Harry Houdini –

World’s Greatest Mystery Man and Escape King

Teacher Guide

**Pre-Reading: Building Background Information**

Using the website <http://www.thegreatharryhoudini.com> on the SMART Board introduce the students to Harry Houdini and why he is famous for what he did. The introduction page gives a good overview (teacher read aloud certain parts to highlight events in his life).

Using the Gallery section on the website students can view actual video’s of Houdini’s escapes.

Ask the students:

~While watching this videos I noticed that they look so different than what we watch today, what do you think caused this?

~Using just what you saw in the movie, how can I tell that these events happened in the past? Tell me specific details.

After going through the website with your students and before you read the book you can make a KWL chart with your students using the information they just learned under the K section.

**While Reading: Discussion Questions**

Cover:

Review genre – have students figure out what genre the book is, and be able to tell you certain reason (proof) that helped them figure it out.

**Page 4 – 5 The Milk Can Escape**

Teacher:

~Before we read I want you to keep in mind that an author uses words to create feelings, I want to know what feeling was the author was trying to create while you read these 2 pages. I’m going to ask you this question after we finish reading these 2 pages. Don’t forget to use the pictures to help! I’m going to ask for specific proof for your answer.

After Reading – have each student share his or her answer and tell a reason.

~Why do you think they brought an ax on stage?

Figurative Language:

Onomatopoeia – Click, Click, Click – Tick, Tick, Tick

Vocabulary:

escape

assistants

failure

drowning

**Page 6-9**

~The author said, “I think” after telling me Erik’s birthdate – why do you think she did that?

~ She also states that he “claimed” Appleton, Wisconsin as his home – what does she mean by this statement? Use clues from the passage to tell me why he would have pick this place.

~ Erik’s first title was “Prince of Air” why did this fit him?

~ “The gasps and applause from the audience were worth almost more than money.” What does this sentence tell me about Erik?

~ What does “eager for glory” mean? Does this fit what we already know about Erik?

Vocabulary:

boggling

epic

unsuccessful

burden

**Page 10 – 11**

~ How did books change Erik’s whole life?

Vocabulary:

identity

magic

lacked

**Page 12 – 13 The Metamorphosis**

What made this trick impressive?

Text Features: Why did the author put the word three in italics?

**Pg. 14 – 17**

~Tell me what caused the next 6 years to be very tough on the Houdini? Where can we find clues in the text to help figure it out?

~ The author states that nothing was more important than warm bodies in a theater – tell me what you think he means.

~How did Harry attract attention in each town he stopped in and who did he make sure was there?

Can you infer how this helped Harry?

~From the text I can figure out that Harry is a determined person – tell me the sentence that helped me infer that.

Vocabulary:

elude

panic

dramatic

audience

**Page 18 – 19 The Underwater Handcuff Release**

~ What was the effect of Houdini doing **free** public performances?

~ Tell me why you think Harry decided to make his tricks more dangerous by adding the element of jumping off of a bridge.

Vocabulary:

crouches

triumph

performance

**Page 20 – 21**

Imagine what things might be in his magic workshop – (Have the students illustrate a picture of what they think it looks like.)

What would be in your dream home? If students are having a hard time – start off the discussion by describing some things that would be in your dream home.

What would Houdini use the gym for?

Predict why Houdini might want the water to get colder and colder each day.

Harry was already a very famous magican – tell me one conclusion you can make about why he still wanted a library full of magic books.

Vocabulary:

basement

installed

boasted

**Page 22 – 23 The Water Torture Cell**

~If you were to go to a Houdini show and watch this trick be performed what feelings might you feel while he is locked inside the cell? WHY?

~Look at the poster to the very right of the page – the person who is locking Houdini in the cell looks very evil. What effect do you think this had on audiences before they came to the show?

**Page 24 – 25**

What helps me conclude that education was important to Houdini?

Look at the illustration, how does it relate to the text? Why is this important to help you understand more about Houdini?

If I wanted to look up how Houdini used the tall buildings in his act how might I go about doing that?

Vocabulary:

Ego

Supernatural powers

Orphanages

“changing with the times”

**Page 26 – 27 The Suspended Straitjacket**

~We read before that Houdini used tall buildings in his act – how does the information on these 2 pages tie into what we already read?

~The title “Prince of Air” is again applied to Houdini on pg. 27 just like it was on page 8. Compare when he first used that title as a child to when it was used in 1915. How are the acts similar and how are they different?

**Page 28 – 30 Behind the Scenes**

~ Retell for me in your own words what caused Houdini to die?

~ Describe some of the “tricks” he used to help him escape during his acts.

~ Houdini stated, “I know more about locks and how to work them than any man living.” Is this statement a fact or an opinion? Tell me how we know this statement could be true.

~ Why would the author call Harry Houdini a real-life superhero? What character traits do superhero’s have? What character traits does Harry Houdini have? Which character traits do they share?

**Book Activities:**

Timeline or comic strip of Harry Houdini’s life using cause and effect relationships (events).

Imagine you are a spectator at a show of Harry Houdini’s. Write about your experience while watching his show. How did you feel? What did you see? Describe your experience to me. If you were able to meet Harry, tell me 3 good thinking questions that you would like to ask him.

After finishing the book on Harry Houdini, choose 4 or 5 other famous magicians. Split your class into groups of 3-5 students and assign a magician to each group. The students can use the internet to research that magician. (I would pre-research first and find specific sites that are student appropriate.) Have a specific question sheet to fill in with the information they find. After learning about the new magician the students could do a double bubble map comparing and contrasting Harry Houdini and their magician.