***Harry Potter and the Chambers of Secret***

***Chapter 1***

***Summary and analysis***

***Brief Summary:***

Chapter 1 opens with a description of breakfast in the Dursley household. The Dursleys and Harry are seated at the table, and a familiar scene unfolds. Mr. Dursley is becoming more and more angry. He is upset because Harry's owl, Hedwig, woke him up during the night, for the third time that week. Harry defends Hedwig, explaining that she is hooting in the middle of the night because she's bored. This explanation only makes Mr. Dursley angrier, and he threatens to lock the owl in the cupboard under the stairs, where he has locked all of the magical items belonging to Harry. Meanwhile, fat Dudley Dursley is eating as much as he possibly can, because his mother is worried that he won't get fed properly when he goes away to boarding school. He exploits Harry, demanding that he fetch more food. Harry reminds him to say "please," but jokingly stating that "please" is a magic word. The mention of magic makes Mr. Dursley lose his temper completely, since he has banned everything to do with magic in his house.

Today is also a special day for Mr. Dursley, as he is entertaining prospective business associates in the evening in the hope that they will place an order with his business. It is essential that the evening goes well, and Mr. Dursley is on edge because of this. He has drawn up a plan for the evening; everyone has a part to play except for Harry, who is ordered to spend the night in his room, where he is least likely to cause any embarrassment to the Dursleys.

We find out that today is also Harry's twelfth birthday. He has received no cards or presents from the Dursleys; this doesn't surprise him, since they never give him cards or presents. But he also has received no cards from his friends, Ron and Hermione. Harry feels sad and lonely; he has not heard from his friends all summer, and he had at least hoped to hear from them on his birthday. He sits in the garden, longing to return to Hogwarts, where he can be with his friends and practice magic again. Harry sees something in the hedge but doesn't have time to investigate as Dudley comes into the garden and teases him. He knows it's Harry's birthday and makes fun of the fact that he hasn't heard from his friends, implying that Harry has no friends. Harry threatens him with magic and Dudley runs to his mother to tell her. Harry is punished for this, and spends the rest of the day performing household chores for Mrs. Dursley. When he finishes his chores, he is given a pitiful supper, then sent to his roomwhere he is startled to find someone sitting on his bed.

***Brief Analysis:***

Chapter 1 establishes the relationship between Harry and his family. There is no love between them, and it is clear that Mr. Dursley feels threatened by Harry and his magical powers. The issue of power is interesting here, as Mr. Dursley is important and powerful in his position as head of the house. Harry is the least important person in the household, yet is powerful because of his magical abilities. He also has power over Mr. Dursley because Mr. Dursley is frightened by Harry's magic, and this makes him weak. The Dursleys don't understand magic, having no magical abilities themselves, and they symbolize the views of the rest of the Muggle (non-magical) population. Consequently, the opening chapter is charged with tension and suspense because of the initial argument and powerful underlying emotions.

***Summary in Detail:***

An argument breaks out over breakfast at number four, Privet Drive. Mr. [Vernon Dursley](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#vernon-dursley) woke up early at the hooting of [Hedwig](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#hedwig), his nephew [Harry Potter](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#harry-potter)’s pet owl. Mr. Dursley yells at Harry that if he can’t control his owl, she will have to go. Harry explains that Hedwig is bored and asks to let her fly outside at night. Uncle Vernon refuses, implying that something bad would happen if Hedwig were let out, exchanging looks with his wife Petunia. Their argument is interrupted by a belch from Dudley, the Dursley’s massive son, who is being overstuffed with bacon by his mother. When Dudley asks Harry to pass the frying pan, and Harry replies “You’ve forgotten the magic word,” meaning please, the Durselys overreact in fear. Uncle Vernon has forbidden the use of the word “magic” in his house, calling it Harry’s “abnormality.”

Harry is a wizard, home for the summer holidays after his first year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The Dursleys are unhappy to have him back. Harry is also miserable. He misses Hogwarts terribly. Uncle Vernon has locked up all of Harry’s magical supplies in a cupboard under the stairs. The Durselys don’t care if Harry is prepared for his return to school in the fall. They are what wizards call Muggles, meaning that they have no magical blood, and are ashamed to have a wizard in the family. Uncle Vernon padlocked Hedwig in her cage to stop her from carrying messages to Harry’s friends.

Harry was left on the Dursleys’ doorstep eleven years before, at the age of one, after surviving a curse from the greatest Dark sorcerer of all time: Lord Voldemort. Harry’s parents died in the attack, but he escaped with only a lightning scar on his forehead. When Voldemort failed to kill Harry, his own powers were destroyed. Harry’s mother’s sister [Petunia Dursley](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#petunia-dursley) raised Harry along with her husband, Vernon. Harry kept making odd things happen without meaning to. He didn’t know why, because his aunt and uncle hid his magical nature from him, along with the circumstances of his parents’ death. Then, a year ago, Hogwarts wrote to Harry, and the truth came out. He started wizard school, where he was famous for having defeated Voldemort.

The Dursleys have forgotten that today is Harry’s twelfth birthday. Uncle Vernon is focused on making possibly the largest deal of his career at a dinner party at their house that evening with Mr. Mason, a wealthy potential client. He tells Harry to stay in his bedroom that night, making no noise. Harry goes outside to keep out of his aunt’s way as she prepares for the party. He sings “Happy Birthday” to himself and feels terribly lonely. He misses his best friends [Ron Weasley](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#ron-weasley) and [Hermione Granger](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#hermione-granger), who haven’t written to him all summer. Harry has been tempted to use magic to unlock Hedwig’s cage so he can send letters to his friends. But he knows that he would get in trouble because underage wizards are not allowed to use magic outside of school. Harry thinks of his previous year at Hogwarts, when he narrowly escaped Lord Voldemort again. Voldemort was a ruin of his former self, but still determined to gain power, and terrifying.

As Harry stares at the garden hedge, he finds that it’s staring back at him, with two enormous eyes. Dudley interrupts the moment to taunt Harry about his lonely birthday. In return, Harry claims to be planning to set the hedge on fire. Dudley is frightened but points out Harry’s powerlessness: his father has threatened to throw Harry out of the house, and Harry has nowhere else to go. When Harry pretends to cast a spell, Dudley tells on him, and Harry is punished with yard work, and no food until it is completed. Harry thinks of the contrast between his fame at Hogwarts and his mistreatment at the Dursleys. He enters the kitchen exhausted, smelling roast pork in the oven, and seeing Aunt Petunia’s elaborate pudding. She feeds him a small amount of bread and cheese and sends him upstairs. Uncle Vernon warns him again not to make a sound that night. When Harry turns to collapse on his bed he finds someone sitting on it.

At 4 Privet Drive, the Dursley family is arguing. Vernon Dursley bellows at his nephew Harry Potter because Harry's pet owl, Hedwig, is noisy. Dudley Dursley, Vernon's spoiled and obese son, clamors for more bacon. When Dudley demands the frying pan, Harry mutters, "You've forgotten the magic word," and the family erupts into chaos.

The narrator explains the reason for the hubbub about the magic word. Harry Potter is a wizard, staying with the Dursleys for the summer after his first term at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Upon Harry's return from school, Uncle Vernon locked all of Harry's magical things—his spellbooks, brookstick, wand and cauldron—into a closet. The Dursleys are "Muggles," or non-magical people, and they were forced to adopt Harry when his own parents were killed by the greatest wizard of their time, the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry survived Voldemort's curse but was left with a lightening-bolt shaped scar on his forehead, beneath his unruly dark hair and above his usually broken glasses. For the survival of this powerful curse (thus destroying Voldemort's powers) and also for his scar, Harry Potter was famous in the wizard world before he was even old enough to remember. Harry did not even know himself to be a wizard until the previous summer, when Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, arrived to whisk eleven-year-old Harry away to Hogwarts for his wizarding education.

The day the story begins, Harry is turning twelve, and the Dursleys ignore his birthday entirely. They are much more concerned with a dinner that night during which Vernon, who sells drills, hopes to make a business deal with a rich builder. During breakfast, Vernon asks his wife, Petunia, and his son, Dudley, to rehearse the things they will say to the guests. Harry is instructed to remain upstairs in his room and pretend not to exist.

After breakfast, Harry walks outside, saddened by the fact that he hasn't heard from his best friends from Hogwarts, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Suddenly, Harry notices a pair of giant eyes staring at him from inside a nearby hedge, but before he can investigate, Dudley waddles over and begins to taunt him for having no friends who call him on his birthday. Harry stares at the hedge, ignoring his rude cousin, until Dudley asks what he's doing, and Harry responds that he was trying to decide how to set the bush on fire. Dudley panics and wails for his mother. Harry's Aunt Petunia promptly punishes Harry by setting him to work around the house. When Harry finishes, she gives him bread for dinner and sends him upstairs. As Harry enters his room to collapse onto his bed, he finds somebody else already sitting on it.

***Analysis in Detail:***

The first chapter sets the proper background for the story, explaining who exactly Harry is, why he is important, and why he does not enjoy living with the Dursleys. Parts of Harry's past, both before and at Hogwarts, are summarized here, shortened from their more detailed introductions in the first book of the series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. This chapter shows the lack of joy in the Dursleys' lifestyle, their abuse of Harry, and their social-climbing ambitions. We see at once the unpleasantness Harry must face while he is home, allowing us to appreciate Hogwarts even before we see it, simply because it must be better than Harry's current situation. Harry handles his relatives gracefully, picking his battles carefully, defending himself at times but not always, laughing at them when they are absurd, and trying not to offend thm. The story begins with the typical plight of a protagonist in British children's literature. Blessed with a special talent, and confined by a terrible family life, Harry is finally set free to have adventures and prove himself worthy.

In Chapter One, we also learn that Harry is a hero within the wizard world. He was mysteriously protected from Voldemort's curse, and his very survival ended an era of terror for the wizard world; in the eyes of the grant magical public, he is cherished. His situation with the Dursleys greatly contrasts this stituation, and we see Harry as lonely and somewhat deflated through his summer at Privet Drive. We are able to see his vulnerabilities, making him a livable, likeable character from the beginning. A theme in the Harry Potter series is that it is important to live up to fame and expectation rather than achieve it in its own merit. He has gained the recognition that many people strive for, and he simply strives throughout his adventures to deserve it. Due to circumstances out of his control, Harry is famous, and because we watch his own uneasiness and confusion, his own modesty and peculiarities of humor, we can watch him as he grows up, understanding the private life of a public wizard figure. Hence, we expect him to be observed, criticized, and admired.

In this chapter, we are also introduced to the artifacts and terms of the wizard world. The term "Muggle" is introduced, as is Harry's pet owl, Hedwig, and we see the unusual school supplies as Harry inventories everything that his uncle has locked up under the stairs. The narrator's tone in describing the magical artifacts is unsurprised. As we see in chapter one, Harry faces many ordinary problems. He has a bully for a cousin, and he wonders why his good friends from school seem to have forgotten about him. Because J.K. Rowling creates a surprisingly normal coming-of-age story for Harry within the fantastic and imaginative world of wizardry, these terms and articles become familiar background to the ups and downs of Harry's daily life. We are to understand that wizards live seemingly ordinary lives.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

As neither Dudley nor the hedge was in any way hurt, Aunt Petunia knew he hadn't really done magic, but he still had to duck as she aimed a heavy blow at his head with the soapy frying pan. Then she gave him work to do, with the promise he wouldn't eat again until he was finished.

While Dudley lolled around watching and eating ice cream, Harry cleaned the windows, washed the car, mowed the lawn, trimmed the flower beds, pruned and watered the roses, and repainted the garden bench. The sun blazed overhead, burning the back of his neck. Harry knew he shouldn't have risen to Dudley's bait, but Dudley had said the very thing Harry had been thinking himself...maybe he didn't have any friends at Hogwarts. (1.86)

***Explanation:***

First off, Harry is *twelve*. This is an insane amount of work that Aunt Petunia makes him do, underlining once more that the Dursleys are abusive jerks. What's interesting about this scene, though, is that, as unfair as it is that Aunt Petunia tries to hit Harry with a frying pan and then sets him to work like a slave, it's not this treatment that seems to be truly bothering him. What's really getting to Harry is his worry that his friends don't like him anymore. If Harry really knew his friends still cared about him, it appears that he would be able to put up with this treatment with relative calm. This theme of friendship as more important than hardship or bad treatment is one that develops throughout the series.

***Quotation 2:***

All Harry's spellbooks, his wand, robes, cauldron, and top-of-the-line Nimbus Two Thousand broomstick had been locked in a cupboard under the stairs by Uncle Vernon the instant Harry had come home. What did the Dursleys care if Harry lost his place on the House Quidditch team because he hadn't practiced all summer? What was it to the Dursleys if Harry went back to school without any of his homework done? The Dursleys were what wizards called Muggles (not a drop of magical blood in their veins), and as far as they were concerned, having a wizard in the family was a matter of deepest shame. Uncle Vernon had even padlocked Harry's owl, Hedwig, inside her cage, to stop her from carrying messages to anyone in the Wizarding world. (1.27)

***Explanation:***

One of the things that strikes us about the early chapters of Book 2 is that, because it is very early in the series, the *Harry Potter* books have yet to become a true sensation. So J.K. Rowling can't assume that everyone who picks up *Chamber of Secrets* will be completely familiar with the world of Harry Potter. She has to define "Muggle" quickly here. In the later Harry Potter novels, though, she can be more confident that everyone in the world knows what she means when she says "Muggle." Second, J.K. Rowling lays out very clearly (a) how much Harry feels excluded at the Dursleys' house, and (b) how much he idolizes Hogwarts and the wizarding world. He misses the wizarding world hugely – little realizing, at this point, how much anguish he's going to encounter there.

***Quotation 3:***

"And you?"

"I'll be in my bedroom, making no noise and pretending I'm not there," said Harry tonelessly. (1.43-44)

***Explanation:***

Before the Masons come over for their dinner party, Uncle Vernon makes Harry repeat that he will stay in his room making no noise and pretending he's not there three times. The repetition emphasizes how little Harry is wanted in the Dursley home. While the later novels give us a reason why Professor Dumbledore leaves Harry in the Dursley household even though they are not nice to him, what effects do you think it's having on Harry to be stuck with the Dursleys over summer holidays? How would you respond to this kind of treatment?

***Quotation 4:***

"Now, we should aim to get in a few good compliments at dinner. Petunia, any ideas?"

"Vernon tells me you're a wonderful golfer, Mr. Mason...Do tell me where you bought your dress, Mrs. Mason..."

"Perfect...Dudley?"

"How about – 'We had to write an essay about our hero at school, Mr. Mason, and I wrote about you.'" (1.52-55)

***Explanation:***

One of the weird things about the Dursleys isn't just that they are so obsessed with being normal; it's that they're so bad at it. Aunt Petunia's compliments seem insincere but at least not crazy. As for Dudley, though – who wouldn't see through his claim that he's going to write a school essay about Mr. Mason? This is why we feel that the depiction of the Dursleys in the early novels of the series are almost cartoonish in their exaggeration. It's later on that we get a more realistic sense of how small-minded, fearful, and difficult they are.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

At breakfast on [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter)’s twelfth birthday, Harry’s uncle, Vernon, scolds Harry because his owl, Hedwig, woke him up with her screeching. Vernon insists on keeping Hedwig locked in her cage, which Harry complains about because it prevents him from sending mail to his friends. When Harry’s cousin [Dudley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) asks Harry to pass the frying pan, Harry says he’s “forgotten the magic word,” at which Vernon and [Petunia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) explode in fury over his use of “the ‘M’ word.” Vernon and Petunia treat Harry as though he is “a bomb that might go off at any moment”—though Harry is not allowed to do magic outside of school.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The opening moments of The Chamber of Secrets return once again to the Dursley household. Harry’s failure to tell the Dursleys that he is not supposed to do magic outside of school is an early demonstration of the way in which lack of information can inspire fear. Without this information, the Dursleys live in constant terror that Harry will use magic to hurt them.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) misses Hogwarts, a magical school where he has just completed his first year. He misses eating in the Great Hall, visiting [Hagrid](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/rubeus-hagrid), the gamekeeper, and playing Quidditch (a wizarding sport played on brooms). All of his magical possessions have been locked in a cupboard under the stairs.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Harry’s love of Hogwarts, and his hatred of spending the summers with the Dursleys, will ultimately become a connection between himself and Tom Riddle, highlighting the similarities between them.

***Summary Part 3:***

A year ago, [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter)’s life was changed when [Hagrid](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/rubeus-hagrid) revealed to him that he and his parents were wizards; at one year old, he had somehow survived a curse from the greatest Dark sorcerer, [Lord Voldemort](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/tom-riddle-voldemort), while his parents Lily and James had died protecting him. Harry is famous in the wizarding world, but with the Dursleys, he is treated like a dog.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Harry’s fame throughout the wizarding world has a great impact on how other people view his identity, and on how he is treated throughout the school year. Rowling reminds readers that Harry has a far humbler background than most wizards believe.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Vernon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/vernon-dursley) and [Petunia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) are hosting an important business dinner that night for a couple named the Masons, and [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) is instructed to stay in his room and not make any noise. While they prepare for the dinner, Harry slumps in the front lawn and sings happy birthday to himself. He hasn’t received any letters from his best friends, [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley) and [Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger), all summer, and he hasn’t been able to send Hedwig to them either.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Friendship and loyalty are crucial to Harry’s character, and this is one of the rare moments in which he questions his friends’ loyalty. It demonstrates how, when Harry feels isolated, he also feels extremely vulnerable.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Dudley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) comes over and begins making fun of [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) for not having any friends. Harry pretends to curse Dudley, and [Petunia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) punishes him by making him do a slew of difficult chores. Dudley’s words get him thinking: maybe he doesn’t have any friends. He viciously thinks, “Wish they could see famous Harry Potter now” as he spreads manure on the flowers. Harry is then made to eat dinner very quickly, and he is sent upstairs before the Masons arrive.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Rowling shows the vulnerability that Harry experiences from not hearing from his friends as a way of contrasting later points at which the loyalty and friendship Harry receives from Ron and Hermione spur him to bravery. It is notable, too, that Harry comments on his humble upbringing, observing the irony that many people deeply admire him in the wizarding community, in contrast to how he is treated at the Dursleys.