***Characters***

**Harry Potter**

Harry Potter is the main character of the story. He is born a wizard to parents who are also magical, James, a wizard, and Lilly, a witch. His father is killed by Lord Voldemort, a dark wizard. His mother is also killed by Voldemort while trying to protect Harry from him. He is famous in the wizarding world because he has survived Voldemort's spell of death. He is sent to live with his mother's sister and her family upon the death of his parents. They treat Harry terribly for many years, and he is unloved and alone in the world. He finds out he is a wizard on the dawn of his eleventh birthday when he is sent to Hogwarts School of Magic. It is here that he learns about his true past and is shown understanding.

**Ron Weasley**

Ron becomes Harry's friend on the train ride to Hogwarts School. He comes from a very large family. His twin brothers also attend Hogwarts as does one of his older brothers, Percy. He has six siblings all together, two who have grown up and left home, the three who attend Hogwarts and a younger sister, Ginny, who is too young to go to school yet. His family is very close, and both of his parents are magical. He is rather poor because of the size of his family and his father's low-paying job with the Ministry of Magic. However, they are a happy family, and the love they have for each other is evident. He becomes Harry's closest friend and trusted confidant.

**Hermione Granger**

Hermione is a very smart and hard-working young witch with Muggle-born parents, who are both dentists. She is initially seen as a know-it-all and annoys Harry and Ron with her stern, owlish ways. She becomes a friend to the boys after they go through a harrowing experience together, and the three soon become inseparable. She is quite handy since she knows many spells and facts about magic.

**Neville Longbottom**

Neville is another member of Gryffindor and has become a distant fourth in the central group of three in the story. He pops up to help Harry, Ron, and Hermione on occasion and is a meek and mild boy. He is teased often by other students, particularly Draco Malfoy. He lives with his overbearing witch grandmother because both of his parents are dead, making him an orphan. He and Harry share that common bond.

**Draco Malfoy**

Draco is Harry's nemesis and a rather nasty and arrogant boy. He is fond of telling everyone that he is a "pure blood" wizard. Both of his parents are magical and obviously very rich and affluent. He is a member of Slytherin House and has two bully friends, Crabby and Goyle who guard him where ever he goes. He lives to make Ron, Harry, and Hermione miserable. He is very jealous of Harry because of his fame, talent, and good luck. His family is reputed to have been "Death Eaters" or Voldemort's followers before he vanished. They came forward after his disappearance claiming a spell was cast on them; however, not many believe this story.

**Headmaster Dumbledore**

Albus Dumbledore is a very wise, smart, and humorous wizard. He is the head of Hogwarts school. He is the same wizard who takes Harry to live with the Dursleys to keep him safe and uninfluenced by his fame in the wizarding world. Even though he does not appear much in the middle of the story, he casts a strong presence throughout. It is the Headmaster who gives Harry the Invisibility cloak at Christmas. He seems to be guiding and testing Harry along the way through his first year. He also seems to understand how strong and amazing Harry is to have survived Voldemort and the Dursleys.

**Professor Snape**

Snape is a wizard who is described as a lanky and oily looking malcontent. He is the head of Slytherin House and the Potions teacher. He has a deep dislike for Harry. Harry's father and Snape attended Hogwarts together and had a relationship similar to that of Draco and Harry. He is Harry's prime suspect in his search to find who is trying to steal the Sorcerer's Stone.

**Professor Quirrell**

The new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He wears a turban on his head at all times and has an awful stutter. He also seems to be very meek and mild in personality, however, Quirrell is not what he seems.

**Professor McGonagall**

McGonagall is the Head of Gryffindor and the Tabby Cat who sits on the wall outside the Dursleys on the night Harry is left on their doorstep. She is very stern and does not play favorites unless Quidditch is involved.

**Hagrid**

Hagrid is described as a giant-sized man. He is Hogwarts' Gamekeeper and is fascinated with magical creatures. He loves Harry and is the one who delivered him from his parents' burned house to the Dursleys. He attended Hogwarts also but got into some trouble while there and had his wand taken from him and snapped in two. He is banned from practicing magic ever again, but he manages to do a bit with the aid of an umbrella.

After his expulsion, Dumbledore Hagrid stay at Hogwarts and appoints him Gamekeeper and provides him with his own house on the grounds. He is very loyal to Dumbledore, and likewise, the Headmaster trusts Hagrid completely.

**Uncle Vernon**

Vernon is Petunia's Muggle husband. Harry's mother was his sister-in-law. He is very stern, rigid, and closed minded. He hates the fact that he must care for Harry and is stingy and mean to him. He does everything he can to keep Harry from becoming a wizard. He hates wizards and witches and sees their lives as strange and frightening.

**Aunt Petunia**

Petunia is Harry's Aunt. She is his mother's sister. She treats Harry like dirt and also cannot stand to have to raise him. He is a burden to her, and she could not stand her own sister when she was alive. Always jealous of her, she disapproved of her life, and made sure to keep her distance from her and her family. She has overindulged her only son to the point of turning him into a spoiled bully who has no respect or manners.

**Dudley**

Dudley is the prodigal son of Vernon and Petunia. He is a fat, lazy, spoiled bully who tortures his cousin constantly. Underneath it all, like his father, he is a coward and a fool having no interest in anything but himself and his own gain. He is Harry's nemesis in the Muggle world. He is not very bright.

**Lord Voldemort**

Voldemort is the dark wizard who killed many in the wizarding community and caused great grief and darkness during his rise to power. He is called "you-know-who" by many who are afraid to say his name out loud. He kills Harry's father, James, and in an attempt to kill Harry, also kills Harry's mother, Lilly. When he turns his spell on Harry, however, the spell rebounds on him and vanquishes him. He leaves Harry with a lightening bolt scar on his forehead.

**Objects/Places**

**The Sorcerer's Stone**

The Sorcerer's Stone was created by Albus Dumbledore's partner Nicolas Falmal. It is a small red ball that can turn any metal into gold and also creates and elixir that when drunk grants eternal life to the drinker. The Sorcerer’s Stone of the novel’s title epitomizes how power can easily corrupt people, particularly those who are already hungry for power and have selfish leanings. The Sorcerer’s Stone is a rare and infinitely valuable object that can turn any metal into gold, and perhaps more temptingly, can create the Elixir of Life, which makes the drinker immortal. This makes the Stone an incredibly powerful object, and as such, it becomes an object of fixation for [**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who), who is also obsessed with gaining eternal life. Voldemort’s return to power largely hinge on his ability to obtain the Stone, as he tells [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter) that it will allow him to regain a body of his own. The quest for the Stone and for unbridled power allows Voldemort to corrupt [**Professor Quirrell**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-quirrell) and enlist him as a follower (Quirrell essentially becomes Voldemort’s host body), even though this quest eventually leads to Quirrell’s death. Harry, on the other hand, tries to gain the Stone not for his own power, but rather to prevent others from misusing it. Thus, the Stone intensifies the greed and desire that fester in those who already flirt with the idea of having absolute power, while demonstrating how those who are more humble and virtuous (like Harry, [**Hagrid**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/rubeus-hagrid), [**Ron**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/ron-weasley), and Hermione) remain untempted by its power.

**The Mirror of Erised**

One who looks into the Mirror of Erised sees his or her deepest desires. The mirror was used to hide the Sorcerer's Stone. To retrieve the stone, the person looking into the mirror has to desire having it but never using it.

# The Mirror of Erised, which Harry encounters on accident one night, hidden in a random room, symbolizes how intense, emotionally charged desires can be dangerous. “Erised” is “desire” spelled backwards, and the Mirror fittingly shows the person peering in it the deepest desire of his or her hearts. For Harry, an orphan without a loving family, this means he sees his parents, [**Lily**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/lily-potter) and [**James**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/james-potter), in the Mirror, as well as the rest of his extended family. While it initially seems innocent and even beneficial for Harry to be able to interact with his fallen family to some extent, the novel warns that even virtuous desires can prove harmful. Indeed, Harry quickly grows obsessed with the Mirror, ignoring virtually everything else in his life and returning three nights in a row (risking punishment for being out of bed) in order to stare into the Mirror’s reflection, as if in a trance. [**Dumbledore**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/albus-dumbledore) joins Harry on the third night, cautioning him that wizards have been driven insane by what they see in the Mirror, either entranced by the image or maddened by wondering if what it shows is possible. Thus, even though Harry’s desires are pure—he understandably misses his family and wants to see them—his deep yearning for something that can never happen prevents him from living in the present.

**Quidditch**

Quidditch is the wizarding world's national game. It is played in the air on broomsticks. Each team must score goals and defend its side of the "field." The Snitch is a winged golden ball that flies about the field during game play. The seeker, which is Harry's position, must capture the Snitch to win the game for their side. If the Snitch is captured at any point during the game by the team that is ahead, that team automatically wins since it adds 150 points to its score. Also, if the Snitch is captured by either side before any points are scored, that side automatically wins the game.

**Bertie Bott's Beans**

Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans are jelly beans in every flavor. Some of these include, ear wax, buttered popcorn, vomit, chocolate, toast, baked bean, strawberry, curry, grass, coffee, marmalade, spinach, pepper, liver, and tripe.

**Wizard Cards**

Wizard Cards are similar to baseball cards. Wizard Cards are collected by kids of the magical world and have famous witches and wizards on them with their picture and name on the front and a bio on the back. They come with Chocolate Frogs.

**Chocolate Frogs**

Chocolate candy shaped like a frog.

**Gringotts Bank**

Gringotts is the Bank of the wizarding community. It is run by Goblins and is very safe and secure.

**The Forbidden Forest**

The forest at the edge of the school grounds that is inhabited by many unknown creatures. Hagrid is very familiar with the forest and those that dwell there.

**The Forbidden Wing**

This is the section of the school that Headmaster Dumbledore tells the students that they must stay out of for the term. This is where the Sorcerer's Stone is hidden.

**The Forbidden Section of the Library**

The section of Hogwarts library that is off limits to students, unless given special permission. It contains books on the Dark Arts of magic.

**Hogwart's**

School of Witchcraft and Wizardry headed by Albus Dumbledore. The school was started by four great wizards and witches. Their names were Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw. The four houses of the school are named after the four founders.

**Diagon Alley**

Wizards and witches' strip mall.

**The Leaky Cauldron**

Wizards and witches' inn and pub; also the entry way from the Muggle world to Diagon Alley.

# The Invisibility Cloak:

The rare and valuable Invisibility Cloak, which makes the wearer invisible, represents the necessity of breaking the rules in order to do what is right. The Cloak belonged to [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter)’s father, [**James**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/james-potter), but then came into [**Dumbledore**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/albus-dumbledore)’s possession after James died, and Dumbledore is the one who anonymously gifts it to Harry. By giving Harry the cloak, Dumbledore is essentially encouraging—or at least allowing—Harry to break the rules when he feels that it is necessary. Harry dons the cloak for the first time when tries to go to the Restricted Section of the library late at night to find out information about [**Nicolas Flamel**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters), believing that information about Flamel is the key to figuring out—and protecting—whatever is under the trapdoor in the forbidden corridor. Harry and [**Hermione**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/hermione-granger) also use the cloak when they drop off Norbert with [**Charlie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters)’s friends so that Hagrid won’t get in trouble for keeping an illegal dragon. And, in the ultimate instance of breaking the rules for the sake of doing what’s right, Harry, [**Ron**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/ron-weasley), and Hermione don the cloak on the night that they try to prevent [**the Sorcerer’s Stone**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-sorcerer-s-stone) from being stolen.

**Setting**

In some ways, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is a traditional English boarding school located in the fairy-green countryside well beyond London. The meddlesome caretaker, Mr. Filch, and his cat, Mrs. Norris, carefully monitor the building, and the grounds are well kept by the beloved Keeper of Keys and Grounds (and Hogwarts drop-out) Rubeus Hagrid. During the long-standing tradition of the Sorting Ceremony, first-year Hogwarts students are separated into four houses (Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin), each with their own proud history, alumni, and secret traditions. The faculty are respected scholars and authority figures removed from the emotional and interpersonal experiences of their students. The curriculum is carefully structured and deliberately traditional, and residents take classes by year and with students from other houses. Points are given and taken away for academic achievement, behavior and deportation, and athletic competition—all in an effort to win the much-coveted house cup at the end-ofyear feast.

And yet, Hogwarts is a world all its own, a non-Muggle world. Students arrive by a train taken from platform nine and threequarters at King's Cross station. During the journey they snack on candies—Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans (including "spinach and liver and tripe"), Cauldron Cakes, Licorice Wands, and Pumpkin Pasties—which they have bought with Sickles and Knuts ("[s]eventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle"). They amuse themselves by trading cards of famous witches and wizards (Professor Dumbledore among them) from packages of Chocolate Frogs. The campus is located inside a moat and the building is a castle.

The house dormitories are in the four round towers located at the corners of the building and accessed by secret passwords that open portrait holes. The Sorting Ceremony stars a Sorting Cap that reads the new students' minds before assigning them to the appropriate house. Not only do the portraits have a frustrating tendency to visit other paintings in the castle, thereby foiling the adventures of many an erring student, Mr. Filch and Mrs. Norris are not the only "caretakers" to avoid. Peeves the poltergeist will insist on reporting students out of bed after hours, and the other ghosts (Nearly Headless Nick and the Bloody Baron among them) have loyalties to certain houses. The faculty members also have their allegiances— as well as curious (possibly threatening) involvements with the adult, magic world.

Course work is difficult and requires much study, whether dry and boring like History of Magic with Professor Binns, "complex and dangerous" like Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall, or disappointingly uninformative like Defense Against the Dark Arts with Professor Quirrell. The sport of choice is Quidditch, a challenging game "that's sort of like basketball on broomsticks with six hoops."

The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is set in a comfortingly traditional and delightfully off-beat way—much like the apprentice magic world of the Hogwarts students as compared to the adult magic world for which they are preparing, or like the whole of the magic world as compared to the Muggle world. Accepted Hogwarts students walk through a wall in order to reach platform nine and three-quarters at King's Cross station. Tapping a brick behind the Leaky Cauldron pub three times with your magic wand will open it to Diagon Alley, the shopping center of the magic world, home to Eeylops Owl Emporium, Ollivanders wand shop, and Gringotts the wizard's bank run by goblins. Diagon Alley is also the only place in London where a prospective student can get everything he or she needs, from the uniform (such as "[o]ne pair of protective gloves [dragon hide or similar]") to course books (like "Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger") and other equipment ("1 cauldron [pewter, standard size 2]"). The Ministry of Magic works to ensure that Muggles remain ignorant of the actuality of the magic world because '"everyone'd be wantin' magic solutions to their problems .. . we're best left alone'." And the commonplace systems of the Muggle world amaze and confound witches and wizards, for example, [p]assersby stared a lot... as they walked through the little town to the station. Harry couldn't blame them .. . he kept pointing at perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and saying loudly, "See that Harry? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?"

The layering of experiences and perspectives in Rowling's text work to keep the reader both grounded and aware. As such, the reader enjoys a setting that has been wonderfully and completely imagined, described, and realized by Rowling in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

**Social Sensitivity**

In a television interview aired in July of 2000—just prior to the release of the muchanticipated fourth Harry Potter book—eminent children's and young adult literature critic and scholar Jack Zipes described Rowling's fiction as formulaic and sexist.

Because Zipes was not given the chance to fully support his thesis within the format of the televised sound bite, any response to his thesis must be based, in part, on conjecture.

Nevertheless, that Rowling's Harry Potter books should be described as formulaic is problematic. The "Harry Potter" books are, after all, a series, and, at least thus far, the action takes place during the academic year.

Aside from some scattered highlights of Harry's summer holidays, the plot of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone follows the unchanging rhythm of a highly structured educational calendar. While an academic year provides a useful template by which Rowling may structure her fiction, the description of such a template as formulaic seems unfair and a refusal to acknowledge just how reliant a young adult audience is on the academic calendar—or how useful it is to the plot structure of British fantasy.

Indeed, Lewis Carroll's Alice has her adventures while she is not engaged with her studies in both Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, and throughout C. S. Lewis' The Narnia Chronicles, his young protagonists travel to and from Narnia while on vacation from school.

In terms of Rowling's potential sexism, it may be likewise argued that, as she follows and departs from a traditional academic structure in her novels, so too does Rowling follow and depart from traditional gender roles. Mrs. Dursley characterizes the standard housewife in the opening pages of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, while Mr. Dursley presents us with a mock-image of the bowler-capped British businessman. But it should be noted that Mrs. and Mr. Dursley are not beloved characters (certainly not characters after whom young readers would be inclined to model themselves), and that other characters do not always line up according to standard expectations of gender: Professor McGonagall is a witch and a teacher to be respected and admired, Madame Hooch coaches the (co-ed) Quidditch team, Hermione Granger is as capable of getting herself out (or in) trouble as Ron Weasley or Harry himself; Professor Dumbledore is a homebody, Professor Quirrell is a weak and fearful wizard, and Hagrid has undeniably strong mothering instincts. Ultimately, that some of Rowling's characters inhabit traditional gender roles while others do not may be the best, and most elegant, argument against the enforcement of those roles.

And yet, the defense of Rowling's fiction as formulaic or sexist does raise some interesting considerations regarding social concerns in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

Because the novel follows the British school year, there are few—if any—references to non-Christian faiths and practices. Thus, the witches and wizards at Hogwarts celebrate Christmas—even despite their supposedly pagan history. Harry is able to afford Hogwarts because of the large inheritance left to him by his parents, a detail that can serve to example a limited representation of economic stratification. Due to his last name and his red hair, we might assume that Ron Weasley is of Irish descent; such an assumption would then lead us to argue that the depiction Ron's family, poor and well-populated, reveals a prejudice against Irish Catholics in Rowling, Great Britain, or both. Similarly, while several referenced characters represent other races and ethnicities (Lee Jordan, for example, is black), the main protagonists of the novel, the characters in whom readers are most invested, are white.

Considering the anxiety that contemporary audiences and critics have regarding the fair and equal representation of peoples in literature—and particularly in literature for children and young adults—these observations are both legitimate and unavoidable. But, too, readers must consider the transcendent possibilities of fantasy novels.

If one of the benefits of fantasy is to remove the reader from an oppressive social reality, and thereby to offer a lens through which he or she might critique and resolve social injustices, critics cannot expect fantasy to perform the same instructional modeling as contemporary realism. This is not an excuse or a justification, and it is not because fantasy does not mirror and model life as does all literature (and all art). It is because, as a genre, fantasy behaves according to its own history, tradition, and purpose. Though it is appropriate to expect contemporary fantasy to fairly and accurately represent social diversity, a more appropriate concern for fantasy may be how well it models the readers' ability to see themselves within their social system and how convincingly it argues for their deserved equality. That Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone does, indeed, reflect and address social diversity, and that Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone inspires both young and old readers to see their worlds in new and different ways (ways that may result in social activism and change), offers a strong argument for our acknowledgment of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone as fantastic literature worthy of a place in the canon.

**Literary Qualities**

Whether because they offer a natural metaphor for coming-of-age audiences transitioning into the adult world, or because—either in cause or effect—they are generally considered most appropriate for the developmental phases and developing psyche of the young adult, the canonized classics of British fantasy traditionally feature young adult protagonists. "The Sword in the Stone," book one of T. H. White's aforementioned The Once and Future King (1965), searches back through history, legend, and the author's own boyhood, to expand the Arthurian legend by contributing the story of Arthur's young adulthood.

Appropriately, White, a teacher of young adults, expands Arthurian legend by describing what the young Wart learned in his lessons with Merlin in order to explain the genius of Wart's later kingship.

But T. H. White is simply one of the more recent authors to artfully and respectfully redefine the traditional parameters of the fantasy genre. He follows such great masters as Lewis Carroll and C. S. Lewis and such beloved characters as Alice Liddell and Lucy Prevensie. In Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1866) and Through the Looking-Glass (1872), Carroll describes a series of experiences that mature Alice both emotionally and intellectually in order to prepare her for life as a logical, reasoning, and kind-hearted woman. In the seven books that make up C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956), Lucy and the Prevensie children (as well as Polly Plumber, Digory Kirke, Eustace Scrubb, and Jill Pole) accomplish a series of moral tasks that underscore Lewis' and the novels' Christian sentiment and earn the characters a place in heaven.

In accordance with, and in honor of, this proud literary history, Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone begins the story of Harry Potter, age eleven, apprentice wizard and self-doubting hero—a novel that, and a protagonist who, has been inspired by the motifs of classic British fantasy. Clearly, Rowling aspires to further define, and to excel within, the genre of fantasy. In her general examination of the young hero's mentor and his acquisition of wisdom, Rowling's Harry Potter resembles White's young Arthur. Though not privately tutored by Hogwarts headmaster Professor Dumbledore, Harry nevertheless is trained within his school and according to his pedagogic system. And it is at crucial times in the narrative of his training that Harry is given the opportunity to consult with Dumbledore: when he develops a dangerous preoccupation with the Mirror of Erised, when he must negotiate the prudent use of the invisibility cloak, and after he has successfully (and for the second time) defeated "He Who Shall Not Be Named." Additionally, Dumbledore resembles Merlin both personally and physically; he is an avid lover of books and wisdom who wears flowing robes and a long, white beard. This resemblance suggests not only how much White's master wizard has influenced— and continues to influence—audience expectation, but how that influence has determined Rowling's use of classic fantasy motifs.

Rowling also credits Lewis Carroll and C. S. Lewis through her description, and use, of a reflective device and a train ride to achieve passage into a fantastic other-world.

In a manner that suggests a parallel to the rites of passage of young adulthood, Harry Potter boards a train at platform nine and three quarters at King's Cross station. Harry's trip will bring him to the wondrously magical and separate (though whimsically and pointedly parallel) world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. After many railway trips, many happy adventures, and the conclusive suggestion that they might be outgrowing such adventures, the Prevensie children of Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia access the kingdom of heaven when they are killed in a train wreck. In Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass, Alice speeds through the countryside of her own parallel world, the reversed world of "nonsense" on the other side of a mirror, while she is engaged in a giant game of chess that she must win in order to return transformed and victorious to the "real," that is adult, world. Harry passes the preparatory "test" of the Mirror of Erised (with a great deal of help and guidance from Professor Dumbledore), gaining the strength and confidence necessary to help him (along with Ron Weasley) face the challenge of the giant chess game towards the end of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Alice's success in the chess game, involving the maturity required to eschew the paradoxes (bureaucracy) of the Red Queen and her supporters (political, governmental systems), informs Rowling's description of Harry's and Ron's actions during the giant Chess game, as well as our perceptions of them. Chess, a game of logic requiring patience and experience, tests and proves both the capabili ties of reason and fantasy, and Harry and his friends must further establish themselves as heroes by exercising both of these capabilities—much in the way the audience does in the act of reading, in the act of entering a reflective art form.

Thus, as a fellow reader and creating author, in book one of the "Harry Potter" series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Rowling gives due credit to the precedents of her literary forebears and extends a hand to those writers who may hope to follow.

And the readers and keepers of the tradition of classic, British fantasy, would do well to acknowledge agreement in Rowling's debt as well as the reader's debt to Rowling.

**Themes**

**Good Versus Evil**

This theme displays itself throughout the book. The first time it comes up is with the comparison of Harry and Dudley. While Dudley can hardly be considered evil at such a young age, he certainly shows potential for it in the future. Harry, on the other hand, even with his difficult circumstances, including loneliness and lack of attention and affection, remains humble, kind, and honorable. Dudley also seems to lack intelligence and, therefore, humor. Harry seems to possess an intelligence far superior to Dudley's, which is why he is often able to use his sense of humor to take his life in stride and not let it defeat him.

Voldemort is the epitome of evil while Harry's parents are seen as the symbol of goodness. Voldemort seeks to destroy all that is right in the world so that he may obtain power. Harry's parents are self-sacrificing and offer their own lives to save that of their son. It is because of Lilly Potter's love for her son that Voldemort cannot hurt him, and it becomes his ultimate undoing. One who has no propensity for love cannot understand its power, which is stronger than any magical spell.

At home, Harry's evil nemeses is Dudley; at school it is Draco Malfoy. Again, Draco is very young to be considered evil, yet there are levels of evil. Draco has a mean heart and a very cold disposition. It is also obvious, however, that his arrogance hides a cowardly boy beneath who is afraid. His fear and ignorance are what drive him to treat others badly. Unlike Dudley, who is not smart enough to understand that his actions are often quite evil, Draco is intelligent, so he has the ability to think clearly about what he does. He makes the conscious decision to harm others.

**The Power of Love**

It is the power of love that keeps Harry alive twice during the plot of the book. The first time is when his mother's ultimate love for him not only keeps Voldemort from killing him but vanquishes the Dark Lord with its power.

Later in the book when Quirrell tries to kill Harry, his hands begin to blister whenever he touches him. When Harry reaches out to grab his face, his face starts to blister. Voldemort is possessing Quirrell's body, so it is that ultimate love that remains in Harry that causes Quirrell/Voldemort to be harmed. It is the lack of ability to comprehend love that holds his enemies at bay.

**Bravery**

Harry, even though he clearly wants to give up to desperation at his living circumstances, hangs in there and tries to see the positive side of things. He has adapted to his environment and manages to not let it defeat him. There are many incidents within the book that allow this skill, which Harry has learned from living with the Dursleys, to help him surmount obstacles. He is brave in the face of those who seek to diminish him, refusing to be beaten down by their ignorance and hatred.

His bravery reveals itself many times throughout the story. It is more obvious in the more grandiose scenes in the book, such as those with the Troll, Quirrell, Voldemort, and Snape. There are other, however, more subtle acts of bravery displayed in the story. For instance, when he first meets Hagrid, he is frightened by his imposing form, yet he gathers his courage and sees past the fear to allow Hagrid to help him. His reaction to Draco Malfoy at the Robe shop can also be seen as brave. Even though he knows no one except Hagrid and is facing uncertainty, he does not simply go along with Malfoy's obvious prejudice and ignorance to simply make a friend. He knows right away that Draco is someone he has no desire to know better.

Several times it is in the defense of others that he shows his brave spirit. When Malfoy insults Ron, Harry immediately stands up for his friend. Also, when Malfoy attempts to taunt Neville by hiding his Rememberall, he does not think about what he is doing; he simply acts to defend his friend.

Many other characters display bravery in the book as well. First Lilly, Harry's mother, jumps in front of her son to save him. Ron runs with Harry into the girls' bathroom to save Hermione from the troll. Ron also sacrifices himself on the chess board so that Harry can stop the thief of the Sorcerer's Stone. Hermione overcomes her fear of not being perfect and lies to Professor McGonagall to protect her friends. She also helps Harry get Norbert out of the school before Draco can turn Hagrid in. Hermione also accompanies Harry to the very last chamber to help him stop the thief of the stone.

**Themes/Characters**

Like the setting of the novel, Rowling's themes and characters are both traditional and off-beat. British to the core, the themes and characters of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone contain a delightful blend of classic fantasy and Victorian sentiment minus the tendency towards what a contemporary audience might consider saccharine.

Ideally—and at their best—both classic British fantasy and Victorian literature enjoy the great themes of love and death, of good and evil. This is true of Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, wherein the title character, our noble hero, having been orphaned and overshadowed by a cruel and ignorant world, continues to battle issues of class and conscience even after he is delivered to a better, more accepting and acceptable, place.

It is this better place, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the magic world more generally, that inspires and insists Harry learn from his orphaned status—that he grow into his own great person rather than be beaten down for being different and for having fewer "normal" advantages. Understandably preoccupied as the orphan is with death, Harry's hero's adventure suitably involves the quest to find, to recover, and to restore the Sorcerer's Stone by which the Elixir of Life can be manufactured and immortality achieved. It is a dangerous tool in the wrong hands, and Harry risks his own life in order to ensure the quality of the lives of others.

In the end, Harry Potter accepts and promotes what Professor Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts and co-creator of the Sorcerer's Stone, so eloquently explains: "to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." With this acceptance comes additional emotional support.

Harry's parents are dead, yes, but this is more of a shift in fate than it is an irreparable loss. In her characteristic layering style, Rowling points out that not only have Harry's parents left the gift of Harry behind, but they have left Harry with a gift. At the novel's end, when Harry asks Professor Dumbledore why Quirrell, the evil wizard Voldemort's accomplice, could not touch him, Dumbledore replies: Your mother died to save you. If there's one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin.

Thus Harry is not only scarred literally and figuratively by his orphaned status, he is also, alternatively, positively marked by it. And this is something that we hope the young adult audience, the intended audience for Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, might learn to recognize as a theme in the real magic of their own lives.

It is the students of Hogwarts, the fictional contemporaries and peers of the intended audience, who demonstrate that these great themes—love and death, good and evil—are part and parcel of every life lived. Whether that student be the quintessential bully, as is Draco Malfoy (and his henchmen Crabbe and Goyle), or the overweight, clumsy, and somewhat untalented but nevertheless good-hearted Neville Longbottom, each individual's psyche and personality is shaped by how they perceive and respond to the great themes in their own lives. In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Rowling's characters are complex, dimensional, and interesting, because they perceive and respond to the signature notes of these themes in their own lives.

Indeed, the bully Draco Malfoy suffers from feelings of inferiority due, in part, by the success, expectations, and snobbery of his father. Neville Longbottom, raised by his grandmother and unpopular for the resulting lack of style this upbringing has caused, carries his own, similar yet distinct, sense of illegitimacy. Ron Weasley is one of seven children (including five boys ahead of him), all of whom have met with great success while studying at Hogwarts—be it as head boy, Quidditch captain, house prefect, or wildly popular pranksters. Hermione Granger negotiates the stress of being a Type-A overachiever from a Muggle family.

The adults of the magic world, too, are not above the struggle to commandeer their lives and worlds—a facet of Rowling's fiction that may account for the literary success of the Harry Potter books in the real, adult world. Professor Snape struggles with the guilt and frustration of not being able to repay his arch-rival, Harry's (now dead) father, for saving his life. Rubeus Hagrid has been shamed by being expelled from Hogwarts, by having had his wand broken in half and forbidden to use magic thereby leaving him an obvious misfit in the Muggle world as well as one marginalized within the non-Muggle world. Even the wise Professor Dumbledore, a near-perfect man and wizard, must come to terms with the foibles and disappointments that color the human experience. When asked what he sees in the Mirror of Erised—a bewitched mirror that not only bears the inscription, "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi" (I show not your face but your heart's desire), but also reveals Harry's family to him and shows Ron Weasley himself as head boy holding the Quidditch cup—Professor Dumbledore replies: "'I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woolen socks. . . . One can never have enough socks Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn't get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books'."

However tongue-in-cheek it may be, Professor Dumbledore's remark nevertheless speaks a greater truth: in recognizing our great ability to want what we do not have, we just might stumble across an appreciation for what we have been given. It is, ultimately, a restatement of what our young protagonist has learned from the loss of his parents and one that benefits both Rowling's characters and audience—young or old.

# Magic, difference and belonging:

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* is the first novel in a seven-part series centering on protagonist [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter) Potter, who discovers that he is a wizard when he is eleven years old. The series tracks an epic battle between good and evil in the wizarding world, but the first book is, in its essence, a coming-of-age story. Harry spends his early life feeling different from the non-magical people (“Muggles”) around him, though he doesn’t know why. It is only when he discovers he is a wizard and is introduced to the other wizards and the magical world around him, that he is able to grow and feel confident. The magic, then, is not just an exciting part of Rowling’s fantastical world, but also a metaphor for Harry’s coming into his own. Harry’s transition from the non-magical “Muggle” world to the magical world parallels his transition from the isolation and dejection of feeling different to the beauty and excitement of finding a place where he belongs.

Harry’s early life in the Muggle world is marked by isolation and rejection; his [**Aunt Petunia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/petunia-dursley) and [**Uncle Vernon**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/vernon-dursley) make him feel that he is profoundly different from other people and punish him for that difference. Harry’s parents, [**Lily**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/lily-potter) and [**James**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/james-potter) (who are a witch and wizard), die when he is just a year old when they are killed by a dark wizard named [**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who), and subsequently Harry is raised by his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon (who are Muggles). They treat his magic as dangerous and refuse even to tell Harry that he has these magical abilities. When they literally try to fit him into their “normal” life, Harry’s magic comes out in full force and he is often punished as a result. One day, Aunt Petunia tries to cut Harry’s hair to her own liking, making him almost bald except for his bangs. When his hair grows back immediately the next day, she punishes him by making him remain in his cupboard for a week. In other words, Aunt Petunia isolates Harry for what makes him different—his magical abilities, which are still unknown to him—making him feel worthless and like he doesn’t belong. When Harry is included—a rare occurrence—on a trip to the zoo for his cousin Dudley’s birthday, he finds that he is able to communicate with a snake in a glass display. He then unintentionally makes the glass disappear, allowing the snake to escape. Harry is severely disciplined and again made to stay in the cupboard for a week without any meals. Later, Vernon insists to Aunt Petunia that when they took him in as a baby, they swore they would “stamp out that dangerous nonsense.” In referring to magic as “dangerous nonsense” that needs to be “stamp[ed] out,” Vernon firmly positions Harry’s difference—his magical ability—as something inherently evil that needs to be quashed. Vernon and Petunia’s displeasure is then passed on to Dudley as well, who makes sure Harry is miserable at school by preventing him from making friends, often chasing him or picking on him. These treatments sum up an idea that Harry has felt through his whole life: the odd occurrences that seem to mark a difference in him signify that he doesn’t fit in.

When a wizard named [**Hagrid**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/rubeus-hagrid) visits Harry and informs him that he is a wizard, Harry’s understanding of himself and the world around him drastically changes. Magic represents a new world to which Harry finds that he truly belongs, and one that he starts to grow into over the course of the book. J.K. Rowling’s wizarding world is not an entirely separate, mythical place, but one that is woven into the fabric of the non-magical world. Hagrid takes Harry on a shopping trip in London, and when Hagrid taps on a brick in a nondescript back alley, the wall pulls away to reveal the magical Diagon Alley, a wizarding shopping area where Hagrid gives Harry a basic knowledge about what his magical abilities mean. As Harry is initiated into this new world, it transforms Harry’s difference from “dangerous nonsense,” as Uncle Vernon put it, to something that makes him special. At Hogwarts, the wizarding school where children learn to harness their magic, the differences from regular school are many. Rather than math, science, and languages, Harry learns Charms, Herbology, Potions, and Transfiguration. The building itself is very different, as the staircases move on their own, ghosts flit about the hallways, and owls deliver the morning mail. “Harry had never even imagined such a strange and splendid place,” which implies that the things that make Hogwarts (and perhaps Harry himself) seem different or “strange” are also the things that make it “splendid.” Additionally, the magical Sorting Hat at Hogwarts places children into four different “Houses” based on their personalities and defining attributes. When Harry is placed into Gryffindor House, it literally gives him a sense of belonging, of joining a group of children that become his closest friends. On a broader scale, Hogwarts itself is a place for those who are different and don’t quite fit into the Muggle world. In other words, Harry essentially finds belonging by embracing rather than shying away from the magic that makes him different.

*The Sorcerer’s Stone* bears many touchstones of a classic coming-of-age story: Harry Potter is a neglected child who feels different and isolated from those around him. When he enters a new school and makes new friends, however, he sees how his differences give him the opportunity to feel as though he belongs. What sets Harry Potter apart is Rowling’s sly implication that being able to find that world—where one’s differences are celebrated—can literally be a magical thing.

# Love, Family and Friendship:

At the center of *The Sorcerer’s Stone* is the importance of love from both family and friends. Though [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter)’s parents, [**Lily**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/lily-potter) and [**James**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/james-potter), love him a great deal, they die when he is very young, and he is placed in the care of his [**Aunt Petunia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/petunia-dursley) and [**Uncle Vernon**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/vernon-dursley), Muggle relatives who treat him terribly. When he goes to school at Hogwarts, Harry gains a group of friends—primarily [**Ron**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/ron-weasley) and [**Hermione**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/hermione-granger)—who demonstrate that the love at the heart of friendship can be just as important as that at the heart of familial ties. Ultimately, as Harry learns about his magical abilities and tries to thwart the forces of evil in the wizarding world, Rowling argues that love, family, and friendship serve as forms of protection that help Harry to overcome whatever challenges come his way.

Through Lily and James’s sacrifices for their son, they demonstrate that family can be a life-saving source of love. Harry’s story starts in the aftermath of his parent’s death. When he is only a year old, an evil wizard named Voldemort goes to the Potter home in order to kill Lily and James. Both are killed trying to protect their son, but Lily’s sacrifice in particular prevents [**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who) from being able to kill Harry, as it is implied that this love gives him a kind of magical protection. Additionally, when he tries to kill Harry, Voldemort becomes incredibly weak and disappears. The sacrifice that Lily makes continues to protect him even later in his life. Harry comes face-to-face with Voldemort again at the end of the novel; he has returned, even though he is weak, by taking over the body of a Hogwarts professor named [**Quirrell**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-quirrell). Professor Quirrell is unable to touch Harry without being burned, which ultimately prevents him from being able to kill Harry. Dumbledore, the headmaster at Hogwarts, later reveals to Harry that Lily’s love is indeed what protected Harry and kept Quirrell from being able to touch him. Dumbledore explains that “to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever.” Thus, love becomes essentially the ultimate force for good and a weapon against evil.

While love is always a force for good in the novel, family is not always a conduit for love. Rowling provides a counterexample to James and Lily in the Dursleys, Harry’s unpleasant aunt and uncle, who demonstrate how family ties without love essentially constitute meaningless bonds. Harry’s Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon have absolutely no love for him and are hesitant to take him in as a baby in the first place. Over the first eleven years of his life, they make his living conditions horrendous by forcing him to live in a cupboard, giving him no possessions of his own, and essentially treating him as a servant in their home. Thus, even though family can be a source of love, when a child is not treated with love, it can make a child feel far from protected. Harry feels vulnerable and isolated in the only home he has ever known; as a result, he must find the familial love he is not getting from the Dursleys from other places.

Ultimately, friendships come to take the place of Harry’s family in terms of providing love, support, and protection. The friends that Harry makes at Hogwarts function as a kind of chosen family, as they allow him to feel loved, and, perhaps more importantly, help him to overcome challenges in his life. Even before Harry has officially started school, he meets a classmate named Ron on the train to Hogwarts. Harry confesses his fears that he won’t be good at school because he doesn’t know any magic. Ron immediately quells those fears, telling him that there “loads of people who come from Muggle [non-magic] families and they learn quick enough.” Harry in turn shares his candy with Ron on the train, demonstrating the mutually beneficial power of friendship. Ron and Harry, in turn, help another friend overcome a great challenge; when a troll is running loose at Hogwarts, they help to save another girl in their class, Hermione, from being killed by it. Buoyed by their ability to overcome this obstacle together, the three immediately form a tight-knit bond as a result—one that drives not only the rest of the plot of this book, but the rest of their seven years at Hogwarts. At the end of the novel, Harry is trying to prevent one of the professors, [**Snape**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-snape), from obtaining the Sorcerer’s Stone, which is a powerful object that can grant its bearer eternal life. The Stone is guarded by several rooms, each bearing a different obstacle. When Harry, Ron, and Hermione decide that the best way to protect the stone is by stealing it first, they work as a team to get past these challenges. Hermione is able to remember a key detail from Herbology to get past a set of vines that threatens to strangle them; she also gets past a tricky logic puzzle. Ron takes the lead on a chess game with living pieces, even sacrificing himself in order to let Harry and Hermione advance without him. Harry uses his flying skills to retrieve a key with wings, allowing them to pass through yet another door. Only together are they able to advance, and thus their love and friendship is ultimately what allows Harry to face Voldemort and conquer him once more.

The power of love is a thread that runs through all seven of the *Harry Potter* books, but Rowling’s argument concerning love is clear even from the very first pages of the very first novel in the series. Love allows Harry to live, and then ensures that he has the support he needs to fight off the forces of evil. Ultimately love becomes the definitive difference between Harry and Voldemort, and is the reason why good will always conquer evil.

Power, Greed and Desire:

For [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter) and his friends starting school at Hogwarts, magic comes with a certain degree of power: the ability to make a feather levitate, to turn a match into a needle, to fly on a broomstick. But Rowling also hints at what happens when adult wizards grow greedy for power and the dangerous ramifications of that desire. Thus, not only does Rowling associate greed and the desire for power with evil, but she also argues that even more innocent desires can be harmful, because they can lead to a destructive kind of greediness.

[**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who) is the prime example of how power and greed are dangerous, as the desire for power leads him to becoming the most evil wizard in history. In one of the book’s early chapters, Hagrid explains Voldemort’s backstory to Harry: decades earlier, Voldemort had wanted power and thus turned “as bad as you could go.” Those who stood up to him were killed—including Harry’s parents, [**Lily**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/lily-potter) and [**James**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/james-potter). Thus, the desire for power is immediately associated with evil. Voldemort is so powerful that wizards don’t even want to say his name, instead calling him “You-Know-Who” or “He-Who-Must-Not Be-Named,” demonstrating how power can breed fear. This fear, in turn, allows Voldemort to gain more power, as he enlists followers simply because people are afraid of him, or are enticed by the power that he has and want some of their own. Voldemort, having been inexplicably unable to kill Harry as a baby, disappears for eleven years, but he returns when Harry begins school at Hogwarts. He takes over the body of a professor, [**Quirrell**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-quirrell), and tries to steal [**the Sorcerer’s Stone**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-sorcerer-s-stone) in order to revive himself and eventually return to power. Quirrell himself also reinforces this association of power with evil. He tells Harry, “There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it.” Yet, because this statement is being spoken by a character who has been overtaken by an evil wizard, Rowling implies that this kind of philosophy only serves those who are evil.

While Voldemort is easily associated with greed and the desire for power, other characters also toy with the same feelings. Rowling shows how seemingly benign desires can bleed into greed, ultimately arguing that deep desires can be dangerous and ultimately lead to bad choices. Harry himself is tempted by intense desires; one day while roaming in the castle at Hogwarts, he finds [**the Mirror of Erised**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-mirror-of-erised) (“desire” spelled backwards). The Mirror’s reflection shows Harry with his parents next to him, and he is filled with an intense longing for them. He returns to the Mirror again and again, trying to see more of his late parents, until [**Dumbledore**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/albus-dumbledore) discovers him in front of the Mirror. Dumbledore tells Harry that the Mirror shows one’s innermost desires—which is why Harry sees his parents, since he’s never truly known them—but he also cautions Harry that many wizards have wasted their lives or have gone insane because of what they see in the Mirror of Erised. Through Dumbledore’s advice, Rowling demonstrates that desire and greed—even if the greed stems from a perfectly innocent and understandable place—can be dangerous, and must be approached with caution. Harry’s cousin [**Dudley**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/dudley-dursley) is another embodiment of greed. Dudley receives more presents from his parents each year, eats as much as he wants, and gets anything he asks for. Vernon and Petunia spoil Dudley with both material goods and attention as a way of loving him. They don’t intend to turn him into a repulsive person, but nonetheless their actions instill that greed in him. Even though he is not nearly as bad as Voldemort, Rowling thus reinforces the association she has created between greed and bad character.

If love is the driving good force in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, then power, greed, and desire serve as the primary forces of evil. Though characters are not always so black and white—even predominantly “good” characters can be tempted by these ideas—they are ultimately defined by their abilities to overcome dangerous desires and greediness.

# Humility and Self-sacrifice:

In contrast to the ideas of power, greed, and desire held up as forces for evil, humility and self-sacrifice become the cornerstones of good character in *The Sorcerer’s Stone*. While antagonistic characters like [**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who), [**Quirrell**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-quirrell), and [**Dudley**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/dudley-dursley) tend to focus on their own desires and needs, characters like [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter), [**Ron**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/ron-weasley), and [**Hermione**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/hermione-granger) often think about others before themselves. In associating her protagonists—and Harry in particular—with these virtues, Rowling emphasizes the idea that humility and self-sacrifice are key indicators of goodness and are virtues worth striving for.

Throughout the novel, Harry is the primary example of how characters are shown to be good by exhibiting selflessness and humility. After Harry’s parents are tragically killed and [**Dumbledore**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/albus-dumbledore) is figuring out the best course of action to take regarding the newly orphaned one-year-old Harry, he comes to the conclusion that it is best to leave him with the Dursleys in the Muggle world. Otherwise, he reasons, Harry’s ego will swell considerably, as he is soon to become famous in the wizarding world as “the boy who lived,” and the boy who was able to defeat Voldemort. In fact, [**Snape**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-snape)’s instant dislike of Harry stems from the idea that he thinks Harry is arrogant due to his fame. This could not be further from the truth, however: Harry spends the first eleven years of his life essentially as a servant to his [**Aunt Petunia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/petunia-dursley) and [**Uncle Vernon**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/vernon-dursley), with no knowledge of the wizarding world, and thus he has no conception of the fame surrounding him (and little conception of his own self-worth, as Petunia and Vernon constantly belittle him).

When Harry discovers that he is one of the most famous people in the wizarding world, he still remains humble. Instead of letting the fame go to his head, he actually becomes worried because he doesn’t think that he can live up to people’s expectations. Thus, Harry sets out to try and prove himself through hard work rather than relying on his reputation. He works hard in school and earns good grades, even though he does sometimes get into trouble. He also becomes the youngest Quidditch player for a Hogwarts team in a century after [**Professor McGonagall**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-mcgonagall) sees his knack for flying. But again, rather than let this get to his head, he works harder and harder at practice. When he wins a match for his team in under five minutes, which is an astonishing feat, he is hardly phased by the adoration his classmates heap upon him—he is simply happy that he is no longer just a famous name, and that he has an accomplishment to be proud of. This humility fuels Harry’s self-sacrificing tendencies, putting his own desires and sometimes his well-being aside in order to please others or to do good deeds. When Harry thinks that Professor Snape is out to steal [**the Sorcerer’s Stone**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-sorcerer-s-stone) (a powerful object that gives its owner eternal life), Harry is adamant that he should find the Stone before Snape does—not because he wants its power, but simply because he wants to protect the Stone from those with evil or selfish intentions. He risks his life completing the obstacles that are guarding the Stone, all in service of the good of the school—and the wider magical world. These actions make him the hero of the book, and associate his core qualities of humility and selflessness with his goodness.

Hermione and Ron, the two other protagonists, also follow Harry’s lead, learning to putting others’ needs above their own. This reinforces the importance of striving toward humility and selflessness as a means to be a genuinely good person. When Ron, Harry, and Hermione discover that [**Hagrid**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/rubeus-hagrid) is trying to keep a dragon illegally, Ron offers to give the dragon to friends of his brother [**Charlie**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters) (who works with dragons for his job) so that Hagrid will not get into trouble for keeping it. At another point in the novel, Harry and Ron try to save Hermione from a troll that is loose in Hogwarts and they get in trouble for not leaving it to the teachers to handle. Uncharacteristically, Hermione lies to the teachers so that only she will get in trouble instead of the two boys, thus sacrificing herself for her friends. This moment is a key turning point in Hermione’s character, as she sheds her towering self-importance and instead begins to be more selfless and humbler. Ron and Hermione also accompany Harry on his quest to protect the Sorcerer’s Stone, and when facing the challenges that guard the stone, each of them stays behind so that Harry can advance closer and closer. Ron deliberately allows himself to be hurt playing a game of wizard’s chess (in which the pieces are alive and violently break each other when the pieces are taken) so that Harry and Hermione can move forward to the next task. Then, when Hermione figures out a logic puzzle that will only allow her or Harry forward, she argues that Harry should go ahead; she’ll return to Ron and send an owl to Dumbledore. Thus, each of them retains humility and understands that the greater good is more important than achieving some kind of personal glory.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione’s humility sets them apart from the other characters in the book. In contrast with characters like Voldemort and even [**Draco Malfoy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/draco-malfoy) and Dudley, the novel’s three kid protagonists care about others more than they care about themselves. In making these traits key to getting the Sorcerer’s Stone, Rowling emphasizes how humility and self-sacrifice are necessary qualities to being the heroes of the book and achieving success in their mission.

Rules and Rebellion:

Although the wizarding world provides [**Harry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/harry-potter) with freedom that he did not receive at his [**Aunt Petunia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/petunia-dursley) and Uncle Vernon’s house, there are still strict rules that he must follow in both the wizarding world in general and particularly at Hogwarts. Harry does not set out to be a troublemaker, but over the course of the novel, he ends up breaking rule after rule. Harry believes that when the rules are in conflict with doing what he feels is the moral thing to do, it is better to rebel than to submit to them. And because Harry is more often than not rewarded for this rebellious behavior, J.K. Rowling too argues that breaking rules is sometimes necessary in order to do what is right.

As quickly as Harry is introduced to some of the rules of the school, he breaks them when he feels that it will help those who are being picked on, or who would be otherwise targeted. Harry is often rewarded for the way he elevates kindness and helping others over following arbitrary rules. On the first day that Harry learns to fly on a broomstick, a classmate of his named [**Neville**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/neville-longbottom) breaks his arm, and the professor, Madam Hooch, whisks him away to the hospital wing. She cautions the other students not to fly until she gets back, or else they’ll be expelled. But when [**Draco Malfoy**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/draco-malfoy), the class bully, picks up a gift from Neville’s grandmother called a Remembrall and begins to make fun of Neville, Harry tells him to return it. Malfoy instead dares Harry to get it back, mounting his broom and throwing the Remembrall as far as he can; Harry mounts his broom as well and is able to catch it while flying on his broomstick, but [**Professor McGonagall**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-mcgonagall) sees him. Yet instead of punishing him, she gets him to join the Quidditch team, making him the youngest Quidditch player at Hogwarts in a century. By bravely sticking up for Neville—even when he was not around—Harry is rewarded rather than punished for breaking the rules, a pattern that will continue to crop up throughout the novel. Another instance of rebellion comes a few months later, at Halloween. A dangerous troll is loose in the castle, and all students are instructed to return to their dormitories to take shelter while the teachers deal with the situation. Instead, Harry says that he and [**Ron**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/ron-weasley) should go to find [**Hermione**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/hermione-granger) in the girls’ bathroom; she’s been crying there all day because Ron made fun of her, and thus she doesn’t know about the troll. Unluckily, the troll ends up in the very bathroom that Hermione is hiding in. Although Harry, Ron, and Hermione are able to defeat the massive troll, Professor McGonagall is furious with the students for not being in their dormitories as instructed. But before McGonagall can punish Ron and Harry, Hermione swiftly (and surprisingly) takes the blame for their actions. Thus, again, Harry receives few consequences for not following the rules, and for good reason, too, as he is able to save Hermione as a result.

Harry is not only encouraged towards his rebellious tendencies because he often receives little punishment; he is also encouraged to disregard the rules by [**Dumbledore**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/albus-dumbledore), the headmaster of Hogwarts. At Christmas, Harry receives a package left anonymously, inside of which is an [**Invisibility Cloak**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-invisibility-cloak), which allows the person who wears it to become completely invisible. The package is later revealed to be from Dumbledore, who writes in a note, “use it well.” While this doesn’t explicitly counsel Harry to break the rules, it certainly allows him to do so, as long as he is using the cloak “well,” or for a good purpose. He uses the cloak to break into the restricted section of the library in order to find out more information on [**the Sorcerer’s Stone**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/symbols/the-sorcerer-s-stone), ultimately aiding him in keeping the precious Stone away from those with evil intentions. Harry also uses the cloak to try to help [**Hagrid**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/rubeus-hagrid) get rid of the dragon he has secretly raised, because keeping a dragon as a pet is illegal. Thus, again, Harry breaks the rules in order to help his friends try to stay out of trouble and do what he feels is right. Perhaps the ultimate episode of rule-breaking in which Harry, Ron, and Hermione participate occurs when they try get to the Sorcerer’s Stone before [**Snape**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-snape) does, thinking him the villain. They “petrify” (a curse that literally stuns whoever is hit with it) [**Neville**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/neville-longbottom), who tries to stop them from sneaking out at night. They then go to a corridor on the third floor, which has been expressly forbidden to students. Such blatant rule-breaking allows Harry to get to the Stone, where he is able to save it from getting into [**Voldemort**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/voldemort-you-know-who)’s possession. Even more than that, Harry’s rule-breaking consequently saves the entire magical community from Voldemort—at least for the time being. While Harry’s success is validation enough, Dumbledore confirms that he believes Harry did the right thing. He praises the young boy’s efforts to fend off [**Quirrell**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-sorcerer-s-stone/characters/professor-quirrell) and Voldemort, and awards Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Neville enough house points to allow Gryffindor to win the House Cup.

It is worth noting that Dumbledore awards Neville points as well, observing that it takes courage to stand up to one’s friends. Thus, it is not that Dumbledore is simply rewarding rebellious behavior; he is rewarding students for doing what they feel in their heart is the right thing to do. And to Rowling, who uses Dumbledore as the highest moral authority in the novel, doing what is right is far more important than following the rules perfectly. If Harry hadn’t broken so many rules in his first year of school, Voldemort presumably would have gotten ahold of the Sorcerer’s Stone and returned to power with a vengeance, thus cutting short the entire series and ending the magical world as Harry knows it.

**Style**

**Point of View**

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is told in third-person, limited point of view, with the narrator unidentified and invisible and the tone objective. Harry is the character whose thoughts, feelings, and experiences are revealed to the reader. The narrator at some odd points throughout the book is omniscient, telling the reader what Harry is thinking or feeling. The narrator mostly relays events as they happen and also reveals some, but not all, of the thoughts and feelings of the main character Harry Potter. The actions and thoughts of the other characters are relayed to the reader via the conversations among the characters themselves. The actions of the main characters and the narrative descriptions of them tell the reader what type of person the main characters are. The characters and places are not always accounted for by the narrator; sometimes they are described through the eyes of Harry.

**Setting**

The larger setting of the story is England. Earlier in the book, within this larger structure is the Dursleys' house on Privet Drive. There is also a trip to the zoo, the "rock" out in the sea where Vernon Dursley makes the family go to hide from the letters, and some scenes at the train stations at various points.

Later, but also in the context of "England," Harry goes to Diagon Alley, The Leaky Caldron, and later to Hogwarts Castle. The smaller setting of Hogwarts becomes predominant as the remainder of the story is set in and around the Castle. Much of the action takes place inside the Great Hall, in the classrooms, in the Forbidden Wing, and in the dormitories. There is also some action outside on the Quidditch field, at the top of the astronomy tower, in Hagrid's hut, and in the Forbidden Forest.

The book ends at the train platform or at a train station.

**Language and Meaning**

The language of the book is extremely easy to read and follow. It is written in a flowing style that both children and adults can enjoy. Although the book was classified as a children's book, all readers of any age who enjoy imaginative, straight-forward story telling will enjoy it. The language, however, is obviously simplified for the originally intended audience.

There are some British phrases and idioms that appear occasionally, but they do not confuse the reader to any extent. The original version published in the United Kingdom was called Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. Apparently, the American version of the story was changed to suit American tastes, slang, and culture more effectively.

**Structure**

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is divided into17 chapters. Most are rather short and either explain a point outright or lead the reader to the next chapter for explanation. They all end with enough intrigue to lead the reader to turn the next page.

The paragraphs are short, presumably because the book was written for children aged 8 to 12. This in no way takes away from the book and, in fact, enhances its easy-to-read language. The sentences are generally short and to the point.