A Hands-On Houdini

While the Museum is closed to the public, the JMM team has created family activity packets for you to enjoy in your own homes. Each collection of materials is inspired by our exhibits, Jewish History, and Jewish holidays.

All of the activities we share are designed for families to complete together and use supplies you probably have in your house.

In 2018 JMM opened one of our most successful ever exhibits, Inescapable: The Life and Legacy of Harry Houdini. Erik Weisz was born in Budapest, Hungary on March 24, 1874. Seventeen years later, he transformed himself into Harry Houdini and became the most famous magician and escape artist of all time.

During his short lifetime (Houdini died on Halloween night, 1926) he saw radical changes in the world, from the invention of the lightbulb, film, automobiles, the telephone, radio, skyscrapers, and airplanes, to the fast-paced urbanization of America and radical shifts in public taste for entertainment. Houdini was able to recognize the importance and potential of these rapid technological advancements and used them to make himself America's first true superstar.

Try the activities shared here and think about how Houdini used changing technology and an audience hungry for new entertainment to create such an amazing career that we still celebrate today!

Don’t forget to share photos of you enjoying our crafts and activities on our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr pages and use #MuseumFromHome.
Design a Houdini Poster

Self-promotion was key to Houdini’s success. He made special use of bright, exciting posters to draw attention to his shows and share his latest magical triumphs, feats of endurance and miraculous escapes.

Supplies needed:

- A large sheet of paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Optional - Print out of poster elements
Early Animation

Harry and Beatrice Houdini on location with the production crew for “The Man from Beyond.” Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

One major technological advancement during Houdini’s life was movies – both live action filming and animation. Houdini starred in numerous films, often doing his own stunts (and even buying his own production studio). Becoming a film star helped Houdini reach bigger audiences in a new way, sending his moving image across the world.

In this activity, create your own thaumatrope (a special toy that creates an animated picture) as a building block to the science of animation.

Supplies needed:

- Thaumatrope printable
- Glue
- String
- Markers
Paper airplanes

Houdini in his Voisin bi-plane cockpit. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Another technology that Houdini took a special interest in was air travel – particularly the invention of the airplane. Houdini himself became a pilot, performing filmed stunts in the air.

Use the activity below to create your own paper airplanes! You can also learn more about the science of airplane flight here.

Supplies needed:

- Paper airplane printable
Disappearing Penny

Houdini wasn’t known just for his dangerous stunts and mysterious escapes – he was a practiced stage magician. Houdini knew that the most important step to becoming a successful entertainer was practice, practice, practice.

In this activity, learn how to make a penny disappear – and then practice until you are as good as Houdini!

Supplies needed:

- Square of fabric or handkerchief
- Double sided tape
- Coin
Keep Discovering

If you are still interested in learning more about Harry Houdini and the time in which he lived check out some of the resources below.

Follow along with this reading of A Picture Book of Harry Houdini and learn about Houdini’s early life and his rise to become a famous magician.

Gain an inside look at one of Houdini’s most famous acts: escaping from a straitjacket.

Feeling inspired to learn more magic tricks? Take some of the ideas here plus your Disappearing Penny trick and turn it into a whole show to impress your friends and family!

The Jewish Museum of Maryland is an agency of The Associated
Design a Houdini Poster

Without much of today’s technology, Harry Houdini had to use other methods to advertise his shows. One of these methods was creating posters which promoted not only his magic shows, but also his movies! His posters often featured colorful images and large text to attract the attention of those passing by.

What You Need:
- A large sheet of paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Print out of poster elements optional

What to Do:
- Using a combination of your own craft supplies and the pintables create a poster for Houdini.

Bonus Challenge: Try creating a poster for your own magic show, how will you attract a crowd? What will be the finale of your performance?
A death-defying performance

The Handcuff King

America’s Sensational Perplexer

HARRY HOUDINI
Introducing
The Only and
Original:
THE HOUDINIS

HARRY
HOUDINI

3 SHOWS IN ONE
MAGIC-ILLUSIONS-ESCAPES=FRAUD MEDIUMS EXPOSED
Early Animation

Harry Houdini became involved with the film industry in its earliest years, acting, producing, and even researching new film technology. Did you know that there was pre-film animation? One of these devices is called a **thaumatrope**, a small disc that has half of an image on the front, and half on the back; when spun, the image appears as one. Build a thaumatrope here.

**What You Need:**
- Thaumatrope print out
- Glue
- String
- Markers

**What to do:**
- Either color in or decorate the front and back of the your thaumatrope.
- Tape the two white discs together, making sure that one side is taped upside down.
- Punch a hole on the left and right of the image, next tie a piece of yarn to each side.
- Wind up your thaumatrope by spinning the disk. Now pull on the string away from the paper disk. As the disk spins watch your images come together!

**Bonus Challenge:** Now you understand the basic concept try to design your own thaumatrope.
Paper Airplanes

When Harry and his family immigrated to the United States, they traveled on a ship called the S.S. Frisia. Little did they know that during their lifetime a new form of transportation would be created – the airplane! Just after the Wright Brothers invented the first operational airplane in 1903, the field of aviation took off and many others began designing their own aircrafts. In 1909, Houdini purchased one of Gabriel Voisin’s

What You Need:
- Print out of our paper airplane folding guides.

What to do:
- There are two styles of paper airplanes to make, follow the instructions on the printable, carefully folding each crease in order.
- Let your planes soar, which goes highest, furthest or fastest?

Bonus Challenge: Try folding a new type of paper airplane, can you create something that will fly further than these designs? Or modify your planes, can you improve upon these designs?
Option 2
Learn a Coin Trick

While Harry Houdini is best known for his death-defying escapes, he spent much of his early career performing close-up magic at dime museums, medicine shows, and on Vaudeville variety shows. Learn this simple close-up magic trick that is certain to impress your family and friends!

What You Need:
- Square of fabric or handkerchief
- Double sided tape
- Coin

What to do:
- Take a piece of felt and stick a piece of double-sided tape on one of the corners.
- Announce that you will make the dime disappear and place it in the center of the felt.
- Take the corner with the tape, and place it onto the dime, then place the other corners on top of it.
- Say the magic word and began unfolding the felt. Make sure to grab the taped corner and the dime last.
- Wave the felt around and show your audience that the dime has disappeared!

Bonus Activity: No magician is complete without his top hand and wand, try making your own magical accessories.