

If Dumbledore Is So Powerful, Shouldn't He Fight Voldemort?

OFFICIALLY, ALBUS DUMBLEDORE IS SIMPLY the headmaster of Hogwarts. But he is significantly more important in the magical world than such a role would imply. He is the only wizard, other than Harry, whom Voldemort fears—one of the few unafraid to speak of the fallen wizard by name. He had been first choice to lead the Ministry of Magic, but, preferring to remain at Hogwarts, he plays a behind-the-scenes role, advising Minister Cornelius Fudge.

Quite tall and thin, his hair and beard fall below his waist. He has a prominent, hawk-like nose, on which rest glasses with half-moon lenses. His Chocolate Frog trading card notes he is “considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times,” and he has the titles to prove it: Order of Merlin (First Class), Grand Sorcerer, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confederation of Wizards.

Dumbledore

A CLASSIC WIZARD

Dumbledore's first name means "white" in Latin. That befits a wizard with well-earned gray hair. It also makes him the perfect opponent of the "Dark" Lord. His last name comes from an old English word for bumble bee. J. K. Rowling says she liked the idea that this music-lover might absent-mindedly hum to himself.

Dumbledore certainly is a wizard in the legendary mold. One might easily mistake him for Merlin or Obi-Wan Kenobi of *Star Wars*. Gandalf, the wizard of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* books, could be a twin brother: "[Gandalf's] long white hair, his sweeping silver beard, and his broad shoulders, made him look like some wise king of ancient legend. In his aged face under great snowy brows his dark eyes were set like coals that could leap suddenly to fire." That description sounds a lot like the scene in *Goblet* when Dumbledore realizes Barty Crouch Jr. has been disguised as Mad-Eye Moody: "There was cold fury in every line of the ancient face; a sense of power radiated from Dumbledore as though he were giving off burning heat."

WHY NOT SEARCH FOR VOLDEMORT?

Dumbledore, his trading card tells us, "is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945." Since that was the same year that Britain and its allies defeated Hitler and other enemies of democracy in the Second World War, we can take it as a hint that Dumbledore and Grindelwald had quite a struggle. So Dumbledore must be an accomplished fighter.

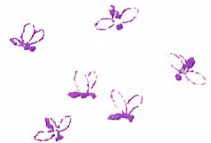
Why then would he let Harry face Voldemort? Surely he is powerful enough to find the Dark Lord and finish him once and for all?

A CHILD'S EYES

If only it were that easy. Dumbledore, for all his accomplishments and wisdom, is only human.

We usually see him as Harry would: all-knowing and all-powerful. He is the perfect parent—especially important to Harry, with his own parents dead and Sirius Black on the run. To Harry, who knows only the version written in history books, Dumbledore's achievements seem too impressive to ever be matched. Meanwhile, Harry is full of doubts about his own abilities.

But of course Dumbledore is only human. What could one expect of a person who likes chamber music, tenpin bowling, and lemon drops? He must have had all the same doubts as Harry when he was young—maybe more. History books record only part of the story. (Trading cards even less!) We know he makes mistakes, like hiring Gilderoy Lockhart to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. Had Dumbledore been all-knowing, he would have seen through Lockhart. But no one can be expected to know everything.



It's possible—even likely—that Dumbledore has a larger plan for the defeat of Voldemort. That design could very well call for a one-on-one duel between himself and the Dark Lord, as a prelude to a final conflict between Voldemort and Harry. In any case, he appears to know more secrets than he has divulged so far, and will reveal his intentions only on his own schedule. For instance, he has never explained how Voldemort knew it was so important to attack Harry, even though Harry was only a year old.

Whatever role Dumbledore plays, we can be sure that a crucial lesson for Harry on the road to becoming a mature wizard is to see him as human, flawed like everyone else despite being deservedly revered. Only then will Harry be able to see his own character and accomplishments as equally admirable.

See also:

Hogwarts
Potter, Harry
Voldemort