



Escape!: The Story of the Great Houdini

Sid Fleischman

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Who was this man who could walk through brick walls and, with a snap of his fingers, vanish elephants? In these pages you will meet the astonishing Houdini—magician, ghost chaser, daredevil, pioneer aviator, and king of escape artists. No jail cell or straitjacket could hold him! He shucked off handcuffs as easily as gloves.

In this fresh, witty biography of the most famous bamboozler since Merlin, Sid Fleischman, a former professional magician, enriches his warm homage with insider information and unmaskings. Did Houdini really pick the jailhouse lock to let a fellow circus performer escape? Were his secrets really buried with him? Was he a bum magician, as some rivals claimed? How did he manage to be born in two cities, in two countries, on two continents at the same instant?

Here are the stories of how a knockabout kid named Ehrich Weiss, the son of an impoverished rabbi, prestochanged himself into the legendary Harry Houdini. Here, too, are rare photographs never before seen by the general reader!

Escape!: The Story of the Great Houdini Details

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From Reader Review Escape!: The Story of the Great Houdini for online ebook

Nathan Whitmore says

If you are interested in many haphazardly arranged biographical notes about Houdini's life — and bad writing — then read this book. Sid Fleischman, a well-regarded children's author, is out of his element as the biographer of his childhood hero.

His frequent and awkward employment of simile nearly caused me to quit reading only four chapters in. Imagine that “as voluptuous as a Valkyrie on a diet” was your best illustrative comparison, then imagine that similar unwieldy similes were found in nearly every paragraph. To employ two of Fleischman's other overused techniques, I'd say his writing was as grating as nails on a chalkboard. (Cliche. That one was cliche. And a little hyperbole. It was bad, but maybe not that bad.)

His love for his subject shines through, however, and that kept me reading. 2.5 stars.

Christophe Ang says

The biography was an interesting take from an aspiring magician/author. As per the magician's code, the author did not reveal any of Houdini's magic tricks, but rather (the whole purpose of the book itself), Houdini's life. It starts from the day Houdini came to Appleton, Wisconsin to his journey to Europe and back to America. From when he was dirt poor to a high-class magician.

I thought the biography was interesting in that I learned many new things about Houdini I had never known. People know the name, much like I did, and what he was great for, but not many know the full extent of what his life was really like, they didn't get to know the 'real' Houdini. From this biography I learned a lot about Houdini, such as that Harry Houdini was just his stage name and that his given name was Ehrich Weiss.

Ariell says

I am a lover of Houdini, especially his spiritualist-busting. This is a good and lively primer.

Natalie says

My father always spoke of Houdini with reverence- as if he had known the man or witnessed one of his death-defying escapes. The man is a legend, to be sure. One can hardly breathe the word 'magician' without referencing the escape artist. I knew Harry Houdini's basic story- that the name that gave him such recognition wasn't his birth name, most of his stage tricks, and his death. There were several things I didn't realize going into this biography- one, that he was such a narcissistic, egotistical man, and two, that he seemed to have massive ADD- swapping his obsessions regularly. I suppose it makes sense that he was full of himself. He outdid any other magician of his era, time and time again. Any challenge, he accepted, and beat. I think I might be a little full of myself too. What surprised me was his shameless self-promotion-

which, ironically, is what made him the legend he is today. People know his name because he was constantly putting himself out there- on posters, in movies, and in the newspapers. He made sure he was never far from the limelight; which is why he stays there even today, 90 years after his death.

The pictures in this book are plentiful and fascinating. It even encouraged me to look up some clips on youtube featuring some of his escapes.

I have one gripe here. I did not care for how the author presented the information. It seemed to me as if this method of delivery would have been fantastic if orated- like an old crotchety uncle telling a story about his younger days- than written down in a book. The author wavers. Jumps around. Puts in his own two cents. Goes off on tangents. I understand that he knew Bess Houdini personally, which is why he tells the story the way he does. If nothing else, this author has inspired me to read another book on Houdini- one that isn't so tainted with opinions and doesn't have that old-man-long-story flair.

Brooke ♥booklife4life♥ says

****Short Review****

I guess there is pictures in the book but seeing as i listen to the audio i missed out on those :(

I will admit i knew almost nothing about Houdini before reading this, i knew about his magic tricks but that's it. So i learned a lot, i really thought he was American, but he's not, thou he lied on his passport to say he is, which is kinda ingenious. I didn't know he was married either, and he was a very good husband to her, and she was a great support system. i didn't know he kept a diary either. I might look into checking the book out at the library to just see the pictures :D

Liv says

Pretty basic biography. It felt more so like reading a Wikipedia summary or a quick article on him, instead of a book. Here's his whirlwind background, here are all of his tricks and poof! Here's the demise.

Bonnie McEwan says

I enjoyed reading about Harry. He was one of those men driven to accomplish his goals. I was surprised (and somewhat disappointed) that they were able to write such detail about his life without exposing the secrets of any of his magic tricks. I had been hoping to learn how to disappear. I had read about the circumstances of his death in the past, and in reading this account, I was reminded of how unnecessary and premature it was. I wonder what other magic tricks we would be enjoying today if he had lived another 40-50 years.

Abdulla Almana says

Harry Houdini's grand illusions and daring, spectacular escape acts made him one of the most famous magicians of all time. Houdini wanted to be the most spectacular escaper ever in history and he was successful, but his wealth of money kept him being pushed down. So one day he started practicing his skills. Then he got much better by practicing everyday and he was is now known as the best escaper ever.

Bethany says

Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini
Sid Fleischman
Harper Collins, 2006, 215 pages, \$8.99
Biography
ISBN 9780060850968

This biography gives an in depth look at Harry Houdini's magical life. The author actually met Houdini's widow and has included many pictures that she personally shared with the the author so the book has a unique feel to it. At first, I thought the book would be too elementary to keep my attention since it has large font and many pictures. However, the author's extreme enthusiasm for Houdini becomes contagious. The author starts by giving Houdini's background. Most people know Houdini for his eccentric tricks but few think of him as being a devoted husband who came from a poor, humble family. As the author points out, everything about Houdini was a mystery. Houdini wouldn't even reveal his real birth place! Even the great illusionist's death seems a mystery. You would think that he would have died while doing some amazing, death-defying trick. However, he actually died from a ruptured appendix. Of course, the best part of the text is the description of Houdini's illusions. Whether you believe in magic or not, it is hard to imagine how anyone could manage to unravel themselves from thick ropes while under water or how they could squirm out of a straitjacket while being suspended upside down.

I would definitely include this text in my classroom as a way to get kids excited about biographies. Biographies are often boring but this one has a unique feel to it and will keep students on the edge of their seats. If you like this book, I would recommend The Original Houdini Scrapbook by Walter B. Gibson. It has a collection of Houdini's letters and pictures.

Carsen says

"Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini" by Sid Fleischman tells the story of Harry Houdini, the greatest escape artist ever known. He was born in Budapest, Hungary before his family traveled to Appleton, Wisconsin in search of more wealth. Later, inspired by the magician Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, he ran away from home to ease his family's financial strain and begin his career in magic. During his reign as the "King" of just about everything he could think of, Houdini married his wife Bess and the two traveled through the US and Europe together. Houdini pulled off stunts like the milk can escape and metamorphosis, as well as walking through solid walls and getting out of just about any lock or jail cell holding him.

I thought this biography was a particularly interesting one, partly because of the content and amazing stunts as well as it's writing style. Being written by a former fiction author, it seemed to have that touch of creativity when it came to recounting Houdini's life. His life as well was just very interesting and often raised the question of "how?" Overall, I enjoyed reading about Harry Houdini and his stunts, and would recommend the book to anyone who is interested in the topic of magic.

Kristen says

Really interesting non-fiction from a writer whose fiction I like. The topic is interesting anyway, but Fleischman knows how to spin a biography into an adventurous story. Good especially for kids who have to read a biography and don't know what to choose.

Pamela says

There is treasure galore in libraries and bookstores, much of which is overlooked by adults because it's tucked away in Young-Adult or Children's sections. A few years back, I used to be one of those 'mature' readers who steered clear of 'Juvenile' literature thinking it no longer had anything exciting or relevant or exceptional to offer me. Boy, was I wrong. Since getting over my delusional book snobbery, I've enjoyed many wonderful books penned in the straight-forward simplistic language of youthful tomes, often enhanced by illustrations and/or photographs. And it is delightful.

"Not long ago the breast pocket snipped from a man's pajamas (initials HH monogrammed in gray) came up for auction in New York City . . . So eager was the crowd for this fragment of sleepwear that a lofty price of \$3,910 was reached before the auctioneer banged his hammer and shouted. 'Sold!'"

"Escape! The Story of The Great Houdini" written by Newbery Medalist Sid Fleischman is case-in-point: A delightful entertaining/informative book on Ehrich Weiss (a.k.a. Harry Houdini) enhanced with rare photographs and advertisements, captivating readers of all ages.

Fleischman was fascinated by "Houdini, The World's Handcuff King & Prison Breaker." In his teen years, as his fascination for magic grew, he became acquainted with Houdini's widow, Bess – a friendship that would last until her death in nineteen-forty-three. Eventually then, Fleischman went on to become a practicing prestidigitator as well as an award winning children's author. So rather than just another book touting facts (facts that can be a bit elusive when it comes to Houdini) – "Escape!" is more like an intimate look into the Houdini family photo album and diary. And to think, Fleischman wrote this in his eighties. Amazing!

"While a few contemporary magicians scoff at Houdini's abilities as a magician, all concede that he had genius as a showman. When the escapist dangled upside down in a straitjacket from the top of an office building, a stampede to the box office followed. That was showmanship."

Born Jewish, Hungarian and poor, Houdini set his sights on applauding greatness, becoming a self-made showman. And like all showmen, he insisted on being the king of his forte hill. Whatever the illusion: disappearing elephants, walking through walls, escaping from chains, needle threading/swallowing, the Miser's Dream, movie stunts or airplane gimmicks, Houdini insisted on out-besting his contenders. Mudslinging challengers kept the eccentric Houdini on his ego-driven toes to create ever more mystic acts of danger and intrigue that couldn't be easily duplicated.

And being paid handsomely, up to \$5,000 per week, the great escape artist could afford to be quite the collector of books and oddities: ". . . he emptied his pockets to buy expensive books, historic documents, Lincoln autographs, and treasures that interested him, such as Edgar Allan Poe's writing desk. His 5,000 book collection had become so large that he was obliged to put a full-time librarian in New York on his payroll."

Yes – a fun, eccentric good read – four inescapable stars.

JoLee says

Featured in "Historical Nonfiction for Young Readers" on Intellectual Recreation.

Who isn't fascinated by Harry Houdini? He's become an American legend. In this delightful biography for young readers, Sid Fleischman takes us through the life of the great magician, from its humble beginnings to its sudden end.

Escape!: The Story of the Great Houdini was one of the great children's author Sid Fleischman's last books, and I loved the personal touches he included in his biography of Harry Houdini. Fleischman was fascinated by magic and Houdini as a child, and as a young magician, he knew Houdini's wife Bess.

In *Escape!* the reader follows the Houdinis on their journey to success. Born Ehrich Weiss, the son of a rabbi, Houdini transformed himself into the showman that has become a household name.

Wonbo says

Escape!: The Story of the Great Houdini. by Sid Fleischman, Genre: Biography, nonfiction, Pg.206

This book about Houdini's life. Harry Houdini, was surprisingly a name he created after the Great French magician Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin. [Houdini means like Houdin] To my surprise, Houdini was not born in America, but in Hungary.

Other parts that I liked in this book was the part where Houdini was lecturing to his wife about not to believe in superstitions and later, Bess - the wife, said "Houdini was so into Friday the 13th, that he would not even go outside" and the author wrote down. "Take that, Harry". This comment just made me burst into laughter.

The sad part of the book was his death. Harry, who was half dozing off after he had stayed several days up to nurse his sick wife, was weakened himself, and during a lecture, where he boasted about being in shape and able to take a blow in the stomach, was actually hit four times in the abdomen, which gave fatal damage to his appendix. It was sad watching his stubbornness not going to hospital because he was the great Houdini, which made him sick and killed him.

Kai says

This novel tells the story of the author/magician, the Great Houdini. It starts with his back story, and how he came to great fame and getting into the magician business. Houdini is still recognized as one of history's greatest magicians. This man was one who could walk through brick walls and, with a snap of his fingers, vanish elephants. He was a magician, ghost chaser, daredevil, pioneer aviator, and king of escape artists. No jail cell or straitjacket could hold him! He shucked off handcuffs as easily as gloves. It was a good read, long enough to keep my attention but not too long to keep me bored. The pictures within the book helped give a better description of his tricks and moves.
