



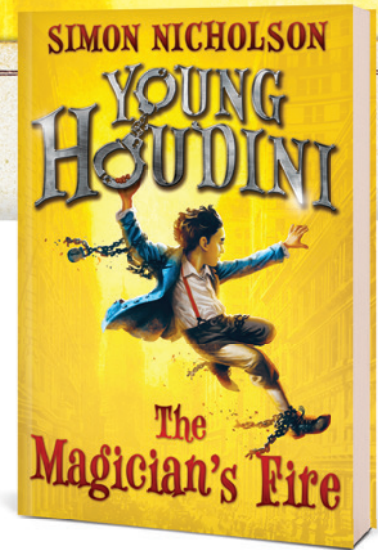
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

YOUNG HOUDINI: The Magician's Fire

By Simon Nicholson

**A Common Core State Standards–Aligned
Educator's Guide** Grades 4, 5, and 6

Note: The activities in this guide align with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for grades 4, 5, and 6, but standards for other grades may also apply.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Young Houdini spends his days practicing magic tricks with his two best friends, Arthur and Billie. But when Harry's magical mentor, Herbie, disappears after a theater performance, the three friends band together, determined to rescue the beloved magician. With nothing more than a mysterious puff of purple smoke, an ominous threat, and a menacing Bulgarian for evidence, Harry, Arthur, and Billie embark on a dangerously thrilling investigation that pushes their skill, and friendship, to the limits. Set in the New York City of the late nineteenth century, *Young Houdini: The Magician's Fire* is the first book in a new mystery adventure series featuring Harry Houdini, his friends, and their adventures.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Nicholson grew up in London, England. He worked in the theater before starting to write stories, mainly for children. Since then he has written books, plays, and many episodes of internationally successful children's television shows, and is one of the UK's most prolific screenwriters for children of all ages. He's visited lots of schools to talk about his writing and enjoys helping children come up with their own stories.

PRAISE FOR *THE MAGICIAN'S FIRE*:

**"Middle-grade readers...will gallop
through this spellbinder."**

— *Kirkus* **STARRED ★ Review**

Prepared by We Love Children's Books



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Pre-Reading Questions and Activities

Ask students if they have ever heard of Harry Houdini. Discuss the real facts of his life with them and how big a celebrity he was in his time.

Have students read the book title and look at the cover illustration. Read the summary on the back of the book and ask students to share their first impressions. Will this be a biography? A mystery? In what time period will the story take place? What sort of adventures will Harry Houdini and his friends face?

It is said that "A magician never reveals his secrets." Discuss this with the class. Have they ever heard this saying? Do they think this is true? Why or why not? Why would a magician feel this way?

VOCABULARY

As students read the book, have them write down words they encounter that are unfamiliar to them. Have them derive the meaning of the words from context, and then look up the words in the dictionary to see how close they came to the actual definition. Come together as a class and have students share their lists. Working together, list synonyms and antonyms, and discuss why the author used a specific word and not one of the synonyms.

RL 4.4, 5.4, 6.4

RF 4.4, 5.4

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

L 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6

Post-Reading Discussion Questions and Activities

TEAMWORK

Harry and his friends form a great team. We first see them in action at the beginning of the book, during the "Great Train Escape," where they work together to stage an amazing escape for an audience of thrilled and terrified onlookers. Discuss with the class the elements of the "Great Train Escape." How did each of the friends contribute to the success of the caper? How do their abilities complement each other, and how do they work together as a team? Could any one of them do the same things alone? What does the reader learn about the characters from this adventure?

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1



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FRIENDSHIP

One of the major themes of this book is the lesson Harry learns about friendship. As a class, review the scenes where Harry's behavior creates friction with his friends. Make a list of what Harry does and how his friends react. Are there any specific moments where Harry learns a lesson about his behavior? Does Harry change his ways? Have students cite specifics from the text to support their statements.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

POINT OF VIEW

This book is told from Harry's point of view. As a class, select a scene from the book and discuss how it might look from the points of view of other characters. Start with Arthur and Billie, but don't forget Boris Zell, Herbie Lemster, or even Wesley Jones. Have each student then select a pivotal scene and rewrite it as seen through the eyes of a different character. Break students into pairs to share their work and revise as necessary.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.6

W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

CHARACTER MAPS

As a class, make a list of the characters in the book. Which are major and which are minor? Use the following categories to create a character map of Harry: physical description, what he says, what he does, and what others say about him. Have students use this map of Harry as a guide in order to create a character map of another major character in the story, citing specifics from the text to support each statement. When they are completed, break students into small groups to discuss their character maps. Then, come together as a class to review their work. What categories do students feel do the best job of communicating character traits to the reader?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1

W 4.4, 5.4, 6.4

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1



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THE REAL HOUDINI

Have students choose a single resource from the Internet or from the library to learn more about the famous magician Harry Houdini. Then have them create a character map of the real Houdini, based on their research, by filling out a chart with the following four categories: physical description, things Houdini said, things Houdini did, and what others said about him. Come together as a class and compare the charts. What kind of person was Harry Houdini? How would Houdini have felt about the book and the liberties it takes with his life? What specifics of Houdini's life and behavior lead students to think this way?

W 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 5.4, 5.7, 5.8, 6.4, 6.7, 6.8

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

WHAT I DID ON MY VACATION

Have students imagine they are visiting New York City in 1886, where they meet Harry and his friends and experience a part of their adventures. Have students write a letter home describing their experiences. This letter should include details about what they see, hear, and do, and should answer the "five W's and one H" questions. Break students into pairs to share their work and revise based on peer feedback.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 5.1, 5.6, 6.1, 6.5

W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10

L 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

TWISTS AND TURNS

Young Houdini: The Magician's Fire is a fast-paced adventure story, full of mysteries and plot twists. Working as a class, make a list of the various surprises and twists in the story. Which surprised students the most? Have each student select one plot twist (the evil of Wesley Jones, the real nature of Boris Zell, Arthur and Billie's fight with Harry, etc.) for closer examination. Have students review the book for clues given in the story about the plot twist to come. How did the author either provide clues or misdirect the reader about what was going to happen? Was the plot twist a satisfying surprise, or did it feel like a trick?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.5, 5.6, 6.1, 6.3, 6.5

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1



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AND THEN

Break the class into pairs. Each pair is to write a summary of the book in twelve sentences. Each sentence is to be written or typed on separate pieces of paper. Have each pair shuffle their summaries, and then trade their summaries with another pair of students. Have each pair of students put together the new set of summary strips in sequential order. When completed, have both groups come back together and arrange all the strips in order, discarding any duplicates, discussing why they made the decisions they did when choosing what to include in their summaries.

RL 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.5, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Have students create a graphic novel treatment of a sequence of events from the book. Break them into small groups to share their work with each other, discussing what part of the book was illustrated, why that scene was chosen, and what details and elements were included. As a class, discuss the differences between this format and a novel. Was it challenging to tell the story in this way? Do any parts of the book work better in the graphic novel format? Work with students to scan their illustrations into the computer and publish a collection of the students' work.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.5, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5

W 4.6, 5.6, 6.6

SL 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5

READER'S THEATER

Break students into small groups to discuss the book. Have them select an important scene that would be effective when read aloud. Come together as a class to share the scenes each group has selected. Working as a class, arrange the performances in the proper sequence. Have each group present their scene to the rest of the class, in sequential order. Encourage students to use distinctive voices when reading their character's part. When the presentations are over, discuss how the scenes work together, how the plot unfolds in the series of episodes, and how the characters respond and change between each of the scenes that have been read aloud.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 4.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 6.1, 6.3, 6.5, 6.7

RF 4.4, 5.4

SL 4.1, 4.4, 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4



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YOUNG HOUDINI: THE SEQUEL

Young Houdini: The Magician's Fire manages to wrap up this adventure very neatly while setting the stage for more stories to come. Working as a class, review the clues and appearances made by the mysterious man in white and the Order of the White Crow. What do students think will happen next?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.5, 6.1, 6.3, 6.5

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Visit the Common Core State Standards website to read about the individual standards listed here:

<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>

Internet Resources

Learn more about Harry Houdini's life, his magic, silent movies, and other interests:

<http://www.thegreatharryhoudini.com/> — Includes a great list of books for children about Houdini and magic.

<http://www.biography.com/#!/people/harry-houdini-40056> — Comprehensive biographical summary.

<http://www.magictricks.com/houdini.html> — All sorts of information about Houdini to explore.

See the real Houdini in action with these video clips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r8qr-p9z5g>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suirlT9F_MY

Images of New York City in the late 1800s—the following image links will help students visualize the setting and time period where Young Houdini takes place:

<http://www.wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=5010>

<https://www.google.com/search?q=new+york+city+1880s+images>