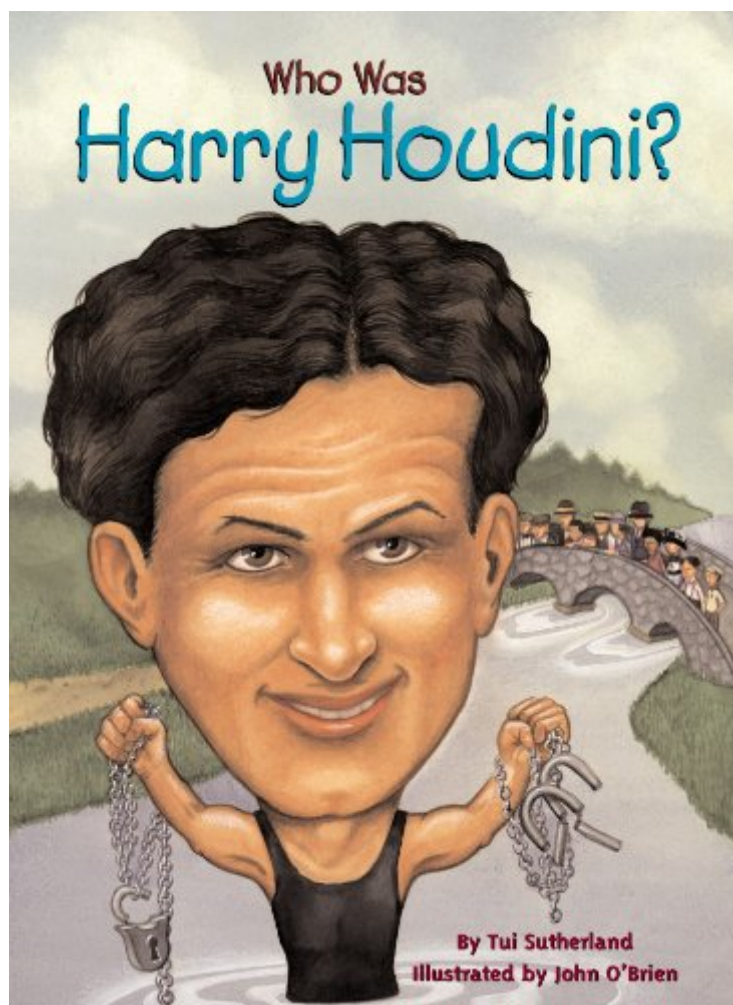


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Who Was Harry Houdini? (Who Was...?)



Synopsis

Every kid has heard of Harry Houdini, the famous magician who could escape from handcuffs, jail cells, and locked trunks. But do they know that the ever-ambitious and adventurous Houdini was also a famous movie star and the first pilot to fly a plane in Australia? This well-told biography is full of the details of Houdini's life that kids will really want to know about and illustrated throughout with beautiful black-and-white line drawings. Illustrated by John O'Brien.

Book Information

File Size: 8790 KB

Print Length: 111 pages

Publisher: Grosset & Dunlap (July 22, 2002)

Publication Date: July 22, 2002

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0097MAT9O

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #159,004 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #6 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Children's eBooks > Biographies > Performing Arts #44 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Performing Arts #127 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Children's Nonfiction > People & Places > Biographies

Customer Reviews

If the picture on the cover is any indication, Harry Houdini is Sean Penn (there's a striking resemblance). This is an interesting book in the "Who Was" series, detailing Houdini's impoverished boyhood in America (after emigrating from Hungary), his early interest in magic, and a turning point, his discovery of a book about Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin, the "father of modern magic." Author Sutherland divided the book into 12 chapters, each beginning with "So you want to be a (Magician, Pilot, Hero, Detective, etc.), detailing Houdini's feats in many areas. Several of the escape illusions are briefly explained (including Houdini's great illusion making an elephant disappear!), and there's a humorous bent as the author admits that it's difficult to tell which of Houdini's many statements

about himself are true! Houdini traveled from town to town, and it wasn't until he Martin Beck, head of the Orpheum Circuit's (a string of vaudeville houses), discovered Houdini that he earned international acclaim, staying five years in Europe. The book does a good job at showing how Houdini worked hard at his illusions, and how this practice (and a penchant for self-promotion) catapulted him to fame. It also emphasizes the real dangers and near disasters that Houdini faced, a far cry from today's televised illusionists. Sutherland does a great job of providing relatively unknown information about Houdini: He was the first person to fly an airplane in Australia, his wife played an important part in his stage act, he was in five movies, and he and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (the author of the Sherlock Holmes series) debated the validity of Spiritualism (Houdini thought it was an exploitative sham).

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