

# A WIZARD TOUR OF THE ASHMOLEAN

SUITABLE  
FOR AGES  
7+

Trail written by Dr Beatrice Groves, author of *Literary Allusion in Harry Potter*.

J.K. Rowling's imagination is fired by the past. This trail looks at how historical objects illuminate the real-world sources of her ideas. Looking at classical, Renaissance, and Victorian objects we'll explore how Harry Potter works its magic on the stories and stuff of the past.

1

## Start in Gallery 16: 'The Greek World'

Find a case called 'Jewellery and Gems.'

Rowling creatively re-imagines myths and historical ideas to develop her creatures and names. Can you find a Griffin in this case? What is this Griffin dress pin from 300 BC made out of?

Rowling was a French teacher. In French, *of* is 'de (d\'' and *gold* is 'or'. What do you get if you say 'Griffin of gold' in French?



## Now go next door to Gallery 20: 'Aegean World'

Look in the 'World of Myths cabinet' about the Minotaur and find coins with labyrinths on them.

The Minotaur is a man-eating half-beast, half-man who lives in the labyrinth (a kind of maze). Harry enters a labyrinth in the Triwizard tournament. What beasts does Harry meet in the maze that are made out of more than one creature?

2

3

## Now go next door to Gallery 14: 'The Cast Gallery'

Find a centaur.

Like the Minotaur, centaurs are half-human, half-beast. All centaurs are deeply suspicious of humans - except Chiron, who teaches many heroes. Which centaur in Harry Potter is like Chiron?

Look round the cast gallery for a boar. Do you recognise this boar from the Harry Potter films?



Visit [www.torch.ox.ac.uk/wizarding-trail](http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/wizarding-trail) for more information.

FACULTY OF  
ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE  
AND  
LITERATURE

ASHMOLEAN  
MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

TORCH  
THE OXFORD RESEARCH CENTRE IN THE HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

# 4

## Now go back to Gallery 21: 'Greek and Roman Sculpture'

Find two Sphinxes.

Sphinxes are famous for asking riddles, like the well-known riddle the Sphinx asked Oedipus - does anyone know what it was? The Sphinx asks Harry a riddle in the Triwizard tournament - what was the answer?

See if you can answer a less well-known riddle the Sphinx asks: 'There are two sisters: one gives birth to the other, and then she gives birth to first. How can this be?' [Answer at the bottom of the page.]



## Then go into the Egyptian galleries (galleries 22 to 27).

Find some hieroglyphs.

# 5

### TASK

Ask your friend (or get your adult to ask you) a riddle!

The oldest fairy tale in the world is written in Egyptian hieroglyphs and is called 'The Tale of the Two Brothers'.

There is an important fairy tale in *Deathly Hallows* that is also written in an old, hard-to-understand language. What was it, and why do you think Rowling decided to write the fairy tale in a 'secret' script?

# 6

## Go downstairs to Gallery 2: 'The Ashmolean Story'

In the 'Nature and Science' case there are lots of objects you would be at home in the Wizarding World. Can you find a calendar written in runes? Which of Harry's friends can read runes?

Look for a painting of the famous Elizabethan magician and mathematician John Dee above this case. Elias Ashmole (who founded the Ashmolean) published his writings on alchemy and believed he knew the secret of the philosopher's stone.

TASK  
Look up the runic alphabet and write a sentence in runes!



## Go upstairs to Gallery 66: 'The pre-Raphaelites'

Find a picture full of flowers called 'Convent Thoughts', painted by Charles Allston Collins.

The Victorians used flowers to hide secret meanings, and Rowling does the same with her character names. Can you think of any examples? The lily is a flower traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary. Why do you think Rowling calls Harry's mother Lily?

# 7

[Answer to the Sphinx riddle: One sister is day, the other is night.]