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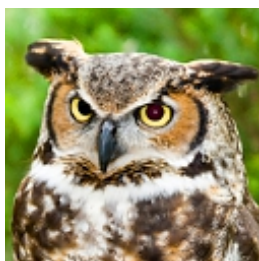
“Harry Potter” author may face plagiarism trial.  
What is the precise meaning of plagiarism?

October 15, 2010

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This week a British [judge](#) refused to dismiss a [plagiarism](#) lawsuit against best-selling author [J.K. Rowling](#). The claims against the wildly successful creator of “[Harry Potter](#)” say that she stole ideas from an obscure fantasy book. The judge said that a proper hearing should be held to consider the matter.

Is [plagiarism](#) simply copying words? Or is it more complicated than that?

The dictionary [defines](#) plagiarism as “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.”

(Before we leave “[Harry Potter](#)” behind, have you ever wondered if there really is something called a “[hallow](#),” and why they might be deadly? [Click here to learn what “hallow” means in the real world](#). Also, what’s the non-“Potter” source of “[muggle](#)?”)

Plagiarism, then, is not just lifting sentences from another writer’s work and claiming them as your own. If a writer duplicates the ideas of another, it too may fall under the definition of the dreaded “P Word.” Plagiarism can be avoided if writers dutifully credit their sources.

The word comes from the Latin [plagiarus](#), which means “kidnapper.”

The Roman poet [Martial](#) first used the word in the context of stealing another’s literary work. He claimed that another poet had “kidnapped his verses.” (“[Kidnap](#)” has nothing to do with taking a nap. Check out [where the “nap” in “kidnap” comes from, here](#).)

Interestingly, up until the 18th century, plagiarism in Europe was not considered fraudulent behavior. In fact, copying the masters was encouraged, and originality was rarely considered praiseworthy.

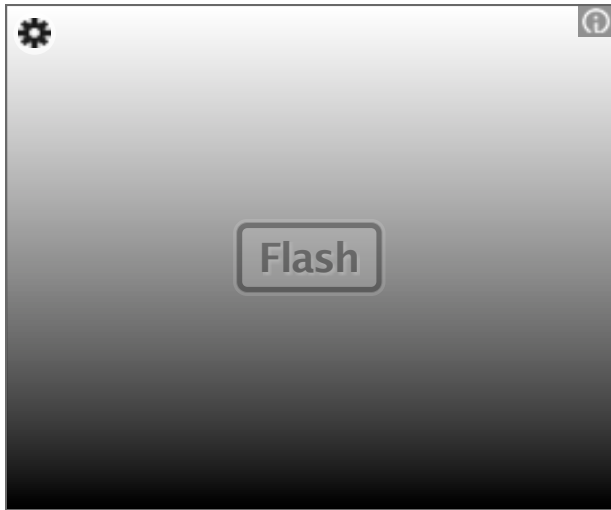
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smithereens

small pieces; bits. ...

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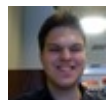
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