**Who was Harry Houdini?**

**Teacher Guide**

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Suggested Vocabulary, Discussion questions and Activities

**Chapters 1 - 2 (Pages 1 – 26)**

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| impress | autobiography |
| determined | flexible |
| muscular | illusion |
| errands | bizarre |
| trapeze | dramatically |
| resourceful | metamorphosis |

Discussion Questions Chapters 1-2

1. Preview this book. What text features do you notice?
2. What genre is this text?
3. What is the main idea or central message of the first two chapters?
4. Why do you think Ehrich ran away from home so many times?
5. What caused Harry to keep a notebook by his bed at night?
6. What does the author mean when he says Harry worked on “selling himself”?

Suggested Activities

* Start a timeline of the events of Harry Houdini’s life to be completed as the book is being read. There is a great reference at the back of the book.
* Draw and label a cartoon of the Metamorphosis Trick.
* Write a five sentence summary of the first two chapters.

Chapters 3 – 4 (pages 27-47)

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| unique | conquer |
| straitjacket | baffled |
| complicated | deceiving |
| promote | circulation |
| discouraged | triumphantly |
| sensation | international |

Discussion Questions Chapters 3-4

1. Describe the method Harry used to “talk to the dead”.
2. What were the major events in chapters 3 and 4?
3. In what order is this biography being written?
4. What event occurred on October 24, 1942?
5. What happened with the Mirror Cuffs?
6. What does the author mean by the word “The King of Handcuffs had triumphed”?
7. How was Harry and Bess’ experience different in Europe than in America?

Suggested Activities

* Continue filling in the timeline with new dates from chapters 3 and 4
* Compare and contrast Harry’s experience with the Hodgson handcuffs and the Mirror cuffs. What was similar? What was different?
* Have the students take turns retelling different parts of the each chapter that has been read so far.
* Have the students view Harry Houdini Straitjacket Escape on You tube. Discuss the video. Have the students write about what they observed and how this compares to what they read in chapter 3.

Chapter 5-6 (pages 48-62)

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| standard | dramatic |
| footlights | features |
| shabbily | despite |
| flourish | developing |
| submerged | fragile |
| frantic | tense |

Discussion Questions

1. What five words would you use to describe Harry Houdini? What character traits describe Harry Houdini?
2. How do Harry Houdini’s character traits contribute to the story?
3. How do you think the illustrations contribute to the story?
4. Why was the milk can trick such a sensational trick?
5. How does the milk can trick compare to the river escapes?
6. What context clues help you to understand the meaning of the word advertise as used in the text, “It wasn’t hard to advertise himself now”?
7. Why did Harry and Bess go to Australia to fly?

Suggested Activities

* Continue to update the timeline with life events from chapters 5 and 6.
* Make a poster advertising Harry Houdini’s Milk Can Escape.
* Create a newspaper article describing Harry Houdini’s flying expedition to Australia.
* Have the students do a readers theatre activity reenacting the meeting between Harry Houdini and Orville Wright.

Chapters 7-9 (63-84)

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| capture | associated |
| orchestras | perfecting |
| serial | benefit |
| cliffhanger | astonished |
| critics |  |
| guaranteed |  |

Discussion Questions

1. What is the central idea expressed in chapter 7?
2. What caused Houdini’s films to make less and less money over the years?
3. Compare and contrast the Brick Wall Trick and the Vanishing Elephant Trick? How are they the same? How are they different?
4. What did Harry perform the Vanishing Elephant Trick?
5. How did Harry feel about World War I? What actions did he take that lead you to this conclusion?
6. Describe the two most important relationships in Harry’s life.
7. At the end of chapter 9 there is a reference to Harry’s relationship with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The author indicates “this friendship ended less happily”. Predict some reasons why this relationship may have ended unhappily.

Suggested Activities

* Continue filing in the timeline with events from chapters 7 – 9.
* Create a movie advertisement to advertise one of Harry’s movies.
* Use a venn diagram or a double bubble map to compare and contrast The Brick Wall Trick and the Vanishing Elephant Trick.

Chapter 10 – 11 (85-102)

Vocabulary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| observant | debunking |
| logic | vulnerable |
| phenomena | appendix |
| appalled | collapsed |
| lecture | mechanical |
| suspicious | apparatus |

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons people may have believed in Spiritualism?
2. Why did Houdini believe that Spiritualism was fraudulent?
3. What caused the relationship between Sir Arthur and Harry to end?
4. What were some methods Harry used to debunk Spiritualist?
5. Why did Harry choose not to go to the doctor after the student punched him in the stomach?
6. In your opinion, what are the most important things that Harry accomplished in his life?

Suggested Activities

* Finish the timeline with the events from chapters 10 -11.
* Create a power point of Harry Houdini’s Life
* Write a research paper telling about Houdini’s Life.
* Create an individual or class collage around themes or characters in the book.
* Make individual or group posters of Harry’s most important life events.
* Make a class poster comparing and contrasting Harry and another musician or another person from the same historical period.