

CHALLENGE ACTS

Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

Marketing E.4.3 – Identify a specific problem or concern and evaluate it.

Art B.4.1 – Understand that artists and cultures throughout history have used art to communicate ideas and to develop functions, structures, and designs.

Marketing E.4.3 – Identify a specific problem or concern and evaluate it.

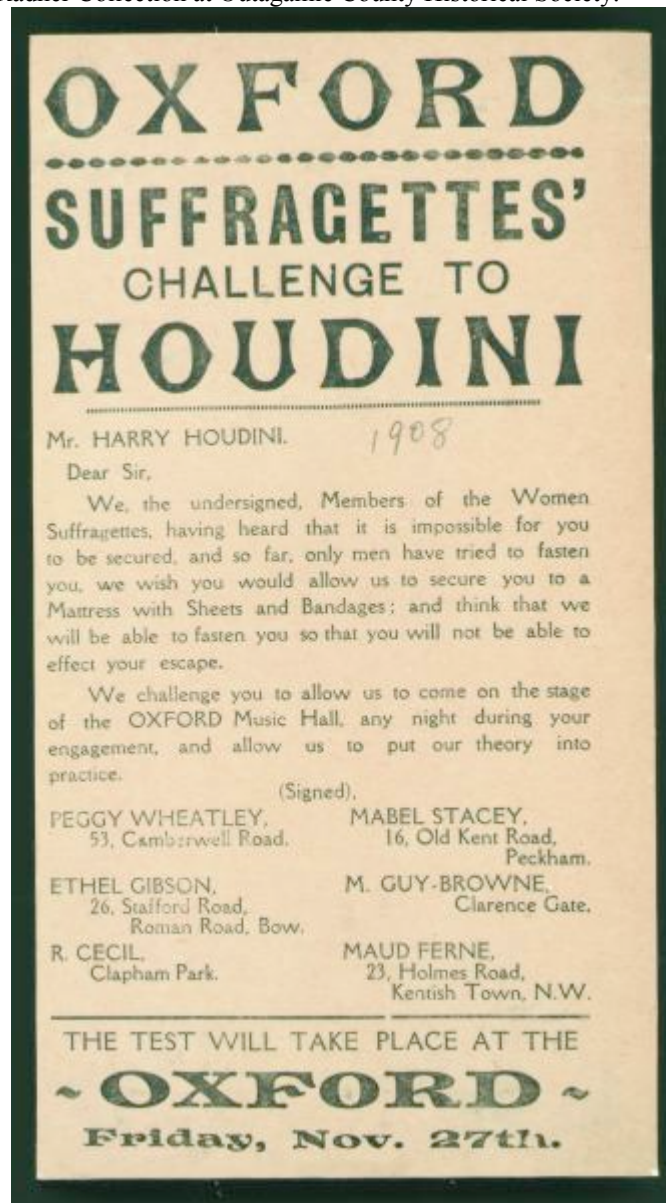
Marketing E.8.2 – Apply problem-solving skills to a current issue or concern

- Gather and interpret information about the concern
- Form sound conclusions about what should be done in the situation
- Give reasons to support conclusions
- Evaluate the evidence and reasons used in forming conclusions

Even after Houdini had achieved fame, he changed his act, adding new escapes to keep it interesting. Houdini also kept the audience interested by letting them challenge him with restraints they invented. Local manufacturers created all sorts of devices they thought could hold Houdini – crates, mail bags, a giant football, auto wheel chains, a glass box, and a boiler, just to name a few. Houdini would accept a challenge one day, advertise the performance in flyers and newspapers, and then perform it another day when thousands of spectators filled the theater after reading about the challenge. Houdini always inspected the challenge device to make sure it had not been tampered with (the lock jammed, for example.) Only once was Houdini beat, and that was when the challenger jammed the lock of the handcuffs, so that they did not work correctly. Houdini escaped every other device that his challengers invented.



Members of the British Women Suffragettes wrap Houdini in a bed of sheets and bandages and strap him in as a challenge, 1908. Radner Collection at Outagamie County Historical Society.



The Suffragettes' challenge to Houdini. Radner Collection at Outagamie County Historical Society.

Do you think you could stump Houdini? Use the process of invention to design a device that might have held Houdini. Inventors use the following steps when tackling a new invention. Use the steps to walk yourself through the process of invention.

- 1) State the problem. What problem are you trying to solve? In this case, the problem is to keep Houdini from escaping. The solution to the problem will become your new invention.
- 2) Interview your parents, friends, and/or your teacher to get ideas. What materials might be strong enough to hold Houdini? Are there any ways to improve upon the devices of other challengers to make them harder to escape? For example, could you make the crate out of glass rather than from wood? Would it be harder

- for Houdini to escape when people could look in and see what he was doing?
How could you make it harder for Houdini to escape?
- 3) Now that you have an idea for what kind of device to invent, start to think about the material you would need if you were to build it. Make a list of these materials.
 - 4) What does your invention look like? Draw a picture of your invention. Write a description of how the device works. The picture and description will communicate the structure, design, and function of your device to your classmates.

Post the student inventors' ideas around the classroom and give students time to read about others' inventions. The students can discuss which one they think will work the best, giving reasons for their answers.

(Invention process modified from www.girltech.com/Invention/IN_invention_intro.html.)