

Novel Resource 3

Sid Fleischman, *Escape! The True Story of Great Houdini*; 2006, Harper Collins Publishers

About the Author

Sid Fleischman is an accomplished, award-winning author. Fleischman has had an interesting life. He was born in Brooklyn, New York and grew up in San Diego, California during the Great Depression. In fifth grade he decided he wanted to become a magician. After high school, he traveled with vaudeville and a ghost-goblin show. He served in the armed forces and then finished college. He worked for a newspaper, and when it folded he turned to fiction writing.

The most interesting thing about Fleischman is that he is a magician. He became interested in magic as a young boy. He even met Bess Houdini, Harry Houdini's wife.

Fleischman has a collection of work including: *The Trouble Begins at 8, A Life of Mark Twain in the Wild, Wild West, Look Behind You, Lady, Venetian Blonde, Jim Ugly, The Whipping Boy, The Entertainer and the Dybbak, The White Elephant, The Giant Rat of Sumatra: or Pirates Galore, Disappearing Act, The 13th Floor: A Ghost Story, By the Great Horn Spoon, The Abracadabra Kid, A Carnival of Animals, Bandit's Moon, The Scarebird, Humbug Mountain, and The Midnight Horse.*

Awards won by Fleischman:

Finalist, American Book Awards The Mark Twain Award (Missouri) The Lewis Carroll Shelf Award The California Young Reader Medal Silver Medal, Commonwealth Club of California The John and Patricia Beatty Award Boston Globe-Horn Book Award The Nene Award (Hawaii) The Charlie May Simon Award (Arkansas, three times) The Young Hoosier Award (Indiana) The Golden Archer Award (Wisconsin) Boys Clubs of America Junior Book Award Jo Osborne Humor Award Parent's Choice Award Redbook Award Paul A. Witty Award American Library Association Notable Books School Library Journal Best Books of the Year, and the Newbery Medal.

Annotation

Now you see him, now you don't, now you see him! Harry Houdini is considered the greatest magician in the world. But, is he really? Sid Fleischman takes you into the world of magic and showmanship during the the late 1800's and early 1900's. Enter Harry Houdini's world through Fleischman's intriguing and insightful biography of the Great Harry Houdini.

Jennifer Scharbrough, Carl Wilde, IPS#79, scharbrj@ips.k12.in.us

Genre- Non-fiction, biography
Point of View-Third person

Theme-The theme of this book is keep trying and never give up and you can achieve your dreams. The title does match the theme in that Houdini is great and to be great you have to work hard and not give up.

Conflict- The conflict Houdini faced in his life was becoming successful. He resolved that by never giving up and he was a success.

Characters:

Harry Houdini

Dash- his younger brother; Dash was also a magician and assisted him on and off during his career.

Bess-his wife; Bess was a performer in one of the shows he performed in. He met her and she became the love of his life.

Setting- United States and Europe; mid 1800's -1920's

Interest Level 6-8

Reading Level 6.6

Book Talk

Houdini has become an adjective almost as much as the person. When someone says that's a real Houdini, what do they mean? Harry Houdini is known as the greatest escape artist ever. How did Houdini enter into this world of magic? Was he a magician; was he just a showman? This biography of the Great Houdini answers some of those questions and more.

Pre-reading questions

Does magic interest you?

Do you wonder how magic is done?

Have you ever been to a magic show or watched a magic special on TV?

What did you think about it?

How do you think someone learns to be a magician?

During Reading

How do you think a twelve year old could survive running away from home?

Chapter 2, page 18.

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Why do you think Houdini changed everything about himself, his birthdate, his name, and where he was born?

Harry Houdini seems to discount Spiritualism, yet he is always exploring it and is involved in it some way. Do you really think he doesn't believe in ghosts, spirits, etc? Support your answer. Chapters 17-end of book.

After reading

Although Houdini changed his name, he remained devoted to his family. When his father dies on pages 36 and 37, Houdini writes that he called him and wrote, "he made me repeat the promise that my mother would never want for anything". Houdini kept that promise. What does that say about Houdini's character?

Do you think that the tricks Houdini performed were worth the risks to his life? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary-

Sleight-(35) deceitful, craftiness

When a magician uses the phrase, "sleight of hand" or "sleights", it means how they trick the person/people watching.

Metamorphosis(35)change of physical form, structure, or substance, especially by supernatural means

In the book, metamorphosis was the name Houdini gave one of his acts because something changed as by magic.

Spiritualism(11)-a belief that spirits from the dead communicate with the living usually through a medium.

Spiritualism is thinking that someone living can talk to someone dead and communicate the dead's words to the living.

Bucolic(50)-relating to a type of rural life

In the book, it means the simple life.

Prestidigitation (prestidigitator), (13)-sleight of hand; magic

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Indiana Standards

Language Arts-6.1.1, 1.3., 1.4; 6.2.7, 2.8; 6.3.1, 3.6,

7.1.3; 7.2.6, 2.7; 7.3.3, 3.5
8.3.7, 3.8; 8.2.9; 8.1.3

Anticipation statement-Escape Houdini

- A person should risk their life for their profession.
- People can communicate with the dead.
- Show business is an easy way of life.
- Harry Houdini was/is the greatest magician ever.
- Magic is easy to learn.

Read Aloud Passage

Pages 32-33; Houdini does his first big disappearing trick.

Chapter 12, pages 101-102. Houdini escapes from a federal prison cell, gets his clothes from another locked cell, and gives the warden a scare when he tells him he released the prisoners from their cells.

If you liked

The Secret Life of Harry Houdini; The Making of America's First Superhero
by William Kalush and Larry Sloman

The Man Who Killed Houdini by Don Bell

The Magic of Alan Wakeling: The Works of a Master Magician by Jim
Steinmeyer

Houdini on Magic by Harry Houdini

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Content Area Connections

Math- Standard, Grades 6-8 Problem Solving

Even, Odd and Total Number of Digits

Start with a number and count the number E of even and the number O of odd digits. Write them down next to each other following by their sum $E + O$. Treat the result as a new number and continue the process. In this example, iterations converge very rapidly. Moreover, in just a few steps they reach the number 123 which has exactly 3 digits of which 1 is even and two are odd. Therefore, applying the computations to 123 produces the number 123 itself, such that further iterations become really mindless. Of course we can always start with another number.

Science-Standard 6.1.2, 7.7.1,8.1.3

The Sticky Card

Ask a friend to stick a card on the wall. It won't work. You take the card back and stick it on the wall. However, when you walk toward the wall, shuffle your feet and it should stick to the wall. The trick is to build up static electricity.

Resources

Movie, "Young Harry Houdini", Walt Disney Pictures

Video clip, Harry Houdini escaping from a straight jacket.

<http://www.videosift.com/video/Harry-Houdini-Suspended-Straightjacket-Escape>

Book Activities

Research Project

Famous Magician

Choose a famous magician. Research your magician, and write a report.

Needed to complete the project: computers, note cards

Answer the following questions in your research:

Who is your magician?

Where was he born/ raised/ go to school?

What inspired you magician to become a magician?

Does your magician make a living as a magician?

How often does he/she practice their craft?

Who was his/her idol?

Interesting facts about your magician.

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Anything else you want to include in your report relevant to your person.

After you have completed your research, write a report on your magician.

Activity is individual.

Standards 6.4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9 4.10
7.4.3, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9; 8.4.2, 4.5, 4.6

Abracadabra

Find a magic trick that you and your partner would be able to perform and explain to the class.

Resources: computer and/or books on magic.

Standards-6.2.4, 6.7.3, 7.7; 7.7.3, 7.4,; 8.7.2,7.5,7.15

Bibliography-

Indiana Academic Standard Resources

Bound to Stay Bound

Amazon.com

Harper Collins Publishing

www.sidfleischman.com

Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini

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