



Houdini and Me

by Dan Gutman

THEMES

- Modern Fantasy
- Time Travel
- Friendship
- Bullies

ABOUT THE BOOK

Harry has always admired the famous escape artist Houdini. And when Houdini asks for help in coming back to life, it seems like an amazing chance . . . or could it be Houdini's greatest trick of all?

Eleven-year-old Harry Mancini is *not* Harry Houdini—the famous escape artist who died in 1926. But Harry *does* live in Houdini's old New York City home, and he definitely knows everything there is to

know about Houdini's life. What is he supposed to do then, when someone starts texting him claiming that they're Houdini, communicating from beyond the grave? Respond, of course.

It's hard for Harry to believe that Houdini is really contacting him, but this Houdini texts the secrets to all of the escape tricks the dead Houdini used to do. What's more, Houdini's offering Harry a chance to go back in time and experience it for himself. Should Harry ignore what must be a hoax? Or should he give it a try and take Houdini up on this death-defying offer?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Harry Mancini was born in Harry Houdini's house on West 113th Street in New York City. How has he become obsessed with the great magician? How does Harry's understanding of Houdini evolve over the course of the novel?
- Harry Mancini learns from Houdini that the key to a magic trick is "misdirection." How does Gutman use this tactic to build suspense? How do the twists in the plot contribute to the story overall?
- At what point do the fantastical elements of the novel become obvious? How does fantasy interact with reality in the story's world?
- Time travel plays an important role in the story. What is the magical device in this novel? This device has meaning other than simply making the time travel possible. What is especially symbolic about the device?

- Harry Mancini and Zeke Austin have a unique relationship. Which boy is the leader of the pair? How do the boys play off each other's characteristics?
- Discuss Zeke's reaction to Harry revealing his communication with Houdini. How would you react if you were Zeke?
- Why are the text messages that Harry receives from Houdini written in capital letters? Explain the first message, "YOU COULD HAVE ESCAPED" (p. 44). How does Houdini's message "WE EXIST IN PARALLEL WORLDS" (p. 53) explain the supernatural and spiritual elements in the story?
- The struggle between good and evil in an important theme in the novel. When does Harry Mancini realize that Houdini is evil? How does Harry eliminate the evil force of Houdini?
- When Harry tells Houdini that he thought he was a good guy, Houdini replies, "I'M A DESPERATE GUY. DESPERATE MEN DO DESPERATE THINGS" (p. 183). How does Harry himself feel desperate and powerless?
- Harry reveals that he is afraid of heights and bullies. Houdini tells him, "YOU CANNOT GET PAST FEAR UNLESS YOU CONFRONT IT" (p. 89). How does Houdini help Harry confront his fear of heights? Is Harry ready to confront his bully when he awakes from the coma?
- At the beginning of the novel, when Zeke suggests that they put a penny on the train track in Freedom Tunnel, Harry replies that it sounds like an urban legend. In what ways has Harry felt as though he has been a main character in an urban legend?
- What is significant about the cell phone at the end of the novel? How are the characters of Harry and Houdini developed through the use of communication through dialogue?
- Good fantasy allows readers to see themselves more clearly. How does Harry see himself more clearly at the end of the novel? How do you see yourself after reading?
- How does the novel appeal to the reader's sense of wonder? Explain the familiar feeling created by Harry's relationship with his mother and with Zeke.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dan Gutman is the author of *Houdini and Me*. He grew up in New Jersey loving sports, which inspired him as an adult to write his Baseball Card Adventure series, beginning with *Honus & Me*, which was nominated for eleven state awards and adapted for television. Other titles of his include the My Weird School series, The Genius Files series, *The Kid Who Ran for President*, and many more. He lives with his wife and two children in New York City.