

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #263

The Magical Legacy of Harry Potter

17th May, 2022

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about the Magical Legacy of Harry Potter.

[00:00:29] This is a [follow-up](#)¹ to our last episode where we looked at JK Rowling's battle to publish the books, so if you want to press pause and go and listen to that one first, then I'd recommend doing so.

[00:00:42] In this episode we're going to talk about how and why Harry Potter changed the world, and look at the legacy that the books, and its author, have left on children's publishing, fan culture, and on Britain.

¹ a continuation of something that has already been started

The Magical Legacy of Harry Potter

[00:00:57] OK then, let's jump right into it.

[00:01:01] The first Harry Potter book, Harry Potter & The Philosopher's Stone, was published 25 years ago this year, on June 26th of 1997 to be precise.

[00:01:14] It's no [exaggeration](#)² to say that the world is a different place for it, and I think you'd be [hard pressed](#)³ to deny that the world is a better place thanks to JK Rowling and Harry Potter.

[00:01:27] Right, let's start with the impact it has had on the world of children's publishing.

[00:01:33] As you'll remember from the last episode, JK Rowling had to fight hard to find a publisher for the first Harry Potter book, and was rejected by 12 publishers before finding one that accepted it.

[00:01:48] The book was very different from other children's books.

[00:01:52] It was long, it was full of lots of detail, it was too [dark](#)⁴ for children, it was set in a [boarding school](#)⁵, which is a type of school that only a tiny proportion of British children go to.

² a statement that represents something as better or worse than it really is

³ having lots of difficulties

⁴ characterised by unhappiness or unpleasantness

⁵ a school where students lived and studied

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[00:02:05] Put simply, the adults in charge of choosing which children's books to publish thought it wouldn't [appeal](#)⁶ to children, they thought children wouldn't like it.

[00:02:15] This all changed after an actual child, an 8-year-old daughter of one of the publishers, read some of it, and reported back to her father that the book was wonderful.

[00:02:28] Of course, lots and lots of children do love it.

[00:02:32] They loved it when it first came out, and the [appeal](#)⁷ of Harry Potter hasn't died out.

[00:02:38] 25 years after the first one was published, the Harry Potter books are still among the top sellers for its publishing house, Bloomsbury, and in 2021 sales of the Harry Potter books actually [jumped](#)⁸ 7%, they went up 7%.

[00:02:57] If you've read the Harry Potter books, you'll know that they are [timeless](#)⁹, the magical world is one that a 10-year-old in 2022 can be as [captivated](#)¹⁰ by as a 10-year-old in 1997.

⁶ be interesting

⁷ the quality of being attractive or interesting

⁸ went up

⁹ not affected by the passage of time

¹⁰ extremely interested in it

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[00:03:11] Looking at the legacy of the books, the impact that the books had on children's publishing was [unprecedented¹¹](#) - it had never happened before.

[00:03:21] The books showed publishers that children's literature wasn't an [afterthought¹²](#), it wasn't something that was basic, [banal¹³](#), and would always be less profitable and interesting than adult literature.

[00:03:34] The fact that Harry Potter was complicated, it was long, it was full of detail and [intricate¹⁴](#) descriptions, this showed publishers that children wouldn't necessarily be [put off¹⁵](#), they wouldn't be [discouraged¹⁶](#), by this level of detail. Indeed, they loved it.

[00:03:52] As such, publishers were more willing to publish longer and more detailed children's books, [blurring the lines¹⁷](#) between what is a children's book and what's an adult book, and ultimately giving children better options for [fiction¹⁸](#).

¹¹ never happened before

¹² a later or secondary thought

¹³ boring and ordinary

¹⁴ very complicated or detailed

¹⁵ caused to lose interest or enthusiasm

¹⁶ caused to lose interest or enthusiasm

¹⁷ making the difference between them less clear

¹⁸ imaginary or not real stories

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[00:04:09] The result of this has been, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Harry Potter has been excellent news for children's [literacy](#)¹⁹.

[00:04:17] Even after the films came out, meaning that children didn't necessarily need to read the books to [engage with](#)²⁰ the story, there have been numerous studies suggesting that it has had positive effects on both the amount of children that read for pleasure, and the amount of reading that they were doing.

[00:04:37] In other words, the books got more children reading.

[00:04:41] As kids started talking about Harry Potter in the playground or after a school holiday, other kids wanted to read it.

[00:04:49] And for many kids, at over 600 pages, the last Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows would have been the longest book they would ever have read, and shown that actually yes, reading can be a huge amount of fun and long books don't have to be [intimidating](#)²¹.

¹⁹ ability to read and write

²⁰ become involved in, enter into

²¹ having a frightening effect

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[00:05:09] Perhaps it is too much to say that Harry Potter gave birth to a new, [reinvigorated](#)²² generation of young readers, but it certainly was the [gateway](#)²³ to reading that many might not have had, had it not been for JK Rowling.

[00:05:25] Secondly, in terms of the cultural impact of Harry Potter, it brought “fan culture” [mainstream](#)²⁴. If you are from somewhere like Korea or Japan, or you’ve spent much time in these countries, you will know that there is quite a [mainstream](#) culture of [fandom](#)²⁵, of people being obsessed with fantasy games and literature.

[00:05:49] Until Harry Potter, in much of the US and in the UK at least, this was a relatively [marginalised](#)²⁶ thing.

[00:05:58] Sure, kids might [dress up](#)²⁷ as Star Wars or Star Trek characters, but certainly for teenagers it was quite an [outsider](#)²⁸ thing to do. Kids might be [teased](#)²⁹ by their

²² made more energetic again

²³ a means of entry or access

²⁴ ideas or behaviours that are accepted and followed by most people

²⁵ the state or condition of being a fan of them

²⁶ considered as not something important

²⁷ put on special costumes for fun

²⁸ not accepted by social groups

²⁹ laughed at

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classmates as being [geeky](#)³⁰, or weird for being so [obsessed](#)³¹ with these [fictional](#)³² characters.

[00:06:19] Harry Potter, and the way it was published [sequentially](#)³³, in order, [opened](#)
[the doors](#)³⁴ for this type of fan culture to become accepted and [mainstream](#).

[00:06:31] As a reminder, the Harry Potter books were published over a period of 10 years, with one coming out every one or two years. The first was published in 1997, and the last, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, published in 2007.

[00:06:48] There were midnight release parties when the next book would be released. Kids would [queue up](#)³⁵ with their parents outside the bookshop, [eager](#)³⁶ to pick up a copy of the latest book, run home and read it as quickly as possible and [find out](#)³⁷ where fortune would lead this young wizard next.

³⁰ boring because of not following trends or fashion

³¹ extremely interested in

³² not real, imaginary

³³ in order

³⁴ made it easier

³⁵ stand in a line waiting

³⁶ wanting very much

³⁷ discover, learn

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[00:07:08] Many people, and I would include myself in this category, as I was 10 when the first Harry Potter [came out](#)³⁸, many people grew up with the books, and grew up with Harry.

[00:07:21] Although the story of Harry Potter is, of course, set in a completely different and magical world, the emotions that Harry feels, and the [struggles](#)³⁹ he goes through to find his place in the world are ones that children all over the world could relate to.

[00:07:39] Friendships, love, [rivalries](#)⁴⁰, disappointment, joy, these are all deeply human things that kids around the world were experiencing at the same time as their magical hero.

[00:07:53] Not only that, but the series also [notably](#)⁴¹ [touches on](#)⁴² real-world issues like [prejudice](#)⁴³ and [inequality](#)⁴⁴, introducing kids to subjects that they might not have [encountered](#)⁴⁵ before.

³⁸ was released or published

³⁹ difficulties

⁴⁰ competitions for the same thing

⁴¹ particularly or especially

⁴² brings up or mentions

⁴³ unfair or unreasonable opinions that is formed without previous knowledge

⁴⁴ the unfair situation in society when some people have more opportunities, money, etc. than other people

⁴⁵ experienced, faced

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[00:08:06] Even in the wizarding world not all witches and wizards are treated equally; those with non-magical relations, for example, are called ‘mudbloods’ — which, in the books, is treated as something like a [slur](#)⁴⁶, a nasty word for something.

[00:08:23] As the Harry Potter books continued to have a more and more [profound](#)⁴⁷ impact on culture.

[00:08:29] [Inevitably](#)⁴⁸ a brighter [spotlight](#)⁴⁹ started to shine on the woman who created the story, JK Rowling.

[00:08:37] Even really by the time the second book was published, JK Rowling had become a [celebrity](#)⁵⁰. And by the time the last book was out, she was a multi-millionaire and probably the most famous living author in the world.

[00:08:53] This fame and success [didn't sit well with her](#)⁵¹. She didn't seem to like it, and was much more comfortable away from the cameras and crowds than attending awards ceremonies or giving interviews.

⁴⁶ a nasty word for something, an insult

⁴⁷ very great or deep

⁴⁸ in a way that it was certain to happen

⁴⁹ public attention

⁵⁰ famous and successful, especially in the entertainment business

⁵¹ wasn't something that she had agreed on or was pleased with

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[00:09:07] As with any successful work of [fiction](#), whether that's a book, a film, or even a song, people want to know about the process of creating it, and they also want to know things that might not have been [revealed](#)⁵² in the book, or have been obvious.

[00:09:24] Why did Harry make certain choices? What did characters truly believe?

[00:09:30] When JK Rowling [revealed](#) her answers to some of these questions, they weren't always well received by the public.

[00:09:38] For example, after the final book in the series had been released, she revealed that the character Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, was gay.

[00:09:50] While many people felt this was something to celebrate, providing much-needed representation in the literary world, others criticised the fact that Rowling never included this information in the books themselves.

[00:10:05] Similarly, you may have heard that she has got into trouble recently for a [perceived](#)⁵³ lack of sympathy for the trans community. Long story short, she tweeted in support of a university lecturer who was [sacked](#)⁵⁴ for her gender-critical views, writing that people shouldn't be [forced out](#)⁵⁵ of their jobs for stating that sex is real.

⁵² made known

⁵³ noticed or understood as such

⁵⁴ dismissed from employment, fired

⁵⁵ made to lose

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[00:10:28] Now, this tweet was [perceived](#) by many trans groups as [endorsing](#)⁵⁶ transphobia, and there has been something of a [backlash](#)⁵⁷ against JK Rowling in certain corners of the internet, even [culminating](#)⁵⁸ in Vladimir Putin comparing the treatment of Russia after the invasion of Ukraine to Rowling's treatment after her comments.

[00:10:52] For someone who appears to [despise](#)⁵⁹ fame and prefer life [out of the limelight](#)⁶⁰ you can imagine it must have been quite the shock to find yourself being compared to Vladimir Putin, and of course JK Rowling publicly rejected the [comparison](#)⁶¹ shortly after it was made.

[00:11:11] Now, let's just pause and [take stock](#)⁶² for a minute.

[00:11:15] We've talked about the impact that the book had on the world of children's publishing, in [encouraging](#)⁶³ children to read because the stories were just so

⁵⁶ supporting publicly

⁵⁷ strong feeling of reaction

⁵⁸ reaching the point of highest development

⁵⁹ strongly dislike

⁶⁰ out of the centre of attention

⁶¹ the statement that she was similar to him

⁶² make an overall review or evaluation

⁶³ giving them reasons

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[captivating](#)⁶⁴. We've talked about the impact that the books have had on fan culture, and on [normalising](#)⁶⁵ being obsessed with magic and fantasy worlds.

[00:11:35] We've also talked about how this legacy has been affected, to a certain degree, by what the creator of this magic world has made publicly known, through her [revelation](#)⁶⁶ that Dumbledore was gay and her comments that were considered to be offensive and [unsupportive](#)⁶⁷ to trans people.

[00:11:53] Evidently, when you sell over half a billion books, and there are literally university courses on your books, it's [inevitable](#)⁶⁸ that you won't please everyone.

[00:12:04] Critics of JK Rowling say that [the fame has gone to her head](#)⁶⁹ - that the more she talks about Harry Potter, the more she [drags the story through the mud](#)⁷⁰, and that the best thing she can do for Harry Potter is to keep quiet about it.

⁶⁴ extremely interesting

⁶⁵ causing it to be considered normal or accepted

⁶⁶ the act of making it known

⁶⁷ not providing support

⁶⁸ certain to happen

⁶⁹ the fame made her too proud or vain

⁷⁰ damages or ruins the story

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[00:12:20] Indeed, the actor who played Harry Potter, Daniel Radcliffe, said, “If you found anything in these stories that [resonated](#)⁷¹ with you and helped you at any time in your life — then that is between you and the book that you read, and it is [sacred](#)⁷².”

[00:12:37] One final important legacy of Harry Potter, and this is particularly true for the film adaptations, is on the impact that it had on Britain’s [soft power](#)⁷³.

[00:12:49] After the success of the books, JK Rowling had huge Hollywood studios offering to pay her vast amounts of money for the rights to the films.

[00:13:00] While some authors would have gladly accepted these [fat cheques](#)⁷⁴ and handed over creative control, JK Rowling didn’t.

[00:13:09] She was worried that Harry Potter would be Americanised, with American actors, and adapted to [suit](#)⁷⁵ American [cultural norms](#)⁷⁶.

[00:13:18] In short, she was worried that the story would be turned into something very different to how she imagined it.

⁷¹ produced positive feelings

⁷² very valuable, deserving respect

⁷³ cultural influence used to achieve its goals peacefully, without force

⁷⁴ large amounts of money

⁷⁵ fit, be appropriate for

⁷⁶ rules or ways of behaving that are considered normal in that particular society

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[00:13:25] Her conditions for the movie versions were that she would have tight control over the script, and that they would all be filmed in Britain with British or Irish actors.

[00:13:37] And the impact of this was huge. There were no American actors allowed, meaning that one of the most successful film [franchises⁷⁷](#) in the 21st century was a uniquely British affair.

[00:13:52] The hundreds of millions of people who have seen the films have watched a very British [take⁷⁸](#) on a fantasy world.

[00:13:59] This is thought to have brought in [countless⁷⁹](#) millions of pounds as tourists [flock⁸⁰](#) to Britain, in part to have a sense of this mysterious world they have seen in the films or read about in the books.

[00:14:12] And on a purely economic level the fact that these hugely successful films were made in the UK proved to many [across the pond⁸¹](#), in the United States, that you don't need to be in Hollywood to make a Hollywood [blockbuster⁸²](#).

⁷⁷ general titles used for creating or marketing a series of products

⁷⁸ view of, version

⁷⁹ too many to count

⁸⁰ get together, gather

⁸¹ on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean

⁸² a very successful film

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[00:14:28] Now, to end this exploration of the magical world of Harry Potter, I wanted to share some fun and interesting facts about the books and films that you may not have been aware of.

[00:14:39] For example, did you know that the film production team spent months training the Hogwarts [owls](#)⁸³ to carry letters?

[00:14:48] Or that Rupert Grint, the actor cast as Ron Weasley, performed a rap for his [audition](#)⁸⁴?

[00:14:55] On a linguistic level, the translators had quite a job ahead of them when it came to internationalising the books.

[00:15:03] You might remember the Master of [Potions](#)⁸⁵, who in the English version is called Severus Snape.

[00:15:10] In French he's called Severus Rogue, meaning proud or [haughty](#)⁸⁶. Similarly, in Italian he becomes Severus Piton, which sounds more like "python", a snake.

[00:15:25] And the book didn't only need to be translated from English to other languages, it needed to be translated from British English to American English.

⁸³ birds with a flat face and large eyes that hunt at night

⁸⁴ short performance that he gave in order to be selected for the role

⁸⁵ liquids that were believed to have magical powers

⁸⁶ too proud, arrogant or vain

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[00:15:35] The title of the original version was “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone”, but when it was published in the United States the publisher thought that “philosopher” wouldn’t be so [compelling](#)⁸⁷ to American children, so changed it to “[Sorcerer](#)⁸⁸”, which is another word for a magician.

[00:15:55] If you ask me, it’s a much worse title, but I am approaching this from the point of view of British English.

[00:16:02] The final thing I would like to say is that I think Harry Potter is a great choice to read for intermediate and above English learners, so for someone like you. It doesn’t matter whether you have read it before in your own language or not.

[00:16:18] Pick up a copy in English, perhaps even on a Kindle so you can easily [look up](#)⁸⁹ harder words, and jump into this magical English world.

[00:16:28] Sure, there will be [pointless](#)⁹⁰ magical words that you might not understand, but that’s all part of the fun.

[00:16:35] At the end of the day, it’s hard to deny the impact of Harry Potter. With over 500 million copies sold of the books, countless millions of young minds being [inspired](#)

⁸⁷ causing interest and attention

⁸⁸ magician

⁸⁹ search for and find

⁹⁰ having or making no sense

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⁹¹, and billions of hours of fun coming from the imagination of one young woman, it's a truly magical legacy indeed.

[00:16:58] OK then, that is it for today's episode on The Magical Legacy of Harry Potter, and with that comes the end of this little exploration of the writing and legacy of the Harry Potter books.

[00:17:11] As always, I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:17:15] If you have read the Harry Potter series, how do you think it affected you, and in what way?

[00:17:21] If you haven't read it, or if you have read it and thought it wasn't very good, what was it about it that didn't get you excited?

[00:17:29] And, given that you may have read a non-English version, are there any amazing translations of the names in your language?

[00:17:36] And if you have read it in English, did you enjoy it?

[00:17:40] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:17:44] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

⁹¹ filled with positive feelings

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The Magical Legacy of Harry Potter

[00:17:53] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:17:58] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Follow-up	a continuation of something that has already been started
Exaggeration	a statement that represents something as better or worse than it really is
Hard pressed	having lots of difficulties
Dark	characterised by unhappiness or unpleasantness
Boarding school	a school where students lived and studied
Appeal	be interesting
Appeal	the quality of being attractive or interesting
Jumped	went up
Timeless	not affected by the passage of time
Captivated	extremely interested in it
Unprecedented	never happened before
Afterthought	a later or secondary thought

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Banal	boring and ordinary
Intricate	very complicated or detailed
Put off	caused to lose interest or enthusiasm
Discouraged	caused to lose interest or enthusiasm
Blurring the lines	making the difference between them less clear
Fiction	imaginary or not real stories
Literacy	ability to read and write
Engage with	become involved in, enter into
Intimidating	having a frightening effect
Reinvigorated	made more energetic again
Gateway	a means of entry or access
Mainstream	ideas or behaviours that are accepted and followed by most people
Fandom	the state or condition of being a fan of them
Marginalised	considered as not something important
Dress up	put on special costumes for fun

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Outsider	not accepted by social groups
Teased	laughed at, made targets for jokes
Geeky	boring and not following trends or fashion
Obsessed	extremely interested in
Fictional	not real, imaginary
Sequentially	in order
Opened the doors	made it easier
Queue up	stand in a line waiting
Eager	wanting very much
Find out	discover, learn
Came out	was released or published
Struggles	difficulties
Rivalries	competitions for the same thing
Notably	particularly or especially
Touches on	brings up or mentions

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Prejudice	unfair or unreasonable opinions that is formed without previous knowledge
Inequality	the unfair situation in society when some people have more opportunities, money, etc. than other people
Encountered	experienced, faced
Slur	a nasty word for something, an insult
Profound	very great or deep
Inevitably	in a way that it was certain to happen
Spotlight	public attention
Celebrity	famous and successful, especially in the entertainment business
Didn't sit well with her	wasn't something that she had agreed on or was pleased with
Revealed	made known
Perceived	noticed or understood as such
Sacked	dismissed from employment, fired
Forced out	made to lose

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Endorsing	supporting publicly
Backlash	strong feeling of reaction
Culminating	reaching the point of highest development
Despise	strongly dislike
Out of the limelight	out of the centre of attention
Comparison	the statement that she was similar to him
Take stock	make an overall review or evaluation
Encouraging	giving them reasons
Captivating	extremely interesting
Normalising	causing it to be considered normal or accepted
Revelation	the act of making it known
Unsupportive	not providing support
Inevitable	certain to happen
The fame has gone to her head	the fame made her too proud or vain
Drags the story	damages or ruins the story

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through the mud

Resonated produced positive feelings

Sacred very valuable, deserving respect

Soft power cultural influence used to achieve its goals peacefully, without force

Fat cheques large amounts of money

Suit fit, be appropriate for

Cultural norms rules or ways of behaving that are considered normal in that particular society

Franchises general titles used for creating or marketing a series of products

Take view of, version

Countless too many to count

Flock get together, gather

Across the pond on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean

Blockbuster a very successful film

Owls birds with a flat face and large eyes that hunt at night

Audition short performance that he gave in order to be selected for the role

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Potions	liquids that were believed to have magical powers
Haughty	too proud, arrogant or vain
Compelling	causing interest and attention
Sorcerer	magician
Look up	search for and find
Pointless	having or making no sense
Inspired	filled with positive feelings

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com