

Thanks for using *Levitation: Physics and Psychology in the Service of Deception* (ISBN: 978-0-9788037-0-4) in your classroom. The following are some ideas for generating discussion, critical thinking, and further learning based on what your students just read.

Content questions

Which character do you find most memorable? Why? Be as specific as you can.

What do you think about the way Kellar got the trick from Maskelyne? How about the way Thurston got the trick from Kellar?

Try building a model of the gooseneck device. Is there another way to do the hoop passing that you can think of?

Thurston decides that it's OK to bring audience members up on stage, even if that means they'll see how the trick works. Do you think he's right to do this?

Why do you think Jarrett seems to like Kellar better than Thurston?

What section or story do you find most effective? Why? Be as specific as you can.

How would you describe Janine Johnston's artistic style? What is its most striking feature?

Which characters do you find to be the most interesting and engaging? That may be different than most memorable! Why? [Which character would you like to go on a vacation with? Which character(s) would you want to invite over for dinner?]

How would you describe the tone of the book? Cite specific pages and/or panels as examples.

Before reading this book, what was your attitude about magicians? In what ways has the book changed your mind about these issues and people?

If you could ask the artist any questions, what would they be?

If you could ask the writer any questions, what would they be?

Storytelling questions

Choose a page in the book and describe how the writer and artist combine words and pictures in effective ways.

Take a look at pages 41-43. Why do you think they're different from the rest?

What role does the way the letters look play in the story? Why do you think they look different between Maskelyne, Kellar, and Thurston?

What's similar about pages 21-23 and 29-31? Why? What's different, and why?

Pay close attention to backgrounds throughout these stories. How do the writer and artist establish and treat setting and environment?

Ask the characters! Ask yourself!

Now that you've read the book, try answering some questions as if you were one of the characters. Then, pretend like you were in the character's situation. How would you answer it for yourself...

"Mr. Maskelyne, what do you think of the improvements Kellar made to the illusion?"

"Mr. Kellar, why did you break the magician's code and go up on stage?"

"Mr. Thurston, why did you break the magician's code and let the audience members up on stage?"

"Guy, which one of the magicians was the greatest?"

Vocabulary

levitation
illusion
magic
sleight of hand

More to explore

The Life and Mysteries of the Celebrated Dr. "Q", by C. Alexander (1921, reissued in 1946 by R.A. Nelson; Columbus, OH: Nelson Enterprises) showed one of the first publicly available and accurate diagrams of the levitation illusion as used by Thurston, and this is the setup we used. As recounted here, the secrets of the invention were revealed, bought, sold, traded, and stolen by professional magicians well before this.

Some of Guy Jarrett's dialogue comes directly from his book *Magic and Stagecraft Technical* (self-published, 1936). I worked from the original, and Jarrett's style of writing is such that there was rarely a need to muss up the text to make his dialogue sound appropriately rough-and-tumble. Jim Steinmeyer has produced an annotated reprint of Jarrett's book which, though I've not read it (yet), is

almost certainly excellent. Speaking of Mr. Steinmeyer, if you read just one more book on the subject of magic, make it his...

Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear (NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003). It features stories about Maskelyne, Kellar, Thurston, and many others you've heard of (Houdini) and perhaps haven't (Hermann). It also has terrific illustrations of many of the featured characters by William Stout. Other books and articles I used include:

Maskelyne and Cooke: Egyptian Hall, London, 1873-1904, by George A. Jenness (Middlesex, England: George Jenness, 1967) for a history of Maskelyne's show, including many illustrations and diagrams.

My Life of Magic, by Howard Thurston (Dorrance & Company, Inc., 1929) for some great anecdotes, aided in their telling because Walter Gibson (creator of The Shadow) no doubt did the majority of the writing.

Recollections of Howard Thurston, Conjuror, Illusionist and Author, by Thomas Chew Worthington III with an introduction by Henry Ridgely Evans (Baltimore, MD, 1938) for another contemporary account of Thurston's career.

The Complete Life of Howard Franklin Thurston, by Robert E. Olson (Calgary, Alberta: Hades Publications, Inc., 1993) for a thorough accounting of all that is Thurston.

The World's Greatest Magician: A Tribute to Howard Thurston, by Robert E. Olsen (Calgary, Alberta: Micky Hades International, 1981) for even more details on Thurston's life and show, including many additional technical details.

Magic: A Pictorial History of Conjurers in the Theater, by David Price (New York: Cornwall Books, 1985) for background.

TOPS Treasury of Illusions, edited by Neil Foster (TOPS, 1965) for Kellar's levitation patter.

My Magic Life, by David Devant (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1931) for some terrific writing on the theory behind stagecraft—theory that also applies to comics, at least to my way of thinking.

Finally, *Cards as Weapons*, by Ricky Jay (NY: Darien House, 1977) didn't end up figuring into the story, as the Jay Method for throwing cards is different from Thurston's, but it's such fun that you should find a copy and read it anyway.

About the Creators

All of **Jim Ottaviani's** books have been nominated for multiple awards, including Eisners & ALA Popular Paperback of the Year, and they also receive critical praise in publications ranging from *The Comics Journal* to *Physics World* to

Entertainment Weekly to *Discover Magazine*, and get national broadcast attention in outlets such as NPR's Morning Edition and the CBS Morning Show. Janine Johnston began her comics career over 10 years ago as an artist for *Star Wars: Tales of the Jedi*. She went on to adapt and paint for the Elfquest series "Blood of Ten Chiefs" and currently works as a painter, muralist, and on numerous projects in both the comics and gaming industry.

Interview

Being about magic, was there any difficulty in doing the research, since magicians can be secretive, especially when they've been dead for seventy years?

This is an old trick, and its secrets were first revealed in print roughly 100 years ago. That said, those old books are hard to find! So I have to give special thanks to my friend Gene Alloway at Motte & Bailey Booksellers in Ann Arbor, Michigan for allowing me access to the Marcello Truzzi collection, and to the late Elaine Lund at the American Museum of Magic in Marshall, Michigan who opened the Museum and her library to me, a stranger, and made sure I got to see and read everything I wanted. Some of it proved to be a wild goose chase. Others, like the British publication "Black and White Budget," dated Feb 8, 1902, provided me with wonderful details on the original version of the trick called "Entranced Fakir."

Had you any interest in magic prior to this, or did you just spot a good story?

I've been a fan, though not a rabid one, of stage magic for twenty years. I don't seek out many shows, though, and don't live in a place where lots of big stage shows appear. The only magicians I'll drop everything or travel to see are Penn & Teller. So I guess I like the romance of it as much as the actual practice. I certainly enjoy reading about it, and Jim Steinmeyer's books are my most recent favorites.

Can you talk a little about the art?

Yes. It's a turn-of-the-century tale, done in a very classic illustration style, because you want it to have this elegant look with the mysticism, and the velvet drapery, and this sense of magic in the background. She was a natural choice for *Levitation*. And when you read through it, you can see that she shifts styles. She can cartoon with the best of them. It's easier for her, actually, to paint than it is for her to cartoon, though. She's equally adept at both, but her natural style is this very classic, painterly type of look.