



Harry Potter: Allusions to Mythology

The Harry Potter series of books by J.K. ROWLING appeals to readers of all ages and backgrounds. One reason for this are the many ALLUSIONS (reference) to MYTHOLOGY. Myths are stories that explain history or nature and often involve supernatural, or seemingly magical beings or events. Myths date back centuries and are known by cultures throughout the world.

What books are talking about today? HARRY POTTER

What is an allusion? REFERENCE

Who is the author of the Harry Potter series? JK ROWLING

What is one thing that myths try to explain? HISTORY OR NATURE

What do myths usually involve? SUPERNATURAL BEINGS, MAGICAL BEINGS AND EVENTS

There are a variety of mythological cultures that Rowling makes allusions to in her Harry Potter books including GREEK, ROMAN, EGYPTIAN, and INDIAN. Since so many myths are passed down from one generation to the next, they can also be considered a type of FOLKLORE. The word “folklore” breaks down in meaning as “FOLK: referring to a specific group of people” and “LORE: stories passed from person to person by word of mouth”.

Myths can be considered _____? FOLKLORE

“Folk” refers to a specific group of what? PEOPLE

Name a culture represented in the mythology in the Harry Potter books. GREEK, ROMAN, EGYPTIAN, INDIAN

What does “lore” refer to? STORIES PASSED FROM PERSON TO PERSON BY WORD OF MOUTH

Name a Greek god. ZEUS, POSEIDON, ATHENA, HERA, ACHILLES

The mythological allusion we’re going to talk about are CREATURES similar to animals and humans, also known as human-like creatures. One creature who has an IRONIC name, meaning that it’s the opposite of what you’d expect, is FLUFFY. I’m not sure about you, but when I hear the name “Fluffy”, I’m expecting a sweet little fluffy kitten or something! In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Fluffy is a three-headed dog who

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guards the entrance to an underground maze. The only way this VICIOUS beast can be calmed and lulled to sleep is by playing music for him. The allusion between Fluffy and Greek mythology can be found in CERBERUS (“SIR ba roos”), a three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the Underworld. When Orpheus visits the Underworld to retrieve EURYDICE (“yer ID uh see”), he lulls Cerberus to sleep with his gift of music.



“Fluffy”

What kind of mythological allusions are we looking at today? CREATURES SIMILAR TO ANIMALS AND HUMANS, HUMAN-LIKE CREATURES

The first creature I mentioned was Fluffy, who has an ironic name. What’s “ironic” mean? OPPOSITE OF WHAT YOU’D EXPECT

What kind of creature is Fluffy? THREE-HEADED DOG

What can calm and lull Fluffy to sleep? MUSIC

Which creature in Greek mythology is Fluffy an allusion to? CERBERUS

What is the job of both of these three-headed dogs? GUARDING

Another dog in Greek mythology is SIRIUS. Sirius was the dog of ORION. When a goddess accidentally kills Orion, she places him in the heavens as

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a CONSTELLATION, or star formation, with his faithful dog, Sirius, at his heels. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, we learn that the character Sirius BLACK is an ANIMAGUS (a wizard who can change into a certain animal). His animal form is a dog and, fittingly, he is the faithful friend. As Harry's father's best friend, Sirius soon joins him in death, protecting Harry.



The brightest star in the constellation Canis Major is "Sirius"



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From the Potter films: Sirius Black with the animal he turns into at will, Padfoot.

What's the name of the dog we're talking about, now? SIRIUS
Sirius and his master, Orion, are made into a constellation; what's a constellation? STAR FORMATION

An animagus can change into an _____? ANIMAL

In the Harry Potter books, who is the animagus? SIRIUS BLACK

Who was Sirius Black best friends with? HARRY'S FATHER

Why is a dog a fitting animal for Sirius to change into? HE WAS A FAITHFUL FRIEND

If you were an animagus, what animal would you change into?

More straightforward allusions can be seen in the Harry Potter books when Rowling includes a mythical creature itself into her stories. We see this in the use of the GRIFFIN. The griffin is a creature from Egyptian mythology that has the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. Griffins are known as FIERCE creatures and were often used to guard treasures. Despite their fierce nature, griffins were befriended by wizards in Rowling's Potter books. In the books, griffins are used by wizards to guard valuable things or places making them a very protective species. In the book, the knocker on the office door of the wizarding school's headmaster, DUMBLEDORE, is in the shape of a griffin; in the films, the entry staircase to the headmaster's office is in the shape of a griffin. It's everywhere!



Griffin from Egyptian Mythology

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Griffin staircase of headmaster's office in Potter films.

What's the name of our next mythical creature? GRIFFIN

The Griffin is from _____ mythology. EGYPTIAN

Name one of the two animals that make up the body of a griffin. EAGLE, LION

Name one characteristic of griffins. FIERCE, PROTECTIVE

In the Potter books, whose office door is guarded by a griffin knocker? HEADMASTER, DUMBLEDORE

Another mythical creature seen in the Potter books is the PHOENIX. From Egyptian and Greek mythology, the phoenix is a great bird that lives 500 years. Its most identifying feature is that, upon dying, it bursts into flames and is born again from its ashes. Because of this, phoenixes are often used as symbols of rebirth or changing into something else . . . something better and stronger! In the Potter books, the headmaster keeps a phoenix

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named FAWKES as a trusted pet and companion. Rowling shares that some of Fawkes' most amazing characteristics are that his tears can heal wounds, he can carry very heavy loads, and he is extremely intelligent.



Fawkes, the phoenix, from the Potter books.

What kind of animal is a phoenix? BIRD

Name one of the two cultural mythologies that described the phoenix.
EGYPTIAN, GREEK

What is the most identifying feature of the phoenix? UPON DYING IT
BURSTS INTO FLAMES AND IS BORN AGAIN FROM ITS ASHES

What is the name of the phoenix kept by the headmaster in the Potter
books? FAWKES

Name one of the three characteristics that Rowling shares about phoenixes
in her books. HIS TEARS HEAL WOUNDS, HE CAN CARRY VERY
HEAVY LOADS, HE IS EXTREMELY INTELLIGENT

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What would you name your pet phoenix?

In addition to straightforward allusions and mythical creatures, Rowling explicitly links mythology to her books by naming many of her characters after characters in myths. MINERVA is the goddess of wisdom, war, art, schools and COMMERCE in Greek mythology. In the Potter books, “Minerva” is the first name of Professor MCGONAGALL, the wise, stern, fair, courageous and remarkably intelligent witch, who is the head of one of the student houses. Both the goddess and the professor are known for their courage, wisdom and strength.



Professor Minerva McGonagall



Minerva, Greek goddess

Who is the goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology? Minerva
Minera is the first name of what professor in Harry Potter? PROFESSOR MCGONAGALL

Name one of the things Minerva was goddess of in Greek mythology.
WISDOM, WAR, ART, SCHOOLS, COMMERCE

Name one of the five characteristics used to describe Professor McGonagall. WISE, STERN, FAIR, COURAGEOUS, INTELLIGENT

Which characteristic of Professor McGonagall, of the five listed, do you think is most important in her role as a teacher and why?

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Another direct naming allusion is found in HERMIONE Granger, a friend and fellow student of Harry Potters. The name “Hermione” comes from “HERMES”, a god in Greek mythology. Hermes was credited with the invention of several musical instruments, the Greek alphabet, astronomy, weights and measures and numbers: whew, was he smart! No wonder he was known as the god of intelligence! Similarly, Hermione Granger is known for being exceptionally smart.



Hermione Granger



Greek god, Hermes

From which Greek god does the name “Hermione” come from? HERMES
What was Hermes the god of? INTELLIGENCE

Name one of the things Hermes is credited with inventing. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, THE GREEK ALPHABET, ASTRONOMY, WEIGHTS, MEASURES, NUMBERS

What is the name of the character named after Hermes? HERMIONE GRANGER

Men, too, in the Potter books received names directly out of mythology. ARGUS FILCH is the caretaker of the wizarding school charged with looking after, not only the building and grounds, but also the students. This CURMUDGEON, or bad-tempered person, is always searching for misbehaving students and takes pleasure in finding them! In Greek mythology there’s a giant named Argus PANOPTES. His last name is made up of the Greek root, “pan” meaning “all” and “optes” referring to “sight or seeing”. It really is the best name for this giant as he is said to

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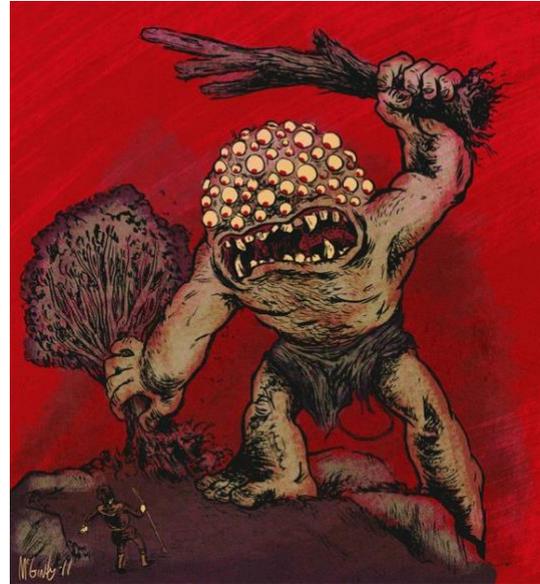
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have had 100 eyes . . . and never slept with more than two of his eyes closed! They both are known for “keeping an eye on things”!



Argus Filch



Argus Panoptes

In the Potter books, what is Argus Filch’s job? CARETAKER

What’s a curmudgeon? BAD TEMPERED PERSON

In Greek mythology, what does the giant Argus Panoptes’ last name mean? SIGHT, SEEING

How many eyes did that giant have? 100

Why is it appropriate that Argus Filch is named for Argus Panoptes? BOTH KEEP THEIR EYES ON THINGS

What do you think it would be like to have 100 eyes?

Creative writing:

Today, we’ve talked about many of the allusions to mythology that J. K. Rowling makes in her series of Harry Potter books. We’ve talked about creatures like a three-headed dog and a man who can change into a dog. We’ve talked about modern-day characters who have a lot in common with characters from ancient myths. *If you had a choice, would you like supernatural powers - like turning into an animal OR would you like super levels of a human quality - like super intelligence? Explain.*

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References

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