

My project is on the enjoyment of literature on magic, and Harry Houdini. I would like to start by giving a brief history of magic, and a background of Harry Houdini.

Magic is the oldest of the theatrical arts. Its earliest origins were in Shamanism and the priesthood. By the time of ancient Egypt, clever conjurers were using many of the same tricks performed by magicians today to convince the masses of their supernatural power. In the thousands of years since its earliest recorded beginnings, magic moved from the temples of ancient times to the street corners and fairs of the Middle Ages, then into taverns and drawing rooms and, finally, onto the stage and television.

Pass out

### Harry Houdini - Display portrait

American escape artist and magician, who was one of the greatest showmen of all time. He was named Erik Weisz and claimed to have been born in Appleton Wisconsin, on April 6, 1874, but he probably was born in Budapest Hungary. After working as a trapeze artist, he turned to magic and took the name Houdini. Houdini's career was extremely influenced by the French-illusionist Jean-Eugene Robert Houdin, who had written on magic: "The Memoirs of Robert Houdin."

Display  
Book

It was because of this book and the name of Robert Houdin, that Houdini improvised his own name by adding a "i" to Houdin to make Houdini. In 1894, Houdini married Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner, and from that time they worked together as the Houdinis - Harry and Bessie. In 1899, Houdini developed a "challenge" act, escaping from handcuffs brought by spectators, he also escaped from prison cells, straitjackets, and boxes. His brother, Theodore who called himself Hardeen did a similar act. Later feats by Houdini included an escape from a "Water Torture Cell" and another was "Walking Through a Brick Wall." Houdini also starred in silent films and in his later years crusaded vigorously against fraudulent mediums exposing their methods. Houdini died in Detroit, Mich. on Oct. 31, 1926, Halloween, from advanced appendicitis, caused by a seemingly minor injury. Houdini willed his magic books to his brother Hardeen. Among his published works are *The Right Way to Do Wrong* and *Magic and Mystery*.

I would now like to explain why you see all these books and these posters. The reason being, is that my hobby is the study of magic and Harry Houdini. It all started in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when my dad showed me a trick. A little later, I'll

show you my very first trick. This first trick lead to a magic set for Christmas, which lead to me putting on shows for my family. It seemed like one thing lead to another. Then one day, I <sup>was</sup> watching T.V. when I saw the movie Houdini, starring Tony Curtis. I was <sup>so</sup> intrigued by the movie, <sup>that</sup> I had to find out more about the man, Harry Houdini. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade for an English Assignment, we were assigned to read a biography. Because of the movie I had seen, I chose Houdini - Master of Escape by Adrien Stoutenburg for my biography. This first book led to a collection of books now numbering 24, and a deep interest in magic and escape. I also collect pictures, posters, pamphlets, clippings, articles, handcuffs, locks, keys, and other paraphernalia regarding my subject. I was unable to bring my handcuff collection which consists of antique cuffs and modern police <sup>handcuffs</sup> and thumb cuffs, <sup>but I was able to</sup> bring a few posters. The purpose of the magic poster is to evoke a sense of wonder. I hope that posters do the same for you as they do for me. I would like to pass out a book that is nothing but magic posters. Also I would like to pass out a Houdini scrap book that I've put together.

Books on Houdini: I have found, that in reading books on Houdini that the reader will find to his delight and surprise that once the fictions are

stripped away about Houdini, that the actual man turns out to be much greater, and much more interesting than the legendary one. Reading different books on Houdini adds new dimensions to the stock character of legend, making the real man seem all the more real and his accomplishment, all the more remarkable.

Quote Milbourne Christopher:

"The performing of magic is my profession; the study of its history my pleasure." The study of magic and Harry Houdini is my pleasure.

Magic books can be read simply for the pleasure of reading about magic. And from such reading one gradually acquires a learning that deepens into a total enjoyment of magic. The more proficient in the art of magic one becomes, and the more widely one reads in magical literature, both new and old, the more fully aware does one become of the extent and variety of the world of magic. Besides bringing together a variety of magic, tricks and its performers, books capture something of the mood and mystique, the color and atmosphere, of this graceful and imaginative art.

For example, this book (Panorama of Magic) 4.

is a pleasure to read and look through; the text teems with lively anecdotes about the wizards themselves, and the illustrations are an unfailing delight. Anyone interested in magic, costuming, stage setting and design, ethnology, and psychology, or anyone who simply likes to read about interesting people or see unusual prints and engravings, will want to own this book.

Pass out

Here then is another unique book (Music Catalogue) that brings together a treasury of information about magic and its performers and also captures, in text and illustrations, the color and fascination of the mystic art.

Pass out

This book here (World's Greatest Magic) conveys the mood of a live performance of magic with its printed words and photographs.

The point, fin trying to make is that photographs, engravings, posters, and other memorabilia will help the reader to share in the pleasure of this enchanted world of magic. They help to recreate the life and times of great predecessors like Harry Houdini.

Anyone who delves into magic's history like myself is indebted to Milbourne Christopher for his fine work and to Walter B. Gibson for his many books on the subject. There are two leading

authorities on the subject of Harry Houdini and Magic.

Walter B. Gibson - An amateur magician himself, has been interested in magic for most of his life. He has written numerous works and articles on the subject, has edited many magazines, and has known personally the greatest magicians of the past fifty years. He traveled, worked, and wrote with Thurston, Blotto, Raymond, and Houdini, and from them gained first-hand impressions of an early generation of magicians.

Point out

Display some of Walter B. Gibson's books. Some of these books are available in the Library.

Milbourne Christopher also knew Houdini personally. Mr. Christopher is a famous magician himself and is noted for catching bullets between his teeth and making a live elephant disappear. I would like to say, that he probably wrote the most definitive biography on Harry Houdini (Houdini: The Untold Story). I would like to read some of the book reviews.

Houdini: The Untold Story; "This book is more than the best life of Houdini, it is, quite simply, one of the best biographies I have ever read."

Houdini: The Untold Story; like being backstage with the tireless performer... You don't have to be a magic buff to enjoy Mr. Christopher's book.

Point out

Another book by Christopher, is:  
Houdini - A Pictorial Life. A couple  
reviews: Houdini the name is  
magic. And so is this book.

For magic buffs in particular -  
for lovers of nostalgia in general -  
this book will be a wonderful event.

He also wrote (Panorama of Magic)  
which I've already commented on.

As heard in the reviews, you don't  
have to be a magic buff to enjoy books  
on Houdini or magic.

Books are but one of the many  
aspects of magic. I was fortunate  
to visit the Magic Castle in Hollywood,  
and the Houdini Museum in Niagara  
Falls. These were both special experiences  
for me, and could be for you also.

Pass out

Here is a pamphlet about the Houdini  
museum and experience.

I'm sure that most of us are  
fascinated by magic and I think that  
we've all enjoyed the magic specials  
with Doug Henning the last few years  
on T.V.

As promised earlier, I would now like  
to perform a few simple magic tricks

1. Number Mystery 2. Marked Coin, 3. Card Penetration

I would like to conclude by saying that I  
hope that what I've presented and displayed  
helped you to share in the pleasure that I myself have  
experienced since my first venturing into  
this enchanted world of magic