Harry Potter: A History of Magic
On view October 5, 2018 – January 27, 2019

Selected PR Images

Harry Potter: A History of Magic, a British Library exhibition, is on view at the New-York Historical Society from October 5, 2018 – January 27, 2019. Capturing the traditions of folklore and magic at the heart of the Harry Potter stories, the exhibition features centuries-old treasures, including rare books, manuscripts, and magical objects from the collections of the British Library, the New-York Historical Society, and other museums, as well as original material from publisher Scholastic and J.K. Rowling’s own archives. From medieval descriptions of dragons and griffins, to the origins of the sorcerer’s stone, visitors can explore the subjects studied at Hogwarts and see original drafts and drawings by J.K. Rowling as well as Harry Potter illustrators Jim Kay, Mary GrandPré, Kazu Kibuishi, and Brian Selznick.

Study of the phoenix by Jim Kay
On loan from Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
Background image: detail from a Medieval Bestiary (England, 13th century)

Harry Potter first met Fawkes the Phoenix in Dumbledore’s office in his second year. Jim Kay’s painting of the bird captures the brilliant colors of the phoenix’s feathers; the image seems to soar across the surface of the page.
**Potions**

Jacob Meydenbach

*Hortus Sanitatis*

Mainz, 1491

© British Library Board

*Hortus Sanitatis* (Latin for “The Garden of Health”) is the first printed encyclopedia of natural history, featuring sections devoted to plants, animals, birds, fish, and stones. This hand-colored woodcut illustration shows a Potions class.

Bezoar stone in a gold filigree case

17th century

Part of the Wellcome Collection, which is cared for by the Science Museum © The Board of the Trustees of the Science Museum, London

Bezoars were first introduced into medieval Europe by Arab physicians. Wealthy owners spent considerable sums on acquiring them, and often kept their stones in elaborate cases. A corruption of the Persian word pādzhahar (pād, expelling; zahar, poison), bezoars reputedly provided a powerful antidote to poison.

**Alchemy**

*The Ripley Scroll*, detail

England, ca. 1570

General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

*The Ripley Scroll is an alchemical manuscript that describes how to make the Philosopher’s Stone. It takes its name from George Ripley, a canon at Bridlington Priory, in northern England, and author of *The Compound of Alchymy*. The scroll itself is nearly 20 feet long and is full of mystical symbolism. The precise meanings of the alchemical icons are not completely understood.*
Nicolas Flamel made his fortune as a landlord in medieval Paris. Following his death in 1418, rumors began to circulate that he was an alchemist who had discovered the Philosopher’s Stone. Flamel was buried in the church of Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie in Paris, his grave marked by this tombstone. The tombstone was reputedly found being used as a cutting board in a Parisian grocery.

Herbology

Robert John Thornton
The Temple of Flora
London, 1807
The LuEsther T. Mertz Library of the New York Botanical Garden

Once described as a “visually magnificent failure,” this elaborate book on botany nearly bankrupted its author, Robert John Thornton. The book was originally entitled The New Illustration of the Sexual System of Linnaeus, but became better known as The Temple of Flora. The dragon arum (Dracunculus vulgaris), sometimes called stink lily, reproduces the smell of putrefying meat to attract flies for pollination.
According to medieval herbals, mandrakes (mandragora) could cure headaches, earache, gout, and insanity. The plant is said to be particularly hazardous to harvest as the shrieks from the roots cause madness. The best way to obtain it safely was to unearth its roots with an ivory stake, attaching the plant to a dog with a cord. A horn would sound, drowning out the shrieking, startling the dog and causing it to drag out the mandrake.

**Charms**

Cotton Mather  
*The Wonders of the Invisible World*  
London, 1693  
New-York Historical Society Library

The Salem witch crisis depended largely on local feuds, religious strife, and long-held cultural beliefs about women and gender. Mather, a Congregational minister in Boston and staunch defender of Puritan orthodoxy, wrote *The Wonders of the Invisible World* as his justification for the Salem witchcraft trials.

Broomstick belonging to Olga Hunt  
© Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle

Few charmed objects are more closely associated with the Western image of the witch than the broomstick. Although the tradition has ancient roots in pagan fertility rites, the connection between broomsticks and witchcraft developed significantly in the witch hysteria of 16th- and 17th-century Europe. This colorful broomstick was once owned by the 20th-century witch Olga Hunt of Manaton, Devon. She reputedly used it to leap around Dartmoor on a full moon, alarming everyone she met.
In ancient times, the incantation “Abracadabra” was believed to be a charm with healing powers. It is first recorded in the Liber Medicinalis ("Book of Medicine") written by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman Emperor Caracalla. Serenus prescribed the charm “Abracadabra” as a cure for malaria. The word should be repeatedly written out, each time omitting one letter. The charm was then worn as an amulet around the neck, in order to drive out the fever.

Astronomy

These pages come from a notebook compiled by the artist and inventor, Leonardo da Vinci. They are written in Italian, in Leonardo’s mirror handwriting, reading from right to left. The shaded diagram in the center right shows the Sun and Moon revolving round the Earth, accepting the theory that the Earth occupied the center of the universe. Leonardo also believed that the Moon was covered with water, and that its surface would reflect light like a convex mirror.
Celestial globes show the position of the stars in the sky as perceived from the Earth. The art dates back thousands of years—the first celestial globes were created in ancient Greece. This example was designed by the Franciscan friar and cosmographer to the Republic of Venice, Vincenzo Coronelli, who is considered to be one of the greatest globe makers in the world. The constellations are depicted as animals, men, and mythical creatures shown in constant dialogue as they move together across the night sky.

Astrolabes were used to create a two-dimensional map of the heavens. The instrument also determined latitude and was employed in the Islamic world to find the direction of Mecca. The back of this astrolabe has a calendar with three apertures, including one showing the lunar phase and one the positions of the sun and moon in the zodiac. This example from Persia (modern day Iran) is thought to be one of the oldest geared instruments still extant.
**Divination**

Black Moon crystal ball
20th century
© Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle

“Smelly Nelly,” the Paignton witch who owned this crystal ball, had a taste for strong perfume. She believed that the fragrance appealed to the spirits who helped her to divine the future. One witness reported, “You caught her scent a mile off downwind . . . to be out with a Full Moon, Smelly Nelly and her crystal was quite an experience.” Known as a Moon crystal, the black globe should be consulted at night, so that the seer could read the Moon’s reflection in the glass.

Oracle bones
China, ca. 1600–1046 BCE
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of A.W. Bahr, 1923

Oracle bones were used in divination rituals associated with the cult of the ancestors in ancient China. Questions relating to subjects as mundane as a king’s toothache to state affairs such as royal pregnancies, warfare, agriculture, and natural disasters would be engraved on the bone before heated metal sticks were inserted into pre-carved hollows, causing the bone to crack. The shaman then interpreted the patterns of the fractures to “receive the oracle” from the spirits of the ancestors.
Defense Against the Dark Arts

Portrait of Professor Remus Lupin by Jim Kay
On loan from Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This portrait shows Professor Remus Lupin, Harry Potter’s Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Lupin taught for only one year at Hogwarts, resigning when it was revealed he was a werewolf. Lupin stands with his hands in his pockets, averting his gaze from the viewer. A poster of the full moon hangs ominously in the background. Lupin’s surname echoes the Latin word for wolf, lupus. Remus was one of the legendary founders of Rome, suckled by a wolf.

Care of Magical Creatures

John James Audubon
Snowy Owl (Bubo Scandiacus), Study for Havell Pl. 121
US, 1829
New-York Historical Society, Purchased for the Society by public subscription from Mrs. John J. Audubon

First-year students at Hogwarts were allowed to bring an owl, a cat, or a toad to school—all animals with historic magical significance. Here you can see a pair of Snowy Owls, the same breed as Harry’s owl, Hedwig. This dazzling watercolor was painted by John James Audubon for his monumental publication The Birds of America (1827–38), which attempted to represent every bird native to North America at actual size.
In this medieval manuscript, the “fenix” is described as a native of Arabia, and can live for up to 500 years. The phoenix’s most remarkable attribute is its ability to resurrect itself in old age. It creates its own funeral pyre from branches and plants, before fanning the flames with its own wings. After the ninth day, it rises again from the ashes. This legendary ability has often been compared to the self-sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Past, Present, and Future

Mary GrandPré considered Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows her most favorite cover. It depicts a fiery orange sky, cracked and battered walls of Hogwarts, and eerie shadows which create a backdrop for the ultimate confrontation between the Boy Who Lived and the Dark Lord. Near the center of the cover, the resurrected Harry is captured in the moment he defeats Voldemort once and for all.
For the 20th anniversary of the publication of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone in the United States, Scholastic commissioned Brian Selznick—author and illustrator of Caldecott Medal–winning The Invention of Hugo Cabret—to reimagine the cover art for the entire Harry Potter series. Selznick designed the seven covers as a single image that tells the story of the Boy Who Lived from his arrival on Privet Drive to the Battle of Hogwarts.

Cass Gilbert
Study for the Woolworth Building
New York, 1910
New-York Historical Society Library, Cass Gilbert Architectural Record Collection

The Woolworth Building—the setting of the Magical Congress of the United States in the Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them movies—was the tallest building in the world when construction was completed in late 1912. Cass Gilbert, the architect, designed it in a gothic style and its owner, five-and-dime store magnate Frank Woolworth, spared no expense on lavish decorations. An inquisitive owl guards the entrance archway, gargoyles tower over its gables, and glistening golden mosaics of phoenix birds, symbolizing the fireproof quality of the building materials, adorn the lobby of this Cathedral of Commerce.
New-York Historical Society exterior, 170 Central Park West  
Photo credit: Jon Wallen

**Accompanying the exhibition is a complete slate of programs featuring trivia nights, art workshops, creative writing classes, social meet-ups, book clubs, engaging courses, and family activities. Visit harrypotter.nyhistory.org to purchase exhibition and program tickets and to learn more about the programs.**