

MUGGLES, MAGIC, AND MEDICINE

There was a lot more to magic, as Harry quickly found out, than waving your wand and saying a few funny words, **J.K. Rowling writes in the first book of the *Harry Potter* series. This idea sparked the interest of National Library of Medicine curators, inspiring them to create the traveling exhibit, "Harry Potter's World: Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine." The exhibit, which was on display at Pitt's Falk Library of the Health Sciences this February and March, allowed visitors to learn how Rowling's fictional wizarding world was influenced by Renaissance traditions. The exhibit creators make the case that modern natural philosophy, medicine, botany, and other sciences have their roots in occult and magical traditions.**

"*Harry Potter* had been so popular worldwide, it has sparked some people's interest in the actual traditions and historical people, some of whom were mentioned in *Harry Potter*," Barbara Epstein, director of Falk Library, explains.

Consider for example Nicholas Flamel, a famous alchemist and, in the first *Harry Potter* book, the creator of the philosopher's stone. Flamel believed, both in real life and in the *Harry Potter* series, that the philosopher's stone could turn any metal into gold and create an elixir that gave its consumer eternal life. Many of Flamel's contemporaries thought he had actually created the coveted stone. Although he didn't find the secret to immortality, the alchemist's experiments with metals did help to clear a path to modern day chemistry. (Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle also practiced alchemy.) Harry Potter's universe does seem to be closer to our "muggle world" than we ever thought. —*Megan Kopke*

ILLUSTRATION OF ALCHEMIST'S WORKSHOP BY HEINRICH KHUNRATH, AMPHITHEATRUM SAPIENTIAE, 1595. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE.