

HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S COMMENCEMENT speaker this week is Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling, and if it seems surprising that a children's author would stand on a podium previously occupied by Bill Gates and Kofi Annan, maybe it shouldn't. Not just because the world's richest author is a natural fit for the world's richest university, but because deep parallels abound between Harvard and Hogwarts, the wizard boarding school at the heart of Rowling's invented universe. Both trade on a mystique borrowed from the traditions of British boarding schools; both boast their share of rituals and arcana.

Great Hall

Harry Potter's first glimpse of the inner world of Hogwarts is its vast dining hall, a crepuscular space with levitating candles, food served in magically vast quantities, and owls swooping in through the arched windows. In the movies, the dining scenes are shot at Oxford, but owls wouldn't look out of place in Harvard's **Annenberg Hall**, where freshmen eat beneath the vaults of Harvard's only significant Gothic building.

Godric's Hollow graveyard

Though not at Hogwarts, it is a resting place for many distinguished historical wizards. Harvard Square has **God's Acre**, a prominent burying ground near the Cambridge Common, where the remains of nine Harvard presidents lie. A good proxy for the pub in Godric's Hollow would be the bar at Cambridge 1, whose wizard (er, student and professor)-filled back room offers an atmospheric view over the headstones.

Azkaban

Hogwarts students dread the notorious sea-bound prison where wizards adept at the dark arts are locked away in squalor while their strange obsessions slowly drive them mad. To Harvard students, this could be none other than **MIT**, whose glowering dome sits along the gray, tempest-tossed Charles.



Secret passages

Like Hogwarts, Harvard has its share of secret passageways discovered by each generation of students — most notably the subterranean steam tunnels that connect buildings throughout campus. In 1968 George Wallace was whisked from a speaking engagement to a car in Harvard Yard via the tunnels, magically evading the angry mob outside Sanders Theatre.



Portraits

Harvard's vast portrait collection may not include any of the talking paintings that guard doorways and spread gossip throughout Hogwarts, but it does have at least one with a ghostly mystery: behind the likeness of 18th-century Harvard president **Benjamin Wadsworth** in University Hall, X-ray photography has revealed the visage of an unknown man wearing a 17th-century scarf.



Owls

In Potterdom, owls briskly deliver magical letters; Harvard students have e-mail for that. But Harvard does enjoy a complement of **red-tailed hawks** that nest in campus trees and prey on squirrels.



Library

Among the thousands of ancient, musty books at the Hogwarts library, Harry and friends struggled to find information about the mysterious wizard Nicolas Flamel. They would have fared better in Harvard's **Houghton Library**, the rare-books collection that houses works on witchcraft, alchemy and botanical lore — and a medieval manuscript in the hand of the real-life Nicolas Flamel, a 15th-century Paris alchemist and scribe.

The muggle world

In Rowling's world, muggles are those born without the gift of magical power—in other words, the rest of us. The nastier wizards regard muggles with cold contempt, and even the good ones who urge friendly relations don't pretend to understand them. For Harvard students, the muggle world is **Boston**, a source of bemusement, derision, and at times vague curiosity.



Hogwarts Express

The Red Line may not immediately evoke the railway carriages that convey students from London to Hogwarts, but students on their inaugural Red Line ride to Harvard feel much as Harry and friends did approaching Hogwarts, eyeing one another with a mix of dread and thrill as the train rumbles through its tunnels.