

J.K. Rowling brings magic to quarantine with launch of Harry Potter hub

By Smithsonian.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.21.20

Word Count **552**

Level **1200L**



Hogwarts Castle in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at the Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando, Florida, June 25, 2010. Photo: Rstoplabe14/Wikimedia. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

Magic has never seemed more necessary than today, as the world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily, spellcasting is a social distancing-approved indoor activity, and Muggles and magicians alike can now use a wealth of online resources to keep their wand-waving skills up to snuff.

In early April, Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling announced the launch of Harry Potter at Home. The new online hub aims to cast "a Banishing Charm on boredom" — particularly for students and teachers seeking relief from the drag of quarantine. A collaboration between Rowling and Audible, Bloomsbury, OverDrive, Pottermore Publishing and Scholastic, the website is chock full of craft tutorials, educator resources and more. Superfans can test their Potter trivia knowledge through a series of quizzes. Meanwhile, newcomers to the wizarding world can read interviews with some of the film franchise's actors or learn how to draw a niffler character.

Harry Potter Can Be Taught Remotely

Rowling has also lifted copyright restrictions for educators. Now, teachers can remotely share the Harry Potter series with their pupils by recording videos of themselves reading the books aloud. For some, such digital read-along sessions aren't possible. If so, users of Harry Potter at Home can access the audiobook for "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" for free. It's available on Audible's new Stories platform or the digital library service Overdrive, according to Fast Company's KC Ifeanyi.

"Parents, teachers and carers working to keep children amused and interested while we're on lockdown might need a bit of magic," Rowling tweeted on April 1.

Local lockdowns have also spurred a surge in enrollment at Hogwarts Is Here, a fan-run website. Since its launch in 2014, it has taken an online learning approach to some of the most valued classes taught at the world's most beloved wizarding school.

Real Classes, Fictional Courses

Through the portal, users can join a Hogwarts house and enroll in a vast curriculum of classes. They come complete with syllabi, reading material, essays and even exams. True magical skill, in other words, requires real work. The course content is, sadly, still fictional. However, you must use critical thinking and research skills required to earn top grades. Both are "skills you can apply in the real world," said Hogwarts Is Here professor Lillian Mae (real name Kristen) to The Washington Post in 2014.

Fans can also hop onto the site's forums to interact with other students — the sort of community that's become much needed in the past several months. As such, the site has been absolutely flooded as of late. It's sparking the creators to admit some technical hiccups in a Facebook post last week.

"We're working on our servers to cope with the extreme traffic, but as more and more people keep joining, things may be a bit slow over this weekend," they wrote. "... And it seems that Peeves" — a mischief-loving poltergeist known to haunt Hogwarts' halls — "is loving all the attention and wreaking even more havoc than usual."

The site's popularity is proof of the staying power of the Harry Potter series. It launched with the release of Rowling's first book in June 1997. Almost 23 years later, the world is very different. Still, the allure of magic, especially in times of immense difficulty, certainly has yet to wane.

Quiz

1 What is the meaning of the phrase "wreaking even more havoc" in the following paragraph from the article?

"We're working on our servers to cope with the extreme traffic, but as more and more people keep joining, things may be a bit slow over this weekend," they wrote. "... And it seems that Peeves" — a mischief-loving poltergeist known to haunt Hogwarts' halls — "is loving all the attention and wreaking even more havoc than usual."

- (A) fixing more problems
- (B) generating more interest
- (C) causing more disruptions
- (D) demanding more of an audience

2 Read the following sentence from the section "Real Classes, Fictional Courses."

As such, the site has been absolutely flooded as of late.

Which phrase from the article helps explain what "flooded" means?

- (A) wealth of online resources
- (B) surge in enrollment
- (C) requires real work
- (D) times of immense difficulty

3 Why did the author conclude the article with a reference to the release date of the first Harry Potter book?

- (A) to highlight the lasting appeal of the Harry Potter universe
- (B) to summarize how public interest in magic has fluctuated over the years
- (C) to contrast how children learn today with how they learned more than two decades ago
- (D) to suggest that websites have changed the way children engage with the Harry Potter universe

4 Which of the following statements BEST represents J.K. Rowling's approach toward the Harry Potter at Home site?

- (A) She wants it to be an essential resource that teachers use after the quarantine ends.
- (B) She wants it to create an online community through the use of multiple forums.
- (C) She hopes that it will help children successfully practice fictional magical skills.
- (D) She hopes that it will entertain kids as they stay home and serve as a tool for educators.

Answer Key

1 What is the meaning of the phrase "wreaking even more havoc" in the following paragraph from the article?

"We're working on our servers to cope with the extreme traffic, but as more and more people keep joining, things may be a bit slow over this weekend," they wrote. "... And it seems that Peeves" — a mischief-loving poltergeist known to haunt Hogwarts' halls — "is loving all the attention and wreaking even more havoc than usual."

- (A) fixing more problems
- (B) generating more interest
- (C) causing more disruptions**
- (D) demanding more of an audience

2 Read the following sentence from the section "Real Classes, Fictional Courses."

As such, the site has been absolutely flooded as of late.

Which phrase from the article helps explain what "flooded" means?

- (A) wealth of online resources
- (B) surge in enrollment**
- (C) requires real work
- (D) times of immense difficulty

3 Why did the author conclude the article with a reference to the release date of the first Harry Potter book?

- (A) to highlight the lasting appeal of the Harry Potter universe**
- (B) to summarize how public interest in magic has fluctuated over the years
- (C) to contrast how children learn today with how they learned more than two decades ago
- (D) to suggest that websites have changed the way children engage with the Harry Potter universe

4 Which of the following statements BEST represents J.K. Rowling's approach toward the Harry Potter at Home site?

- (A) She wants it to be an essential resource that teachers use after the quarantine ends.
- (B) She wants it to create an online community through the use of multiple forums.
- (C) She hopes that it will help children successfully practice fictional magical skills.
- (D) She hopes that it will entertain kids as they stay home and serve as a tool for educators.**