
PORTAL TO REAL WITCH AND WIZARD LEGENDS AND HISTORY

Part of the fun of the Harry Potter books is that we're introduced to this world of magic where kids carry wands, make potions in cauldrons, live in a haunted castle, recite magic spells, and ride on broomsticks. The students of Hogwarts study Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, or Divination. And yet, these subjects that the kids in the Harry Potter world study are actually all real and have been studied in our own world for thousands of years! People from our real past who may have been called “witches” used wands, broomsticks, and brewed potions in cauldrons. They also used astrology and alchemy to make predictions or to study the secrets of the world. Although I'm calling them witches and wizards to relate them to the Harry Potter world, they would not always have been called that. People who studied astrology or arithmancy or crystal gazing were not what we would call "witches," they were astrologers or fortune tellers. Another link to our real world and the Harry Potter world is that the students of Hogwarts are each allowed to bring a certain animal with them to school—animals that are very much like witches' "familiars," animals that people believed helped witches when they performed their magic. The term "witch" and "wizard" became a derogatory word sometime during the middle ages, and it was during this time that many innocent people died because they were accused of "witchcraft." Once again, as with the mythology, the Harry Potter books are part of a long line of tales about witches, wizards, and their witchcraft.

In This Section we'll Learn About:

- References in the Harry Potter books to the “magic” of the real world.

-
- Witches and Wizards from Mythology and History
 - The story of what happened to real flesh and blood people when they were accused of witchcraft.

Magical Terms (In alphabetical order)

ALCHEMY

Alchemy is the ancient practice of transforming base metals like lead or iron into precious metals like gold and silver with a combination of magic and science. Alchemists kept their findings secret, and if there was a magic component to alchemy no one ever revealed it, and it's still unknown. People believed that some of the by-products from the alchemical process could be made into an elixir of immortal life—the legendary philosopher's stone. Many medieval alchemists were spiritual people who believed that the search for this process would bring them closer to God. Alchemy started with the ancient Egyptians and continued with just about every "advanced" society from the Greeks to the Chinese. The practice of alchemy flourished during the middle ages and Renaissance. In its way it continues on today—much of our modern science of chemistry came from the ancient and medieval alchemists' forays into the properties of different metals and substances.

In Harry Potter we are introduced to alchemy because of Nicholas Flamel and the Sorcerer's Stone. The real Nicholas Flamel was one of the most famous alchemists of all time, and legend had it that he lived for hundreds of years. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Nicholas Flamel is very much alive, and friends with

Dumbledore, and the Stone of immortal life really exists and is hidden under Hogwarts.

AMULET

An amulet is an object believed to magically keep its owner from harm. Usually worn as necklaces, amulets can be other objects like statues or items placed on an altar. They can be carvings made of metal or stone or natural items like herbs or gems. People also carved runes or other symbols, like the Egyptian Eye of Horus, into the amulets to make them even more powerful. People have used amulets for thousands of years.

In Harry Potter the trade of amulets gets a boost when the Heir of Slytherin starts attacking and petrifying students, *"meanwhile, hidden from the teachers, a roaring trade in talismans, amulets, and other protective devices was sweeping the school. Neville Longbottom bought a large, evil-smelling green onion..."* (COS, 185).

Amulets also got more popular when word got out that Lord Voldemort had returned in *The Half Blood Prince*. When Harry goes to Diagon Alley he notices things are different—a sign outside Flourish and Blotts said, *"Amulets: Effective against Werewolves, Dementors, and Inferi"* (HBP, 110).

ANIMAL FAMILIARS

Many people believed that witches had animal helpers who did the witch's bidding. These animals could be either the witches themselves who had transformed or demons associated with a particular witch. Black dogs and cats were the two most common animal familiars—black dogs as the devil in disguise hanging around a witch and cats as the witch herself. Scholars now think the idea that witches could turn themselves into animals derived from pagan rituals in which dancers wore animal skins to represent a particular

animal. Also, some ancient shamans would burn the plant henbane in a fire which would produce a hallucinogenic effect on the person inhaling the fumes. The dancers in animal skins may very well have looked just like the animals to the shaman and may have led to the belief that magical people could actually turn into animals.

The belief that certain animals like cats or dogs cavorted with witches and the devil started in the middle ages. All of these animals were important to one or more of the pagan religions that Christianity wanted to supplant. Cats, toads, and goats all had a place in the ancient and pagan religions and mythologies and were therefore suspicious to those trying to rid the world of those religions. Owls, cats, and dogs all feature prominently in Greek, Norse, Celtic, and Egyptian mythologies.

In Harry Potter the students at Hogwarts were allowed to bring one of the following animals with them to school: *"an owl OR a cat OR a toad"* (SS, 67).

A detailed account of the owl, cat, and toad (and dog) are located in the Portal to Symbolism section.

An Owl

The owl has had a strong connection to witches and witchcraft for centuries. Because they are nocturnal and hunt at night, owls were symbolic of darkness, secrecy, even death. For many people, the owl signified bad luck or a bad omen, especially if you saw one during the day. Owls were often thought to be an omen of death. In medieval times, people believed that owls traveled with witches and could also be witches in disguise. It is easy to imagine a superstitious people believing that the nocturnal hunting owls were some kind of evil being with their eerie hoot, their large looming eyes, quiet flight, and strangely spinning head.

In Harry Potter the owl is the "familiar" for Harry and Ron. Harry, of course, has Hedwig his snowy white owl. Ron has the Weasley family owl Hermes and then gets Pigwidgeon after Scabbers turns out to be Peter Pettigrew.

Or a Cat

Cats were the animal most often considered a witch's familiar, especially black cats. One reason could be that cats, more so than dogs, are individualistic, secretive, and mysterious animals. People do not really understand or trust cats. Perhaps cats got such a bad rap because they roam at night, their eyes glow in the dark, and when they fight they unleash an unearthly yowl.

Plus, some ancient pagan cultures worshiped cats and associated cats with goddesses such as Freya or Bast. The ancient Egyptians worshiped cats to such a degree that it was illegal to kill a cat, and if you did kill a cat you could be executed! Cats were often mummified and buried along with their owners.

In Harry Potter Hermione has a cat "familiar," Crookshanks, the huge bandy-legged ginger cat. In the *Prisoner of Azkaban* Crookshanks helps Harry, Ron, and Hermione because he mistrusts Ron's rat Scabbers. Crookshanks is a very smart cat, and he eventually helps the kids discover that Scabbers is actually Peter Pettigrew in his animagus form.

Argus Filch, the Hogwart's caretaker owns a cat, Mrs. Norris, who lurks around the castle spying on the students for Filch. She was known to "*whisk off for Filch, who'd appear, wheezing, two seconds later*" (SS, 132). In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry returns to his dormitory after Quidditch practice and he drips mud on the floor. Nearly Headless Nick tells Harry not to let Filch catch him, because Filch is in a bad mood and won't be happy about the mud. Mrs. Norris then appears out of nowhere, "*the skeletal cat who was used by the caretaker, Argus Filch, as a sort of deputy in his endless battle against students*" (COS, 124).

The connection between Filch and Mrs. Norris is very much like a witch and his familiar: "*Drawn to the spot by the mysterious power that seemed to connect him with his foul cat, Argus Filch...*" (COS, 125). Too bad for Filch that he's not really a wizard, but a squib!

Or a Toad

Frogs and toads have been a part of mythology and folklore for ages. In some societies, people believed frogs and toads were a good symbol of growth and fertility. Their evolution from egg to tadpole to frog and from a creature who lives in the water to one who can live in both the water and on land can be seen to represent humans' own evolution to a higher spiritual plane.

However, frogs and toads began to get a bad name during the middle ages. Perhaps it was due to the fact that they secreted poison and could be used for potions that people became frightened of their power. Perhaps it was due to the fact that frogs and toads live in swampy areas believed to be places of disease and death. Whatever the reason, frogs and toads gained the reputation as witch's familiars and as ingredients in witch's potions. Demons and devils were said to visit the earth as frogs and toads.

In Harry Potter Neville Longbottom owns a toad, Trevor.

Now let's look at another animal important in the Harry Potter books that was once considered a familiar to witches.

Dogs

Black dogs were thought to be "familiars," because they could run errands for the witch and were extremely loyal to her. Some people believed the devil

would walk around as a black dog. In Greek and Norse mythology dogs are guardians of the Underworld, and in Egyptian mythology a dog god prepares the dead as they arrive in the Underworld. Perhaps this is why medieval people believed that dogs, and particularly black dogs, were the devil in disguise. The devil was associated with the pagan Underworld.

In Harry Potter the black dog is associated with Sirius Black. Black is an animagus who transforms into a large black dog. It is fitting that he's a big black dog since he is so vilified in the wizarding world. He was accused of killing thirteen people at one time, certainly enough for people to think of him as a devil. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Sirius, in his dog animagus form, accompanies Harry to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. In this way he becomes Harry's familiar.

Interesting Connection! Both Voldemort and Dumbledore have animal familiars. Dumbledore has Fawkes the phoenix who travels and carries messages for him. Fawkes also appears before Harry when he's in trouble in the chamber of secrets fighting the basilisk. In this respect, he is taking on Dumbledore's role as Harry's protector. Voldemort's familiar is Nagini the snake. In this case, the snake really is a familiar since Voldemort has given Nagini a part of his soul. Nagini does things for Voldemort, like kill the Muggle Frank at the beginning of *The Goblet of Fire*. Both the phoenix and the snake are symbolic of rebirth, which is fitting since so much of the Harry Potter books has to do with Voldemort's attempt to become immortal. It is also fitting that Dumbledore's familiar is a bird—large birds prey on snakes and Dumbledore is the only wizard whom Voldemort ever feared.

ARITHMANCY

In our world arithmancy is usually known as "numerology." Numerology is the idea that numbers can provide the key to secrets about a person's character. A numerologist does this by using a number equivalent to a letter (or letters) in the alphabet.

A simple table looks like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	

A table using English letters but derived from a more ancient source is this (which many numerologists consider to be more accurate):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A	B	C	D	E	U	O	F
I	K	G	M	H	V	Z	P
Q	R	L	T	N	W		
J		S			X		
Y							

In numerology you take your name, find the numeric equivalents to the letters, and add them up in a certain way to find out what kind of person you are. There are three numbers in which to derive information: the *Key Number*, the *Heart Number*, and the *Personality Number*. The *Key Number* is your overall personality (both the inner and outer personality), the *Heart Number* is your inner personality, and the *Personality Number* is your outward personality.

For example: let's use Harry Potter and the second, more accurate table.

H	A	R	R	Y	P	O	T	T	E	R
5	1	2	2	1	8	7	4	4	5	2

The numbers in HARRY add up to 11. The numbers in POTTER add up to 30. We then add the total from the first name to that of the last name, which equals 41. We cannot have a double digit number for our final number, so we add 4 and 1, which is 5.

Harry Potter's "Key Number" is 5. The *Key Number* is your overall personality; the whole you as it were. According to the book "The Encyclopedia of Fortune Telling" people who are 5's are "very interesting to know; they are lively, questioning, intelligent, adventurous and are always prepared to listen to another point of view, however unusual."

To find out Harry's *Heart Number* we add up the vowels in his name:

H	A	R	R	Y	P	O	T	T	E	R
	1					7			5	

The vowels add up to 13. We add 1 and 3 to get 4.

Harry Potter's "Heart Number" is 4. The *Heart Number* is your inner personality. Sometimes this inner personality is the one we keep hidden from

others. The number 4 is "the number of steady application, hard work, determination, and a drive to get things done."

To find out Harry's *Personality Number* we add up the consonants in his name:

H	A	R	R	Y	P	O	T	T	E	R
5		2	2	1	8		4	4		2

The consonants add up to 28. We add 2 and 8 to get 10. We then have to add again, 1 and 0, to get 1.

Harry Potter's "Personality Number" is 1. The *Personality Number* is your outer personality. This is who you present to the outside world and it is how you are perceived by others:

1's "tend to see everything and everybody in relation to themselves....knowing what they want out of life and, because of their assertive and ambitious qualities, usually getting it...like most strong individuals they do not make altogether satisfactory subordinates, being a great deal better at giving orders than taking them."

Hint! Keep in mind that if you change the name you may change the meaning. There may be a difference between your birth name and what you are called later in life. However, what you end up calling yourself or what people call you should be a better indicator of your personality than your birth name, because that is the name you either chose for yourself or it is the name that people see you as. So, using a nickname or shortened version of your birth name will most likely give you a different number, but should be more accurate.

There is another number numerologists find important: the *Birth Number*. You add together the month, the day, and the year of your birth. You then reduce it to a single digit, numerologically significant number.

For example, let's use Harry again. Harry Potter's birthday is July 31, 1980.

Seven is the month of July. The day of birth—31. 1980 is the year. When we add them together we get 2018. We then add $2 + 0 + 1 + 8 = 11$. Now, 11 is one of the two, two digit numbers numerologists use. Eleven "is a desirable and fortunate number and [11's] are likely to *make their mark on life in a way which will earn the respect and admiration...of those whom they encounter*" (emphasis added).

In Harry Potter, Hermione takes Arithmancy with Professor Vector. At first it seems odd that Hermione would take Arithmancy, when she doesn't like any

other kind of "divination." However, there is a difference between numerology and something like crystal ball gazing or reading tea leaves. People have always thought numbers held special qualities, even magical properties. The word arithmancy comes from the Greek words *arithmo* which means "number" and *mancy* which means "prophecy." You add the ancient belief that a person's name is important and significant and that numbers are special and magical, and you get Arithmancy. The very specific formulas derived from centuries of scholars, mathematicians, and magicians, would have been appealing to Hermione.

ASTROLOGY

Astrology is a system of divination that people still use today. We are familiar with it in terms of the astrological predictions—using sun signs to predict what your day or week will be like. Astrologers also use complex charts to make their predictions based on the composition and alignment of the stars and planets. Astrologers today use charts to discover a person's personality in many different areas and use “signs” such as the sun sign and the moon sign to aid them with their knowledge. The astrological sign we are all familiar with, the sun sign, is the one we can spout off whenever someone asks, "what's your sign?"

There are 12 sun signs of the zodiac and astrologers have referenced these for thousands of years. The 12 signs are:

- Aries (The Ram)—March 21 to April 19
- Taurus (The Bull)—April 20 to May 20
- Gemini (The Twins)—May 21 to June 20
- Cancer (The Crab)—June 21 to July 22

-
- Leo (The Lion)—July 23 to August 22
 - Virgo (The Virgin)—August 23 to September 22
 - Libra (The Scales)—September 23 to October 22
 - Scorpio (The Scorpion)—October 23 to November 22
 - Sagittarius (The Archer)—November 23 to December 21
 - Capricorn (The Goat)—December 22 to January 19
 - Aquarius (The Water Bearer)—January 20 to February 18
 - Pisces (The Fish)—February 19 to March 20

The signs are also divided into the four elements: fire, earth, air, and water.

- Fire signs: Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius
- Water signs: Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces
- Earth signs: Taurus, Capricorn, and Virgo
- Air signs: Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius.

Harry Potter's sun sign is Leo. To read a detailed interpretation of Harry's astrological chart there is an article on the Harry Potter Lexicon website entitled, "Harry Potter's Astrological Birth Chart" (you can find it in the Bibliography). This article has all the detail you could possibly want about Harry Potter's birth chart! It appears that J.K. Rowling (whether on purpose or not) picked the perfect birth date for Harry.

Harry's Sign

Harry Potter is a Leo, the Lion, so it is fitting that Harry is so closely associated with Gryffindor house, since Gryffindor is associated with the lion. Not only does Harry belong to that house, but he is able to wield Godric Gryffindor's sword, demonstrating that he is indeed, a true Gryffindor.

Here are some other characters' astrological signs. You can see how closely aligned or not the characters are with their zodiac signs.

Aries (March 21 to April 19)

- Fire sign.
- Aries is "The Ram" and Aries tend to be very forceful in their endeavors.
- Positive: energetic, impulsive, adventurous, creative, and determined.
- Negative: short tempered, self-involved, impulsive, impatient.
- *Fred and George are Aries. They were born on April 1st (April Fool's Day, fittingly).*
- *Other Aries: James Potter.*

Taurus (April 20 to May 20)

- Earth sign.
- Taurus is "The Bull" and those born in Taurus are earthy.
- Positive: steady, strong, generous, and hard working.
- Negative: dull and adverse to change.
- *Professor Sprout is a Taurus.*

Gemini (May 21 to June 20)

- Air sign.
- Gemini is "The Twins."
- Positive: quick intelligence, charming, and curious.
- Negative: mercurial and superficial. They can change quickly as if blown around by the air.
- *Draco Malfoy is a Gemini.*

Cancer (June 21 to July 22)

- Water sign.
- Cancer is "The Crab."
- Positive: loyal, devoted to friends and family, reliable, and sympathetic.
- Negative: they are hurt easily and can retreat into themselves. Like a real crab, Cancers can be hard on the outside and soft on the inside.
- *Dobby is a Cancer.* (I wanted this section to only contain humans, but I could find no wizard or witch who is a Cancer).

Leo (July 23 to August 22)

- Fire sign.
- Leo is "The Lion."
- Positive: confident, strong, proud, outgoing, and ambitious.
- Negative: domineering and do not always listen to others.
- *Harry is a Leo.*
- *Other notable Leo's: Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom.*

Virgo (August 23 to September 22)

- Earth sign.
- Virgo is "The Virgin;" they are often modest and pure in that they are concerned about what is right.
- Positive: analytical, intelligent, efficient, pay close attention to detail, and love order.
- Negative: critical, obsessive, and perfectionists.
- *Hermione is a Virgo.*

Libra (September 23 to October 22)

- Air sign.
- Libra is "The Scales."
- Positive: balanced, good-natured, and have a strong sense of justice. Fair play is important.
- Negative: they can be indecisive.
- *Professor McGonagall is a Libra.*
- *Another Libra: Professor Flitwick.*

Scorpio (October 23 to November 22)

- Water sign.
- Scorpio is "The Scorpion." Another animal associated with Scorpio is the eagle.
- Positive: passionate, strong-willed, energetic, brave, creative, and powerful.
- Negative: they can be vindictive and secretive.

-
- *Molly Weasley is a Scorpio.*

Sagittarius (November 23 to December 21)

- Fire sign.
- Sagittarius is "The Archer." The symbol is a centaur pulling a bow.
- Positive: fun loving, carefree, open, generous, and agreeable.
- Negative: they can be reckless and restless.
- *Hagrid is Sagittarius.*
- *Other notable Sagittarians: Bill Weasley and Charlie Weasley.*

Capricorn (December 22 to January 19)

- Earth sign.
- Capricorn is "The Goat."
- Positive: stable, introverted, and patient.
- Negative: submissive and plodding. They can also be ambitious, but keep their ambitions to themselves as they are very secretive. They are loners.
- *Professor Snape is a Capricorn.*
- *Another notable Capricorn: Tom Riddle.*

Interesting Tidbit! It is said that Capricorns (Snape and Riddle) and Leos (Harry's sign) do not mix well at all.

Aquarius (January 20 to February 18)

- Air sign.
- Aquarius is "The Water Bearer" and the symbol is a person holding a water jug.
- Positive: idealistic, likeable, friendly, intelligent, and love freedom.
- Negative: they can be impractical, too idealistic, and not see things in the world as they are, but rather how they want things to be.
- *Arthur Weasley is Aquarius.*
- *Another Aquarius: Lily Evans Potter.*

Pisces (February 19 to March 20)

- Water sign.
- Pisces is "The Fish."
- Positive: sensitive, emotional, kind, empathic, and generous.
- Negative: disorganized, overly emotional, and easily influenced by others.
- *Ron Weasley.*
- *Another Pisces: Remus Lupin.*

Try it Out! Unfortunately, we have no birthday for Albus Dumbledore, Sirius Black, Bellatrix Lestrangle, Lucius Malfoy or Luna Lovegood. Try finding a sign that works best for them!

In Harry Potter Harry and Ron learn astrology in Professor Trelawney's Divination class. However, the centaurs are the ones most closely linked to astrology. When the centaurs comment on how bright the planet Mars looks, they are practicing astrology. The planet Mars is associated with passion, aggression, and anger. Astrologers associate the sign Mars with going out and getting what you want, personal drive, outward action, and the will to survive. It is fitting, then, that the centaurs would see Mars as bright during the re-ascendance of Voldemort and the Death Eaters. Voldemort's mode of action is all about violence, aggression, and anger. Mars is also the Roman god of war and the planet looks red to us and so is associated with war. When Harry first talks to the centaurs Voldemort was making his plans for war.

Astrology through History

Astrology is very old and has been used by the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks.

Astrology as we know it started in ancient Babylonia in the 8th century BCE, where ancient priests were also astrologers and gave advice using the zodiac to kings and chieftains. At this time they had already developed the system of

the twelve signs of the zodiac. The astrologer priests would advise the kings about wars, harvests, and marriages and the position of the sun, moon, and planets.

Astrology made its way to Greece where it was widely taken up and made more individualized. It was no longer just for kings and their kingdoms but for ordinary people as well. Ptolemy (TOE-leh-mee) is the most famous of the Greek/Roman/Egyptian astrologers. Ptolemy was a Greek living in Egypt under Roman rule.

During the early middle ages, astrology fell out of favor in the west, although it was kept alive in the Muslim world. Western scholars in the middle-ages rediscovered astrology when they translated Arab works into Latin.

During the late 17th century it became very popular to study and learn astrology. It was in vogue for the rich and powerful to have personal astrologers—much like the kings of the ancient world had their astrologer priests, the kings and queens of Europe had their astrologers. The most famous was John Dee, the astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I (16th century).

Astrology continued to be popular among some scholars and royalty. Not only was astrology popular, but tarot cards, numerology, and palmistry were popular as well. This popularity has continued in some circles today.

BLOOD SACRIFICES

This sounds really grim and gruesome, but it is something that people have been doing for thousands of years, and, yes, it is something we see in the Harry Potter books. Blood has been used in religious ceremonies since primitive times. Animals were often sacrificed on an altar to show proper reverence to a god or goddess. It was done to ensure a prosperous hunt or to celebrate the harvest. People used blood because blood is an essential part of what it means

to be fully alive. Blood contains the energy of the person or animal being bled and so adds power to a ritual or sacrifice.

Real people accused of witchcraft were often accused of signing a pact with the devil in their own blood. Witches were often burned at the stake, because burning destroyed their tainted blood. In contemporary movies and books we see young boys becoming "blood brothers" by cutting themselves and then mingling their blood together. It is a powerful bond between them and not taken lightly.

Mythology Connection! In a Norse mythology story Odin and Loki mingled blood and became blood brothers—Odin loved Loki and wanted him to live in Asgard, the home of the gods.

Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice was such a common occurrence in ancient times that it doesn't even receive much mention in the stories of the heroes. Usually when stories mentioned animal sacrifice it was in reference to a god or goddess who had *not* been given his or her rightful sacrifice. The god/goddess became angry with the village or king or person who did not perform the correct sacrifice and then made that person's life miserable! The animal sacrifice was an offering to the gods as the way in which humans, who were weak and lowly compared to the gods, could be protected by the gods. The ancient world was a harsh place, and humans needed all the help they could get. The ancient Greeks and Norse people made sacrifices to keep the gods happy. They also made sacrifices at

certain times of the year in conjunction with rituals or festivals. For example, an animal might be sacrificed in order to ensure a good harvest, or on a certain god or goddess's festival. The Greeks made sacrifices if someone they cared for fell ill. The sacrifice was done in hopes that the person suffering would be healed.

Usually the whole family or entire village would take part in the sacrifice and the ritual killing. One part of the animal was burnt for the gods (or a particular god/goddess) and the rest saved for the people to eat. They ate the entire animal and shared it among all of those present. Also present, at least symbolically, was the god or goddess to whom the sacrifice was made. If you sacrificed a goat to Zeus or Odin or Athena or Brigid, you were symbolically sharing a meal with that god or goddess.

Animal sacrifice was common in the Greek, Roman, Norse, and Celtic world. It also was prominent in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. They also made these sacrifices on certain times of the year or during certain rituals.

Human Sacrifice

Another form of blood sacrifice in the stories was of an innocent person (usually a young maiden) sacrificed to a monster or dragon. Usually the monster was besieging a village or land, and the only way to placate it was to offer it an innocent young woman. As Ronan says to Hagrid, Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Draco when they are in the Forbidden Forest looking for the injured unicorn, *"always the innocent are the first victims...so it has been for ages past, so it is now"* (SS, 253).

In Harry Potter we see many "blood sacrifices."

-
- In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* Voldemort kills and drinks the blood of the unicorn. He sacrifices a sacred and innocent animal in order to make himself stronger. In the old stories the person sacrificed to the gods or monsters was always innocent. In this story it is the unicorn-- "*...it is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn...you have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself...*" (SS 258). In Harry Potter, the "monster" is Lord Voldemort, and like the monsters of old he craves the blood of an innocent being.
 - In *The Goblet of Fire* Voldemort is after Harry's blood when they meet in the cemetery. Harry's blood is important to Voldemort because it contains the magic that Lily gave Harry when she **sacrificed herself to save him**. Voldemort needs Harry's blood and only his to bring himself back to life. Before this moment Voldemort is alive, but barely. He needs a blood sacrifice to come back to his full strength. In keeping with the idea of blood sacrifice and early pagan rituals, Wormtail also recites a spell while taking Harry's blood, "*B-blood of the enemy—forcibly taken—you will—resurrect your foe*" (GOF, 642). Wormtail also makes a sacrifice—his hand. Part of the ritual required the "servant" to sacrifice something, "*Flesh—of the servant—w-willingly given—you will—revive—your master*" (GOF, 641).
 - In *The Half Blood Prince* Dumbledore must give his blood when he and Harry attempt to enter the cave where Voldemort keeps his Horcrux. Dumbledore comments that the payment in blood is "crude," and indeed the idea of payment in blood is ancient and rather crude. Dumbledore also comments to Harry later that, "*...your blood is worth more than mine,*" implying that Harry has a part to play in the future and must not sacrifice his blood yet.

-
- Harry and Dumbledore discover that Voldemort had to make a sacrifice in order to create his Horcruxes. Seven human lives were taken, one for each Horcrux.
 - In *The Deathly Hallows* Dumbledore's foresight proves right. Harry ends up literally sacrificing himself to Lord Voldemort. When Harry enters Snape's memories he finds out that Dumbledore had planned all along for him to be sacrificed. Snape asks, *"you have kept him alive so that he can die at the right moment?"* (DH, 687). Once Harry learns of this, he goes into the Forbidden Forest and allows Voldemort to perform the killing curse. Harry is dead when he talks with Dumbledore in King's Cross station. But here he learns about how the blood sacrifices worked: *"He [Voldemort] took your blood believing it would strengthen him. He took into his body a tiny part of the enchantment your mother laid upon you when she died for you. His body keeps her sacrifice alive..."* (DH, 710).

Harry's *blood* keeps Voldemort alive, but it also gives Harry the ability to come back and be resurrected. It is no accident that the stone he dropped in the forest was the Resurrection Stone. What Voldemort did not understand was that the sacrifice of Harry's mother would be so powerful that it would rebound, not only in destroying his body and keeping Harry alive, but in allowing Harry to be reborn, *"If he could only have understood the precise and terrible power of that **sacrifice**, he would not, perhaps, have dared to touch **your blood...**"* (DH, 710).

- After talking to Dumbledore and understanding the nature of his mother's sacrifice, and his own in giving himself up to Voldemort in the forest, Harry makes the decision to go back and destroy Voldemort. Harry understood at that moment that he had had to physically sacrifice himself

to gain the knowledge to perform this final task. Although no blood was actually spilled, Harry still made the sacrifice.

Sacrifice and the Horcruxes

There is one other form of sacrifice in the Harry Potter books—the “sacrifice” of the Horcruxes. When Harry and Ron destroy the locket Horcrux in the Forest of Dean, the scene is very much like what would happen when making a sacrifice. They destroyed the locket on a flat stone near a tree, *“Harry looked around...and saw the place: a flattish rock lying in the shadow of a sycamore tree”* (DH, 373). Real world sacrifices were often done in groves on flat stones. As a side note: the sycamore tree symbolizes protection—a good tree under which to open up the evil locket!

In Greek and Norse mythology there are many instances of blood sacrifices. Gods and heroes both must make them. Here are a few:

In Greek mythology:

Andromeda—was given up for sacrifice by her family and village in order to placate the sea monster and keep it from terrorizing them. Perseus rescued her by killing the sea monster. She was one of *many* young women in the stories sacrificed to a monster by a king to save the village.

Dionysus—Dionysus was the Greek god of the vine. Like the vine with which he was associated, Dionysus "died" every winter by being torn apart. In the spring he was put back together and born again. Although he died a violent and horrible death, he gave hope to people by being born again each year. Some of his followers, the Bacchae (Dionysus was sometimes called Bacchus), held rituals in the wilderness in which they got terribly drunk on wine and tore apart an animal in reverence to Dionysus.

Prometheus and Zeus—the Titan Prometheus created man. After Prometheus created man he and Zeus had to arrange which part of an animal the people would sacrifice to Zeus. Zeus, being the king of the gods, thought that humans should sacrifice the best part of the animal to him. Prometheus, who was fond of humans, thought they should receive the best part of the animal. So, Prometheus cut up an ox and wrapped the good pieces of it in the hide. He covered the hide with the entrails. In another pile Prometheus put all the bones and then covered them with fat. He then asked Zeus to pick the pile he wanted the humans to sacrifice to him. From this time forward this would be the part of an animal sacrificed to the gods. Zeus picked the pile covered with the shiny fat because the pile with the entrails looked disgusting. He was angry when he learned that he'd been tricked, but since he had made an agreement he stuck with it. Humans then sacrificed the fat and bones and burned that part of the animal on their altars, while they got to keep the good meat for themselves to eat.

In Norse mythology we see sacrifices as well. The Norse had similar animal sacrifice practices to those of their southern neighbors.

Odin—Odin sacrificed himself in order to gain knowledge of the secret of runes. He hanged himself and pierced himself with a spear on the world tree Yggdrasill for nine days and nine nights. Even though he was the king of the gods, Odin died. He brought himself back to life again and gained the knowledge of the runes. He used this wisdom to serve both gods and humans. The runes were sometimes used for divination, but eventually were used to decorate swords and cups, and also for record keeping (like Egyptian hieroglyphs).

Odin also sacrificed his eye in order to gain wisdom. He went down to Mimir's Well and asked the god Mimir if he could have a drink from the well because it contained wisdom. Mimir, a god of wisdom, told Odin he had to sacrifice something in order to take a drink. Odin gouged out his eye, offered it to Mimir, who then allowed Odin to drink. Odin gained wisdom through the water of the well.

The Celtic World—the Celts too, practiced sacrifices. Celtic animal sacrifices were practiced in a similar way to that done by the Norse and Greeks.

BROOMSTICKS

Witches in real witchcraft trials were often accused of flying on broomsticks to their "sabbats" or "black sabbaths" and meeting with the devil. However, broomsticks were mostly used in harmless rituals like sweeping an area to purify it. During marriage ceremonies, the bride and groom would jump over a broom to signify going from one life to another together. Broomsticks were made out of sacred trees like ash and birch and willow.

CAULDRON

A cauldron is a three-legged pot used by witches to brew potions and cast spells. Symbolically, a cauldron represents all four of the elements—water in which the brew is cooked; fire to heat it; air to keep the fire going; and earth where the ingredients come from.

Perhaps the cauldron took on significance as a witch's tool, because it was used during pagan times. It was also the tool of women. Women stayed at home and tended the home fire and cooked food and medicine in a cauldron. Perhaps people believed that if she could brew good food and beneficial

medicine, a woman could easily brew poison and harmful potions in her cauldron.

In Harry Potter the students at Hogwarts are required to own a cauldron for making potions. According to the letter Harry receives, all first years need a pewter cauldron. Pewter is a metal alloy which means it is made out of a combination of different elements.

In Celtic mythology there are several stories involving magic cauldrons.

Bran, Branwen, and the Irish

The first is a story about the Welsh god Bran, his sister and their brother. Bran's sister, Branwen was forced into a marriage with Matholwch, the King of Ireland. At first all went well and they had a big party to celebrate the marriage. Unfortunately, Bran had an evil brother who insulted Matholwch, and to appease Matholwch Bran gave him a magic cauldron that would bring warriors to life overnight.

Many years later the Irish and the Welsh went to battle against each other. At one point the Irish planned to use Matholwch's magic cauldron to regenerate their soldiers. Bran's evil brother (helping out this time) placed himself among the corpses and was put in the cauldron, where he then stretched out and broke it into four pieces. He killed himself in the process, but the Irish couldn't regenerate their soldiers.

Cerridwen and the Birth of Taliesin

The cauldron is important in the story of the witch Cerridwen and the birth of the famous Welsh bard Taliesin. Ceridwen had two children, a beautiful daughter and an "ill favored" son. She loved her son very much, and since he

was ugly she decided to make give him wisdom and knowledge of the future. To do this she brewed a magic potion in her Cauldron of Inspiration.

In Norse mythology we have the story of Thor going to the giant Hymir to obtain his cauldron that is a mile deep so that the gods never run out of mead.

CRYSTAL GAZING

The type of crystal gazing we see the most often in popular culture is the crystal ball. It is often the butt of jokes, but diviners have been using surfaces, such as crystal, glass, and water to see into the future for thousands of years. In ancient times, and even in tribal cultures, diviners used water to "see." What happens in crystal gazing or scrying is that the person doing it goes into a state of being that blocks out all outer stimulus. The scryer focuses completely on the vehicle of the scrying, whether water or crystal. When this happens and all the stimulus from the external world is shut out, the scryer can explore his inner being, and perhaps can even discover something about the future.

In Harry Potter we see crystal gazing quite often, although it may not match our ideas of "crystal gazing." The most obvious example of crystal gazing is in Divination class. Professor Trelawney claims to have "the sight" and has her class look into crystal balls. She asks what they see, but Harry and Ron don't take it seriously and so do not see anything.

Scrying and Mirrors

Using mirrors to scry takes place in the Harry Potter books, even outside of Divination class. In *The Sorcerer's Stone* Harry discovers the Mirror of Erised. What happens to Harry is what may happen to someone scrying into a mirror—he blocks out the external world and becomes completely focused on what he

sees, *"How long he stood there, he didn't know"* (SS, 209). In this case the mirror is magical and allows the viewer to see what his heart most desires (Erised is Desire spelled backward). At one point we discover just how dangerous this kind of fixation can be. Professor Dumbledore tells Harry that the Mirror of Erised can transfix people so much that they become hopelessly lost in it; *"men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible"* (SS, 213). This is a warning about the unexpected power of magic.

In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Sirius Black gives Harry a magical two-way mirror that he and James used to communicate while in detention. It works when one person holds the mirror and says the other person's name, which will then cause the person's face to appear in the mirror. Although Sirius gives this mirror to Harry, Harry does not use it when Sirius is alive. It is not until *The Deathly Hallows* that Harry remembers the mirror. By that time it is broken with only a shard remaining. However, he keeps the shard and discovers that it retained its magic. While held captive in Malfoy Manor, Harry sees a blue eye in the shard and thinks it is Dumbledore. He calls out to the eye and Dobby comes to rescue him.

Important Symbolism! What both of these magical mirrors represents symbolically is the ability of a person to see within to either his own innermost desires (the mirror of Erised) or to connect with another person (Sirius's mirror). Even when connecting with another person, the mirror is used to get what Harry desires. When he uses the shard of mirror in *The Deathly Hallows*, he does so to call for help. His *desire* is to help his friends.

The Pensieve

The pensieve is also a powerful tool for scrying. In this case the vehicle for scrying is the silvery liquid inside the pensieve's bowl. Harry is intrigued by the substance but knows better than to touch it so he prods it with his wand, "*the surface of the silvery stuff inside the basin began to swirl very fast.*" As Harry looks more closely at the pensieve, it turns into a scrying glass, "*the silvery substance had become transparent; it looked like glass.*" (GOF, 583 emphasis added).

The scrying here is in the form of seeing into the past. While most "real" scrying will inform you of some unconscious desire or divine the future, this scrying informs Harry about the past. It is helpful for the future, though, in that he learns about himself through his trip into Snape's past where he sees his father. He also learns about the trial of Barty Crouch, and about Voldemort. In all cases the information will help Harry navigate through his future.

In Greek mythology there was a story of "crystal gazing" similar to what happened with the Mirror of Erised. Narcissus was a beautiful young man so in love with himself that when he looked into a pool of water he became transfixed and would never leave it. He died pining away looking at himself in the water.

DIVINATION

Divinatio means "to predict" in Latin. Diviners use different objects in which to predict future events. In ancient times they used the entrails of animal sacrifices. Sometimes they use the leaves in the bottom of a cup of tea (as Trelawney did), or palm reading, or glass or crystal balls. They also use astrology, numerology, and runes.

In Harry Potter Divination is the class taught by Professor Trelawney. Although Harry, Ron, and Hermione (especially Hermione) think she's a fraud, her class is a requirement. In it they study tea leaves, scry into a crystal ball, create an astrological chart, and study the planets astrologically. Professor Trelawney keeps her classroom in a state in which she believes will induce divination. She uses dim lighting, candles, and incense. Prophets, oracles, diviners, and seers have always prepared themselves and their environment in this way to perform divination.

HAND OF GLORY

This is a particularly gruesome bit of magic. The Hand of Glory was a pickled human hand! According to legend a robber carrying a Hand of Glory would not get caught and doors would magically unlock for him as soon as he came up to

them. The Hand became a candle either by putting wax on the fingertips or by burning the fingers themselves. Here is a little rhyme about the Hand of Glory:

“Let those who rest more deeply sleep,
Let those who wake their vigils keep,
Oh Hand of Glory shed thy light;
Direct us to our spoils tonight.”

In Harry Potter we see a Hand of Glory in the dark magic shop Borgin and Burkes where Harry finds himself after a flubbed trip with Floo Powder. While he is in the shop, Lucius and Draco Malfoy come in and Draco looks around, *"Ah, the Hand of Glory!" said Mr. Borgin...Insert a candle and it gives light only to the holder! Best friend of thieves and plunderers!"* (CS, 52). In *The Half Blood Prince* Draco uses the magic Darkness Powder to create an unnatural darkness so that the Death Eaters can enter the castle. Ginny saw Draco, *"clutching that awful shriveled arm..."* which Ron recognizes as the Hand of Glory, because it *"gives light only to the holder"* (HBP, 618).

RUNES

Runes were the Old Norse alphabet. Many of us are familiar with the Egyptian hieroglyphs or Chinese calligraphy—systems of writing that use symbols to represent words or letters or clusters of letters. Norse runes worked the same way. People started using them around 100 C.E., and the Norse eventually switched to our alphabet around the time that they became Christian. The runes were inscribed on objects such as stones (the large ones are called runestones), swords, and jewelry.

There is speculation that people used runes for divination. A person divines from runes by asking a question and throwing down a certain number of runes, often three, and then pondering what the runes are telling. Each rune stands for something, such as strength, protection, or success. The runes do not actually tell the future so much as give guidance and something to consider. Priests had the knowledge (rune actually means "hidden" or "mysterious") to read the runes. These priests were the ones who "cast the runes" in order to gain information—for example, information about the coming harvest or who should be the next chieftain of a clan.

The Celts had a runic type alphabet as well—the Ogham (pronounced o'um). This alphabet has 20 characters (5 more were added later in their history) and some are represented by a tree or plant. Ogham is similar to the Norse runes in that the Ogham was carved on wood or in stone. Carved in wood it could be worn as an amulet. In the story of Cuchulain, he carved Ogham onto an oak sapling to warn away his enemies.

In Harry Potter there are runes all around the edge of Dumbledore's pensieve. Hermione takes a class in Ancient Runes. As far as we know she does not use them for divination, but for translation. This skill comes in handy in *The Deathly Hallows* when she must translate *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. It is fitting that Hermione is the person taking Ancient Runes. Hermione's quest for knowledge and wisdom is insatiable and in this way she is very much like the Norse god Odin. Odin sacrificed himself on the World Tree in order to obtain the knowledge of the runes. Odin sacrificed his eye to drink from the Well of Wisdom. I'm sure we can all imagine the lengths to which Hermione would go to gain knowledge.

SILVER

In legend, silver was used to defend against magical creatures. A silver bullet is supposed to kill a werewolf, and a silver stake through the heart is supposed to kill a vampire. People believed that when witches left their bodies, for some kind of astral projection, the body and soul remained connected by a silver cord.

In Harry Potter silver is used frequently.

- The students use silver knives to cut their potions ingredients.
- Bellatrix Lestrange kills Dobby with a silver knife.
- Dumbledore uses a silver knife to cut himself in the cave.
- Patronuses are silvery creatures.
- The "liquid" in the penseive is a silvery color.
- Harry's invisibility cloak has a silvery gleam.
- The door to the Gringotts bank is silver.
- The new hand made for Wormtail is silver.
- The instruments in Dumbledore's office are silver.
- Dumbledore's deluminator is silver.
- Professor Trelawney has a silvery ladder leading up to her classroom.
- The Hogwarts ghosts have a silvery gleam about them.
- Fleur and the Veelas emanate a silvery glow.
- Professor McGonagall ties up the Carrows with silver rope.
- Snape's memories come out as a silvery substance.

Try it Out! Can you find more examples of silver used in the Harry Potter books?

In Greek mythology Apollo and Artemis both have silver bows and arrows made by the Cyclopes.

In Celtic mythology the god Nuada lost his hand in battle, and had a new one made of silver. This is very similar to Wormtail's new hand.

TALISMANS

A talisman is an object designed to attract something to the wearer, and is often worn as a necklace. It is very similar to an amulet except an amulet protects the wearer. To make an talisman, an object is enchanted to embody the attraction desired, such as good luck or prosperity. It can also be used to attract strength during a dangerous time.

In Harry Potter there was a brisk trade in amulets and talismans at Hogwarts when students were attacked by the Heir of Slytherin. That trade picks up again when Lord Voldemort comes back to power in *The Half Blood Prince*.

TEA LEAF READING

Reading tea leaves, also known as tasseography, has been around since ancient times. It arose independently in Asia, the Middle East, and Ancient Greece, and also practiced in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Eastern Europe. In addition to reading tea leaves, practitioners can also read coffee grounds and wine

sediments. The process of reading tea leaves is not complicated; the person who wants to have his or her leaves read drinks a cup of tea and then swirls the leaves around the bottom with a little bit of liquid. Then that last bit of liquid is drained and the leaves can be read. The cup is turned around and around to get a better look at the clumps of tea leaves to determine what forms they take. The meaning of symbols also depends on where they are situated in the cup. For example, a symbol of a dog means faithful friends if it is at the top of the cup but secret enemies at the bottom of the cup.

In Harry Potter reading tea leaves is one of the first assignments in Professor Trelawney's Divination class. Harry and Ron see nothing but blotches of tea leaves, but Professor Trelawney sees a "Grim" in Harry's cup. The "Grim" is a symbol of death. Once again, Harry and Ron do not take Professor Trelawney or her assignment seriously!