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The first novel in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, begins near Harry's 11th birthday. Half-giant Rubeus Hagrid reveals Harry's history and introduces him to the wizarding world. The world J. K. Rowling created is both completely separate from and yet intimately connected to the real world. While the fantasy world of Narnia is an alternative universe and the Lord of the Rings's Middle-earth a mythic past, the Wizarding world of Harry Potter exists alongside that of the real world and contains magical elements similar to things in the non-magical world. Many of its institutions and locations are in places that are recognisable in the real world, such as London. It comprises a fragmented collection of hidden streets, overlooked and ancient pubs, lonely country manors and secluded castles that remain invisible to the non-magical population of Muggles. With Hagrid's help, Harry prepares for and undertakes his first year of study at Hogwarts. As Harry begins to explore the magical world, the reader is introduced to many of the primary locations used throughout the series. Harry meets most of the main characters and gains his two closest friends: Ron Weasley, a fun-loving member of an ancient, large, happy, but hard-up wizarding family, and Hermione Granger, an obsessively bookish witch of non-magical parentage. Harry also encounters the school's potions master, Severus Snape, who displays a deep and abiding dislike for him. The plot concludes with Harry's second confrontation with Lord Voldemort, who in his quest for immortality, yearns to gain the power of the Philosopher's Stone. The series continues with *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* describing Harry's second year at Hogwarts. He and his friends investigate a 50-year-old mystery that appears tied to recent sinister events at the school. The novel delves into the history of Hogwarts and a legend revolving around the "Chamber of Secrets", the underground lair of an ancient evil. For the first time, Harry realises that racial prejudice exists in the wizarding world, and he learns that Voldemort's reign of terror was often directed at wizards who were descended from Muggles. Harry is also shocked to learn that he can speak Parseltongue, the language of snakes; this rare ability is often equated with the dark arts. The novel ends after Harry saves the life of Ron's younger sister, Ginny Weasley, by destroying the diary in which Voldemort saved a piece of his soul (although Harry does not realize this until later in the series). The concept of storing part of one's soul inside of an object in order to prevent death is officially introduced in the sixth novel under the term "horcrux". The third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, follows Harry in his third year of magical education. It is the only book in the series which does not feature Voldemort. Instead, Harry must deal with the knowledge that he has been targeted by Sirius Black, an escaped murderer believed to have assisted in the deaths of Harry's parents. As Harry struggles with his reaction to the dementors—dark creatures with the power to devour a human soul—which are ostensibly protecting the school, he reaches out to Remus Lupin, a Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher with a dark secret. Lupin teaches Harry defensive measures which are well above the level of magic generally shown by people his age. Harry learns that both Lupin and Black were close friends of his father and that Black was framed by their fourth friend, Peter Pettigrew.

## About the Author

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