HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE SUMMARY

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Eleven years ago, wizards rejoiced all over the world, and Muggles (non-magic folk) were confused. They celebrated because He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named was defeated. In other words, Voldemort (the evilest wizard around) killed Harry Potter's parents, but for some strange reason, he couldn't kill little baby Harry. Now Voldemort seems to have disappeared. Overnight, baby Harry has become a hero – "The Boy Who Lived." Having lost his family and home, Harry also has become an orphan. Dumbledore (the principle of Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft), Professor McGonagall (a teacher at Hogwarts), and Hagrid (a groundskeeper at Hogwarts) find a home for baby Harry with his Muggle extended family, the Dursleys.  
  
Cut to present day, when ten-year-old Harry lives with his super-mean aunt and uncle and their son Dudley. When they go to the zoo for Dudley's birthday, Harry encounters a sympathetic snake. He's able to speak to the friendly reptile and somehow seems to have removed the glass from its cage, so it can go back to Brazil. After the trip to the zoo, mysterious letters start arriving for Harry. His uncle, Mr. Dursley, is furious and tries to keep them from Harry. But the letters keep arriving at such a rapid rate that, the evening before Harry's eleventh birthday, his uncle takes the whole family to a deserted island to escape all of the mail.  
  
They can't hide for long, though; Hagrid shows up on Harry's birthday to deliver the letter, and the news that Harry's a wizard and has been admitted to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The next day he takes Harry to shop for school supplies at Diagon Alley, where Harry learns more about the wizarding world. He meets Malfoy (a bully) and Hogwarts' new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, Quirrell. Harry also buys his first wand. Sweeeet. Hagrid also picks up a mysterious package at Gringotts, the goblin bank.  
  
Later that summer, Harry travels to Hogwarts. He has to take a train from platform nine and three-quarters, a magical platform! A family called the Weasleys helps him find his way, and he begins to make friends with one of their sons, Ron. He meets other first-year students like Hermione Granger and Neville Longbottom.  
  
Upon their arrival at Hogwarts, the first years are Sorted into one of four houses (think dormitories). Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Neville are all Gryffindors (a house known for bravery); Malfoy is a Slytherin (a house known for ambition, and infamous for producing dark wizards). They begin taking all kinds of classes in magic. Harry dislikes the Potions teacher, Snape, who is unfair and kind of mean.  
  
Harry learns that there was an attempted robbery at Gringotts bank, but nothing was taken. He guesses that the robbers were after what Hagrid picked up. Hagrid lets it slip that it has something to do with someone called Nicolas Flamel.  
  
Malfoy becomes a big bully. During their first broom-flying lesson, he teases Neville. In defending Neville, Harry realizes he's a natural at flying. He's a superstar on a broomstick. Although Harry's broken rules by flying unsupervised, Professor McGonagall rewards him by putting him on the Gryffindor Quidditch team as Seeker (a very important position on the team).  
  
Later, Malfoy and Harry have a fight, and Malfoy challenges Harry to a wizard duel at midnight. Hermione and Ron accompany Harry, but Malfoy doesn't show – he was trying to get them in trouble for roaming the school while they should be in bed. As they hurry to get back to the dorm, the three friends stumble into a forbidden part of Hogwarts, where they bump into a three-headed monster dog. Luckily, they escape in the nick of time.  
  
Harry and Ron aren't getting along with Hermione, but make up when they rescue her from a troll that's terrorizing the school. Though they get in trouble to taking on the troll alone, they also show their bravery. Now the three are inseparable.  
  
As the first Quidditch match approaches, the three friends suspect Snape of wanting the package from Gringotts. During the game, Harry's broom acts weird and seems to be hexed. Harry's saved, but his friends blame Snape for putting him in danger.  
  
During the winter break, Harry stays at Hogwarts and is given an invisibility cloak that once belonged to his dad. He uses it to sneak around the castle and discovers the Mirror of Erised in one of Hogwarts' many secret rooms. When he looks into the mirror he sees his parents, but when he shares the mirror with Ron, Ron sees himself as a hero. Dumbledore catches Harry at the mirror and explains that the mirror shows you your heart's desire. The wise old wizard then says he's going to take the mirror away because it's dangerous.  
  
When classes resume after winter break, Harry, Ron, and Hermione figure out who Flamel is – an alchemist and the only person in the world to have the Sorcerer's Stone, which can provide immortality. They decide the Stone must be what was hidden at Gringotts and is now being guarded by the three-headed dog.  
  
When not trying to solve the mystery of Nicholas Flamel, Harry is trying to balance Quidditch and school work. Gryffindor wins another Quidditch game, which Snape referees, and then Harry hears Snape and Quirrell arguing.  
  
Meanwhile, Hagrid adopts a dragon, which is illegal. Ron, Hermione, and Harry have to convince him that's it's just not practical to raise a baby dragon, and find a way to smuggle the dragon out. Malfoy spies on them and tries to turn them in. When Harry and Hermione have successfully sent the dragon out in the middle of the night, they're caught by McGonagall – along with Neville, who was trying to warn them, and Malfoy, who tattled – and are given really big detention. Gryffindor moves to the last place in the house cup contest, and everyone is really mad at them.  
  
Harry, Hermione, Neville, and Malfoy have detention with Hagrid in the forest at night. They are supposed to figure out what's killing unicorns and drinking their blood. Harry runs into some centaurs who see trouble ahead in the stars. They all realize that Voldemort is trying to return and that he's the one killing unicorns.  
  
After the first-year exams, Harry, Ron, and Hermione talk with Hagrid and realize that he said too much about the Sorcerer's Stone to the mysterious stranger who gave him the dragon. Harry, Ron, and Hermione suspect that Snape is after it. That night they try to retrieve the Stone. Neville attempts to stop them, so they have to temporarily paralyze him with magic. They pass by the three-headed dog by playing it music, only to meet with another series of challenges. First, they're trapped by a Devil's Snare plant, then they have to catch a flying key, and then they have to play a life-size game of wizard chess. The chess game takes Ron out, leaving Harry and Hermione to solve a logic puzzle and drink potions to go forward. There's only enough for one, so Harry moves on and sends Hermione back for help.  
  
To Harry's surprise, he runs into Quirrell, not Snape like he thought he would. Quirrell reveals that Voldemort is living in him like a parasite. (Eek!) He tries to use Harry to get the Stone. He makes Harry use the Mirror of Erised, and Harry finds himself holding the Stone and lying about it. Quirrell/Voldemort tries to kill Harry, but when he touches Harry, he burns. Harry blacks out.  
  
When Harry comes to, he's in the infirmary with Dumbledore, and Quirrell is dead. Dumbledore explains that Harry defeated Quirrell/Voldemort through the protection of his mother's love. He also mentions that the Stone has been destroyed.  
  
Later, at the end-of-year banquet, Dumbledore praises Ron, Hermione, Harry, and Neville for the parts they played in defeating Quirrell. He rewards them by giving Gryffindor house tons of points. They win the house cup for Gryffindor, and even pass all of their exams. Then, they leave Hogwarts for the summer and part ways at the train station. Though it stinks to be returning to the Dursleys, Harry explains how much easier his time with them will be now that he can do magic.

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS SUMMARY

After a marvelous year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter is stuck spending summer break with his awful Muggle (non-wizard) aunt and uncle, Petunia and Vernon Dursley, and his equally horrid cousin, Dudley. On July 31, it's Harry's birthday, but no one remembers. All the Dursleys care about is their guests for the evening: important clients for Uncle Vernon's drill business. Uncle Vernon tells Harry to sit in his room and pretend he doesn't exist – he doesn't want Harry's freakishness (i.e., magic) wrecking his business. When Harry retreats to his room to stay out of the way, though, he finds someone unexpected waiting there: a house-elf named Dobby.

House-elves are bound in servitude to wizarding families. This particular house-elf has sneaked away from his Dark wizard family to warn Harry that something bad is coming to Hogwarts this school year. Harry can't go back to Hogwarts for his own safety; Dobby is determined to keep the Boy-Who-Lived alive. Harry doesn't care about random threats from the arch-nemesis who killed his parents, Lord Voldemort; he just desperately has to get away from the Dursleys and back to his best friends at school. Dobby is disappointed Harry won't promise not to return to Hogwarts. So Dobby takes desperate measures: he casts a charm that ruins the Dursleys' dinner party. Uncle Vernon loses his deal, and he blames Harry. So Uncle Vernon shuts Harry up in his bedroom with bars on the windows. He promises Harry will never get out.

However, Uncle Vernon doesn't count on the inventiveness of Ron Weasley, one of Harry's best friends, and his two brothers, Fred and George. They come flying up to the bars on Harry's windows in an enchanted car belonging to their father. They pull the bars from the windows and help Harry to escape. They bring Harry back to the Weasley household at the Burrow. Harry has an awesome time there until school starts, especially once he and Ron go into London to buy school supplies and meet up with their other best friend, Hermione Granger.

In Diagon Alley, the main wizarding street in London, Harry, Ron, and Hermione go to Flourish and Blotts (a bookstore) to buy their school textbooks for the year. The store is hosting a book signing by the new Hogwarts Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Gilderoy Lockhart. Professor Lockhart seems excessively vain and self-conscious; he immediately zeroes in on Harry as the famous Boy-Who-Lived and tries to use Harry's fame to get more attention for himself from the *Daily Prophet* newspaper. At Flourish and Blotts is also Harry's main school enemy, Draco, and his father, Lucius Malfoy. Lucius Malfoy gets into a fight with Mr. Weasley over Mr. Weasley's poverty and low social standing. The owner of the store finally has to break it up.

Harry and Ron arrive at King's Cross Station to take the Hogwarts Express with the other Weasley kids who attend Hogwarts: Ginny, Fred, George, and Percy. But Harry and Ron can't get through the magical barrier to Platform 9 3/4. In a panic that they have missed the train to Hogwarts, they decide to take Mr. Weasley's flying car to Hogwarts. They succeed in reaching Hogwarts mostly safe (though they are spotted by some Muggles, which is strictly against wizard law), but the car loses power and crashes into a violent tree called the Whomping Willow. Harry and Ron survive, but the car is fed up and rolls off into the Forbidden Forest.

Harry and Ron get into huge trouble for arriving late at school and coming in a flying car. What's more, Ron snapped his wand in the crash, so his spells become unpredictable and undirected for the rest of the year. They don't get expelled, though, which is the important thing. Ron misses the Sorting of his younger sister, Ginny, who ends up in Gryffindor House, just like Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Ginny is very shy around Harry, but she clearly has a huge crush on him.

Harry starts to notice strange things around the castle: he hears a voice that no one else can hear, which talks about tearing, ripping, and killing. Harry worries that he is starting to lose his mind. Things come to a head when he, Ron, and Hermione are coming back from a ghost party on Halloween night. They find a huge pool of water on the floor. There is a creepy message painted on the wall: "THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE" (8.163). As well, Mrs. Norris, a cat who belongs to the Hogwarts caretaker, is hanging by her tail from a torch bracket. Her eyes are wide open, but she is stiff as a board. The whole school suddenly starts to suspect that Harry is responsible for this event.

The school's suspicions increase when Harry duels with Draco during the first (and last) meeting of Professor Lockhart's Dueling Club. Draco makes a snake appear, and the snake turns to attack a Hufflepuff second year, Justin Finch-Fletchley. Harry tells the snake to stop without ever realizing that he's speaking to it in Parseltongue, snake language. The ability to speak to snakes is one of the things Salazar Slytherin, one of the founders of the school and the supposed creator of the Chamber of Secrets, was known for. Because none of the other kids can understand Parseltongue, they suspect that Harry was encouraging the snake to attack Justin because Justin is a Muggle-born and not a pureblood wizard. The whole school starts to believe that Harry *is* the Heir of Slytherin who has opened the Chamber.

It doesn't help matters that the next victim of whatever is happening at the school is Justin Finch-Fletchley. Harry finds him Petrified on the ground along with Gryffindor ghost, Nearly Headless Nick. All of the Hufflepuffs (and many of the other students at Hogwarts) think that Harry must have been the one to attack Justin. When Colin Creevey, a Gryffindor first year who has been annoying Harry with his constant photographs, turns up Petrified as well, the school takes this as definite evidence that Harry has been up to no good.

Meanwhile, Harry, Ron, and Hermione have been trying to find the Heir of Slytherin on their own. They reason that the flood of water at Mrs. Norris's attack came from a nearby bathroom. The bathroom is haunted by the ghost of a former Hogwarts student, Moaning Myrtle. She didn't see anything from that night, though. Because Moaning Myrtle has such an awful personality, her bathroom is always empty. So Harry, Ron, and Hermione decide to use it as a base to create Polyjuice Potion. Polyjuice Potion allows you to take the shape of another person for an hour, as long as you have a hair from him or her to add to the potion at the last minute. Harry, Ron, and Hermione think that Draco Malfoy is behind the attacks, so they decide to take the shapes of his Slytherin friends to get a confession out of him.

They are finally able to collect all of the ingredients and finish the potion by Christmas break. Harry and Ron change successfully into Draco's two dim-witted best friends, Crabbe and Goyle. But Hermione's potion has gone wrong. She used a hair from the robes of Millicent Bulstrode in her potion, but the hair turns out to have been *cat* rather than *human*. Hermione sprouts hair from her face and grows cat ears and a tail. Harry and Ron break into the Slytherin Common Room to talk to Draco, but they find out (disappointingly) that he's not the Heir to Slytherin. He does tell them that the Chamber was last opened fifty years ago, and that time, a Muggle-born died.

After this failed attempt at tracking down the Heir of Slytherin, things die down a bit at Hogwarts. There are no new attacks and Hermione returns to her normal human shape. Then, Harry finds out that Moaning Myrtle's bathroom has flooded again. Apparently, someone threw a blank diary into her toilet. Harry takes the diary and discovers that it once belonged to a Hogwarts Head Boy, Tom Riddle. Riddle enchanted the diary to hold on to some of his memories. When Harry asks the diary what happened fifty years before with the Chamber of Secrets, Riddle shows him that it was Hagrid, the current Hogwarts groundskeeper, who was keeping a monster secret in the castle. Harry loves Hagrid, so he doesn't want to believe it's true. Yet he knows that Hagrid has a weak spot for scary creatures, so Harry suspects that Hagrid was the one to open the Chamber the first time.

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Just before his Quidditch match against Hufflepuff, Harry hears the voice in the walls again. Hermione has some kind of breakthrough and rushes to the library to research more, but she is Petrified before she can tell them what she realized. Now that Hermione is the fourth student attacked, things have come to a crisis point. Harry and Ron decide to sneak down to Hagrid's hut to confront him.

While they are at Hagrid's hut, a knock comes at the door. Under the cover of Harry's Invisibility Cloak, Ron and Harry watch Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, come to arrest Hagrid. Fudge has no evidence, but he's under a lot of pressure from the school governors, and that *was*what Hagrid was expelled from Hogwarts for fifty years ago. As Hagrid leaves for Azkaban prison, he announces loudly that people should be watching the spiders if they want to learn something useful. Lucius Malfoy also appears to tell Professor Dumbledore that the school governors have voted to remove him from office in wake of these attacks. So Hogwarts is left without Hagrid or Dumbledore, its Headmaster. Harry and Ron return to the school truly discouraged.

Harry grows more and more determined to find out what is causing these attacks. Following Hagrid's instructions, Harry and Ron track a line of spiders from the castle into the Forbidden Forest. They arrive at a hollow in the ground where the monster Hagrid *did* bring to the castle, a huge spider called Aragog, confirms that he was *not* raised in the Chamber of Secrets. Aragog also never killed anyone. He is willing to let his children (other huge spiders) eat Ron and Harry, though. After barely escaping with their lives, Harry and Ron make it back to Hogwarts. They know Hagrid is innocent, but they don't know what to do next. Harry suddenly realizes: could the girl who died in the first Chamber of Secrets attacks have been Moaning Myrtle?

Harry and Ron try to go to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, but Professor McGonagall (head of Gryffindor House) finds them. They claim that they were going to visit Hermione in the Hospital Wing, since they don't want to get into trouble for looking for the Chamber of Secrets. Professor McGonagall is moved and lets them go. In the Hospital Wing, Harry notices that Hermione has something clenched in her fist. It's a description of a monster called a basilisk, a giant venomous snake that can kill just be looking at you. Harry realizes that the monster in the Chamber of Secrets must be a basilisk, since none of the people who were Petrified looked at the basilisk directly. The fact that none of them made eye contact with the basilisk is the only thing that saved their lives. Harry can speak Parseltongue (snake language), which is why he heard it talking as it moved through the pipes of the school.

Harry and Ron discover that the basilisk has actually physically taken a student down into the Chamber of Secrets: Ginny Weasley. They decide to help bring her back. They go and find Professor Lockhart, who, as Defense teacher, is supposed to be going to fight the monster. However, Professor Lockhart is actually packing to run away. He has boasted all year of his great deeds, but he's actually a giant liar. Ron and Harry use their wands to force Professor Lockhart in front of them as they go to look for the Chamber of Secrets in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

Moaning Myrtle tells Harry and Ron that she died looking into a pair of golden eyes. They realize that she was murdered by the basilisk, and that it came out of a pipe at the sinks against the wall. Ron spots that one of the taps is shaped like a snake. Harry commands it to open in Parseltongue, and the sink opens to reveal a tunnel to the Chamber of Secrets. As Harry, Ron, and Professor Lockhart continue down the tunnel, Professor Lockhart tries to cast a Memory Charm to give Harry and Ron amnesia and save his own life. But he is using Ron's wand, which is broken. The wand backfires and Professor Lockhart is hit with his own curse. The force of the hex half-collapses the tunnel. Harry is trapped on one side of the tunnel facing the Chamber, while Ron and Professor Lockhart are on the other. Harry continues onward alone.

Harry finds Ginny unconscious in the Chamber of Secrets. Near her is the blurry figure of Tom Riddle. Riddle finally explains that he has been using his diary to gain control of Ginny for much of the year. He is able to take physical form now because he is feeding off Ginny's soul. He lied when he told Harry that Hagrid was the one to open the Chamber of Secrets; it was actually Riddle himself when he was a student at Hogwarts. Riddle forced Ginny to go into the Chamber in order to lure Harry to him, since he wants to talk to Harry. Riddle has discovered that Harry is famous for defeating Voldemort as a baby. He wants to know how Harry did it, since Harry was just a baby and Voldemort was the greatest wizard who ever lived. Riddle knows that this is the case because he *is* Voldemort: "I Am Lord Voldemort" is an anagram for Riddle's full name, "Tom Marvolo Riddle."

Harry tells Riddle that he escaped with his life because his mother scarified her life for Harry, leaving him protected by her love. Riddle's wrong, though, if he thinks he's the greatest wizard that ever was. Harry says Professor Dumbledore is the greatest wizard. After this show of faith, Professor Dumbledore's phoenix appears carrying the Sorting Hat to Harry. The Sorting Hat gives Harry a ruby-colored sword, which Harry uses to stab the basilisk through the head. The basilisk bites Harry at the same time, leaving Harry dying in the Chamber. The tears of Dumbledore's phoenix bring Harry back to life, and he uses the basilisk fang to stab Riddle's diary and get rid of his spirit. Once the diary is destroyed, Ginny wakes up and she and Harry struggle back up the tunnel to Hogwarts.

With Harry's heroic deeds, the school is reopened and Professor Dumbledore returns. Professor Dumbledore tells Harry that he can speak to snakes because Voldemort can; when Voldemort tried to kill Harry eleven years ago, he left a bit of his power in Harry. Even so, this doesn't mean that Harry is going to become the next Voldemort. Professor Dumbledore confirms that Harry is truly a Gryffindor: he drew Gryffindor's sword out of the Sorting Hat. Harry has chosen to follow the path of good, which separates him from Voldemort.

During Harry's conversation with Professor Dumbledore, Lucius Malfoy walks in, accompanied by his abused house-elf, Dobby. He's furious that Professor Dumbledore has come back to the school. Since the other school governors have asked Dumbledore to return, though, there is nothing Lucius can do. In that moment, Harry realizes that it was Lucius Malfoy who slipped Ginny the diary during his fight with Ginny's father at Flourish and Blotts in the beginning of the novel. Dobby had been trying to protect Harry from his own master's evil behavior.

Harry hands the diary back to Lucius covered in one of his filthy socks. Lucius rips the sock off in a fury. As he throws the sock down, Dobby the house-elf catches it. Dobby has been serving the Malfoys against his will all of this time. By the terms of the house-elf's enslavement, if the master presents the house-elf with clothes, the house-elf can go free. When Lucius lets go of the sock and Dobby takes it, Lucius is accidentally freeing his house-elf. When Lucius realizes how Harry has tricked him into letting Dobby go, Lucius tries to curse Harry. Now that Dobby is free, though, he protects Harry from Lucius before disappearing from the castle.

By the end of *Chamber of Secrets*, Lucius Malfoy has been fired from being school governor, Professor Lockhart has gotten amnesia from his own backfired memory charm, Dobby the house-elf is free, Ginny is liberated from Tom Riddle's possession, and Harry has figured out that he is a true Gryffindor. All's well that ends well!

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN SUMMARY

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Poor Harry Potter is stuck spending another summer with his odious relatives, the Dursleys, who really should've had Child Protective Services called on them years ago. After putting up with lots of rotten treatment, Harry finally loses his temper and blows up his Aunt Marge (like a balloon, not like a bomb). So Harry hightails it out of Number 4 Privet Drive and gets picked up by the Knight Bus, which takes him to Diagon Alley and thus back to the wizarding world.  
  
Harry isn't punished for his "crime" (he's not allowed to practice magic outside of school) and soon finds out why: turns out, a dangerous prisoner, Sirius Black, has escaped from Azkaban and is hunting down Harry. Given how many times he's faced off with homicidal maniacs, Harry isn't all that concerned about this development. The real problem is that he doesn't have permission to visit Hogsmeade, the wizarding village near Hogwarts, this school year. Now this is a serious bummer.  
  
Harry reunites with his two BFFs, Ron and Hermione, and the three head back to Hogwarts with something new in tow: Hermione's adopted cat, Crookshanks (who is rather hideous and super smart). Crookshanks, of course, has it in for Ron's pathetic rat, Scabbers, which leads to a long series of arguments between Ron and Hermione. So what else is new?   
  
On the way back to school, some Dementors, the scary guards of Azkaban, enter the train to look for Sirius Black. Being around the creepy Dementors makes Harry hear his parents' death at Voldemort's hand, and often makes him faint (not something that most teenaged boys hope for).   
  
At Hogwarts, changes are afoot. Remus Lupin arrives as the awesome new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, and Hagrid is the new Care of Magical Creatures teacher. The year progresses and Harry is busy kicking butt in Quidditch, Hermione is swamped with her insane course load, Hagrid is eagerly (with Hermione's help) trying to prove that his hippogriff isn't dangerous before a tribunal, and Ron is consumed with worrying about Scabbers. Meanwhile, everyone is preoccupied with fear of Sirius Black, who breaks into Hogwarts twice during the school year.   
  
Harry devotes most of his time to three things: Quidditch (which pays off since he and his team win the Quidditch Cup, finally), sneaking into Hogsmeade (courtesy of a magical map provided by Fred and George), and working with Professor Lupin on casting the Patronus spell, a defense against Dementors.  
  
Midway through the year, the boys stop speaking to Hermione after her cat presumably kills Scabbers and after she turns Harry's anonymously gifted Firebolt broomstick to Professor McGonagall for inspection. The trio eventually reconcile in time to help Hagrid with his eleventh-hour appeal to save Buckbeak, his hippogriff. Harry gets a cryptic spoiler alert about the book's climactic moments from the Divination teacher, Professor Trelawney, who predicts that Voldemort's servant will return to his master. Yikes.  
  
Hagrid loses the appeal. On the day of Buckbeak's execution, the Harry, Ron, and Hermione find Scabbers alive and well in Hagrid's cabin. Things get nuts after this. Scabbers runs off, a giant black dog attacks and drags Ron and Scabbers into the creepy Shrieking Shack, Ron's leg gets broken, and Harry and Hermione follow. Soon Lupin and Snape show up and we learn the shocking truths: Lupin is a werewolf, Sirius Black is an Animagus (meaning he turns into the giant black dog at will) and Scabbers the rat is really Peter Pettigrew, Voldemort's servant and the real criminal (Sirius was framed), hiding in his Animagus form. Crazy. As it turns out, Sirius Black is a good guy and Harry's godfather.  
  
Pettigrew escapes and Sirius is captured by the Dementors. Before we can get too depressed, though, Dumbledore arrives and instructs Hermione to use her Time-Turner to fix everything. So Harry and Hermione travel back in time to that afternoon and manage to save both Buckbeak and Sirius. Harry saves Sirius by casting a super powerful Patronus against the creepy Dementors (he didn't even faint!).   
  
The school year ends and everyone heads home for the summer. Lupin is forced to resign (because he's a werewolf); Sirius, who is now in hiding, writes Harry a letter; and the BFF trio parts ways for yet another summer.

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE SUMMARY

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*Goblet of Fire* opens with a bunch of murders, which shows us right off the bat that J.K. Rowling is getting darker with this installment. Fifty years prior, the town of Little Hangleton was shaken by the killing of the entire Riddle family: a man, woman, and their adult son. No one could figure out the cause of death, but the entire village is sure that Frank Bryce, the Riddles' gardener, is the murderer. Even so, Frank Bryce has stayed on as the caretaker for the Riddles' former house. One night, he sees a light on at the Riddle house and goes to investigate. He finds a wizard (Wormtail) and someone else – a *thing*. The thing orders Wormtail to murder Frank Bryce. And 200 miles away, Harry Potter wakes up. He has seen the whole scene. The *thing* sitting in that chair must have been Harry's enemy, Lord Voldemort, though it seems impossible since the Dark Lord is still supposed to be a spirit without a body… An ominous beginning to this installment of the *Harry Potter*series.  
  
This dream – and Harry's growing pain from the lighting bolt-shaped curse scar on his forehead – demonstrate that Lord Voldemort is gaining strength once again. Harry doesn't know what to do about any of this, so he writes to his godfather, Sirius Black. Then, Harry's best friend Ron Weasley rescues Harry from a boring summer vacation with his awful Muggle relatives to go to the Quidditch World Cup.  
  
At the Quidditch World Cup game itself, Harry, Ron, and their other best friend, Hermione Granger, wind up enjoying themselves quite a bit. But then, the night of the match, there's a vicious, public prank committed by a bunch of guys in robes and masks – former Death Eaters, supporters of Voldemort.   
  
True mayhem breaks out when someone casts the Dark Mark into the sky, a well-known symbol of Voldemort himself. Ministry of Magic representatives catch a house-elf, Winky, holding the wand that cast the Dark Mark. To make matters worse, the wand is Harry's – he dropped it in the rush when the Death Eaters appeared. The house-elf in question belongs to the household of Mr. Bartemius Crouch, a very strict and upright member of the Ministry of Magic. Even though it seems impossible that Winky cast the Dark Mark herself, Mr. Crouch still expels poor Winky from his household.  
  
When Harry, Ron, and Hermione wind up back at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry for the year, they discover that none other than Winky is living in the Hogwarts castle kitchens. So is Dobby, a house-elf friend of Harry's who first appeared in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Hermione feels that the house-elves are basically slaves to the wizarding families they serve, so she grows politically active as she tries to come to their rescue. She starts S.P.E.W. – the Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare – and makes Ron and Harry join. But everyone keeps telling her that the house-elves are happy to act as servants for wizards, and she shouldn't force her help on people who don't want it.  
  
Besides Hermione's growing political enthusiasm, three major things happen at Hogwarts during the school year. The first is the appointment of a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher yet again – this time, one Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody. Moody is an experienced Dark wizard fighter who seems committed to teaching Harry as much as he can, and Harry grows to like and trust the prof.  
  
The second major thing going on this year is the Triwizard Tournament, a competition between the three European wizarding schools of Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang. Each of these schools will have one champion enter the competition, whose name will be selected by the magical Goblet of Fire. Students have to be over seventeen years old to enter, though, so that rules out Harry, Ron, and Hermione (but who are they to follow the rules?).  
  
At Halloween, each school's representative is announced. For Durmstrang, it's Viktor Krum (a world-class Quidditch player, who played in the World Cup final), for Beauxbatons, it's Fleur Delacour (a stunningly beautiful girl), and for Hogwarts, it's Cedric Diggory (a loyal, dependable Hufflepuff guy). Then, mysteriously, Harry gets selected as a *fourth*champion. No one knows how: Harry is too young and couldn't have put his own name in the Goblet of Fire! But once he has been selected, he has no choice but to participate in the Triwizard Tournament as well. This, of course, creates friction between Harry and most of Hogwarts, especially Ron. They all think that he must have put his own name in, and that he's just looking for more attention and glory. Harry starts getting more and more stressed.  
  
Adding to the stress is the third major thing that happens during Harry's fourth year at Hogwarts: Rita Skeeter. Rita Skeeter is a reporter for the*Daily Prophet*. She likes to sell stories, and she's perfectly happy to twist the facts if she thinks they will make for a more sensational read. She publishes a really exploitative article about Harry in the Triwizard Tournament, claiming that he still cries whenever he thinks of his dead parents. Harry is furious and embarrassed. Fortunately, the article doesn't put Harry off his game: he manages to get through the first Triwizard Tournament task – with a Hungarian Horntail dragon, no less – pretty smoothly. Afterwards, he even makes up with Ron. Double score!  
  
Even though Harry and Ron are again best friends, the stress of Harry's life doesn't go down. Nope – now, he's got hormones to deal with. As part of the Triwizard Tournament tradition, there's going to be a Yule Ball during the winter holidays. Harry has to ask someone to go with him. He invites a Ravenclaw girl he has a crush on, Cho Chang, but turns out she's already going with Cedric Diggory. Ron, in a fit of insanity, asks beautiful Fleur Delacour. But she's not interested. Hermione is going with Viktor Krum – something that really bothers Ron, though he's too emotionally dense to figure out why. So Harry and Ron wind up going with twins Parvati and Padma Patil, which doesn't make any of them very happy. Ron and Hermione end the night by having a screaming fight about Viktor Krum, and even when they make up, there's still simmering tension between them.  
  
Rita Skeeter continues to make trouble: she publishes an article telling the world that Hagrid, Harry's good friend and teacher of Care of Magical Creatures, is vicious half-giant. This is a huge deal in the wizarding world, and Hagrid almost quits his job because of it. Fortunately, Harry, Ron, and Hermione manage to convince him not to leave. But Hermione is so furious that she resolves to figure out how Rita Skeeter is finding out all of this private information she shouldn't have any way of knowing.  
  
Meanwhile, Harry keeps moving through the Triwizard Tournament. He and Cedric have started exchanging tips for each of the tasks, and, with the help of Mad-Eye Moody and Dobby the house-elf, Harry is tied for first place with Cedric after the second task. The third task is supposed to take place on June 24th. They're going to have to get through a giant maze, and at the center of the maze is the Triwizard Cup. Whoever reaches the cup first wins.  
  
On the day of the third task, Harry, Cedric, Viktor, and Fleur all start to move through the maze. Harry overhears Fleur scream and assumes that she's out of the tournament. Then, he is shocked to hear Viktor casting the Cruciatus Curse (an illegal spell that causes intense pain for those on the other end of it) on Cedric Diggory. So Harry stuns Viktor, and he and Cedric keep going through the maze. Harry gets injured by a giant spider just before reaching the Triwizard Cup, but Cedric offers to let Harry have the prize anyway to thank Harry for all of his help during the competition. Harry wants to take the Cup at the same time as Cedric, so the two of them can tie in the competition. Cedric agrees, and he and Harry grab the Cup at the same time.  
  
But the Triwizard Cup magically transports both Harry and Cedric to a graveyard. Suddenly, Cedric is murdered before Harry's eyes with the Killing Curse, *Avada Kedavra*. Yep – Wormtail and the *thing* that is Voldemort are both in the graveyard. This whole Triwizard Tournament was organized just to bring Harry to this graveyard, where Voldemort's father, Tom Riddle, has been buried. Wormtail puts together a potion made out of Tom Riddle's bones, Harry's blood, and Wormtail's own severed hand to bring Voldemort back to life and health. With this new power, Voldemort gets his body back.  
  
With Voldemort's rise, his Death Eaters appear in the graveyard around him. Voldemort sets up a "duel" between Harry and himself, although it's clear that Voldemort is absolutely confident in his own triumph. But something weird happens when Voldemort and Harry's wands face each other: a beam of light connects both wands, and the previous spells that Voldemort has cast start coming out of his wand. This means that the ghosts of the people Voldemort has murdered start appearing in reverse order out of his wand: Cedric Diggory first, then Frank Bryce, then Harry's mother, and then Harry's father. The shock over the appearance of these ghosts gives Harry the time he needs to rush over to Cedric's body and then grab the Triwizard Cup. The Cup transports Harry and Cedric's body back to Hogwarts…to the shock of everyone they appear before.  
  
Harry is ushered away from the maze by Moody. Slowly, Harry starts to realize that something is wrong with Moody. Moody tells Harry that *he*was the one who put Harry's name in the Goblet of Fire. And he has been helping Harry get through the three tasks because he wanted Harry to reach the Triwizard Cup first – so that he could be transported to Voldemort's father's graveyard and be used in a spell to bring Voldemort back to life. Moody then raises his wand to kill Harry, but three Professors – McGonagall, Dumbledore, and Snape – all stun Moody before he can do it. As they watch, the unconscious Moody slowly turns back into his true form: Bartemius Crouch, Jr., who was convicted thirteen years before of being a Death Eater and for horribly torturing Frank and Alice Longbottom (Neville Longbottom's parents).  
  
Barty Crouch, Jr. was smuggled out of prison by his father, Bartemius Crouch, Sr., as a favor to his dying mother. But he has been kept under house arrest under the care of their house-elf, Winky. Winky begged and pleaded that Barty Crouch, Jr. be allowed to go the Quidditch World Cup as a reward for good behavior. It was at the Quidditch World Cup that Barty Crouch, Jr. escaped Winky and cast the Dark Mark that frightened so many wizards. After getting free, Barty Crouch, Jr. made contact with Lord Voldemort, concocted this whole Harry Potter in the Triwizard Cup idea, and substituted himself for the real Moody using a disguise potion called the Polyjuice Potion. Meanwhile, the real Moody has been living locked up in Barty Crouch, Jr.'s trunk for the past year – yikes.  
  
Harry gives his evidence that Voldemort has risen again to Professor Dumbledore, who informs Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic. But Fudge absolutely refuses to believe it. He's in firm denial, and manages to keep any mention of Voldemort out of the *Daily Prophet*. There's no additional proof besides Harry's word because Barty Crouch, Jr. has been killed in Ministry custody: a magical creature called a Dementor ate his soul. So it's just Harry's word against Fudge's, and Fudge has all the power.  
  
At the end of school Leaving Feast, Professor Dumbledore decides to set his Hogwarts students straight. He explains to them that Lord Voldemort murdered Cedric Diggory, and that Voldemort is back again. But several students – troublemakers like Draco Malfoy – refuse to acknowledge Professor Dumbledore's speech.  
  
On the train to London for the summer holidays, Harry, Ron, and Hermione talk about the past year. Hermione finally gets to explain that she's figured out how Rita Skeeter has been spying. Rita Skeeter is an unlicensed Animagus, someone who can change into an animal. Animagi are all supposed to register at the Ministry, but Rita hasn't. Her form is a beetle – a convenient size for overhearing private conversations. So Hermione has agreed not to share Rita's secret with the Ministry of Magic as long as Rita Skeeter doesn't publish any more nasty things about people for at least a year. Ron promises Harry that he can come and visit the Weasleys later in the summer. Until then, Harry should take care of himself. Harry says good-bye to Ron and Hermione until the next school year.

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX SUMMARY

We start *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* back in Little Whinging, Surrey, where Harry is stuck for yet another summer with his awful relatives, the Dursleys. The Dursleys keep up their usual nonsense – wizards are freaks, Harry is a wizard, therefore Harry is a freak – but Harry seems to have changed. He simmers with fury all the time. None of his friends are writing to him about the war with Voldemort, and he feels isolated and resentful. Harry starts provoking fights with his dumb cousin Dudley. He wants to have a target for his rage. But in the middle of one of these confrontations with Dudley, something completely bizarre happens. In Little Whinging, Surrey, two *dementors* show up!

Dementors are the guards of the wizard prison Azkaban. They are also magical creatures that feed off fear. If they get the chance, they'll fasten their mouths over their victims' lips and suck the souls right from their bodies. Even though Harry is fifteen and underage according to wizarding law, so he isn't supposed to use magic outside of Hogwarts. But he can't let the dementors suck his cousin's soul out. He casts a Patronus charm to repel the dementors. The Ministry of Magic immediately sends Harry a notice scheduling a hearing. If Harry is found guilty of the charge of casting a spell as an underage wizard (especially in a Muggle – non-wizarding – area), he'll get expelled from Hogwarts.

Hearing that Harry is struggling out in Little Whinging, the Order of the Phoenix turns up at the Dursleys' house to take Harry to their headquarters. The Order of the Phoenix is the group of wizards who resisted Voldemort during the first war against him fifteen years ago. They have reassembled thanks to Harry's news at the[end of Book 4](http://www.shmoop.com/harry-potter-4-goblet-fire/ending.html) that Voldemort is rising again. They bring Harry to Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place, a dark and gloomy townhouse in a Muggle section of London. Harry is shocked not only to find his friends Ron and Hermione waiting for him, but also his godfather, Sirius Black.

In fact, the house belongs to Sirius. It has been in the Black family for ages. The Black family is a pureblood line of Dark wizards: Sirius was the first Black to be in Hogwarts' Gryffindor House, like, ever. Sirius's cousin, Bellatrix Lestrange, has become one of Voldemort's most powerful Death Eaters. And his other cousin Narcissa is mother to Harry's arch-nemesis at school, Draco Malfoy. Sirius has given the Grimmauld Place house to the Order because it's the biggest contribution he can make right now. Since Sirius is a convicted murderer (though falsely accused), he can't go out in public. He is also an Animagus who transforms into a dog (a form he calls "Snuffles"), but Voldemort is aware of his dog form, so Sirius can't use that either. He is trapped in Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place, surrounded by memories of his unhappy childhood.

In fact, Sirius and Harry are experiencing similar feelings of grim misery right now: Sirius is stuck inside all the time, unable to do anything substantial to help the cause against Voldemort. And Harry feels left out of the planning of the war, even though he has faced Voldemort *four times* and survived! Both Harry and Sirius feel resentful and isolated from their friends, which makes the tone of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* much darker than previous installments in the Harry Potter series.

Eventually, Harry goes to his hearing. Thanks to the testimony of Arabella Figg, a Squib (non-magical person with magical parents) who has been living next to the Dursleys and watching out for Harry on Professor Dumbledore's orders, Harry can prove that there were dementors in Little Whinging and he was acting in self-defense. While Professor Dumbledore helps to prove Harry's innocence, Harry is angry that Dumbledore refuses to speak to or even look at Harry. Harry can't understand why Professor Dumbledore seems to have turned his back on Harry, so Harry decides to turn his back on Professor Dumbledore. He refuses to tell Dumbledore about any of the things he experiences during the school year, and in fact, the two don't speak properly until the very end of the novel.

This whole hearing business sets up one of the major plot lines of the novel: the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, has decided to discredit Harry as much as possible. The Minister does not want to acknowledge that Voldemort has come back, so he insists on this hearing to try and get Harry kicked out of school. What's more, Fudge pressures the *Daily Prophet* newspaper to report that Harry is dangerously unstable. He also sends a Ministry representative, Dolores Umbridge, to Hogwarts as Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. She is supposed to be teaching, but in fact, she's there as a spy for Fudge. She is keeping close watch on Harry and on Professor Dumbledore, whom Fudge suspects of trying to steal his post as Minister for Magic.

Professor Umbridge is a power-hungry monster who spends her time at Hogwarts tightening controls on every aspect of Hogwarts life: she gives Harry detentions in which she forces him to write with a Blood Quill that cuts into his hand every time he uses it. She gets herself appointed Hogwarts High Inquisitor, which gives her the authority to observe other professors and decide if they are doing their jobs properly. She forbids students from meeting in groups of three or more without official permission. And she appoints all of the worst bullies in the school, including Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson, to an Inquisitorial Squad with powers to punish their fellow students whenever they see fit. Professor Umbridge's power trip makes her incredibly unpopular with students and teachers alike, but with the backing of the Ministry of Magic, it seems impossible to curb her growing power.

Harry finds the pressure of dealing with Professor Umbridge unbearable. Not only does half the wizarding world think he's making up stories about Voldemort thanks to the *Daily Prophet*, but Professor Umbridge tells him to his face and in front of the student body that he is lying. The only relief Harry gets from all of this stress is from Dumbledore's Army. This is a student group suggested by Hermione; it's strictly forbidden by Umbridge, but they go ahead and start meeting in secret anyway.

Because Professor Umbridge refuses to allow them to practice defensive spells during Defense Against the Dark Arts, this inter-House group gathers together to study things like the Disarming Spell and the Patronus Charm with Harry as their leader. They call themselves Dumbledore's Army because they know that that is what the Ministry is most afraid of: that Dumbledore is using Hogwarts to train powerful wizards who are loyal to him. The name is a joke, though: this group meets without the direct authority of Dumbledore. Harry is proud of all of the progress his students are making, and he is delighted to resist Professor Umbridge right under her evil nose.

At least Harry has the D.A. to look forward to; otherwise, his life continues to suck for most of the fifth book. Because Professor Umbridge has it in for him, she gives him a *life-long* ban from playing Quidditch. What's worse, Harry has been having terrible nightmares in which he seems to be looking through the eyes of Voldemort. Things come to a head in Chapter 21, when Harry sees Voldemort's huge snake attacking Mr. Weasley in the basement of the Department of Mysteries. Harry rushes to Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall to tell them that Mr. Weasley has been attacked. As soon as Professor Dumbledore hears what Harry has been seeing, he tells Harry to start studying Occlumency.

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Occlumency is a little-known field of magic that is supposed to protect a wizard's mind from magical scanning. And who's the best Occlumens at Hogwarts besides Professor Dumbledore himself? That would be Professor Snape, of course – Harry's most-hated teacher. Professor Snape and Harry start their lessons in secret, on Dumbledore's orders. But the lessons leave Harry feeling like his mind is even more open than it was naturally. He is dreaming more vividly every night. And Professor Snape is also catching glimpses of Harry's most painful and embarrassing memories, things Harry doesn't want anyone to see, let alone Professor Snape.

One day, Harry happens to be in Professor Snape's office alone and he decides to get a bit of revenge. He looks into Professor Snape's Pensieve, which is a storage place for memories. In it, he sees Professor Snape's worst memory: fifteen-year-old Snape getting brutally bullied by Harry's father, James, and his three best friends, Sirius, Remus, and Wormtail. So not only has Harry started to resent Professor Dumbledore, but now he is starting to wonder if his own father and godfather are really good people. All of Harry's heroes and idols seem to be falling off their pedestals.

One of the members of the D.A. rats out her fellow members to Professor Umbridge, who comes down on their meeting like a ton of bricks. She finds the list of members under the joke heading, "Dumbledore's Army," and she and Minister Fudge take it very seriously. They use it as evidence to try and arrest Professor Dumbledore, but he leaves Hogwarts on his own power. This leaves Harry without any obvious mentors or allies at school.

Of course, all of these problems – Sirius's isolation, Harry's anger, and Harry's lack of trusted authority figures at Hogwarts – come to a head in the final chapters of the book. Sirius has grown so reckless after a year trapped in Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place that he will jump at anything to get out of the house. And Harry has grown so sure that Professor Dumbledore has been deliberately cutting him off from necessary information that Harry has been trying desperately to see things through his increasingly frequent nightmares.

Well, one night, Harry sees something extremely troubling: at the end of the corridor he keeps revisiting in his nightmares, he sees Voldemort torturing Sirius. Harry assumes that Voldemort must have Sirius, and he decides to ride to the rescue. Without Professors Dumbledore or McGonagall at Hogwarts (since McGonagall was injured trying to defend Hagrid from Aurors ordered to remove him Hogwarts by Professor Umbridge), he tries to pass the message on to Professor Snape (who is a member of the Order of the Phoenix). But Harry doesn't like or trust Professor Snape enough to believe that the man is going to help Sirius.

So Harry rushes to the Ministry of Magic accompanied by a few of his friends who are also members of the D.A.: Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Neville, and Luna Lovegood. Once they get to the basement of the Department of Mysteries, they find a room full of glass balls that Harry has been seeing in his dreams. He searches everywhere, but there is no Sirius. In fact, the dreams have been sent by Voldemort all along. Voldemort has lured Harry to the Department of Secrets so that Harry can pull out a prophecy (in the form of a glass ball) kept there for him. Harry finds the prophecy, but he and his friends are ambushed by a circle of Death Eaters.

In the fight that ensues, Ginny breaks her ankle, Hermione gets horrible internal injuries, Ron grapples with a giant brain, Luna Lovegood gets Stunned, and Neville Longbottom breaks his nose and gets *Crucio*-d by the same Death Eater who tortured his parents to insanity. Harry has led his friends right into a trap and they are paying the price. But worst of all is that Sirius Black and the rest of the Order of the Phoenix ride to the rescue. Sirius slips through an apparently empty archway in the Department of Mysteries and never reappears. He is dead, killed recklessly trying to save Harry.

Professor Dumbledore arrives at the Department of Mysteries around the same time that Voldemort does. The two have a showdown that ends in Voldemort trying to possess Harry to force Dumbledore to kill the boy. But Harry's heart is too full of emotion for Voldemort to keep control, and he scurries off. But Voldemort doesn't disappear before Cornelius Fudge and a whole bunch of Ministry employees *see* old Voldy with their own eyes. So Fudge can no longer deny that Harry and Professor Dumbledore have been telling the truth and Voldemort is back. He removes Professor Umbridge from power and places Professor Dumbledore as Headmaster of Hogwarts once again.

Back at Hogwarts, Professor Dumbledore apologizes to Harry for keeping him in the dark for all of this year. Dumbledore explains that he was trying to protect Harry, the same way he tried to protect Sirius by leaving him in Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. Now, Professor Dumbledore can see that leaving an active man to rot in a house by himself may not have been the best plan. But he had the best of intentions. Harry rages at Professor Dumbledore, but his anger is also a cover for his own guilt: why did he have to fall for Voldemort's trap and blunder into the Department of Mysteries in the first place?

Professor Dumbledore explains the prophecy to Harry. It was made in the year Harry was born, and it states that a boy born at the end of July to parents who have defied Voldemort three times will arrive with power that Voldemort doesn't have. There were two candidates to fill the prophecy, Harry and Neville Longbottom. But by attacking Harry when he was a baby and leaving Harry with his curse scar and magical connection to the Dark Lord, it's Voldemort who selected Harry to be the boy of prophecy. Now Harry must kill Voldemort or else be killed by him.

So now Harry knows why Voldemort has been coming after him: because Voldemort believes that Harry continues to present a danger to his rise to power. And it's Harry's fate to keep facing Voldemort until one or the other of them is dead. With this understanding of his fate, and with his guilt and sorrow over Sirius's death, Harry feels much less anger towards his friends. They all know that war is coming soon, and that the time for emo brooding is over: Harry has to start acting like an adult to face the challenges that are coming his way.

HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE SUMMARY

When Harry enters his sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the world is in turmoil. Voldemort's army is gaining force and momentum, and tragedies are everyday occurrences. The Muggle world is experiencing great loss and havoc as well, and fear abounds. The Prime Minister of the Muggle world meets with both the former and current Ministers of Magic, and the news is not good. It would seem that a war is at hand, and even Hogwarts isn't entirely safe.  
  
After seeing Draco Malfoy conduct sketchy business at Borgin and Burkes at the beginning of the school year (while on a school supply shopping trip with the Weasleys in Diagon Alley), Harry is convinced that Draco now works for Voldemort and is plotting something big. Harry proceeds to spend his year at Hogwarts following Draco's actions carefully. However, few believe Harry's theory that Draco has become a Death Eater.  
  
Hormones are raging at Hogwarts, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione's friendships are put to the test. Ron finds his first girlfriend in Lavender Brown, which sends Hermione into a poorly concealed rage most of the time. Meanwhile, Harry begins to realize that he has feelings for Ginny Weasley, Ron's little sister.  
  
The sixth year homework load is intense, and everyone (including Hermione) seems to struggle under the weight and difficulty of the work assigned. Professor Snape has assumed the illustrious role of Professor of the Defense Against the Dark Arts, and he proceeds to make Harry's life miserable, making sure to give him detention whenever possible. Professor Horace Slughorn joins the Hogwarts faculty as the new Potions teacher, and he finds Harry to be a Potions superstar (thanks to a mysteriously helpful used textbook Harry finds, which once belonged to a former student known as the Half-Blood Prince). To Hermione's frustration, Harry follows the Half-Blood Prince's tips and effortlessly excels in Potions. The sixth year is also the year in which Harry and his friends begin to learn how to Apparate, or to travel from one place to another magically.  
  
Throughout this sixth year, a number of tragedies and inexplicable events strike members of the Hogwarts community. It would seem that there is someone within the walls of Hogwarts conducting dark magic, carrying out orders from the Dark Lord himself, and Harry is bent on figuring out what exactly is going on. At times this mission of Harry's is thwarted by other responsibilities, like captaining the Gryffindor Quidditch team, which turns out to be a really tough job. Everyone expects Harry to lead Gryffindor to victory, but his mind is elsewhere.  
  
Dumbledore decides at the beginning of this school year that he should take a bigger role in Harry's education, and he arranges for Harry to have private lessons with him every so often. Harry, elated by this news, soon discovers that these private lessons involve traveling into the memories of those who knew Voldemort once upon a time. Over the course of several visits, Harry and Dumbledore venture into precious memories, gathering essential information about Voldemort's family, his childhood, his schooling at Hogwarts, and how he came to be the Dark Lord. The final memory is one that Dumbledore needs most but is unable to procure as it belongs to Professor Slughorn, who has intentionally erased it using complicated magic. Dumbledore implores Harry to convince Slughorn to give him this memory, a task that proves almost impossible, as Slughorn will stop at nothing to avoid Harry once he knows what Harry is after.  
  
As luck would have it, Harry possesses a good luck potion, Felix Felicis, which he earned for winning a contest in Potions class (thanks, Half-Blood Prince). One day, when Harry is all out of ideas about how to get the memory from Slughorn, he drinks part of the potion and, through a string of very lucky instances, is able to get the memory from Slughorn.  
  
When Dumbledore and Harry travel into this particular memory, they realize that it shows the moment at which Voldemort first learned about Horcruxes. A Horcrux is a powerful, outlawed kind of Dark Magic that allows the soul to be divided, giving its owner the ability to become immortal. When he was at Hogwarts, Voldemort once convinced Slughorn to give him valuable information about Horcruxes, and what resulted was (Dumbledore supposes) a quest to divide his soul seven times and to hide each piece in various vessels in locations around the world. Using the memories that he has already collected pertaining to Voldemort, Dumbledore can make good guesses about where Voldemort's Horcruxes might be. The only way to kill Voldemort is to destroy every single Horcrux, which, Harry realizes, will be his ultimate goal and mission in life.  
  
After traveling to retrieve the first Horcrux, a task that proves to be incredibly difficult, dangerous, and scary, Harry and Dumbledore arrive back at Hogwarts only to find that the castle has been invaded by Death Eaters. The Dark Mark (the sign of Voldemort) floats like a cloud over the castle tower. As Dumbledore and Harry fly to the tower over which the Dark Mark lingers, they discover that the Dark Mark is a trap intended to lure Dumbledore to that very tower. Before he is cornered by Death Eaters, Dumbledore is able to use his magic to hide Harry and to make him temporarily immobile and mute, so that the Death Eaters will not discover him.  
  
Draco Malfoy arrives first at the scene, his wand pointed at Dumbledore, intent upon killing him. Draco is nervous and shaky – it doesn't look like he'll be able to go through with killing the great wizard. But he's under orders from the Dark Lord, who has specifically stated that no one but Draco is allowed to kill Dumbledore that night. Soon Draco is flanked by his fellow Death Eaters who taunt Dumbledore and urge Draco to pull the trigger. But Draco can't do it. Then Snape arrives. Knowing that powerful Aurors bent on protecting Dumbledore have arrived, Snape kills Dumbledore, sending him tumbling off the edge of the tower.  
  
Harry is overwhelmed with grief. He watches Dumbledore die, and he can't do a thing to save him or help him on account of the protective magic Dumbledore had cast upon him. Harry runs downstairs to get help and finds his friends, teachers, and Aurors fighting the Death Eaters in a violent battle. Blood is everyone, but no one is hurt too badly. The Death Eaters leave, and Harry is unable to stop Snape or to use his magic on him. A crowd has gathered around Dumbledore's body, and Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, sings a grief-stricken song. The faculty assembles to decide what should be done next, and to consider closing Hogwarts for good.  
  
Dumbledore wished to be buried on school grounds. On the day of his funeral, people from all over the world come to pay their respects. Everyone from the Minister of Magic, to Hagrid's mother, to the mermaids in the lake, to the centaurs in the forest show up to honor the greatest wizard in the world. Deep in his heart, Harry knows what he must do next. He must hunt Voldemort down and destroy each one of his Horcruxes. Ron and Hermione swear to follow and support Harry no matter what. Harry is left with a heavy heart, but with the knowledge that he has good friends.