

Name: _____

Great Minds: J. K. Rowling

by Lydia Lukidis

Wizards, Hogwarts, and Gryffindors! Everybody knows J. K. Rowling is the author of the ever popular Harry Potter series. Everybody knows she's incredibly successful, famous, and rich. But Rowling's past wasn't so magical. She certainly didn't have anything handed to her on a silver platter. She represents a true rags to riches story.

Let's go back in time for a moment. Rowling was born in 1965 in Yate, England. Her parents were voracious readers. She grew up surrounded by books. She quickly became a bookworm and dreamed of being a writer. Her favorite subjects in school were English and languages. No surprise there. By the age of six, she wrote her first story. By the age of eleven, she wrote her first full length novel. That's pretty incredible!

Upon graduating university, she worked a series of jobs in London as a secretary and teacher. She also worked at Amnesty International. In 1991, Rowling left England to work as an English teacher in Portugal. That's where she met her first husband. They quickly got married and welcomed a child shortly after.

Unfortunately, this was a turbulent era for Rowling. Soon after her daughter was born, her marriage fell apart. The couple got divorced. In an instant, she lost everything. She became homeless and unemployed.

Now a single mother, she moved back to England. She lived in a tiny apartment and looked after her daughter. She survived on public assistance and had a few brief odd jobs here and there. But she never gave up on her writing. She continued to write stories every chance she got. She would write in cafes as her daughter napped.

Rowling first dreamed up Harry Potter when she was delayed on a train. She was



**"Happiness can be found,
even in the darkest of times,
if one only remembers
to turn on the light."**

- J. K. Rowling

imagining creating a place where a child could have power. This is what sparked the idea of Hogwarts, the School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Over the next five years, she developed her ideas and outlined the series of seven books. She scribbled her notes by hand on scraps of paper and napkins. Soon she had a pile of notes that she had to piece together. Despite living in poverty and suffering from depression, she persevered.

When she finished the first manuscript (Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone), it was rejected. That seems unbelievable! In fact, it was rejected a dozen times. This went on for a year. Then the publishing company Bloomsbury finally accepted it. The first book was published in 1997.

As soon as the book hit the market, it gained instant popularity. Rowling began to receive thousands of letters from fans. It appealed both to children and adults. The Harry Potter series is now published in 80 languages, and has sold over 500 million copies across the world.

Cut to today, and Rowling is wildly successful in her professional career. As you all know, the merchandising of Harry

Potter alone is pretty extraordinary. She gets royalty checks for each Harry Potter item sold, from lunch boxes to umbrellas! And of course, she landed even more fame and money once the eight Harry Potter movies were made. She has also written many other books like the Fantastic Beasts series, and some books for adults.

Rowling got married again and had two more children. Today, she lives a happy and charmed life. She has received many awards and honors, including an OBE for services to children's literature, France's Légion d'Honneur, and the Hans Christian Andersen Award. She is worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

But she will never forget where she came from. Rowling regularly donates large amounts of money to various charities. She loves to help those less fortunate than her. Her determined and compassionate spirit keeps her humble. This is yet another reason everyone adores her.



The Hogwarts Express from Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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1. Based on the information in the article, how old was J. K. Rowling when her first book in the *Harry Potter* series was published?

- a. 27 b. 32
c. 49 d. 55



2. The author of the article describes J. K. Rowling's life as an example of "a true rags to riches story". What does she mean by this?

3. Based on your knowledge of the article, where did the inspiration for J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series come from?

4. Read the following statements about J. K. Rowling. Determine whether they are true or false. If the statement is true, write a **T** on the line. If the statement is false, write an **F**.

_____ Rowling didn't develop an interest in storytelling until later in life.

_____ The original name of Rowling's first book was Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.

_____ Rowling's books have sold more than 500 million copies worldwide.

_____ Rowling's first book was on the market for a long time before it gained popularity.

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The following terms are vocabulary words from the article.
Match the vocabulary word with its correct definition by writing
the corresponding letter on the line.



1. _____ voracious a. gives away money or goods to a charity or other good cause
2. _____ turbulent b. amount of money paid to an author for each book sold (or for the sale of each item related to the author's work)
3. _____ persevered c. the state of being extremely poor
4. _____ manuscript d. characterized by conflict, challenges, and difficult times
5. _____ royalty e. having a magical quality
6. _____ charmed f. having a modest view of one's own self-importance
7. _____ donates g. achieved success despite difficulties
8. _____ compassionate h. having an intense interest in an activity, like reading
9. _____ humble i. an author's unpublished work
10. _____ poverty j. having sympathy for other people

ANSWER KEY

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1. Based on the information in the article, how old was J. K. Rowling when her first book in the *Harry Potter* series was published? **b**

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b. 32
c. 49
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2. The author of the article describes J. K. Rowling's life as an example of “a true rags to riches story”. What does she mean by this?

When the author says this, she means that Rowling had to endure many hardships and even poverty before she achieved her breakthrough to success and fame.

3. Based on your knowledge of the article, where did the inspiration for J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series come from?

Rowling was riding on a train one day when she imagined a world where a child could have power.

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F Rowling didn't develop an interest in storytelling until later in life.

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- a. gives away money or goods to a charity or other good cause
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