

# ***PUBLIC REACTION TO HOUDINI'S DEATH***

## Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

Social Studies B.8.1 – Interpret the past using a variety of sources, such as biographies, diaries, journals, artifacts, eyewitness interviews, and other primary source materials, and evaluate the credibility of sources used.

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

- Write nonfiction and technical pieces (summaries, messages, informational essays, basic directions, instructions, simple reports) that convey essential details and facts and provide accurate representations of events and sequences.

Social Studies B.4.7 – Identify and describe important events and famous people in Wisconsin and United States History.

Social Studies B.4.3 – Examine biographies, stories, narratives, and folk tales to understand the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people, place them in time and context, and explain their relationship to important historical events.

When Houdini passed away in 1926, he was a legend in his own time. Houdini was a household name. When people thought of Harry Houdini, they immediately thought about escape. In Houdini's day there were a lot of things from which Americans wanted to escape. Some Americans were trying to free themselves from old ideas or practices. In the 1800s, people began challenging practices like child labor and fighting to get women the right to vote. Reformers also fought for better working conditions and pay for all workers. They worked for laws to improve living conditions in crowded city neighborhoods. Reformers also started new religious societies where people shared property and lived simply. Houdini was a symbol of freedom for many people because he made people believe that there was always a way out of difficult situations. It is for this reason that Houdini was so well-loved as an entertainer.

Look at the picture of Houdini's funeral procession on Thursday, November 4, 1926. Study the photo for a few minutes to form a general impression of it.



Houdini's funeral procession, Thursday, November 4, 1926. Photo courtesy of Corbis.

- 1) From this picture, would you say that Houdini was a popular person? Why or why not?
  
- 2) The photo shows policemen standing in the middle of the street. What do you think the policemen's role at the funeral was?
  
- 3) Imagine that you are a child standing in the crowd watching the pallbearers carry Houdini's casket past you. What do you think you might have been feeling?
  
- 4) What is the mood of the people photographed? Name three details of the photo that caused you to give this answer.
  
- 5) Have you ever seen a similar funeral procession – on T.V. or in a movie perhaps? If yes, what do you think Houdini may have had in common with the person or persons honored in those funerals?

Obituaries are short biographies written in honor of a person who has passed away. They tell about a person's accomplishments, interests, and family. Pretend that you are a journalist writing Houdini's obituary. Use what you have learned during this unit to give people a brief biography of this famous escape artist.