



HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATORS' GUIDE

A PICTURE BOOK OF HARRY HOUDINI

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ILLUSTRATED BY MATT
COLLINS

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Readers will be mesmerized by this captivating biography of one of the most celebrated escape artists and magicians in history.

Harry Houdini astounded audiences around the globe with his death-defying acts and illusions. With his wife, Bess, often by his side, he freed himself from ropes, handcuffs, straight jackets, and prison cells. Though Harry was always intrigued by magic, his life was not always so glamorous. As a boy he shined shoes to help his family make ends meet. Yet a career in magic was always in the cards. *Includes a selected bibliography, source notes, important dates, and recommended websites.*

INTRODUCING THE BOOK

Popular culture has been defined as culture for the masses. Today it is associated with movies, TV, radio, cyberspace, advertising, toys, etc. In short, it is anything that captures the imagination of the people. From the 1890s to his death in 1926, Harry Houdini was at the center of American popular culture. He astounded, captivated, and mesmerized audiences with his death-defying escapes. He was one of the first celebrities to be known by just one name, Houdini. Even today his legacy lives on. His performances continue to be the gold standard for magicians today.

Before reading *A Picture Book of Harry Houdini*, discuss with your students popular culture today. Brainstorm with them categories of popular culture. Make sure they include: music/dance, fashion, entertainment (TV, movies, theater), celebrities, toys, and language.

Create a chart like the one that follows and have your students fill in their responses. Then add a chart for parents and a third one for grandparents. Your students should interview their parents and grandparents to find out what was popular when they were children. The responses should be written on the appropriate chart.

Questions to be answered are:

- Which things that were popular when their parents and grandparents were children continue to be popular today? Which are not? Why?
- Will things that are popular today be popular in the future? Why?

POPULAR CULTURE

Pop Culture Today

Music/dance	Fashion	Entertainment (TV, Movies, Theater)	Celebrities	Toys	Language

Pop Culture When My Parents Were Children

Music/dance	Fashion	Entertainment (TV, Movies, Theater)	Celebrities	Toys	Language

Popular Culture When My Grandparents Were Children

Music/dance	Fashion	Entertainment (TV, Movies, Theater)	Celebrities	Toys	Language

LET'S PUT ON A SHOW

Vaudeville was all the rage in Houdini's time. Vaudeville was a style of variety entertainment in the United States. (England had a similar form of live theater called "music hall.")

A vaudeville show consisted of a number of entertainers, each with a specialty: comedians, dancers, impersonators, singers, acrobats, song-and-dance men, musicians, and magicians. They traveled across the country to entertain audiences from New York City to California.

Have your students put on their own vaudeville show. They can sing, dance, tell jokes, impersonate a famous person, and of course do magic tricks. They can work individually or in groups of twos, threes, or fours.

There were two categories of acts in a vaudeville show: well-known entertainers such as Al Jolson, the Marx Brothers, and George M. Cohan to name a few; and novelty acts such as mind readers, balancing feats, and animal trainers. These novelty acts always had interesting names to excite the audience. Have your students create names for their acts. Discuss with them the types of words and language they can use, such as adjectives and alliteration. Examples are *The Fabulous Four* for a group of singers, or *Martha's Marvelous Melodies* for a singing act by Martha.

Once the acts are set, select one student to be the master of ceremonies.

The second illustration in *A Picture Book of Harry Houdini* shows Houdini on a vaudeville stage. Note the placard on the right-hand side. This was the typical way to identify and introduce acts. Your students should make placards or signs to announce their acts. The master of ceremonies should reveal each new card as an act comes on the stage.

The class can create and hang billboards around the room announcing the vaudeville show. Put the show on in your classroom and then take it on the road to entertain other classes in your school. Students might want to entertain their parents, so send notes home inviting families to attend the show.

MAGIC TRICKS

Harry Houdini was an expert in sleight of hand. He confounded audiences with magic tricks, leaving them wondering, "How did he do that?" Your students can learn some easy magic tricks that will amaze their friends. Below are several websites filled with magic tricks for young readers.

<http://www.activitytv.com/magic-tricks-for-kids>

<http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/do/magictricks.html>

<http://magic.about.com/od/libraryofsimpletricks/ig/Easy-Tricks-for-Kids/>

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