

## Inside HARRY POTTER'S Chamber of Secrets

Celebrating 20 years of J.K. Rowling's world of magic at a special exhibition in London's British Library

BY STUTI AGARWAL

FOR ANYONE WHO IS EVEN HALF A SERIOUS POTTERHEAD, THE FACT THAT JOANNE ROWLING THOUGHT UP THE WORLD OF HARRY POTTER ON A TRAIN FROM MANCHESTER TO LONDON IN 1990 AND SCRIBBLED IT ALL ON NAPKINS, IS A WELL KNOWN ONE. "ALL OF A SUDDEN THE IDEA OF HARRY JUST APPEARED IN MY MIND'S EYE. I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT TRIGGERED IT. I SAW THE IDEA OF HARRY AND THE WIZARD SCHOOL VERY PLAINLY," READS AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY ROWLING.

Beside it, behind the glass is the synopsis of the first Harry Potter book, typed out to accompany the opening chapter of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, which was circulated among many publishers. Fairly crumpled and stained, the document looks like it has been handled a lot. In fact, Rowling writes of eight rejections before the book reached Bloomsbury, where its fate was decided by founder Nigel Newton's eight-year-old daughter. Her verdict, "The excitement in this book made me feel warm inside. I think it is possibly one of the best books an 8/9 year old could read," was crucial in approving the proposal.

Twenty years later, the handwritten verdict, also a little worse for wear, along with many other things that led to one of the most successful ventures in children's publishing history, have been curated in an exhibition titled "Harry Potter: A History of Magic" by the British Library, London, to celebrate the anniversary of the first book of the series. And as was intended, I quickly find out, "there is a lot more to magic, than waving your wand, and saying a few funny words."

### WELCOME TO HOGWARTS

It is no Marauder's Map, but Rowling's annotated sketch of the layout of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, complete with the pumpkin



patch by the gamekeeper's cabin, changing rooms for the Quidditch teams and the giant squid that inhabits the Black Lake, is as good an introduction as any to the castle that was the setting for most of the novels.

A quick note by Rowling mentions how she likes putting on paper what she is painting in her mind. There's a detailed drawing of how to open the gateway to Diagon Alley in six simple steps and a sketch of Herbology professor, Professor Sprout, which Rowling drew the night her mother passed away—an event, she mentions, that changed the course of the following novels making them darker. She even handwrote—illustrations and all—the *Tales of Beedle the Bard*, a magical children's fairy-tale book mentioned in the Harry Potter books, as she did many of the chapters of the Harry Potter books that are also part of the Library's collection.

Accompanying Rowling's artistry are Jim Kay's illustrations of the first three books, which are just the skilled stir one needs in brewing a perfect Harry Potter love potion.

### POTIONS AND ITS CLOSE COUSIN

If there is one thing that seven years with Severus Snape have taught Potterheads, it is the importance of keeping a bezoar handy—a quick remedy introduced by Arabic physicians in medieval Europe.

Much of what is on display looks at the history of magic that influenced Rowling's writings, such as the real bezoar, held in a golden case that is a marker of its worth.

As Snape said, not many understand the subtle science, and exact art that is potion making. Yet, if it is brewing that interests you, there is one curious artefact: the real cauldron that supposedly exploded when some Cornish witches were brewing a powerful potion by the sea. Many of the ancient books showcased mention that the cauldron is one of the most widely recognised symbols of magic in Western culture, mostly associated with women—witches with long, crooked noses, and chins curling up to touch them.

Rowling immersed herself in both fact and legend for her books. The broom, bezoar and the orb are all properties of real European magical folks. The scroll, another European text, tells exactly how to make the philosopher's stone.





Jim Kay began illustrating the Harry Potter books in 2013. It took him two and half years to finish the first book.

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## HERBOLOGY

The sense of mysticism in exploring Rowling's magical world is oddly disrupted, replaced with the understanding of her creative process. Rowling didn't just think up mandrakes. Resembling a human form, mandrake roots have long been known for their hallucinogenic properties, and as a cure for many ailments. Jim Kay referenced these roots when working on his sketches of them. A medieval herbal text reveals the best method of uprooting a mandrake without worrying about their fatal cry—legends that perhaps Rowling found inspiration in. As she did from the other text on display, English botanist Nicholas Culpeper's *Complete Herbal*, for naming herbs and potions. She has two copies, one from over twenty years ago.

## ASTRONOMY AND ANCIENT RUNES

Rowling divulges that for names she often looked up to the skies for inspiration.

The most famous star system in the constellation, Canis Major, connects to make a dog and is called Sirius or the Dog Star while Bellatrix is Latin for female warrior. Names are very well thought out in Rowling's Harry Potter universe. A handwritten list by Rowling has all the subjects taught at Hogwarts, alongside the names of their teachers. The list of Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers even includes unfamiliar names like Enid Pettigrew, and Oaken Hornshaw—characters that never appear in the books.

Then again, Rowling has also charted out the names of all the Death Eaters, and spouses and children of all central characters along with what they do. A footnote by the author reveals her love for unusual names, and where she collects them from, war memorials and gravestones included.

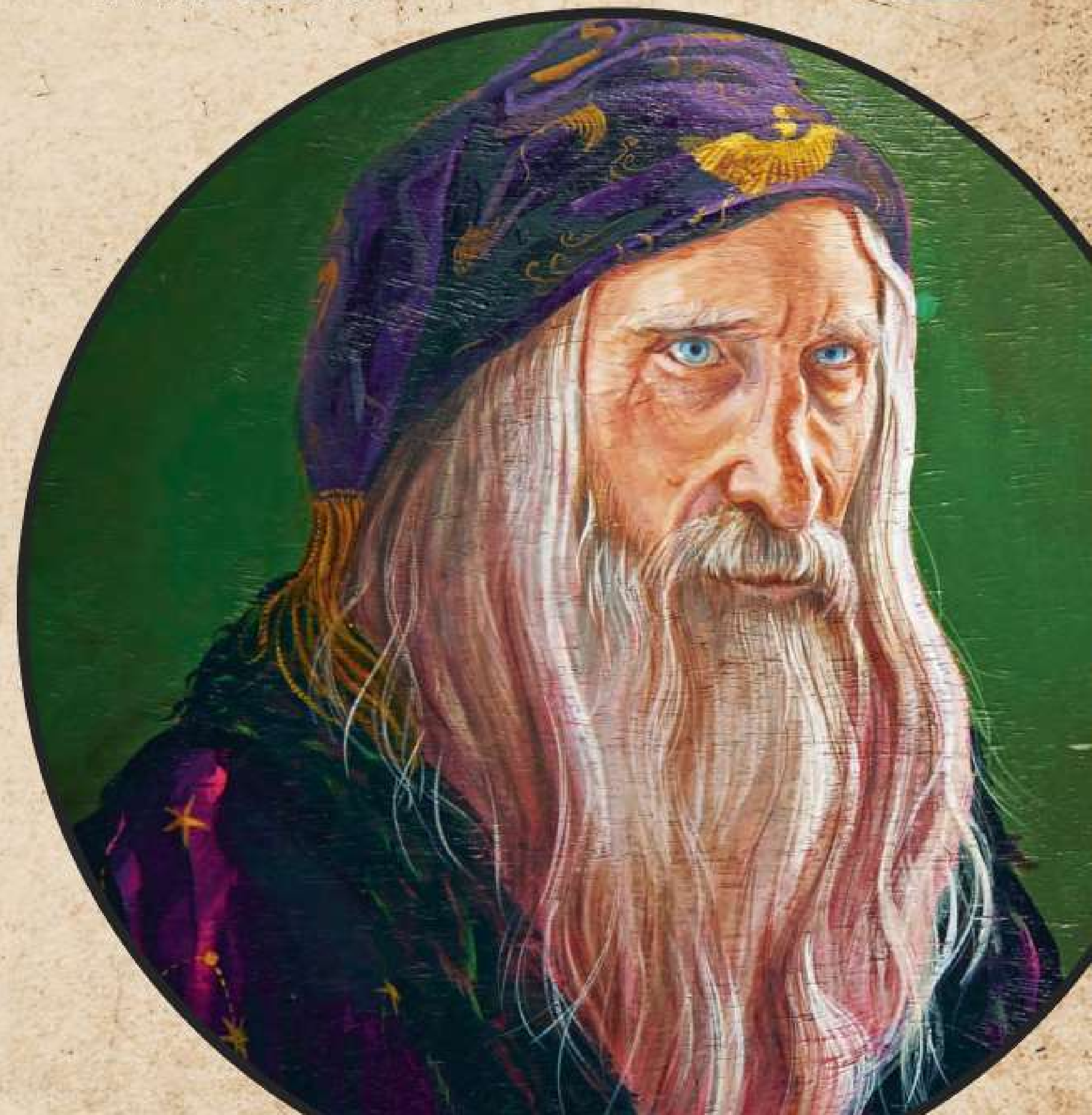
## DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS

There is little doubt that the most powerful of spells in Harry Potter's world is the killing curse, "Avada Kedavra." While the derivation from the old "abracadabra" may be evident, the original spell is no good for conjuring

Kay's illustrations are the most detailed drawings of the series (bottom); The exhibit has articles and manuscripts about traditions of folklore and magic that are at the heart of the Harry Potter stories (top).



**A HANDWRITTEN LIST HAS ALL THE SUBJECTS TAUGHT AT HOGWARTS, ALONGSIDE THE NAMES OF THEIR TEACHERS. THE LIST OF DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK ARTS TEACHERS INCLUDES NAMES THAT NEVER APPEAR IN THE BOOKS**





rabbits out of hats, like the 13th-century *Liber Medicinalis* (Book of Medicine) will tell you. Written by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, a physician, he prescribes the charm "abracadabra" as a cure for malaria. Sufferers were instructed to write down the word again and again, leaving out one letter each time. The cone shaped text was then worn as an amulet around the neck.

### CARE OF MAGICAL CREATURES

As someone who has read the books (all of them) at least three times, coming across a deleted chapter from the series is very exciting; and a chapter from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, where Harry and Ron meet mermaids for the first time, is pure gold. The two land Ron's father Ford Anglia right into the Black Lake, and mer-people help them and the bewitched car out.

A tiny scribble-by Rowling's editor, however, questions whether it really works, since we don't see mer-people again. He even suggests a few alternatives, but Rowling goes with crashing the car into the Whomping Willow, seeing the importance of the enchanted

Scrolling through the globe of the night sky tapping on constellations that inspired central characters (top) and scrolls that Rowling herself admired (facing page) gives insight into the author's creative process: A wall at the exhibit is lined with the cover designs of the books' 81 translated versions (bottom).

### Essentials

"Harry Potter: A History of Magic" is open until 28 February 2018 at the British Library, London ([www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk); tickets GBP16/£1,380).

tree in the coming books.

If mermaids weren't enough, there are handwritten pages of the escape from Gringotts in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Showcasing Rowling's rather whimsical thoughts, these pages are an insight into how she works, often skipping scenes and dialogues in between and coming back to them later.

JUST AS I AM GETTING USED TO Rowling's distinct whimsical style, I am pushed by the queue in front of a rather large piece of parchment, which has the plans for the fifth book. All the following six books were plotted before the first was published. Ten columns and countless rows chart each day of action, spelling out the complexity of the storylines and how they intertwine, from people's whereabouts to the discovery of new information. These maps are extensive enough to take many days to go through, and impressive enough for you to want to pick up a Harry Potter book yet again.

I only wish I could get my hands on the annotated first edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, also on display. It is filled with afterthoughts, sketches, and little notes about things she would change, or how life was when she wrote that particular chapter.

And, if you are only wondering how to make yourself invisible, the 17th-century manuscript *The Book of King Solomon Called the Key of Knowledge*, tells you exactly how.

VICTORIA JONES: PA IMAGES/CONTRIBUTOR/PA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (BLOWS & GLOBE); FACING PAGE: JOHN PHILLIPS/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES/ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

