊 👊👊👊👊

👊 👊👊👊👊

(long pause)

👊 👊👊👊👊👊 👊👊👊👊👊 👊 👊 👊👊👊👊👊

👊👊👊 👊👊👊 👊👊 👊👊👊👊 👊👊👊 👊👊👊 👊👊 👊👊

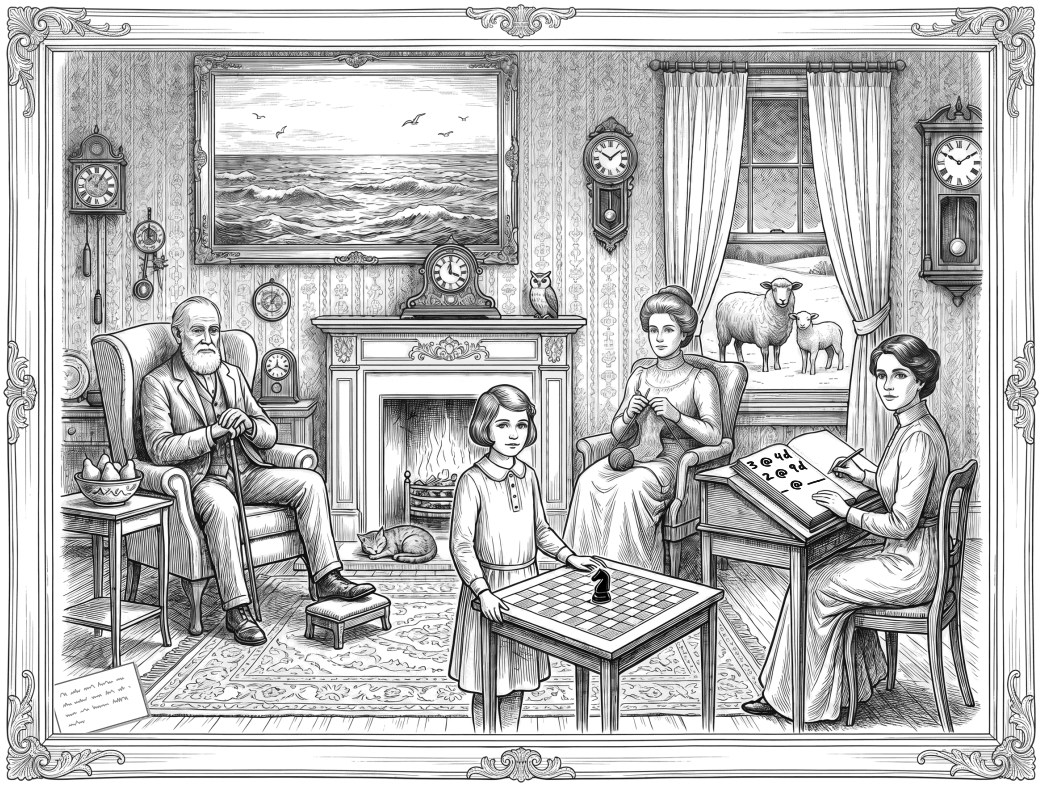
Someone under the floor is trying to tell you something. What are they saying?

The knocking says:

☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

The Family Portrait

Over the parlor fireplace hangs one great painting: the Vane family at home, painted the winter before Ambrose Vane vanished. They watched him work. A card is tucked into the frame in Vane's hand: "Each of the four has one word to say. Greet them as I was taught to, eldest first, and they will give you my message. Listen to what they say." Mrs. Hollis says Vane stood here and would not come away.



Vane's message:

☐☐☐ ☐☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Written on the back of the canvas

My sister Hester is younger than I am, and cleverer. She never put down the household account book while there were sums to do.

Wren is our daughter. She learned chess before her feet reached the floor, and she still won't let anyone else touch her chessboard.

My father, Josiah, taught me to mend my first clock. He sits beneath the painting he brought home from his years in the navy, with his boots up on the footstool as every evening.

My wife, Cordelia, is two years older than I am and has never let me forget it. She sat knitting by the window, with wool from her father's flock.

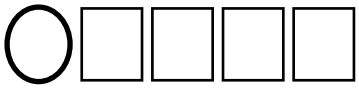
I am not in the picture. Someone had to hold the painter's lamp.

The Ledger

Copy each place's answer from its page into the boxes. The **circled box** is that place's letter.

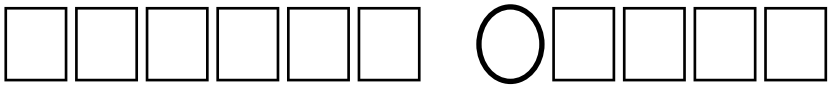
The housekeeper's statement gives the four places in the order Vane went to them on his last night.

The apothecary cabinet's drawer holds:



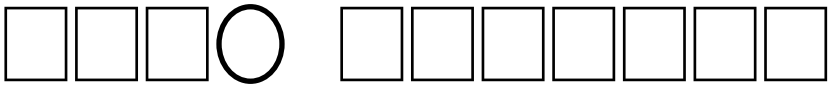
Letter: _____

The diary says Vane lost his:



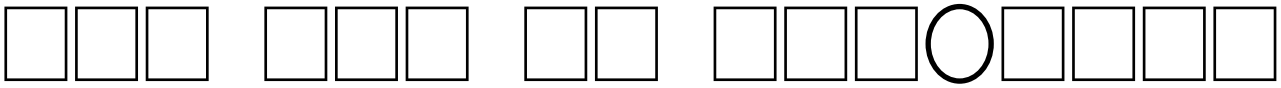
Letter: _____

Under the floorboards, the knocking says:



Letter: _____

The family portrait says:

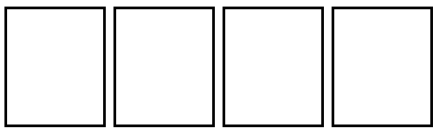


Letter: _____

In order:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

Write each place's circled letter in that order:



Say it aloud together, then open the Answer Page.

The Housekeeper's Statement

From the statement of Mrs. Edda Hollis, housekeeper to Mr. Ambrose Vane, given on the morning of November 1, 1926. Put her six cards back in order and you'll know how to read the Ledger. Midnight is getting closer.

Cut these cards apart and shuffle them before play.

"By eleven every candle had burned out. In the dark he went to stand before the family portrait, and he would not come away."

"He crushed something from the apothecary cabinet into a cup of tea. That was exactly halfway between his knocking on the floor and his sitting down to write."

"The hall clock struck eight, and he counted the strikes out loud. Then he lit every candle in the study."

"He sat down to write in his diary an hour and a half after he knelt on the floor. I brought him a lamp, and he didn't look up."

"The clock struck twelve. When the last stroke faded, the study was empty and his chair was still warm."

"Half an hour after the candles were lit, he was on his knees, knocking on the floorboards and listening, as if someone might knock back."

Hint strips

Cut along the dashed lines. Fold each strip so only its label shows. Open one fold at a time.

The Apothecary Cabinet

fold

Hint 1 Compare 7 4 6 and 9 4 7. The 4 sits in the same spot in both, so it can't be "right and in its place" in one try and "in the wrong place" in the other. It isn't in the code.

fold

Hint 2 9 4 7 puts the 7 last. 3 9 1 puts the 3 first. Now use 1 3 0 for the middle.

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **317**, the drawer of **ANISE**. The Ledger's circled letter is **A**. The drawer slides open. Inside is a pinch of something crushed, and it smells like the tea Mrs. Hollis mentions.

The Diary

fold

Hint 1 "Wind it back" means move each letter backward in the alphabet. Use the alphabet strip on the page.

fold

Hint 2 Move each letter back five places: N becomes I, and Q becomes L. It begins "I LOST MY..."

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **POCKET WATCH.** ("I lost my pocket watch. Without it I cannot find my way back to morning.") The Ledger's circled letter is **W**.

Under the Floorboards

fold

Hint 1 Each letter is two groups of knocks. Count the first group to choose a row of the pencilled grid, and the second group to choose a column.

fold

Hint 2 The first letter is 2 knocks, then 2 knocks: row 2, column 2, which is G. There's no K in the grid; C stands in for it.

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **GOOD EVENING.** The Ledger's circled letter is **D**.

Hint strips

Cut along the dashed lines. Fold each strip so only its label shows. Open one fold at a time.

The Family Portrait

fold

Hint 1 Each person's word is something you can see near them, read aloud: Hester's account book, the painting above Josiah, Wren's chessboard, the view behind Cordelia. Greet them eldest first.

fold

Hint 2 Josiah is the eldest and Wren, the daughter, the youngest. Cordelia is two years older than Vane and Hester is younger, so Cordelia comes second and Hester third. Cordelia's word has three letters: what do you call a mother sheep? And on the chessboard it's not just a knight: where is it?

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **SEE YOU AT MIDNIGHT.** The sea (see), a ewe (you), @ (at), and a knight in the middle of the board (mid-knight). The Ledger's circled letter is **N**.

The Housekeeper's Statement

fold

Hint 1 Work out a time for every card. Three cards give you the hour outright: eight, eleven and twelve.

fold

Hint 2 Candles at 8:00, so the floorboards at 8:30 and the diary at 10:00. Halfway between those puts the cabinet at 9:15.

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **Floorboards, cabinet, diary, family portrait.**

The Ledger

fold

Hint 1 Write each place's circled letter in the order from the housekeeper's statement.

fold

Hint 2 It isn't the first word a Halloween crowd reaches for. Vane wants the night to *end*.

fold

Hint 3 Answer: **DAWN.**

tape here

tape here

The Answer Page

Fold and seal. Open only at the end.

Top flap. Read this first.

If you said WAND: So close. The house loves that one. Check the order the housekeeper gave you and try again before you open the flap. Said something else? Open it.

fold here

The word is DAWN.

You say it together: *dawn*. Somewhere in the walls, the knocking stops.

The door swings open onto a grey hallway, and far down it, a window is turning pale. Behind you, on the desk where nothing was a moment ago, a pocket watch begins to tick.

You escaped with ____ minutes to spare.

Place	Answer	Letter
The Apothecary Cabinet	317: ANISE	A
The Diary	POCKET WATCH	W
Under the Floorboards	GOOD EVENING	D
The Family Portrait	SEE YOU AT MIDNIGHT	N
The Housekeeper's Statement	Floorboards, cabinet, diary, family portrait	(order)

Want one built from your own group's stories, jokes and history? Join the Kinundrum Advent beta.

A free printable from Kinundrum. Free for home and school use. Please don't post it publicly or sell it.

Illustrations: original art made for this kit. Pictures and icons: Noto Emoji (Google), SIL Open Font License 1.1; Tabler Icons (Paweł Kuna), MIT License. Fonts: Atkinson Hyperlegible (Braille Institute of America), SIL Open Font License 1.1; Atkinson Hyperlegible Mono (The Atkinson Hyperlegible Mono Project Authors), SIL Open Font License 1.1; La Belle Aurore (Kimberly Geswein), SIL Open Font License 1.1; Caveat (The Caveat Project Authors), SIL Open Font License 1.1.

Another way to play

Text versions of the puzzles that rely on pictures, for a player who can't easily see them or uses a screen reader. The answers and the hints are the same, so write answers on the puzzle's own page.

Under the Floorboards

The pencilled grid is on the Under the Floorboards page. This is the knocking, written out one knock at a time. A comma is a short pause and a full stop a longer one, just as the gaps on the page:

Knock knock, knock knock. Knock knock knock, knock knock knock knock. Knock knock knock, knock knock knock knock. Knock, knock knock knock knock.

(long pause)

Knock, knock knock knock knock knock knock. Knock knock knock knock knock, knock. Knock, knock knock knock knock knock. Knock knock knock, knock knock knock. Knock knock, knock knock knock knock. Knock knock knock, knock knock knock. Knock knock, knock knock.

The boxes and the hints are the same as on the Under the Floorboards page.

The Family Portrait

You're standing in front of the painting. This is what you see, from left to right:

On the left, an old man with a white beard sits in a winged armchair, both hands resting on a walking stick, his boots up on a little footstool. On the wall above him hangs a large framed painting of waves rolling across open water, with gulls in the sky.

In the middle, in front of the fireplace, a girl stands at a small table with a chessboard on it. A single black knight stands on one of the four middle squares of the board. A cat sleeps on the hearth behind her.

Behind her, a woman sits knitting in an armchair, a ball of wool in her lap. In the window beside her, out in a snowy field, stand a sheep and her lamb.

On the right, a second woman sits at a writing desk with a pen in her hand and a book open in front of her. On its right-hand page, in her handwriting, are two lines, "3 @ 4d" and "2 @ 9d", and under them a blank line, "_ @ __", ready for the next.

Clocks hang all around the walls, and one stands on the mantelpiece. The card is tucked into the bottom left corner of the frame.

The writing on the back of the canvas, the boxes and the hints are the same as on the Family Portrait page.