

READING

- 1 Look at the photos. Who is the man and what is he doing? Read the article quickly and check.

Magical mysteries

Harry Houdini, a name synonymous with death-defying feats of escapism, still makes people wonder today how he did it. But who was the man behind the name?

Born Erich Weiss in Hungary in 1874, he first took an interest in magic at a young age when he went to see a travelling magician called Dr. Lynn. The young Weiss was amazed at the skill and sleight of hand that Dr. Lynn used to perform the 'linking rings' trick. However, it wasn't until he reached the age of 17 that he chose magic over factory work with a factory workmate, Jack Hayman. They formed a duo called the Houdini Brothers, naming themselves after Weiss's idol at that time, Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, a famous French magician. The duo created their own trademark act called 'The Crate Escape': one of them was locked inside a sealed crate and had to escape.

Houdini went on to work without Hayman, but success did not come quickly. It took him five years and a lot of hard work to become established in the world of magic, and it wasn't until 1898 that he became the legend he still is today. He made his name with his 'Challenge Act'. It was based on the simple principle of generating as much publicity for himself as he could. He would arrive in a town, book a theatre and declare that he could escape from anything, but more often than not it involved lots of pairs of handcuffs. It seemed unbelievable that he could have unlocked so many pairs of handcuffs and free himself without anyone noticing anything, and yet he did it time after time. No one could work out his secret. It was rumoured that he might have hidden different sets of keys inside a belt, which enabled him to unlock the handcuffs. However he did it, the public soon tired of this illusion and his popularity began to dwindle. The public needed something new and even more daring.

In 1896, Houdini added a new dimension to his act. He had himself fastened inside a straitjacket and suspended high above the ground. Within minutes he had freed himself from the jacket and was back down on the ground. The act was a huge success, but Houdini then wanted something even more daring. He had himself thrown into the Hudson River in New York in a sealed milk can, which he escaped from within minutes. His most sensational trick was the 'Water Torture Cell', in which he was immersed head first in a glass tank full of water with his feet padlocked and emerged a few minutes later smiling, if a little wet.

We may never know the real secret behind his great escapes, but what we do know is that even today escapologists and performers like David Blaine still try and emulate the feats of the great Houdini. His reputation as the world's greatest escape artist remains.



GLOSSARY

synonymous	closely linked to a person, a place or a thing
death-defying	extremely daring and very dangerous
sleight of hand	the skill of deceiving people using small movements when you perform a trick
dwindle	decrease
strait jacket	a body suit used to restrain people who are violent or mentally ill

2 Read the article again and match the people with the facts.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 Erich Weiss | A Erich Weiss's co-worker in the factory |
| 2 Dr. Lynn | B a French magician whom Erich Weiss admired |
| 3 Jack Hayman | C a modern-day escape artist and performer |
| 4 Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin | D a travelling magician in the late 1800s |
| 5 David Blaine | E the real name of Harry Houdini |

3 Choose the correct answer.

- The name Harry Houdini is often associated with ...
 - a number of different card tricks used by magicians.
 - the 'linking rings'.
 - a French magician who performed escape acts.
 - very daring escape acts from dangerous situations.
- Before he went into magic, Erich Weiss ...
 - worked in a factory.
 - had practised the 'linking rings' tricks for years.
 - did not know anyone else who was interested in magic.
 - had got to know a French magician.
- Some people think that Houdini was able to free himself in his Challenge Act because ...
 - the handcuffs were never locked properly.
 - he had his own special method of opening the handcuffs.
 - he used his own keys to open the handcuffs.
 - he secretly asked someone else to release the handcuffs.
- In the Water Torture Cell act, Houdini went into the water ...
 - with his padlocked feet entering the water first.
 - upside down with his padlocked feet at the top of the tank.
 - the right way up with his padlocked feet standing on the bottom of the tank.
 - with his head going in first and his hands padlocked.
- Modern performers and escape artists today ...
 - still try to copy what Harry Houdini did.
 - try to be more like David Blaine.
 - don't understand the success of Harry Houdini.
 - have worked out how Houdini escaped.

4 How do you think Harry Houdini escaped from the sealed water tank?

VOCABULARY

Negative prefixes

5 Complete the text with the correct adjectives. Use a prefix from the first box and an adjective from the second.

dis il (x2) im (x2) ir un

mature legal patient responsible
safe legible appointed

There's a haunted house near my school. The teacher doesn't want us anywhere near it because it's dirty and ¹ _____ with all those broken windows and the ² _____ graffiti, and because it's ³ _____ to enter a building without permission. One day I decided to go in anyway, and my teacher found out. He said he was very ⁴ _____ with me, and that I was very ⁵ _____ for risking my safety like that and very ⁶ _____ for my age. However, now the town hall is going to restore the building and we're going on a class trip there. I'm so ⁷ _____ to visit, this time with permission!

6 Write true sentences for you using adjectives with negative prefixes from exercise 5.

7 Look back at Verb Zone in your Student's Book and write down the five multi-part verbs from Unit 8.

8 Complete the sentences so they're true for you.

- One thing that really freaks me out is _____
- I don't know what I want to do when I finish school, but I would rule out _____
- To scare birds away from a garden, one thing I think you can do is to _____
- One mystery I think we may never figure out is _____
- If the lottery numbers I'd chosen were called out, _____