
PORTAL TO SYMBOLISM

So far we've seen symbolism with the different mythologies and how the gods and goddesses were associated with certain symbols. A symbol is something that represents something other than itself. For example, snakes may be symbolic of rebirth, because they shed their skin. The Harry Potter books are rich with symbolism of all kinds—animals, numbers, colors, and the wood used for wands all have symbolic meanings. J.K. Rowling may not always have meant to give a certain animal symbolic or mythological meanings, but we can find them there anyway.

In This Section we'll Learn About:

- Animal Symbolism
- Number Symbolism
- Color Symbolism
- Wood Symbolism

Harry Potter Animal Symbolism

Are you a dog person or a cat person? We often ask people this question, because it is an indication of the person's personality. We attribute certain qualities to a "cat person" that are different from those of a "dog person." This goes back to ancient times when people would give symbolic meaning to certain animals because a god or goddess was associated with that animal. If an animal was associated with a goddess (like the hare) then that animal became symbolic of more feminine qualities. Obviously masculine animals (like the stag) became associated with more manly qualities. The kinds of gods and goddesses mattered too—was it a sky god or an earth god? A sky god had a different kind of animal as a symbol than an earth god or sea god. The

symbolism might also be something as simple as where the animal lives or how it moves. Does it fly high in the sky like the eagle or burrow in the ground like a weasel? That will determine the symbolism surrounding that animal.

The Harry Potter books are teeming with animals, from animals the students can bring to Hogwarts, to animagi, to the form a wizard's patronus takes. Many of the animals seen in the books are often mentioned or important in Greek, Norse, Celtic, or Egyptian mythology. Some are closely associated with a certain god or goddess. Furthermore, animals were associated with witches during the middle ages; they were often believed to be either the witches familiars, the witches themselves, or the devil.

The Animals (in alphabetical order)

BADGER

In Harry Potter the badger is the animal associated with Hufflepuff house.

- The badger usually represents determination, aggressiveness, independence, and tenacity. According to the Sorting Hat, Hufflepuffs are "unafraid of toil."

BULLDOG

In Harry Potter, in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Aunt Marge breeds and raises bulldogs. She brings one, Ripper, to the Dursley's house when she visits, and it does not like Harry. Of course, the feeling is mutual! When Uncle Vernon was angry at Harry for the mishap with Dobby and the pudding he came "*bearing down on Harry like a great bulldog, all his teeth bared*" (COS, 21).

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- Bulldogs were originally bred for fighting. Their method of fighting was to latch onto the other animals' snout and not let go until the opposing animal smothered to death. This characteristic seems particularly apt because Aunt Marge does not leave Harry alone; she harangues him until he can't stand it anymore, and she "*wanted Harry under her eye at all times*" (POA, 25). Bulldogs have thick shoulders, a thick head, and drooping skin around the face—like Vernon and Marge!

CATS

In Harry Potter there are many cats!

- Hermione's pet animal is a cat, Crookshanks. Crookshanks helps lead Hermione and Harry into the Shrieking Shack through the hole in the Whomping Willow in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Crookshanks knows that Scabbers is not really a rat.
- Professor McGonagall is an animagus who turns into a tabby cat. The first time we meet her in *The Sorcerer's Stone* she is in her cat form.
- Professor Umbridge's patronus is a cat. She also has creepy pictures of cats all over her office.
- Mrs. Figg, the Squib who lives near Harry on Privet Drive, has many cats and also breeds them.
- Argus Filch uses his cat, Mrs. Norris, to spy on the students at Hogwarts. She often roams the castle by herself but somehow manages to communicate to Filch when the students are doing something wrong.

Cats have a rich symbolism throughout history. First, cats were often believed to be the "familiars" of witches. The cat familiar could communicate with her owner. The cat could go out at night and take care of the witch's business while the witch stayed safely at home. There was also a belief that a witch could actually turn into the cat in order to go out into the world at night and cause

trouble, like cursing a person or their animals. We still have the superstition that when a black cat crosses your path, it means bad luck.

In Norse mythology the goddess Freya rode a chariot pulled by two cats. Freya, the goddess of love and beauty, was very well loved by the Norse people.

In Egyptian mythology we find probably the most familiar and famous cat in any mythology—the Egyptian goddess, Bast (or Bastet). Bast was a popular goddess and very well loved, and her followers eventually spread into Greece and Rome. Bast has the head of a cat on the body of a woman. She was originally a sun goddess and the daughter of Ra, the sun god. She eventually became the goddess of fertility and healing and a protector of women and children. In Ancient Egypt cats were so well loved that killing a cat was punishable by death. Some cats lived in the temples, cared for by priests. Many families had cats as pets and mourned them when they died. People often mummified their cats to bury them! One reason the Egyptians loved their cats so much was because cats protected and kept rodents out of the food supply, and Egypt was an important exporter of grains in the ancient world. Cats also killed snakes, which could be a problem in ancient Egypt.

DOE

In Harry Potter the doe is the patronus of Lily Potter and Professor Snape. We do not see Lily's patronus, but Snape sends his doe to Harry to help him find Griffindor's sword in *The Deathly Hallows*, and we find out later that Snape's patronus is a doe as a tribute to Lily.

- The doe represents femininity, peace, and gentleness. In ancient times and in the middle-ages, people also followed deer to find food like herbs and plants, because they knew if the deer could eat something, then it would be okay for humans too.

The Celts associated deer with the spirit realm. There are stories where people followed deer into a forest and found themselves in a magical realm. The deer was the guide into the spirit world, whether or not the person wanted to go there.

Harry Potter Connection! When Harry follows the doe patronus and finds Griffindor's sword it is a very “otherworldly” moment for him, *“it was a silver-white doe, moon-bright and dazzling, picking her way over the ground, still silent, and leaving no hoofprints in the fine powdering of snow...Harry stared at the creature, filled with wonder...he felt that he had been waiting for her to come...”* (DH, 366). He follows the doe, retrieves the sword, and reunites with Ron. This doe is full of magic.

DOGS

In Harry Potter there are several dogs.

- Sirius Black is an animagus who transforms into a big black dog. Being a dog helps Sirius to survive in Azkaban. Sirius said the dementors, *“could tell that my feelings were less—less human, less complex when I was a dog...”* (OOTP, 466).
- Hagrid keeps Fang, the large boarhound.
- Ron's patronus is a dog—a Jack Russel Terrier. Jack Russell terriers are cheerful, merry, devoted, amusing, and loving. They are spirited,

obedient, and fearless. Sounds like a good description of Ron. Except for the obedient part!

Dogs are usually symbolic of loyalty and fidelity, protection and guardianship. Dogs are useful companions and have been for centuries—they help with hunting, they eat scraps from tables, and they provide protection. Most of the dogs in mythology are guard dogs.

In Greek mythology

Cerberus—the three headed dog in Greek mythology who guarded the gates of the underworld.

Cyon Chryseus—“Golden Dog” sent by Rhea, to guard her child Zeus and his nurse, the she-goat Almathea, while Zeus was hidden from his father, Chronus. There are also a couple of women associated with dogs, which is unusual because dogs are most often associated with men:

Hecuba—Hecuba, the queen of Troy, suffered an awful fate when the city fell to the Greeks after the Trojan War. Her husband and children were killed and she was taken captive by the Greek Odysseus. The gods took pity on her and turned her into a dog so she could escape.

Harry Potter Connection! Sirius Black escaped the dementors in Azkaban by turning into a dog and slipping out from under them.

Hecate—she was the Greek goddess of the night and of crossroads. She is often portrayed as a three headed goddess, with three of these animal faces: a dog, horse, lion, boar, or serpent. The animal she is most associated with is the dog. She is sometimes portrayed as a dog or dog-shaped, and her presence is indicated by the barking of dogs.

In Norse mythology the most famous dog is Garm, the guardian of the realm of the dead, Helheim. If, in your life, you'd given bread to the poor you could then give Garm a cake and he'd let you pass into Helheim. He will howl at the start of Ragnarok. He is very similar to Cerberus.

EAGLE

In Harry Potter the eagle is the animal associated with Ravenclaw house.

- The eagle is usually associated with the sky (for obvious reasons), the sun, rising above the mundane, and majesty. The eagle has been used for centuries as the totem animal of power and royalty. The eagle also has fantastic eyesight and so often symbolizes far seeing or wisdom, which makes it a good symbol for Ravenclaw house since they are known for their "wit and learning." It is also a good symbol since Ravenclaw house is in a tower, high above the Hogwarts castle.
- It is a bird of prey and is used as a representation of power and dominance. It was the emblem of the Roman senate, the Holy Roman Empire, and many powerful families throughout history.

In Greek mythology the eagle is one of the symbols of Zeus, the king of the gods, the sky god, and the bearer of the lightning bolt. It is only fitting that the sky god have an eagle as his animal.

There is a very famous story of Zeus and Prometheus that involves an eagle.

In Norse mythology there was an eagle who perched on the top of the World Tree Yggdrasil. A squirrel carried messages and taunts back and forth between the eagle and the Nidhogg serpent down in the underworld.

In Egyptian mythology the eagle is symbolic of the sun god Ra.

FERRET

In Harry Potter Mad-Eye Moody turns Draco Malfoy into a ferret when he was about to curse Harry behind his back.

- Ferrets are clever and inquisitive. Like weasels they can burrow down in holes and "ferret out" smaller rodents. They do a "war dance" where they hop up and down sideways, thrash and arch their backs, turn their heads from side to side, and hiss.

Harry Potter Connection! The ferret's "war dance" sounds like the bouncing up and down Malfoy did when Moody transformed him!

FROG/TOAD

In Harry Potter: Neville Longbottom owns a toad, Trevor, who always gets away from him.

- Professor Umbridge looks like a toad. In fact the first time Harry sees her *"he thought she looked just like a large, pale toad"* (OOTP, 146). Interestingly, about Professor Umbridge, she is also what we would call a "toady," a person who hopes to gain favor from someone higher up by using flattery. In modern cultural references, the "toady" is often the small, skinny boy who hangs around with the big bully. Professor Umbridge is a toady in that she flatters the Ministry in order to gain advancement. She uses this power to bully others.

Historical Tidbit! The term "toady" came from a 17th century practice—a charlatan trying to con people would hire a boy to pretend to eat a toad (which were thought to secrete poison), and then the charlatan would “cure” the boy. The boy was called a “toad-eater;” later shortened to “today.”

Frogs and toads have been a part of mythology and folklore for ages. In some societies, people thought of frogs and toads as symbols of growth and fertility. Parts of frogs and toads were used for making potions and medicines. Some toads will secrete a poison that causes paralysis and even death when hounded by a predator. That secretion was used for poison, but some parts of the frog and toad were beneficial and made good medicine.

In Egyptian mythology the ancient Egyptian goddess of fertility and childbirth, Heket, is depicted with the body of a woman and the head of a frog. When women gave birth they often held on to an amulet shaped like a frog to bring about a safe and healthy birth. Midwives, women who deliver babies, were considered the servants of Heket.

GOAT

In Harry Potter Aberforth Dumbledore's patronus is a goat. Harry, Ron, and Hermione find this out in *The Deathly Hallows* when they go to Hogsmeade and break the curfew. Aberforth's patronus chases away the dementors. When they go into the Hog's Head, it smells like goat.

In Potions class, Snape tells the students that “*A bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat and it will save you from most poisons.*” Harry uses a

bezoar to save Ron after he drank the poisoned mead meant for Professor Dumbledore.

- Goats can represent and symbolize many things. In addition to dogs, they were the first domesticated animals and therefore represent steadiness and loyalty. They also symbolize abundance because goats have provided food, milk, and clothing for people for thousands of years.

In Greek mythology a she-goat, Amalthea, nursed the infant Zeus when his mother hid him from his father Chronos.

In Norse mythology a she-goat Heidrun provides the mead for the warriors in Valhalla. How a goat provides mead, a drink made from fermented honey, is a mystery! Thor rides in a chariot pulled by two goats, Tanngrisnir (Teeth-barer) and Tanngnjóstr (Teeth grinder). He can eat them, and as long as none of their bones are broken, they regenerate the next day.

HARE

In Harry Potter the hare is Luna Lovegood's patronus

- Hares are a symbol of fertility, because hares (and rabbits) have so many babies.
- Because of their fertility they are used in many cultures' spring festivals. They are associated with the feminine and *the moon*—a fitting patronus for a girl named "Luna."

In Greek mythology the hare is associated with Artemis (the goddess of the forest and the hunt), because they are forest animals.

In Norse mythology the hare is associated with the goddesses Freya, the goddess of love, lust, and beauty. In some depictions, Freya is attended by hares with lanterns.

In Celtic mythology the hare is associated with Eostre, the goddess of rebirth. The hare is her sacred animal, and she can shape-shift into a hare. According to the Romans, when they encountered the Celts they discovered a taboo against eating hares or rabbits, most likely due to the fact that so many goddesses (not just Eostre) could change themselves into hares. You don't want to eat your goddess!

HOG/BOAR

In Harry Potter the Hog's Head is the tavern owned by Aberforth Dumbledore.

- Ernie Macmillan's patronus is a boar.
- There are winged boars on top of pillars at the gates of Hogwarts.

Boars symbolize courage and ferocity in battle. A boar will not give up even when cornered. They can also symbolize fertility.

Historical Tidbit! The symbolism of a hog's head goes back to when people served a whole hog's head at the Christmas feast.

In Greek mythology there is a famous tale about a boar hunt called the Calydonian Hunt. The Calydonian boar was a boar sent by Artemis to punish the people of Calydon for not sacrificing the first fruit of the harvest to her. The boar destroyed cattle and crops and killed the men who hunted it. A young woman, Atalanta, was among a select group of hunters sent to kill it. She shot

the first arrow to bring it down. Atalanta was one of the few female heroes of ancient mythology.

The Greek hero Heracles had to capture the Erymanthian Boar in one of his 12 labors. He chased it to exhaustion and then trapped it in a snowbank.

In Norse mythology a boar was fed to the slain warriors who lived in Odin's hall Valhalla. The boar was killed and eaten every day and by the evening he was whole again. Actually everything regenerated in Valhalla—the men would fight each other all day and their wounds would magically disappear so they'd be ready to fight the next day.

The god Frey has a chariot pulled by two golden boars. The boars' bristles shine like the sun and light up dark places.

Frey's sister Freya rides a boar when she is not using her cat driven chariot.

In Celtic mythology the boar is associated with a forest goddess, Arduinna, from Gaul. She is depicted riding a wild boar.

OTTER

In Harry Potter the otter is Hermione's patronus.

- Otters represent playfulness and joy.

In Norse mythology the killing of an otter started the heroic journey of Sigurd. The otter was not a real otter but a shape-shifter in the form of an otter who was killed by the god Loki.

OWLS

In Harry Potter owls play a large role:

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- They are the messengers of the wizarding world. They carry the mail, deliver the newspaper, and deliver messages. Hogwarts has an entire room of owls for use as the school mail and delivery service.
 - The Weasley family owns the owl Hermes. He's a pathetic little owl who often delivers the mail and messages and then nearly drops dead when he's done. He's named after Hermes, the messenger god of the Greeks.
 - Harry, of course, owns Hedwig. Hedwig is the first magical gift that Harry is given when Hagrid buys her for Harry's eleventh birthday gift. She is actually the first decent gift Harry has *ever* been given. Hedwig not only delivers Harry's mail and messages; she is his friend. When he stays with the Dursley's during the summer, Hedwig is his only friend, and she even shares his punishments with him when the Dursley's mistreat him. In *The Chamber of Secrets*, after Dobby drops the pudding on Mr. Dursley's business companion's wife, Hedwig is locked up and deprived of food just like Harry. At the beginning of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry makes Hedwig leave when Aunt Marge comes to visit, so she won't get Harry into trouble. Hedwig is upset, but she goes to stay with the Weasleys. There are other times in the books when Hedwig gets upset with Harry, and her dismissals are particularly hurtful to Harry. When Hedwig dies in *The Deathly Hallows* it is a symbolic moment—she represented Harry's years at Hogwarts and as his first magical gift, his innocence. Harry's innocence dies along with Hedwig.

For many cultures, the owl signified bad luck or a bad omen, especially if you saw one during the day. Seeing an owl during the day was an omen of death. Because they are nocturnal and hunt at night, owls are symbolic of darkness, secrecy, and death.

In medieval times, people believed that owls traveled with witches and could also be witches in disguise.

The owl symbolized wisdom to the ancient Greeks. The owl can revolve its head almost completely around to get a full view of the world, and this allows the owl to see more completely. It has very large eyes that can see in the dark. The

ability to "see well" is a distinction of a wise person. We still have the symbol of the "wise old owl" in our modern culture. The most intellectual character in Winnie the Pooh is Owl!

In Greek mythology Athena, the goddess of wisdom and the patron of Athens, is often depicted with an owl. The owl either perches on her shoulder or on her head. Her Roman counterpart, Minerva, has an owl too.

The screech owl is sacred to Hades, the god of the Underworld.

In Celtic mythology we see a negative attitude towards owls with the story of Blodeuwedd.

PEACOCKS

In Harry Potter there were white peacocks at Malfoy manor. Death Eaters noticed them when walking up to the manor at the beginning of *The Deathly Hallows*. Voldemort was stationed inside.

- Peacocks are symbolic of beauty and wisdom—beauty because of their beautiful colors, and wisdom because of the "eyes" in their tails.
- The peacock is symbolic of fidelity, because it stays single if it loses its mate.
- Peacocks are also symbolic of pride and arrogance. With their tails fanned out and their heads up, peacocks look like they are strutting around. When we want to talk about someone being arrogant, we say he struts around "like a peacock." Lucius Malfoy is certainly prideful and arrogant.
- A white peacock is a little different. White is the color of purity and innocence in Western culture, and white peacocks are a symbol of immortality. White peacocks complement the theme of death and resurrection in *The Deathly Hallows*.

In Greek mythology the peacock was sacred to Hera, Zeus's wife.

RAT

In Harry Potter Ron owns a rat, Scabbers. Of course, we find out that Scabbers is not really a rat but Peter Pettigrew in his animagus form. Peter Pettigrew was the secret keeper for the Potters and informed Lord Voldemort about where they were living.

- Rats, in our culture, are often associated with filth and disease because they are found in sewers and garbage and, well, they carried plague! Rats are symbolic of being sneaky. A person is called a "rat", when he is deceitful or betrays another. You "rat" someone out by telling on him. A good animagus form for Wormtail. He was definitely a rat.

SNAKES

In Harry Potter there are snakes and snake imagery all over the place!

- In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry discovers he can understand the snake at the zoo and then frees it.
- The entire book of *The Chamber of Secrets* is devoted to snakes. Harry discovers that he speaks Parseltongue. During the Dueling Club Professor Snape tells Malfoy to conjure a snake to attack Harry, but Harry talks to it and the snake becomes passive. The ability to speak Parseltongue, Harry discovers, is to be aligned with Slytherin and Voldemort. The basilisk is a giant snake, and there are snake symbols and Parseltongue passwords used to get into the Chamber.
- In *The Goblet of Fire*, when Voldemort is resurrected, he looks very much like a snake, "*whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake's with slits for nostrils...*" (GOF, 643). At the beginning of the book, Voldemort's snake Nagini kills the old Muggle Frank.

Harry Potter Connection! Once Tom Riddle becomes Lord Voldemort he becomes more and more snake-like. His face, of course, looks like a snake. He also talks like a snake with the ends of his words ending in a hiss, *“Harry imagined he could hear the snake hissing slightly...or was it Voldemort's sibilant sigh lingering on the air”* (DH, 653). Even Voldemort's movements are snake-like, *“the swishing of his cloak was like the slithering of a snake”* (DH, 654).

- Nagini attacks Arthur Weasley when he is guarding the Department of Mysteries.
- Dumbledore owns an instrument that produces green smoke that turns into a snake, *“a serpent's head grew out of the end of it, opening its mouth wide”* (OOTP, 470). Dumbledore seems to gather information from it and then it collapses and turns into two snakes *“coiling and undulating in the dark air”* (OOTP, 470).
- When Harry and Hermione travel to Godric's Hollow to talk to Bathilda Bagshot they find her, but she acts strangely until Harry sees *“the old body collapsing and the great snake pouring from the place where her neck had been”* (DH, 340). Nagini had somehow inhabited Bathilda's body and waited for Harry to arrive. Then she was to keep Harry at the house until Voldemort arrived. Unfortunately for Voldemort, Harry gets away again.
- Nagini becomes an important part of *The Deathly Hallows*, because Harry discovers that she is one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. Voldemort protects

Nagini in a magical bubble. Nagini kills Snape, and then Neville Longbottom kills Nagini by cutting off her head.

The serpent is one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbols. The symbolism of snakes is often as varied as the cultures of the world. In some cultures, snakes are a symbol of evil and deception, while in others the snake is a symbol of earthly wisdom. In many cultures, though, the snake (or serpent) is a symbol of rebirth and regeneration.

One of the reasons the snake is a symbol of evil and deception is due to its forked tongue. The forked tongue points in two different directions and this is seen as a symbol of deceitfulness in speech. We often see snakes as being sneaky and crafty and telling humans lies in order to lead them into trouble, like the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. The snake tricks Eve into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and brings about their Fall.

One important meaning of the snake is rebirth and regeneration. The snake represents this because they shed their skins on a regular basis. In essence a snake sheds its old life and starts anew every time it sheds its skin. Perhaps this is what happened to Voldemort—he shed his old skin every time he created a Horcrux and lost a piece of his soul. His new “skin” looked like a snake.

There are snakes, serpents, or some kind of snake monster in Greek, Norse, and Celtic mythologies. There are also snakes and serpents in other mythologies as well, one with particular relevance to Harry Potter.

Nagini

In Hindu and Buddhist mythology there are serpent beings and semi-divine deities called...Nagas. Naga actually means "serpent" in Sanskrit. Nagas are strong, handsome, and can either assume human or serpent form. They live in an underground realm called NagaLoka and are guardians of treasure. In Buddhism, the naga are represented as door guardians. Nagas most resemble the cobra, but they are depicted in other ways as well:

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- As a snake with one or up to seven heads.
 - As a human with a snake canopy over its head (like a cobra).
 - As half human with the lower half coiled like a snake.

Harry Potter Connection! In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, Nagini were female naga's.

In Greek mythology the most famous snake monster would be Medusa, the only mortal sister of the three Gorgons. Because of this mortality Medusa could be killed by the hero Perseus. The Gorgons were depicted as horrifying women with living, writhing, venomous snakes for hair. One look from a Gorgon would turn a mortal to stone.

Harry Potter Connection! The basilisk could turn a person to stone with one look. Hermione figured it out and used a mirror to avoid a direct gaze. In the Greek story of Perseus he used his shield to protect himself from the Medusa's stare.

- The Greek god Hermes carries a "caduceus," a wand with two serpents intertwined on it and topped with wings. This caduceus is now often used as the symbol for medicine.

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- Another serpent from Greek mythology was Python, the daughter of Gaia and the guardian of Delphi, which at that time was supposed to be the center of the earth. The god Apollo eventually killed Python and put his own oracle at the temple of Delphi. There are various stories as to why Apollo killed Python: in one she was asked by Hera to harass Apollo's mother Leto, and so Apollo killed her in revenge; in another she was a monster who terrorized innocent people, and so Apollo killed her to keep the world safe.
 - The Greek hero Heracles had to kill the Hydra, a nine headed serpent. Every time he cut off one head two more would take its place. He eventually figured out to cauterize the place where the head was cut off so no more would grow. His nephew, Iolaus, did the cauterizing.

In Norse mythology there are two major serpents—Jormungand and the Nidhogg.

- **Jormungand**—this is the serpent child of the trickster god Loki and a giantess mother. Odin threw Jormungand into the sea where he grew so big that he encircled the world and grasped his own tail. The symbol of the snake with its tail in its mouth is a common one in the world of symbolism. Jormungand is also called the Midgard Serpent (Midgard is the human world). At Ragnarok (the end of the world) Jormungand will rise up out of the water and his breath will poison the sea and sky.
- **Nidhogg**—the Nidhogg is the dragon/serpent that inhabits the underworld (Niflheim) by the base of the World Tree Yggdrasil. Nidhogg feeds on the bodies of the dead and also gnaws on the World Tree. He taunts the eagle perched at the top of Yggdrasil. The Nidhogg will free himself at Ragnarok and will fly out of the earth with the dead as his soldiers. He will feast on the dead and will survive Ragnarok and live in the new world.
- **Loki's Punishment.** A lesser serpent story in Norse mythology involves the trickster god Loki. Loki had arranged for the god Balder, the most beloved of the gods, to be killed. His death caused much distress and so

the other gods were angry with Loki. He fled and hid, but eventually they found him. Loki's punishment was to be tied to a rock below a serpent who dripped poison into Loki's eyes. Loki's wife stands by him, though, and catches the serpent's venom in a bowl. Loki will be freed at Ragnarok.

- In the story of the hero Sigurd, Sigurd was betrayed by his brothers-in-law. One of the brothers-in-law, Gunnar, was later killed—thrown into a pit full of snakes. He had the ability to charm them by playing the harp, but one was not charmed and stung him in the heart, killing him.

In Celtic mythology the snake was a representation of rebirth and the cycle of nature. Some Celtic amulets show a snake eating its own tail, similar to Jormungandr. This is symbolic of the snakes' cyclical nature of shedding its own skin and regenerating. The god Cernunnos is depicted holding a snake in each hand.

In Egyptian mythology the serpent often appeared as an elemental deity—one who was present at the beginning of time.

The Egyptian god Apophis was a negatively depicted serpent god. He embodies the forces of evil and chaos, and he tries to ambush the sun god, Ra. Every night Ra has to fight off Apophis and defeat him. Apophis cannot be destroyed, though, because he is necessary to balance the forces of good and evil. If he is destroyed, the world will be plunged into chaos.

The god Nehebkau, who guards the entrance to the underworld, is depicted as a serpent with human arms and legs. He is said to help the sun god Ra in his travels through the underworld. Nehebkau also protects the pharaoh in the afterlife.

Ouroboros

Another common, and ancient, snake symbol is the Ouroboros. The word ouroboros is Greek for “tail-eater,” and it is a snake or dragon wrapped in a circle with his tail in his mouth. The Ouroboros is symbolic of the cycle of life

and death, rebirth, renewal, and eternity. This symbol has been seen all over the world.

SPIDER

In Harry Potter spiders are almost as plentiful and important as the snake.

- In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Hagrid tells the kids to "follow the spiders," because that will lead them to information about the Heir of Slytherin. When Harry and Ron do follow the spiders, they are led deep into the Forbidden Forest to the giant spider Aragog and his spider "family." Ron is terrified of spiders.
- Professor Snape's home away from Hogwarts is on a street called "Spinners End," and that seems very fitting. Snape is a very complicated character who seems to weave a web of deceit and lies about him. Harry and his friends do not know where Snape's loyalties lie, but Dumbledore trusts him completely. The entire series, up until almost the very last chapter, is a mystery about Severus Snape.
- When Harry and Professor Dumbledore leave Horace Slughorn's house, after convincing him to teach at Hogwarts, Harry thinks of Slughorn like a spider, "*Harry had a sudden and vivid mental image of a great swollen spider, spinning a web around it, twitching a thread here and there to bring its large and juicy flies a little closer*" (HBP, 75). Slughorn likes to collect famous people, like a spider collects flies.

A spider is often a symbol of cunning and resourcefulness. Spiders can also be symbolic of the trickster, because tricksters weave their trickery and stories and lies so efficiently and well. The spider's web could also be seen as the ultimate trick—it is difficult to see, so creatures just walk (or fly) right into it. Spiders are sometimes seen in creation stories, because they weave their own homes.

In Greek mythology the most famous story is of Arachne (ah-RACK-nee). It is where we get our scientific name for spider—arachnid.

Arachne

Arachne was a young girl exceptionally gifted at weaving. She made the mistake of boasting about her ability as a weaver...always a bad idea in the old stories! Minerva (the goddess of wisdom, but also of crafts) took offense at this and challenged Arachne to a contest in which they both created a tapestry. Arachne perhaps forgot that her ability as a weaver came from Minerva and so accepted the challenge. At the end of the contest Minerva was upset to find that Arachne's tapestry was every bit as good as hers. Minerva assaulted Arachne, hitting her and slashing her face. Arachne, disgraced and humiliated, then hanged herself. Minerva (either taking pity on Arachne or to spite her) cut the thread that she was hanging by, and turned her into a spider.

Spiders are also associated with the Greek Fates and the Norse Norns. They are the women who "spin" the fate of all beings.

STAG

In Harry Potter the stag is Harry's patronus. The stag is also the form James Potter took as an animagus.

- The stag is symbolic of masculine power, fertility, and nobility. The antlers symbolized the King of the Forest, because they were similar to the branches of trees and a king's crown. The stag was also a symbol of rebirth and regeneration due to its ability to shed its antlers and grow new ones.

In Greek mythology the stag is sacred to Artemis, the goddess of the forest and hunting. One of the Labors of Heracles was to capture Artemis's sacred stags with golden horns. Heracles did not want to kill it, so he chased the stag for a year before capturing it.

In Norse mythology there are four stags that eat at the branches of Yggdrasil, the World Tree.

Oakthorn is the name of the stag that lives in Odin's hall of Valhalla. He eats the leaves of the tree Yggdrasil, and his horns drip a stream of water into one of the three wells (Hvergelmir) in Niflheim, the land of the dead. Hvergelmir is the source of all the rivers of the world.

In Celtic mythology the white stag is an indicator that the Otherworld is close by. In some legends seeing or crossing paths with a white stag symbolized you were about to go on a quest.

The god Cernnunos is depicted with antlers very much like a stag's.

King Arthur and the White Stag

In one of the many stories about King Arthur by the French author Cretien de Troyes, King Arthur hunts a white stag. He and his knights were at his court feasting and having a good time, when he decided he wanted to hunt a white stag. According to this story there is an ancient custom associated with killing a white stag—the person who kills the white stag must kiss the fairest maiden of the court, come what may. At this time, kissing a maiden who was not your wife could cause trouble, even if you were the king. Not to mention that each of the high born women and their husbands and fathers would think that she was the fairest maiden in the court. But Arthur wanted to go on the hunt no matter what.

The next morning King Arthur and his court left to hunt the white stag. Arthur and his men went on a vigorous hunt, and King Arthur killed the white stag. Of course he did, he was the King! They returned to the castle to celebrate and feast, but he had to determine which maiden was the most beautiful so he could bestow her with a kiss. Arthur worried that fighting would break out

when he chose the maiden to kiss. Queen Guinevere asked him to wait until one of his knights, Erec returned.

While Arthur and his men were at the hunt, Queen Guinevere and the knight Erec had an adventure that involved a fair maiden. Guinevere and Erec met this maiden, her knight, and a dwarf in her service. Erec was provoked by the knight and so followed the "damsel" and her two men. He followed them to a village and lodged with a poor man and his beautiful daughter. Erec found out that the knight who provoked him would be at a tournament the next day. Erec showed up, challenged the knight, and won the battle. The poor innkeeper gave Erec his daughter for a wife, which had been agreed on ahead of time. She was by far the most beautiful maiden around. They then returned to King Arthur's court. Everyone proclaimed that she was the most beautiful maiden, and King Arthur was able to bestow upon her the kiss of the white stag.

WEASEL

In Harry Potter the weasel is Arthur Weasley's patronus.

- Weasels are small mammals that will attack animals larger than themselves if necessary and so the symbolism of a weasel is often that of a cunning and fierce warrior. The negative side is the weasel represents trickery and sneakiness. This is most likely due to the fact that weasels are small, thin animals who can fit into small holes.

In Roman mythology there is one small story about a weasel that involves the hero Hercules. Hercules was the son of the god Jupiter and a mortal woman Alcmena. The goddess Juno, in one of her jealous rages, persuaded the goddess of childbirth, Lucina to sit outside of Alcmena's room while she was in labor. Lucina sat outside with her legs crossed and her hands tied and her garments bunched up in order to prevent Alcmena from giving birth right away. Hercules was one of two twins, and Juno wanted Hercules to be born last, because the

first baby to be born would be the son of Alcmena's mortal husband and so ruler of his kingdom.

Almena's maid, Galanthis, tricked the goddess of childbirth by rushing out of the room to say that Hercules had been born. The goddess jumped up and by moving she broke the spell. Alcmena was then able to give birth, for real, to Hercules. The goddess Lucina punished Galanthis by flinging her to the floor and turning her into a weasel.

Harry Potter Connection! Galanthis, the maid turned into a weasel, had red hair, just like all of the Weasleys!

Harry Potter Magical Creatures

You might notice that I did not include magical creatures in this section, but only real animals. If you are interested in information about magical creatures please refer to *Fantastical Beasts and Where to Find Them* by J.K. Rowling. You can also find good information in *The Sorcerer's Companion* by Allan Zola Kronzek and Elizabeth Kronzek.

Harry Potter Numbers and their Meanings

Did you know that numbers have had symbolic value for thousands of years? The ancient Egyptians and Greeks believed numbers were one of the foundations of nature that determined how the world works. They did not think numbers were "magical" but thought they were one of the ways in which to solve the mysteries of the world. Physicists today believe in the perfectness of numbers. In the Harry Potter books we often hear that numbers are magical,

and, in fact, we are told that "7" is the most magical number. That is why Voldemort divides his soul into the seven Horcruxes. The number seven turns up quite frequently, as do three and twelve. In fact, if you pay close attention while reading the Harry Potter books you'll see these magical numbers popping up everywhere. Three, seven, and twelve appear in the books more than any other numbers.

Try it Out! I will point out some of the significant number references in the books, but there are many more. See how many you can find!

One

One represents the beginning, the creator, the "Prime Mover."

Two

Two represents duality. The dual nature of two can either be in balance or conflict.

In Harry Potter we see this duality with:

- Harry and Voldemort. Harry is the good to Voldemort's evil. As the prophecy said, neither can live while the other survives. They are connected through Harry's scar and their wands.
- Snape. He is evil and good at the same time.

We also see it anytime there is a flip side to any situation.

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- The Weasley's and the Burrow are the opposite of the Dursley's and their house on Privet Drive.
 - The trio of Harry, Ron, and Hermione have an opposite with Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle.

We see the balanced nature of two in symbols like the Chinese yin-yang, or in pairs such as good/bad, male/female, sun/moon, and any other dualistic coupling.

Three

Three represents growth and moving forward. With three there is a beginning, middle, and end; birth, life, death; past, present, and future.

In Harry Potter:

- Harry was in the hospital wing for three days after his fight with Quirrell over the stone.
- After Dobby uses magic, Harry gets locked up by the Dursley's for three days before Ron and the twins rescue him.
- The old magic Voldemort uses in the potion to bring himself back takes three ingredients.
- Harry ends up in the hospital wing three times because of a Quidditch match.
- He turns the Resurrection Stone over three times.
- Hagrid knocks three times on the Hogwarts front door when he delivers the first year students to the castle.
- It takes three passes in front of the door to get into the Room of Requirement.

Three is the Christian trinity, the points of the triangle, trident, fleur-de-lis (the French flower symbol), and triquetra. It is the sun in the morning, at midday, and setting. In Greek and Norse mythology there are three Fates, three Norns,

three Furies, three Grey Women, and three Graces. In Celtic mythology the cycle of a woman's life contains three parts: maiden, mother, crone.

Try it Out! There are so many symbolic occurrences of the number three that it would be impossible for me to list them all. See if you can find more.

Four

Four represents totality and completeness. It is static and solid. It is symbolic of the earth.

In Harry Potter

- There are four Hogwarts houses.
- Voldemort wants the four trophies of the house founders.
- The Dursley's live at number 4 Privet Drive.

There are four points on a compass, four seasons, four directions, four elements (in Western culture), four sides to a square, four arms of a cross. Four is a strong, solid, foundational number.

Five

Five represents the human being. When a human stretches his/her arms and legs it forms a five sided figure with its two arms, two legs, and a head. Like three, five is a circular number and it represents being whole. The pentagram is five sided and when pointed up it symbolizes spirituality, but when pointed down it symbolizes black magic.

Six

Six represents balance and harmony. It also represents luck.

Seven

Seven represents totality, perfection, and security.

In Harry Potter

- Slytherin has won the Quidditch cup the last seven years when Harry arrives at the school.
- There are seven secret passages into Hogsmeade from Hogwarts.
- Seven “Harry Potters” escape at the beginning of *The Deathly Hallows*.
- Seven Horcruxes.
- Seven Weasley children.
- It is interesting that Hogwarts castle has 142 staircases, a number which when the digits are added up equals...seven.
- The age at which magic will reveal itself if a person is magical is seven.
- Dumbledore's office is on the 7th floor of the castle.

There are seven days of the week, seven metals important to alchemy, seven deadly sins, seven pillars of wisdom, seven sacraments, and in the Bible God rested on the seventh day.

During the middle ages there were seven liberal arts taught at the university. A Jewish Menorah has seven branches. There are seven stars in the Pleiades (a cluster of stars) and seven colors of the rainbow.

Try it Out! Like three, seven is mentioned so many times in the books it would be impossible to list them all. See if you can find more examples of the number seven.

Eight

Eight represents infinity. This is often because the number eight turned sideways looks like the symbol for infinity.

Nine

Nine represents wholeness and completeness. It is 3×3 or $3+3+3$ so it represents the "triple triad."

In Norse mythology, there are nine "worlds" where gods, elves, dwarfs, and humans lived. Odin hung on the World Tree for nine days.

Ten

Ten represents completeness and finality and a return to beginnings.

Odysseus wandered for nine years, but returned home on the tenth. There are Ten Commandments.

Eleven

Eleven represents balance, since it contains a one and one which makes two, and two is a number of balance. In numerology it is considered a "power number" since it is a two digit number that repeats itself. Because it follows

ten, which is a number of completion, eleven is a number of starting over and going forward.

In Harry Potter Harry is eleven when he goes to Hogwarts and starts his journey.

Twelve

Twelve represents completion.

In Harry Potter

- Hogwarts has twelve Christmas trees.
- Nagini is twelve feet long.
- Dumbledore found twelve magical uses for dragon's blood.
- Dumbledore puts out twelve streetlights on Privet Drive with his deluminator.

Our day is broken into two twelve hour cycles. Our year is broken into twelve months. There are twelve signs of the zodiac, twelve apostles, twelve tribes of Israel, twelve days of Christmas, twelve labors of Hercules, and the Chinese zodiac is broken into twelve year cycles. There are twelve Olympian Greek gods and goddesses.

The Symbolism of the Eye and Color

There is an old saying, "the eye is the window to the soul," and in most cultures people believe that to be true. What is so special about eyes? It is through our eyes that we connect with people. We look people in the eye when talking to them; when people are in love they stare into each others' eyes; when we listen to people intently we look at them; when we smile our eyes smile, and when we lie it is our eyes that give us away. You can tell if someone is faking a

smile by looking at their eyes—their eyes will not smile but look odd and not quite right. A true smile travels all the way to the eyes, and they shine and sparkle.

Eyes are linked to spirituality as well. Images of eyes are linked to different gods in mythology, and people who are considered spiritual are often said to be able to "see."

Eyes are an important symbol in the Harry Potter books. Not only is Harry often identified with his mother because he has her eyes, but the eyes of Voldemort are mentioned frequently, and eye contact is important in magic.

In Harry Potter the kids learn early on that eyes and eye contact are important in magic.

- In *The Sorcerer's Stone* when Hermione and Ron think Snape is trying to kill Harry at the Quidditch match, they notice that Snape keeps eye contact with Harry while muttering the spell. Hermione understands that breaking the eye contact will break the spell. She starts her little blue flame under Snape, and the distraction breaks the eye contact. Of course Hermione does not know about Quirrell, but her flame breaks his eye contact as well, and so breaks the spell.
- In *The Order of the Phoenix* Harry is required to learn occlumency. Occlumency is the magic of keeping your mind closed from someone trying to break into it using legilimancy. In order to do legilimancy, the wizard or witch must make eye contact with the subject. Harry also finds out that Snape is an accomplished occlumens and legilimens, which reinforces Harry's belief that Snape can read his mind. Harry started having the feeling that Snape could read his mind early in their relationship; Harry "*sometimes had the horrible feeling that Snape could read minds*" (SS, 221). Little did Harry know in those early days that Snape really could read his thoughts! Luckily for Harry, Snape had few opportunities to look Harry in the eye.

Harry also has the feeling early on that Dumbledore can read his mind, *“Dumbledore was giving Harry a searching look. His twinkling light-blue gaze made Harry feel as if he were being X-rayed”* (COS, 144). Dumbledore may have been using legilimancy, since he had just found Harry, Ron, and Hermione standing before the writing on the wall about the Heir of Slytherin.

After Harry dreams about Arthur Weasley getting attacked by Nagini in *The Order of the Phoenix*, he makes eye contact with Dumbledore for the first time in months and, *“at once, Harry's scar burned white-hot...and unbidden, unwanted, but terrifyingly strong, there rose within Harry a hatred so powerful he felt, for that instant, that he would like nothing better than to strike—to bite—to sink his fangs into the man before him”* (OOTP, 474-5). The eye contact is so powerful that Harry has the desire to kill Dumbledore. Dumbledore knew this would happen and had kept his distance from Harry, lest they have to look at each other. Harry finally wonders if the reason Dumbledore won't make eye contact is because he is afraid that he'll see Voldemort, that Harry's *“vivid green [eyes] might turn suddenly to scarlet...”* (OOTP, 492).

- In *The Deathly Hallows* the symbol of the Deathly Hallows looks similar to the Egyptian "eye of Horus". It is also in this book that Harry sees the blue eye looking at him in the piece of broken mirror that Sirius had given him. When he is in the dungeon at Malfoy Manor he sees the blue eye again, and thinking it is Professor Dumbledore, he asks for help. Help actually comes in the form of Dobby who is often identified by his *“bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls”* (CS, 12).

When Harry sees Dumbledore's memory where he asks Snape to kill him to save Draco's soul, we see that *“his tone was light, but his blue eyes pierced Snape as they had frequently pierced Harry, as though the soul they discussed was visible to him”* (DH, 683).

Characters and Their Eyes

Several characters are closely identified with their eyes. Dobby of course. Harry is regularly recognized by people as Harry Potter not because of his scar but because he looks like James and *has Lily's eyes*. Professor Trelawney—the first time Harry sees Professor Trelawney he sees that *"her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size..."* (POA, 127). Her large, magnified eyes are indicative of her ability to "see" since she is the Divination teacher. Mrs. Norris has *"bulging, lamplike eyes just like Filch's"* (SS, 132). Firenze has *"astonishingly blue eyes"* (OOTP, 601).

Snape and Dumbledore

Snape and Dumbledore are two other characters who are described by their eyes, and quite frequently. When Harry meets Snape for the first time in Potions Class, Snape is identified by the quality of his eyes, *"his eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels"* (SS, 136). Clearly, Professor Snape is not a nice person. Contrast this to Dumbledore whose eyes are regularly described as "twinkling."

Even at the end, Snape's actions are described through his eyes, or through the act of seeing. When Voldemort talks to him about the Elder Wand, Snape does not look at Voldemort, but *"his dark eyes were still fixed upon the coiling serpent..."* (DH, 655). When he does finally turn to look at Voldemort his face was still and *"it was a shock to see that anyone lived behind the blank eyes"* (DH, 655). We know that occlumency and legilimancy require eye contact. Snape must have been working very hard to keep his mind closed at this point. When Harry finds him dying in the Shrieking Shack, Snape's final act is to ask Harry to look at him, *"the green eyes found the black, but after a second, something in the depths of the dark pair seemed to vanish, leaving them fixed, blank, and empty"* (DH, 658).

Voldemort

Finally, Voldemort is identified by his eyes, which turned red as he turned more and more evil. When he was handsome Tom Riddle he had brown eyes, but by the time he returns to Hogwarts to ask Dumbledore for a teaching job his eyes have begun to turn red. Even though he is still Tom Riddle his eyes flash red when he is thinking something evil, like when he saw Salazar Slytherin's locket for the first time, "*there was no mistaking it this time: Voldemort's eyes flashed scarlet at the words...*" (HBP 437). When Voldemort returns to power in the *Goblet of Fire* he is described as having "livid scarlet eyes" and forever after he has red eyes.

In Greek mythology there are many stories involving creatures with interesting eyes. Argus, the giant, had one hundred eyes in his head, and the Gray Sisters shared one eye between them and they helped the hero Perseus.

The Greek hero Odysseus met a cyclops on one of his adventures. A cyclops is a giant with one eye in the middle of his head. The ancient race of Cyclopes were imprisoned in the Greek mythological underworld of Tartarus. During the battle between the Titans and the Olympian gods, Zeus released the Cyclopes from their prison to help the Olympians. The Cyclopes were excellent with metal working and so helped the Olympians by forging Zeus's thunderbolts, Poseidon's trident, Hade's helm of invisibility, and bows and arrows for Artemis and Apollo. The most famous cyclops was Polyphemus, the cyclops that Odysseus encountered on his travels. Odysseus managed to escape from Polyphemus by blinding him in his eye.

The Gorgon Medusa is also a famous Greek monster known for her eyes. One look into Medusa's eyes killed you. Even dead, the head of Medusa could kill with one glance.

In Norse mythology the most famous eye story is Odin's. Odin, the king of the Norse gods, wanted unlimited wisdom. He went to the Well of Wisdom to drink, but he could not attain any unless he was willing to sacrifice something

of his own. He gave up his eye to gain wisdom. Odin is always depicted with only one eye.

In Celtic mythology one of the races of gods in the Irish creation story were the Fomors. Their king, Balor, was called Balor "of the Evil Eye" because the gaze of that eye could kill.

In Egyptian mythology the most important and well known eye symbol is the Eye of Horus. The Eye of Horus, also known as the "udjat", is a symbol of protection and wisdom. It is associated with the god Horus and also with the earthly Pharaoh. Horus is the son of the god Osiris and the goddess Isis. Horus had to battle with his evil uncle, Set, and in the process lost his eye. The god Thoth restored Horus's eye, and he gave it to his father Osiris who was dead and in the Underworld. This revived Osiris, and, while still not alive, was enough to make him the god of the Underworld.

The Eye of Horus is the eye of a falcon, and Horus is the falcon headed god. In the pictures, a tear drops out of the eye.

More Meanings...

- Another mythological and spiritual eye is the "Third Eye." Located in the middle of your forehead just between and above your eyes, the "Third Eye" is a spiritual and intuitive "eye." It is one of the chakras which are power points up the center of your body in the yogic tradition. The third eye chakra is all about seeing, intuitiveness, awareness, and insight. The Hindu god Shiva has an eye in the middle of his forehead.
- In more modern culture we see the "Eye of Providence" or the "All Knowing Eye," the eye depicted at the top of the pyramid on our dollar bills. It represents the all-knowing eye of God, and has been used since the middle ages.
- Most of us have heard of the "evil eye." This basically means looking at someone in a mean way. However, throughout history, and in some cultures, there is a real significance to the "evil eye." Many cultures truly believe or believed in the harm done from someone giving you, a loved

one, or even an animal, the evil eye. The evil eye could cause the person or animal to become sick or even die. The cultures that believe in the evil eye also have devised protections from it as well. People can wear amulets or use gestures to protect themselves or their loved ones from the "evil eye."

Eye Color, and Color Symbolism

Eyes are important in another way in the Harry Potter books. The *eye color* of certain Harry Potter characters are mentioned a great deal and stand out.

There is great symbolism in colors. It's one of the reasons why we ask people for their "favorite" color. It means something different if your favorite color is blue rather than red. They have entirely different connotations. We'd probably think someone who has red as a favorite color is adventurous and a little wild, while the person who likes blue is safe. In the Chinese system of Feng Shui, color is seen as very important in decorating your house. For example, you do not want to paint your kitchen red. Red is the color of fire, and since the kitchen is for cooking and symbolically already full of fire, you want to balance that with another "cooler" color, like green. The symbolism of color varies for different cultures, especially between western and eastern cultures. We'll stick with the western symbolic meanings when going through the different colors, because Harry is a western boy.

Try it Out! When reading about the colors, see if the color of a person's eyes is a good representation of their character!

Green—*Harry and Dobby have green eyes.*

- Positive: green is usually symbolic of the earth. It is also symbolic of spring and therefore renewal and regeneration. Green is seen as a refreshing color. In some cultures it is a symbol of good luck. After blue, it is the color most often picked as a favorite.
- Negative: it is symbolic of jealousy and envy (e.g. jealousy being the "green-eyed monster" or people being "green with envy").

Blue—*Ron and Dumbledore have blue eyes. Also, Dumbledore's brother Aberforth has the same color blue eyes.*

- Positive: blue is the color most often picked as a favorite color. Blue is a symbol for peace and tranquility. It is a calming color symbolic of harmony and stability, because of its association with the sea and the sky. When someone is "true-blue" they are faithful and loyal. It can also represent truth, trust, and dependability.
- Negative: it is symbolic of depression ("the blues") and coldness (most likely for its association with water).

Brown—*Hermione has brown eyes.*

- Brown is another earthy color, like green. It is symbolic of stability, simplicity, and comfort. It is also symbolic of wholesomeness and approachability. Its association with the earth makes it stable and secure. Brown symbolizes being "down-to-earth."

Gray—*Draco and Lucius Malfoy have gray eyes.*

- Positive: gray is symbolic of modesty, dignity, intelligence, and conservatism.
- Negative: associated with old age and sadness. Gray can be unsettling because it is neither black nor white but a vague color in between the two—a "gray area" is a place where you are not sure of what you think or believe.

Black—*Snape's eyes are black. Hagrid's eyes are black.*

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- Positive: black can represent elegance, mystery, depth, and sophistication. It is usually representative of power—priests' vestments, judge's robes, limousines, and tuxedos are all black.
 - Negative: it can be symbolic of fear, evil, unhappiness, anger, and death. It often represents something bad—the phrases "black day" or "black sheep" come to mind. A black day is a very bad one, while the black sheep of the family is someone who has gone and done bad things.

Red—*Voldemort's eyes are red.*

- Positive: like black, red is a color rich with opposites. It can represent love, passion, strength, heat, and energy.
- Negative: symbolic of danger, blood, war, and violence. "Seeing red" means that the person is very angry, almost to the point of violence. A "red flag" is a warning sign of danger.
- The one thing that both the good and bad sides of the color red have is that it is symbolic of passion and intensity. Whether it symbolizes love (like on Valentine's Day) or hate (like the blood of war) it is passionate.

In addition to eye color, colors symbolize other things as well. The color of a wizard's robes, for example, could be an indication of that person's personality. Both Dumbledore and McGonagall are seen in "emerald" robes, while Snape is *always* in black. Notice how the Malfoy's are all described as pale faced with dull gray eyes, while Hagrid is ruddy faced and Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkle. These are all indications of character, and we can understand a lot about a person by the colors associated with him/her. If we didn't already know that Tom Riddle was going to turn into Lord Voldemort, we'd certainly know that something was wrong with him when his eyes "flashed scarlet."

The Symbolism of Wood and Trees

In addition to numbers, animals, eyes, and colors, there is symbolism attached to different trees and their wood. The symbolism of wood appears in the Harry Potter books, most significantly, with the witches and wizards wands. Wands

are made out of particular kinds of wood, and each wand is distinctly attracted to certain witches and wizards—the wand chooses the witch or wizard. Because Ollivander and Gregorovitch put so much emphasis on the woods chosen for each wand, let's spend some time looking at the symbolism surrounding these different woods. Perhaps the wood and tree associated with each person's wand will tell us something about that witch or wizard.

Ash

Ash wood is used for wands and broomsticks. The ash symbolizes strength, power, and a higher awareness. It is one of the three magical woods, along with oak and thorn.

In Harry Potter

- Ron's first wand was made from ash.
- Cedric's wand is made of ash, and Ollivander calls it "springy."
- The handle of Harry's Firebolt is made from ash with a birch twig tail.

In Greek mythology the goddess of retribution, Nemesis, is sometimes depicted holding the branch of an ash tree.

In Norse mythology the ash tree is important. The World Tree, which encompasses the entire world, is an ash tree. The roots go far into the underworld, and its branches enter into all of the other worlds, including the worlds of humans and the gods. Odin hanged himself from the World Tree for nine days in order to gain the wisdom of the runes.

Also, the first man, Ask, was made from an ash tree.

Finally, Yggdrasil, the ash World Tree will survive the cosmic battle that ends the world as we know it. From within it the two surviving humans will emerge and the world will begin again.

In Celtic mythology the ash tree was thought to resist the magic of fairies.

Birch

Birch symbolizes cleansing. Sweeping an area with a birch branch is said to purify it. This is why broomsticks were often made from birch. It helps to ward off evil spirits, and so people hung birch over the doors of their houses. It also symbolizes fertility. When a couple got married they jumped over a birch rod to start their new life.

The fires at the festival of Beltane (May Day) would be made from birch. Maypoles are made of birch.

In Harry Potter the tails of Harry's Nimbus 2000 and Firebolt brooms were made from birch twigs.

Chestnut

Chestnut wood is similar to oak in looks and hardness. It is very durable.

In Harry Potter Wormtail's wand is made from chestnut. It is brittle.

Elder

The elder tree is a symbol of death and endings, but because it has white flowers and has many medicinal properties, it is also symbolic of life and renewal. The elder was often planted near a doorway for protection from evil spirits.

Flutes and wands were often made from elder.

In Harry Potter the Elder Wand was made from, well, elder! According to Ron, a wand made from elder was bad luck, and that most likely had to do with the

deadly Elder Wand being made from that wood, *“Wand of elder, never prosper”* (DH, 414).

In *The Deathly Hallows* the symbolic ramifications of elder is particularly clear. When Voldemort learns that the Elder Wand is buried with Dumbledore, he opens the tomb and steals the wand. By doing this Voldemort gives rebirth to this special wand. The Elder Wand was symbolically dead in Dumbledore's hands, and is reborn in Voldemort's, *“the spiderlike hand swooped and pulled the wand from Dumbledore's grasp, and as he took it, a shower of sparks flew from its tip, sparkling over the corpse of its last owner, ready to serve a new master at last”* (DH, 501).

It is fitting then that the Elder Wand ends up being what ultimately kills Voldemort. When Harry uses the “expelliarmus” spell to disarm Voldemort in their final battle, the explosive force of the Elder Wand leaving Voldemort is what kills him, *“Harry saw Voldemort's green jet meet his own spell, saw the Elder Wand fly high, dark against the sunrise...spinning through the air toward the master it would not kill, who had come to take full possession of it at last”* (DH, 743-4).

The Elder Wand was the wand that went from being an instrument of killing its owner, to the instrument that brings about a new world—a world without the evil of Voldemort.

Elm

Elm is a symbol of death, rebirth, and the underworld.

In Harry Potter Lucius Malfoy's wand was made from elm. Voldemort "borrowed" it when he discovered that his own wand had a strange connection with Harry's.

In Norse mythology, the first woman, Embla, was created out of an elm tree.

Hawthorn

The hawthorn blooms during the month of May and so it is called the May Tree, and its branches are used for May Day celebrations. The hawthorn was thought to be protected and inhabited by the fairies.

The hawthorn tree has a dual nature to it. It is beautiful and has many useful properties, but it has thorns. Because it is the May Tree, it symbolized fertility in the Celtic world, but later it symbolized chastity. People used hawthorn to decorate for May Day, but it was bad luck to bring it inside the house.

In Harry Potter Draco's wand is made from hawthorn. It is "reasonably springy." Harry takes it from Draco in *The Deathly Hallows*, when they fight in Malfoy Manor after being captured by the Snatchers.

Harry Potter Connection! Draco Malfoy is associated with things that represent duality—his wand made out of hawthorn and his zodiac sign Gemini, the Twins. Draco worked hard to kill Dumbledore all through *The Half Blood Prince* only to change his mind when actually given the chance. He also did not rat out Harry, when he is caught by the Snatchers and taken to Malfoy Manor. He hates Harry but does not turn him in. When Draco turns up at the Battle of Hogwarts to catch Harry, Ron calls him "two-faced."

Holly

Holly is often symbolic of wintertime, since its evergreen leaves and bright red berries brighten up the dreary, dark, cold months of winter, especially December. It is symbolic of light in the middle of darkness, and of life in the middle of death.

The holly tree was thought to have special properties that repel lightning. It was often planted near houses and stables to protect them from lightning strikes.

In Harry Potter Harry's wand is made from holly. It is "supple."

Harry Potter Connection! It is fitting that Harry Potter's wand is made from a wood that symbolizes light in the darkness and life in the midst of death.

Harry is, from the start, known as the boy who lived, even though Voldemort's attack should have killed him.

Harry is almost killed after his struggle with Professor Quirrell. In fact, Harry is unconscious for three days, a very symbolic number in mythology and religion. Harry survives, though, after his struggle with evil and darkness.

Harry is nearly killed by the basilisk. He is brought back by the healing powers of Fawke's tears.

Harry survives the attack by the dementors when they try to give him the "kiss." His holly wand is quite literally a light in the darkness—he produces his silvery-white stag patronus to save himself.

In Celtic mythology Cuchulain's chariot poles were made from holly.

Hornbeam

Hornbeam was the guardian of sacred groves. It symbolizes loyalty, hard work, and strength. The hornbeam is nothing flashy or mysterious.

In Harry Potter Victor Krum's wand is made from hornbeam. Ollivander rates it "thicker than usual" and rigid.

Mahogany

Symbolizes strength and resilience. It is even said that mahogany trees can withstand lightning strikes.

In Harry Potter

- James Potter's wand is made of mahogany. It is pliable and good for transfiguration.
- The handle on Harry's Nimbus 2000 is made of mahogany with a tail made from birch.

Oak

The oak is a symbol of strength, hardiness, endurance, and courage. It was a tree the ancient Druids worshiped. They would carry oak staffs and meet in groves of oak trees. The druids also used mistletoe, which grew in oak trees, in their rituals and for magic. They believed that it had been placed there by the gods with a lightning strike. One version of the origin of the word druid is "knower of the oak."

The oak is also representative of doorways. Not only real world doors (of which many are made of oak), but also spiritual doorways. The oak is believed to lead the way to the truth and inner knowledge.

The oak has a tendency to attract lightning, so it is often the symbol of the sky gods and thunder gods, like Zeus, Thor, and the Celtic Dagda. This tendency to attract lightning also made it a symbol of power. Not only is the oak associated with the sky gods, it was often used as an emblem of kings and rulers and even countries. The oak or the oak leaf were used in coats-of-arms as well.

In Harry Potter

- Hagrid's wand is made from oak and is "rather bendy."
- Hogwarts has oak front doors.
- There are oak trees in the Forbidden Forest.

In Greek mythology the oak was sacred to Zeus. Sacred oaks lived in Zeus's Temple of Dodona, and it was from within this temple that Zeus would give out his prophecies.

The Golden Fleece captured by Jason and the Argonauts hung between two oak trees.

In Norse mythology the oak was sacred to Thor, because it represented strength.

In the hero story of Sigmund (Sigurd's father) his father Volsung built a great hall in which an oak tree grew in the middle and its branches grew out over the roof.

In Celtic mythology oak is most important in connection with the druids. The oak is one of three magical woods, along with ash and thorn. In some versions of the Merlin story, he is imprisoned in an oak tree by the "Lady of the Lake."

In the story of Cuchulain, he cuts down an oak sapling to create a message on it in Ogham. It was a warning to the army of Queen Maeve not to cross the ford.

Vine

The vine is symbolic of connection and eternity. The artwork of the ancient Celts and the Norse depicts vines weaving and interweaving around, and you often cannot see where it starts or ends. Also, because vines are opportunistic and will grow up on gates, fences, houses, or trees, they symbolize taking advantage of what you are given.

In Harry Potter Hermione's wand is made from vine.

Willow

Broomsticks are made from willow. Divining rods were often made from willow, because it is flexible and will allow the rod to move when over water. Because willow trees grow in or near water, they are associated with the feminine and the moon. Willow trees are also symbolic of being flexible, because their trunks and branches will bend but not break.

In Harry Potter

- Lily's wand is made from willow. It is "swishy, good for charms work."
- Ron's second wand is made from willow.
- The Whomping Willow obviously is a willow. It's so flexible it can bend its branches far enough to smack around the Ford Anglia!

In Greek mythology Persephone has a grove of sacred willows near the entrance to Hades.

Yew

Yew is symbolic of immortality, rebirth, rejuvenation, and longevity. They are also thought to be very magical. Yews are often considered a gateway to the Otherworld. The yew tree grows in an interesting way—its branches bend down and grow into the ground. From there new trunks grow and become new yew trees. It is a cycle of never-ending growth. Yew trees are often planted in cemeteries. The yew tree is poisonous.

In Harry Potter

- Voldemort's wand is made from yew. Ollivander said it was "powerful."
- There is a yew tree growing in the cemetery where Harry and Voldemort meet in *The Goblet of Fire*.
- There are yew hedges around the Malfoy's house.
- Yew trees grow in the Forbidden Forest.
- Hagrid takes the fifth years into the forest to see the Thestrals and Harry sees a Thestral in a "*black space between two gnarled yew trees*" (OOTP, 444).

In Celtic mythology a young couple, Naisi and Deirdre, were killed by King Conchubar (Naisi was killed by the king's men, and then Deirdre killed herself), and a yew tree grew on each grave. The tops of the yew trees, when fully grown, met each other at the top. The branches met over a church, and no one could part the two trees.