

Quidditch Through the Ages Short Guide

Quidditch Through the Ages by J. K. Rowling

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Overview

Quidditch Through the Ages is a spin-off from the books in Rowling's Harry Potter series and is intended to be one of the books Harry and his friends use themselves. This book is a history of the magical sport, Quidditch, played by witches and wizards and enjoyed by Harry Potter and his friends in Rowling's books. This book is purportedly borrowed from the library of Harry's school, the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and is intended to be comprehensive in scope, beginning with the history of broomsticks, covering the changes in the game over the centuries, and ending with an overview of Quidditch today.

Quidditch Through the Ages serves as an actual sports handbook written in the same style as any sports handbook, and it provides detailed information about Quidditch teams, players, and past matches.

About the Author

J. K. (Joanne Kathleen) Rowling was born in Gloucestershire, England on July 31, 1966. She attended Exeter University and worked as a teacher in Edinburgh, Scotland and in Portugal before publishing her first Harry Potter book in 1997. She wrote this book while she was a single mother supported by public assistance, unable to work and pay for child care at the same time.

After the publication of this first book, entitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling's situation changed from rags to riches. The first three books in her seven-book series sold over 30 million copies, they were printed in 35 languages, and Rowling earned over \$400 million.

Rowling has received numerous awards for her Harry Potter books, and because of her tremendous success stimulating children to read, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from St. Andrews, Scotland in 2000. Because Rowling's Harry Potter books dominated the top slots on the New York Times Best-Seller list, the decision was made to create a separate best-seller's list for children's books. This of course, was an honor to Rowling as well as a boon for children's authors. Rowling is an inspiration for children's authors. She achieved stardom with her first published book, she sold Warner Bros. the film rights to her first two books, and she sold all seven volumes of Harry Potter's adventures as a series, each volume focusing on one year of Harry's training at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The publication of *Quidditch Through the Ages* (under the pseudonym Kennilworthy Whisp) and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* came about after the British charity Comic Relief, dedicated to helping poor children all over the world, asked Rowling to write something for them. They suggested a short story at first, but Rowling instead suggested the idea of producing two of Harry's textbooks from the Hogwarts School. Not surprisingly, these two "textbooks" achieved remarkable success. They are distributed all over the world, and most of the money from these titles goes to charity.

Setting

The setting of this book is within the fantasy world Rowling created for Harry Potter and his friends; a place where witches and wizards engage in all sorts of magic, including games that involve the use of magical broomsticks and that engage players with extraordinary powers. When J. K. Rowling brought Harry Potter and his friends to life, she created a world in which the rules of logic no longer exist. Because children of all ages found themselves immersed in Rowling's magic world, she embellished that world with enough details to sustain the magic. The setting of this book therefore, as well as its companion book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, is in the imagination. Rowling takes readers back into Harry's imaginary world, to the library of the Hogwarts' school, and to places such as Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, the home of Canada's three most celebrated Quidditch teams.

Social Sensitivity

The wide appeal of Rowling's books and the success she has had in creating a world of magic influenced this author to create both *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Both of these books are geared to Harry Potter fans specifically, but they are unique and amusing enough to appeal to anyone who peruses fantasy books and to anyone who finds themselves captivated by the idea of a world that transcends the rules of logic.

There has been some criticism of Rowling's motives for writing *Quidditch Through the Ages* and its companion book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Due to the popularity of her Harry Potter books, Rowling probably felt confident that people would devour anything that kept them captivated by Harry Potter's world, and she published these two books at a time when readers were eagerly awaiting another fix of Harry Potter's magic. Though these two books certainly boosted Rowling's popularity, she wrote them after Comic Relief approached her about writing something for charity.

Proceeds from both *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* support Comic Relief, and have provided funds to needy children around the world.

Literary Qualities

Rowling uses numerous devices to make her book a credible representation of an actual book from the Hogwarts' library.

First and foremost, she does not identify herself as the author, but rather she creates a fictional character who anyone immersed in the magic world of Harry Potter can believe had the proper credentials to write the book. Then she embellishes her story with other colorful characters who, like Whisp, add to the suspension of disbelief.

The creation of a network of secret societies also adds to the suspension of disbelief.

Rowling mentions the regulations on the game of Quidditch imposed by the Department of Magical Games and Sports, for instance. She explains that this department developed as a result of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy of 1692, which made every Ministry of Magic "directly responsible for the consequences of magical sports played within their territories."

Furthermore, all the characters including Kennilworthy Whisp, Madam Pince, Gertie Kettle, and the Quidditch players of the past all appear to be dedicated to maintaining the "secrecy" of their wizarding ways.

Quidditch Through the Ages and Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them came about long after Rowling succeeded in captivating children worldwide with her use of enchantment. She clearly knows the world she has created so well that details seem to come effortlessly. She can recount statistics of the game, she can detail the rules, and she can provide humorous accounts of past players and past matches. In order to maintain the suspension of disbelief, Rowling also includes diagrams and illustrations, copies of fictional newspaper articles, excerpts from letters and diaries purportedly archived in places such as the Norwegian Ministry of Magic, and copies of items on display in the Museum of Quidditch in London.



Themes and Characters

Quidditch is a game similar to soccer but played in the air on broomsticks, and Rowling wrote the book under the pen name Kennilworthy Whisp, a wizard who claims to be a Quidditch expert. Though readers of the Harry Potter books know nothing of Kennilworthy Whisp until the publication of *Quidditch Through the Ages*, they were familiar with the book and with the sport itself. Harry is a Quidditch player, and he learned how to play the game by reading this very book, which was mentioned in several books in the series.

As with *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, the theme of *Quidditch Through the Ages* seems to be simply that magic exists, based on the underlying presumption that wizards can transcend the boundaries of the mortal world. In the game of Quidditch, they fly through the air on broomsticks, a feat that Rowling (a.k.a. Whisp) says witches and wizards have been performing as early as AD 962. The book is filled with "fictional facts" about the sport in order to explain the rules of the game and the evolution of the game over centuries. For example, she tells us that a wizard named Bowman Wright has been credited with the invention of the Golden Snitch, a walnut-sized ball that was "bewitched" to remain within the boundaries of the playing field, and she tells us that a wizard named Zacharias Mumps has been credited with first developing a description of the game.

Bowman Wright and Zacharias Mumps serve as characters in this unconventional work as do Kennilworthy Whisp, some Quidditch players, and Gertie Keddle, the witch who lived on Queerditch Marsh in the eleventh century and who wrote a diary detailing important information about the beginnings of Quidditch. Rowling does not truly develop these characters, yet she does give them substance by embellishing her story with details. We understand that Zacharias Mumps is concerned with hiding the sport from Muggles (non-magic folk), and that Gertie Keddle "only knew the name of one of the days of the week."

Kennilworthy Whisp, the fictional author of this book, can certainly be labeled a principal character, even though Kennilworthy Whisp is simply a pen name for J. K. Rowling, who created Whisp's character to maintain the suspension of disbelief.

She provides information about Whisp's life and work in a few brief paragraphs about the author. Whisp, she tells us, is a self-proclaimed Quidditch fanatic who collects vintage broomsticks and is the author of many Quidditch-related works.

Rowling created the character of Kennilworthy Whisp to write the book, but she used a character from her past books, Albus Dumbledore, to write the book's foreword. Harry Potter fans already thoroughly know Dumbledore; he's the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and he also wrote the foreword to *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.



Dumbledore personally asked Madam Pince, the librarian of the Hogwarts school, to make this book available to Muggles. He explains in the foreword that even though he tells Madam Pince that proceeds from the sale of this book would go to charity, the librarian was shocked and speechless about lending it to Muggles. Madam Pince appears to be dedicated to maintaining the secrecy of the magic world and "has been known to add unusual jinxes to the books in her care." Kennilworthy Whisp, Albus Dumbledore, and Madam Pince all frequent the world of Harry Potter and all emerge as well-respected wizards dedicated to upholding tradition. The characters in *Quiddich Through the Ages* belong to one of two categories; those like Whisp and Dumbledore and Pince who purportedly live in the world today (that is, in the world today as created by Rowling), and those who purportedly lived in the world of the past and played some role in the development of Quidditch through the ages.

Topics for Discussion

1. By comparing Quidditch to soccer, what literary techniques does Rowling use to make Quidditch seem like a credible sport?
2. Explain your interpretation of Dumbledore's comment in the foreword: "All that remains is for me to . . . beg Muggles not to try playing Quidditch at home; it is, of course, an entirely fictional sport and nobody really plays it."
3. Using examples from the book, explain Rowling's use of humor and what purpose you believe it serves.

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Choose several of the "characters" in the book and explain how they add to Rowling's creation of an enchanted world.
2. Explain the term "suspension of disbelief" and explain how Rowling achieves this in *Quidditch Through the Ages*.
3. Read *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and compare and contrast these two books in terms of style and content.
4. Explain the stylistic devices Rowling uses to make Quidditch appear like a real sport and her book appear like a credible sports history.

For Further Reference

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Gleick, Elizabeth. "The Wizard of Hogwarts."

Time 153(14) (April 12, 1999): 86. Discusses Rowling's success as an author, gives brief biographical information about her, and some information on the appeal of her books.

Gray, Paul. "Magic 101." *Time* (March 19, 2001): 77. Review of *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

Jones, Malcolm. *Newsweek* (March 19, 2001): 62. Review of *Quidditch Through the Ages* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

Related Titles

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, the companion book to Quidditch Through the Ages is another of Harry Potter's schoolbooks, this one purportedly a facsimile of Harry's personal copy. Both of these books were written by fictional authors created by Rowling, and both of them further describe the enchanted world of Harry Potter.

Related Web Sites

Maduran, Jane. "Textbooks for Wizards."

The Tech 121(16) www.tech.mit.edu.

Richards, Linda. "Spellbinding Textbooks."

Januarmagazine www.januarmagazine.com/kidsbooks/rowlingcomicrelief/html.



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