

# ***BLOWS KILL HOUDINI***

## Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

English Language Arts B.4.1 – Create or produce writing to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

- Write expressive pieces in response to reading, viewing, and life experiences (narratives, reflections, and letter) employing descriptive detail and a personal voice.

Houdini died on Halloween of 1926. His death, like his life, is an interesting story. Houdini was performing in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. A few days before the performance, Houdini spoke to students at the McGill University and warned them about fraudulent mediums. After his speech, he invited some of these students to his dressing room the night of the performance to chat. One student was an artist and came with pencil and paper to sketch Houdini. The night that the students visited Houdini in his dressing room, Houdini was not feeling very well. He had a pain in his abdomen and was lying on a couch. Houdini was probably sick with appendicitis. Appendicitis is a swelling of the appendix. The appendix is a small finger-shaped extension of your large intestine. It is located in the lower right part of your abdomen or belly. Sometimes the swelling is caused by an infection; other times, it is caused by something blocking the appendix, such as partially digested food that is trapped in there. When a person has appendicitis, he or she will probably have stomach cramps or indigestion. The area around the belly button usually begins to hurt first. The person may vomit. Shortly, the pain moves down to the lower right side of the belly and it becomes very sharp. This is probably how Houdini was feeling when the McGill students came to visit him.

While the students were talking with Houdini, one of them asked if Houdini, who was very physically fit and strong, could withstand a punch to his abdomen. No one knows for sure why the student asked this. Houdini always found it hard to resist a challenge. He said that he could withstand a blow to his belly. However, before Houdini could stand up and brace himself, the student landed several hard punches on Houdini's stomach. These punches may well have caused Houdini's appendix to burst, leading to an infection.

Even though Houdini was very sick by now, he went on to perform that night. After the performance, Houdini continued his tour by traveling to Detroit. There, after performing on October 24, Houdini collapsed. He died a week later from peritonitis, an infection in the surfaces of the abdominal organs. Now, doctors can give people medicine (antibiotics) should their appendix burst. But, in Houdini's day, such medicine did not exist.

Write a journal entry about a time when you or someone you know was sick enough to go to the hospital. What was that like? Was it frightening? Were you worried? If you do not know of anyone who has had to go to the hospital, imagine how such a situation would cause you to feel.

