Name_____

Harry Houdini

Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1874, Erich Weisz would later be known as the famous magician Harry Houdini. Houdini was one of seven children. His family moved from Hungary to the United States, and when he was thirteen, he moved with his father to New York to help find a place for the family to live and to begin working.

By 1894, Houdini was beginning to perform his magic for small audiences; however, most were only interested in his escape tricks, such as freeing himself of shackles or from locked prisons. By 1899, Houdini was traveling and living with a vaudeville act that performed around the country.

Houdini's most famous escape trick was the Chinese Water Torture Cell. For this trick, Houdini was suspended by his feet and then lowered into a locked glass cabinet that was filled with water. His body was upside down in the tank. He had to hold his breath for over three minutes to escape from the water-filled prison. Houdini continued to perform until his death in 1926 at the age of fifty-two.

After Houdini's death, his brother was given Houdini's collection of props. Eventually, his brother sold the items and after several different sales, many of his most important pieces—including the Chinese Water Torture Cell—became the property of another well-known magician, David Copperfield.

Text Questions

1. Which paragraph gives the most information about Houdini's childhood?
   a. first paragraph
   b. second paragraph
   c. third paragraph
   d. fourth paragraph
2. Why might David Copperfield want anything that belonged to Harry Houdini?
   a. He wanted to destroy the other magician's props.
   b. He wants to put the items on display in a museum.
   c. He most likely admired the magician and wanted something that belonged to him.
   d. He probably did not realize what he was buying.
3. What can you infer about Houdini's success as a magician?
   a. Everyone loved to watch his performances.
   b. He created all of his own tricks.
   c. His parents gave him money to help get his career started.
   d. His main success came from his skill as an escapee artist.
4. From what you read in the text, which of the following statements is true?
   a. Harry Houdini never married.
   b. Harry Houdini wanted to return to his home in Hungary.
   c. Harry Houdini was eventually a successful magician.
   d. Harry Houdini admired the work of David Copperfield.
5. What does the word *shackles* mean as it is used in the second paragraph?
   a. rope tied into a noose
   b. chains used to imprison
   c. words used to insult
   d. tape used to bind

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