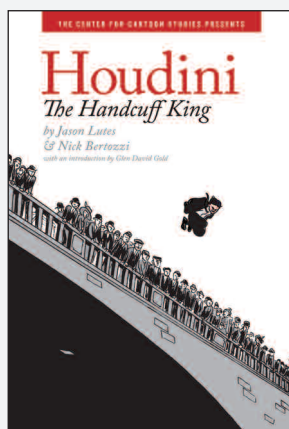


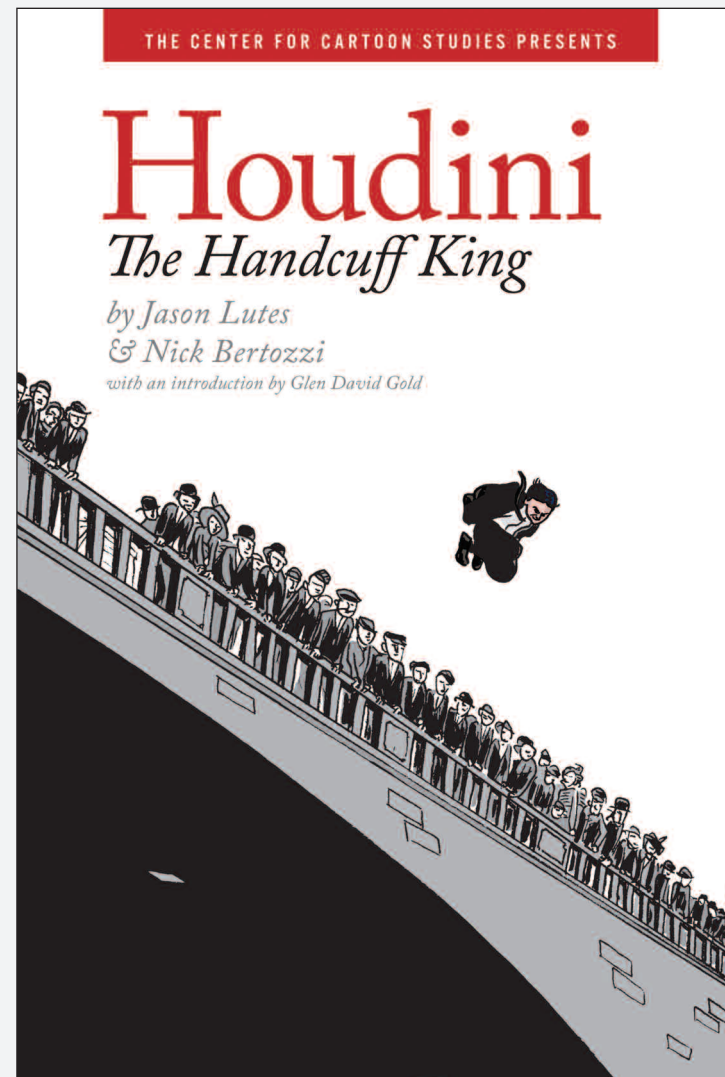
This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer. Visit her Web site at tracievaughnzimmer.com to find many other guides to children's literature.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Harry Houdini mesmerized a generation of Americans when he was alive, and continues to do so eighty years after his death. This is a “snapshot” of Houdini’s life, centering on one of his most famous jumps. As Houdini prepares for a death-defying leap into the icy Charles River in Boston, biographer Jason Lutes and artist Nick Bertozzi reveal Houdini’s life and influence: from the anti-Semitism Houdini fought all his life to his adulation by the American public; from his hounding by the press to his loving relationship with his wife, Bess; from his egotism to his insecurity; from his public persona . . . to the secret behind his most amazing trick! And it’s all in graphic form, so it’s fresh, original, and unlike anything previously published about this most fascinating of American showmen.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide includes discussion questions intended to be thought-provoking and provide insight into the themes of the book, which include magic, truth, loyalty, discrimination, and fame.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How does Houdini make sure that his performances are well covered by the press? What odd things does he do to promote his events? Why do you think this is important for his career? How do entertainers gain notoriety and press coverage today?
- 2 Who did Houdini write a book about? What does he discover about his namesake? Why would he be “. . . ashamed and embarrassed to carry the name”?
- 3 Do you think Houdini liked being famous? Would you like to be famous one day? Why or why not? For what, if anything, would you like to gain acclaim (or infamy)? How does Houdini show both insecurity and a large ego throughout this portrait?
- 4 Why does the policeman ask if Houdini has horns? What does this reveal about the policeman? How would you deal with comments like this? How did Houdini deal with anti-Semitism during his entire career?
- 5 Loyalty was especially important to Houdini. Why? With whom did he place his greatest trust? What did he require those who worked for him to do? Can true allegiance and loyalty be hired or not? What makes you think so (or not)?
- 6 Why was it imperative for Bess to arrive before Houdini’s jump into the Charles River? Do you think he would have attempted the feat if she had not arrived? Why? Despite knowing how he may have accomplished the trick, do you still think he was amazing?
- 7 Which set of illustrations do you think adds the most tension to Houdini’s story? Why? Which page is your favorite? Why? What do you gain from reading Houdini’s story in this unique format?

- 8** Do you think the research for a graphic novel like this was difficult for the artist? What types of details would need to be established in order to bring it to life? How could creating the art demand even more specific information than simply writing about the event?
- 9** After reading the Panel Discussion section at the end of the book, what do you think is the most interesting fact you uncovered? Does telling a story visually limit the information that can be included? How?
- 10** Based on this account of Houdini, do you think you would have wanted to be his friend? What do you think Bess's life was like with the Great Houdini? Describe his personality as it is depicted in this story.



PROJECTS

- 1** After reading the introduction and the Panel Discussion, create your own graphic representation of another incident in Houdini's story.
-or-
Research another important historical figure (or one that has long fascinated you) and tell that person's story in a similar format.
- 2** Research one of the following topics from the book and create a Learning Web about what you discovered:
- Immigration
 - History of magic
 - History of publicity/advertising
 - Religious discrimination/anti-Semitism
 - Design of locks/handcuffs
 - Cartoon studies
 - Magician's code



ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ARTIST



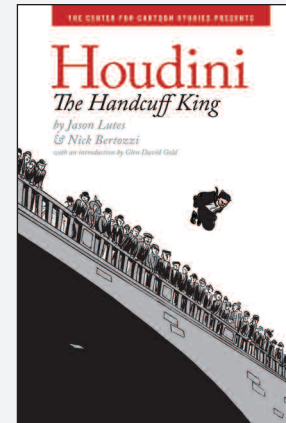
JASON LUTES is a cartoonist living in Seattle. He has been an admirer of Houdini for most of his adult life, and his celebrated graphic novel for adults, *Jar of Fools*, also pays homage to the “Handcuff King.” His most recent book is *Berlin*.

NICK BERTOZZI is an award-winning cartoonist based in New York. His upcoming graphic novel, titled *The Salon*, stars Pablo Picasso. Visit his Web site at www.nickbertozzi.com



THE CENTER FOR CARTOON STUDIES, America’s premier cartooning school, was founded in 2005 under the leadership of James Sturm, the creative director of The Center for Cartoon Studies Books. CCS is located in downtown White River Junction, Vermont, in its historic Colodny Surprise Department Store. www.cartoonstudies.org

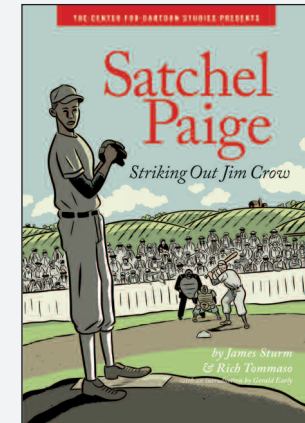
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