

Harry Houdini

by Guy Belleranti

Harry Houdini is the most famous magician and escape artist of all time. He was born Ehrich Weisz in 1874 in Budapest, Hungary. When he was four his family moved to Appleton, Wisconsin and his last name became Weiss due to a misspelling by immigration officials. Like many immigrants of the time, they were a poor family.



Ehrich had to work to support his family. His father made a living as a rabbi. The family relocated to New York City.

Ehrich had become a magician. He started his act by choosing it as an escape act. He performed an act called The Houdini Escape. He was inspired by Robert-Houdin, a famous French magician.

After a couple of years, he had several brothers. However, they were not successful. His wife, Wilhelmina, was also a magician. They called themselves "The Houdinis".

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his fascination led to his escape act. With a friend, he formed the duo. He was inspired by Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin. He named his first name to Harry. He was inspired by his escape act. He married Wilhelmina. The duo then called themselves "The Houdinis".

Harry Houdini was a small man of 5'5", but he was extremely strong and athletic. He was also highly motivated to succeed. Still, he was not an instant success. Starting out with card tricks, he billed himself as the King of Cards. He gradually moved on to large illusions and run-of-the-mill box escape routines.

The real take-off point in his career may have been in 1898 when he invented the

Name : _____

"Escape Challenge". With this routine, he dared spectators to handcuff or tie him in unusual knots. He would then miraculously free himself or "escape". Soon, he and Bess were performing on vaudeville stages throughout the country. As his popularity and fame grew so did the number of places he performed. He performed in Europe and even in Australia.

His increasingly complicated escapes and illusions created the image of a super hero. No handcuffs, straitjacket or jail cell could hold him. One routine featured him escaping from a straitjacket while hanging upside down high above the ground. In his famed Metamorphosis routine, Houdini was locked in a trunk full of liquid, and in the water tank full of water. He escaped on stage and "walked

When Houdini worked with a couple of his friends on Houdini's magic. One day, an injured Houdini nicknamed himself become Buster Keaton in the silent movie era.

In the early 1900's, he was intrigued by magic, although the boy wasn't a magician. The boy grew up to become a comedian of the silent

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And speaking of the silent movie era, in 1919 Harry Houdini established his own short-lived movie company. He made several silent films in which he starred and performed dangerous stunts. However, the films, unlike his magic, were not very successful.

Houdini's love for daredevil and exotic endeavors extended even to airplanes. In

Name : _____

1910, he was on a performing tour in Australia, and during the tour he became one of the first people to fly a plane on that continent.

After his mother's death in 1913 Houdini consulted a spiritualist. His hope was to communicate with his dead mother. What he found instead were spirit mediums using magic tricks to con their victims. This set him off on a new crusade. He began attending séances in disguise, his purpose being to reveal mediums as frauds. He also began devoting parts of his performances to exposure shows, duplicating the ghostly apparitions, noises and mysterious levitations of the spiritualist.

He did expose
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Conan Doyle was a g
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In the fall of 19
began having severe
medical treatment. A
unprepared Houdini
withstand body blow
isn't known. Howeve

Michigan with a ruptured appendix and peritonitis. A number of days later on Halloween Harry Houdini died. He was 52 years old.

But that isn't the end of the Harry Houdini story. Houdini had apparently made a pact with Bess that he would contact her from "the other side" if such a thing were possible. Bess began attending publicized séances every Halloween. He never did

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Name : _____

communicate with her, however, and after ten years she stopped the séances.

Still, Harry Houdini lives on. Magicians continue to perform many of his famous routines, mystifying and entertaining audiences the world over. And in July 2002 the United States Postal Service issue a postage stamp with his likeness.

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Name : _____

Harry Houdini

1) Classify the following sentences as true (if it's mentioned in the passage), false (if it contradicts the text) and not given (If the information is not mentioned in the passage).

a) Harry developed a liking for magic at a young age.

b) Harry didn't become a great magician overnight.

c) Before Bess, his wife, became Harry's partner in performances, he had worked with three _____

d) Unlike his _____ successful.

e) Harry's ma _____ prove spiritualists
wrong. _____

f) Harry's ma _____ lmes stories.

2) The writer attrik _____
enlist them? _____

Houdini. Can you _____

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3) What was the original purpose for Houdini's association with the spiritualists? Did this purpose change? If yes, expound on the new purpose.

Name : _____

Harry Houdini

4) Explain the cause of the sinking of the Titanic and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

_____ Houdini and Sir Arthur

5) Write a short note on Vaudeville.

_____ Séance

_____ Séance

-

_____ Levitation

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wrong. _____

f) Harry's ma

No

2) The writer attri
enlist them?

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Houdini. Can you

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3) What was the original purpose for Houdini's association with the spiritualists? Did this purpose change? If yes, expound on the new purpose.

Houdini originally consulted a spiritualist hoping to communicate with his

dead mother. Yes, this purpose changed as he realized that spirit mediums

were using magic tricks to con their victims. This set him off on a new

Name : _____

Harry Houdini

crusade. He began attending séances in disguise, his purpose being to reveal mediums as frauds. He also began devoting parts of his performances to exposure shows, duplicating the ghostly apparitions, noises and mysterious levitations of the spiritualist. He did succeed in exposing some mediums as frauds.

4) Explain the cause of Harry Houdini's friendship with Conan Doyle.

In his crusade against spiritualism, Houdini strained his friendship with Conan Doyle, who was a great believer in spiritualism. Houdini used to perform

Harry Houdini and Sir Arthur

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5) Write a short note on Vaudeville.

Vaudeville

entertainment that was

popular in 1800s.

Séance

-

It's a meeting in which people try to communicate

with the dead through the agency of a medium.

Levitation

-

It's the act of rising and floating, or making

someone rise or float without physical effort.

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