

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 help support his family. His father made a living as a rabbi. The family eventually 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 acts. With a friend, he formed the duo. He was inspired by Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin. He changed his first name to Harry. He was inspired by his brother. He was inspired by his brother. Harry Houdini married. 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 escape act.

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"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 superhero. 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 would appear on stage and "walked

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

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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 some of the mediums he had formed with. Conan Doyle was a great skeptic of exposures. In fact, so were the powers that he used.

In the fall of 1919 Houdini began having severe back pain. After medical treatment. An unprepared Houdini could not withstand body blows. The cause isn't known. However,

Houdini died in Detroit, 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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to strained a friendship with Sherlock Holmes stories.

believe Houdini's claim that he himself had magical powers.

another tour when he was in Detroit. At his tour, he refused to perform. He allegedly punched an audience member. His well-known ability to escape from handcuffs and other restraints with what followed. He died in Detroit, Michigan.

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 i

e) Harry's ma
wrong. _____

f) Harry's ma

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successful.

prove spiritualists

lmes stories.

Houdini. Can you

2) The writer attrik
enlist them?

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 Conan Doyle.

Houdini and Sir Arthur

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5) Write a short note on the following:

Vaudeville

Séance - _____

Levitation - _____