

Pick one of the following prompts to begin a piece for the YpsiWrites Houdini Poetry Challenge.

1. “You knew locks. You know fear. You can go anywhere with that.” (Beatrice to Houdini, 15)

What *fears* and *locks* do you know? How have they prepared you to go *anywhere*?

Write a poem that explores the places, *real and imagined*, that you can—or will—go, along with what has prepared you to go there. Consider using “lock” as a metaphor in the piece.

2. “There are chains. There is freedom. There are keys.” (Houdini, 44)

What are some chains and keys in your life? People? Places? Things? Are some of those both chains *and* keys?

Write a poem that details and describes what in life that holds you back - and what in life helps you break free! Try apostrophe by including the word “you” to address some of those keys and chains directly.

3. “You knew, that first day, what the magic was, between us.” (Houdini to Beatrice, 74).

Among other topics, *Houdini: A Musical* is about the love between Houdini and Beatrice, his wife, also known as “Bess.”

In the line above, Houdini suggests an instant knowledge between the two of them that is “magic” - *that resists easy explanation*. Where is there magic in your life - *things that you know but cannot explain*? Name those magical aspects of your life, and use poetic devices to try to explain them! Try hyperbole!

4. “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.” (Beatrice to Houdini, 89)

What truths about your life would split the world open?

Using devices we talked about today, write a poem about *a truth* - and include what it might look like for that truth to split the world. Use metonymy to name part of the truth.

5. “My whole life has been leading to this.” (Houdini, on testifying before Congress on fortune tellers, 117)

What has your whole life been leading to?

Write a poem that imagines key (pun not intended) moments in your life—past or potential—and the important event they lead up to. Be sure to use lots of descriptive language! Anaphora would work well for this one.

6. “I speak through the body.” (Houdini during the Congressional hearings on fortune tellers, 126)

Houdini communicated a lot through the body: bravery, hope, wonder, and so much more!

In what ways do you speak through the body? What can your body communicate? Pick a few different things your body can say, and write a stanza about each. You might use personification here.

7. “You do things I cannot understand.... Maybe you do not understand it yourself...” (Marco Bone, Congressional hearings, to Houdini, 139)

What things do you do that amaze yourself and others?

Write a poem that plays into the idea of not being able to understand what you do by being *especially playful with your language*. Use lots of metaphor, metonym, personification, more!