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

***Chapter 9***

***Summary and analysis***

***Summary:***

**The Writing on the Wall**

* Filch pushes through the crowd.
* He sees Mrs. Norris hanging there and accuses Harry of killing her.
* Professor Dumbledore pulls Filch, Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Professors Lockhart, Snape, and McGonagall into Lockhart's office nearby.
* Professor Dumbledore announces that Mrs. Norris isn't dead; she's Petrified.
* Filch insists it was Harry: "You saw what he wrote on the wall! He found – in my office – he knows I'm a – I'm a – [...] He knows I'm a Squib!" (9.27).
* (A Squib is a person born to magical parents who can't do magic themselves.)
* Professor Snape agrees that "Potter and his friends may have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time" (9.31).
* Then, why weren't they at the Halloween Feast?
* Harry gives their airtight alibi: hundreds of ghosts saw them at Nearly Headless Nick's deathday party.
* So, why didn't they come to the Halloween Feast afterwards?
* Harry can't say that he heard a voice no one else could hear talking about killing.
* He claims that they weren't hungry.
* Professor Dumbledore reminds Snape, "Innocent until proven guilty" (9.42).
* Professor Dumbledore promises Filch that they can heal Mrs. Norris just as soon as Professor Sprout's Mandrakes have gotten big enough to make a restorative potion.
* Harry, Ron, and Hermione are allowed to go back to Gryffindor Tower.
* Ron confirms that Harry was right not to say anything about the murderous voice: "Hearing voices no one else can hear isn't a good sign, even in the Wizarding world" (9.52).
* Ron finally explains to Harry what a Squib is: "Kind of the opposite of Muggle-born wizards, but Squibs are quite unusual" (9.59).
* Over the next few days, all anyone can talk about is the attack on Mrs. Norris.
* Ginny Weasley seems particularly upset about it, since, Ron tells us, she is "a great cat lover" (9.63).
* Hermione is spending all her time in the library looking for clues on what has happened.
* Harry notices Justin Finch-Fletchley turning back and going the opposite direction the minute he sees Harry.
* Harry is confused.
* Hermione tells Ron and Harry that all the school library's copies of *Hogwarts: A History* have been checked out.
* Everyone in the school is looking for information on the Chamber of Secrets.
* Unfortunately, Hermione can't remember what the Chamber is.
* During their History of Magic class with dead (and deadly boring) Professor Binns, Hermione interrupts his lecture to ask what the Chamber of Secrets is.
* Professor Binns dismisses the Chamber of Secrets as a legend.
* Hermione persists in asking him, though.
* Professor Binns is so "thrown by such an unusual show of interest" (9.96) that he finally explains.
* Hogwarts was apparently founded over a thousand years ago by two witches and two wizards: Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, Godric Gryffindor, and Salazar Slytherin.
* They worked together in harmony for several years, "seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated" (9.100).
* Then, Slytherin and the other founders fell into a serious argument.
* The other founders felt that the school should be open to all children who showed magical talent.
* Yet Slytherin wanted to limit Hogwarts enrollment to students from magical families.
* He didn't want any Muggle-born students at Hogwarts.
* So Slytherin left Hogwarts when the other founders refused to give in.
* Then, legend goes, "Slytherin had built a hidden chamber in the castle, of which the other founders knew nothing" (9.102).
* No one can open this hidden chamber except a direct heir of Slytherin.
* Slytherin's heir would be able "to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic" (9.103).
* Professor Binns dismisses this legend as nonsense and goes back to his usual lesson.
* After class, Ron claims that Salazar Slytherin was a loony.
* Harry starts to worry about himself: after all, the Sorting Hat initially wanted to put Harry in Slytherin rather than Gryffindor.
* As they rush down the hall to their next class, Harry sees Colin Creevey.
* Colin tries to tell Harry, "a boy in my class has been saying you're —" (9.125).
* But the crowd pushes Colin on before he can finish.
* Harry realizes that there are rumors going around that he is Slytherin's heir.
* Harry, Ron, and Hermione go back to the scene of the crime to see if they can find anything.
* They do notice something weird: a line of spiders trying to get out of the castle.
* Ron admits that he hates spiders: "If you must know, when I was three, Fred turned my – my teddy bear into a great big filthy spider because I broke his toy broomstick...you wouldn't like them either if you'd been holding your bear and suddenly it had too many legs and" (9.148).
* Harry recalls that there was a lot of water on the floor that night.
* It must have come from the nearby girls' bathroom.
* They go in to have a look.
* The bathroom is home to a miserable, whining ghost girl named Moaning Myrtle.
* She is extremely quick to take offense: "My life was nothing but misery at this place and now people come along ruining my death" (9.167).
* She doesn't recall seeing anything the night that Mrs. Norris was Petrified.
* She was too busy being a giant drama queen.
* As Harry, Ron, and Hermione come out of the girls' bathroom, Percy Weasley spots them.
* He's furious that they are breaking school rules and worrying Ginny.
* So he takes five points from Gryffindor and gives them detention. Percy's a prefect, which means he can discipline other students for misbehavior.
* In the Common Room that night, Harry, Ron, and Hermione discuss what to do next.
* Ron is sure that the Heir of Slytherin must be Draco Malfoy.
* Draco obviously agrees that Muggle-borns have no place at Hogwarts and his whole family is in Slytherin. He must be the Heir!
* To prove it, Hermione suggests that they make Polyjuice Potion.
* Polyjuice Potion allows you to transform into someone else for an hour.
* If she, Harry, and Ron turned into friends of Draco's, they might be able to get him to confess.

***Brief Summary:***

Filch arrives at the scene and in his distressed state instantly accuses Harry of the crime. He is about to attack Harry to avenge Mrs. Norris' apparent murder when Dumbledore arrives, accompanied by Professors Snape, McGonagall and Lockhart. They calm the situation, taking the three students and Filch to Lockhart's office. Upon closer inspection, it is discovered that Mrs. Norris isn't dead but petrified, something that can be reversed with a magic potion.

Attention is turned to Harry, and his involvement is questioned. Snape questions Harry, Ron and Hermione first, wanting to know why they were absent from the Halloween feast in the Great Hall. Thankfully, their whereabouts can be proved, with hundreds of ghosts at Nick's party able to support the fact that they were in the dungeon and not at the scene of the crime. Unfortunately, they are unable to explain why they didn't return to the celebration after the ghosts' party. Snape finds this unusual and queries the fact that they must be hungry, since food at ghosts' parties is inedible. They deny this and claim to be tired, going to bed being their excuse for being near the scene of the crime and not the celebrations. Ron's stomach betrays them by rumbling loudly, and Snape is satisfied that he has trapped them. Snape is certain that the trio is lying and suggests that they be punished until they are prepared to tell the truth. His suggested punishment is to ban Harry from Quidditch; which McGonagall sees as unnecessary, with the punishment not fitting the incident. Dumbledore exempts them further by stating that the spell enchanting Mrs. Norris couldn't be achieved by a student of their age, and the trio are free to go.

The incident has unsettled Hogwarts, with the students being able to talk about little else. Rumors are prevalent, especially those about the Chamber of Secrets. One of the founders of the school was alleged to have hidden a Chamber of Secrets that only his direct heir would be able to open. The chamber has direct links with dark magic and is also threatening to those without pure wizard blood. Several searches have been carried out for the chamber, throughout the centuries, but it has never been discovered, leading many to believe that it doesn't exist. But this doesn't prevent rumors from spreading, with some saying that Harry is the heir of Slytherin, something he is extremely uncomfortable with, as the Sorting Hat initially placed him in Slytherin, then changed it to Gryffindor upon Harry's silent request.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione decide to find out more about the incident and the Chamber of Secrets. They visit Moaning Myrtle, a Hogwarts ghost, to find out whether she saw anything, since the incident occurred outside the toilets she haunts. She is uncooperative and sulky, disappearing into the u-bend of a toilet and refusing to come out. Hermione researches the situation thoroughly and devises a plan that will transform them into members of the Slytherin house so they can question Draco Malfoy, who they believe may be the heir to Slytherin, his family being evil enough for it to be possible.

***Brief Analysis:***

Dark magic is a main point for discussion in this chapter. The incident with Mrs. Norris being so powerful and obviously evil poses the question of who could be responsible. Argus Filch instantly accusing Harry demonstrates the animosity he feels toward him and also reveals how powerful he assumes Harry to be. Filch feels threatened by Harry; having no magical power of his own, and this explains his treatment of Harry.

The Chamber of Secrets is symbolic of dark magic and evil. Rumors surrounding the chamber link it to Salazar Slytherin, whose views about non -pureblood wizards, and his house reputation for turning out wizards associated with the dark arts, enhance the evil symbolism of the Chamber of Secrets.

Power and its use are also examined. It is clear that Harry is powerful, but what troubles him is the source of this power. He is concerned by the possibility that its roots may be in the dark side, and he desperately hopes that this is not the case. An example of the sly side of the Slytherin house is apparent in Snape's chosen punishment for Harry, which is unjust and malevolent, designed merely to hurt Harry. McGonagall, who is representative of Gryffindor house and therefore truth, justice and good magic, thwarts his plans.

***Critical Analysis:***

Filch spies Mrs. Norris hanging from the ceiling, and explodes at Harry, accusing him of killing the cat. Dumbledore appears at this time and whisks Harry, Ron, Hermione, Filch and Mrs. Norris away, into Lockhart's nearby office, which Lockhart eagerly volunteered. They sit tensely among all of Lockhart's preening portraits of himself. Dumbledore examines the cat, Professor McGonagall frets quietly, and Snape sneers. Lockhart reassures them all in his curse-reversing expertise and Filch sobs. Dumbledore explains that the cat is not dead, but petrified, and that second- year students could not have possibly mastered the magic necessary for that degree of a dark spell. Dumbledore also says that soon the school will have enough grown Mandrakes to make a restorative potion, which Lockhart eagerly volunteers to make. Filch is unconvinced and explains that Harry knows he is a Squib and therefore attacked his cat, and Snape interrupts and says that the three students were in a peculiar place on the night of the Halloween feast. Ron, Harry, and Hermione explain the Deathday party, and Snape asks why they didn't come straight to the feast afterwards. Not wanting to explain about the eerie, disembodied voice, Harry explains that they were tired and wanted to go to bed. Snape does not believe them and recommends that Harry be taken off the Quidditch team until he is ready to tell the truth. McGonagall and Dumbledore quickly say that this will not be necessary. The three students walk up to their dorms, Ron explains what a Squib is, and Harry ponders what the Chamber of Secrets could possibly be.

Filch keeps a close watch on the scene of the crime, Justin Finch-Fletchley runs from Harry, seeming to believe that he is the instigator of the crime, and Ginny Weasley seems in utter terror of everything. In History of Magic class, while Professor Binns, the small, elderly, and boring ghost who teaches it, drones on, Hermione raises her hand and persuades him to explain the history of the Chamber of Secrets. We then learn that the original founders and namesakes of the four houses created Hogwarts as a place to bring up bright young witches and wizards, and that all went smoothly until Salazar Slytherin offended the other three by expressing his wish to exclude all Muggle-born wizards from the school. Slytherin left the school over this disagreement, but only after he built a hidden Chamber of Secrets, which contained a monster that would wipe out all non-pureblood wizards from Hogwarts. He said that only his heir would be able to control it. The students bombard Binns with questions until he grows annoyed, says it's all folklore, and returns to the original lesson plan.

This knowledge causes Harry to worry. When he was sorted by the hat the previous year, the Sorting hat had told him that Slytherin would make him great. When Harry thought how much he didn't want to be in Slytherin, the hat placed him in Gryffindor. He hopes he is not somehow connected to Salazar Slytherin. However, much of the school seems to think that he is. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione walk through the corridor with the writing on the wall, speculating where all the water came from the night of the attack and noticing a line of spiders hastily escaping through the window, they decide to look into Myrtle's bathroom for clues. Myrtle is as gloomy as ever, and the bathroom itself is rather depressing as well. After a few minutes they leave, only to run into Percy Weasley, who scolds them terribly for being in a girls' bathroom and for being in a suspicious place; this exchange upsets both Ron and himself.

That night, Harry, Ron, and Hermione speculate on whether Malfoy is the Heir of Slytherin, and Hermione suggests that they could find out by making a Polyjuice potion, thus turning themselves into Slytherins and eavesdropping on Malfoy in their House common room. Ron and Harry are skeptical, but Hermione persists, saying that she could have a teacher write her a note to check out a book from the restricted section of the library, where that potion would be.

In this chapter, Harry is burdened with secrets; first, he worries about the voice he has been hearing. He knows that a teacher would not believe him and he even questions whether Ron and Hermione believe him. He can think of no explanation for this phenomenon. Furthermore, he is worried that he is a Slytherin. From the beginning of the first book in the series, Harry was alarmed at the thought of getting placed into Slytherin House. He met Malfoy in Diagon Alley and from him learned about Slytherin's history, and from that moment on, he was wary both of Malfoy and of the House. The idea that a voice speaks of killing students terrifies Harry, and he is terrified further at the idea that he might be involved in a way he doesn't understand.

It doesn't help that other students are beginning to suspect him. He is an easy target, however, and he becomes more of one throughout certain events in coming chapters. In this situation, Snape severely mistrusts him. Dumbledore does trust him, and McGonagall is strict, but is a sports fan and so is adamant that Harry remain on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Harry is witnessing strange and frightening things, but he does not want to acknowledge that he could be anymore involved than anyone else. Trouble at Hogwarts often affects Harry, since the trouble always has Voldemort behind it in some way. Harry refuses to alert the teachers about the voice he is hearing.

J.K. Rowling makes the culprit very unclear and ambiguous. By the end of this chapter, when Hermione is conjuring up ways to slip into the Slytherin common room and prove that Malfoy as Slytherin's heir, the reader would have a good reason to suspect Malfoy; we know that he has called Hermione a Mudblood and grinned at the immobile petrified cat. He has ancient family roots in the Slytherin House, and he seems just malicious enough to be responsible for the harm caused. Furthermore, Percy Weasley is in a suspicious place at a suspicious time, and is extraordinarily upset at Ron for being there, too. Both of these boys could be seen as possible culprits. Rowling frames many different characters as possible culprits, including Harry himself, before she reveals the truth.

***Critical Study(Ch 7-9):***

When Argus Filch sees what happened to Mrs. Norris, he blames [Harry Potter](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#harry-potter): “You’ve murdered my cat! You’ve killed her! I’ll kill you!” Dumbledore interrupts Filch, arriving on the scene with several other teachers. He detaches Mrs. Norris, and asks Argus, Harry, Ron, and Hermione to follow him. Lockhart offers his nearby office as a meeting place. Professors McGonagall and Snape join them. After examining Mrs. Norris carefully, Dumbledore tells Filch that she’s not dead, but has been petrified. Filch blames Harry again. Dumbledore replies that no second year could have done it; the Dark magic required is too advanced. Filch maintains that it must be Harry, because of the message on the wall: Harry knows he is a Squib. Harry replies that he didn’t touch Mrs. Norris, and that he doesn’t know what a Squib is.

Snape points out that they might have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that the circumstances are suspicious. He asks why they weren’t at the feast. Harry, Hermione, and Ron explain about the deathday party. Then Snape wants to know why they didn’t join the feast afterward: why did they go up to the third-floor corridor? Harry thinks that the truth would sound too far-fetched, so he lies, saying that they were tired and wanted to go to bed. Snape is skeptical that they would skip supper. He suggests to Dumbledore that Harry be taken off the Gryffindor Quidditch team until he is completely honest. McGonagall protests. Dumbledore says “innocent until proven guilty,” infuriating Snape and Filch. Dumbledore promises that they will be able to cure Mrs. Norris with potion made from Mandrakes, once they are fully grown. Lockhart, who has been interjecting with hyperbolic self-aggrandizing comments, offers to make the Mandrake potion. Snape objects, noting that he is the Potions master at Hogwarts.

After they’re dismissed, Harry, Ron, and Hermione talk in an empty classroom. Harry asks his friends if he should have told the teachers the truth about the voice he heard. Ron says no: “hearing voices no one can hear isn’t a good sign, even in the wizarding world.” Ron also remembers that someone, maybe his older brother Bill, told him a story about a secret chamber in Hogwarts. When Harry asks what a Squib is, Ron stifles a snigger and adds “Well—it’s not funny really—but as it’s Filch,” then explains that a Squib is someone born into a wizarding family who doesn’t have magic powers, and that Squibs are quite unusual. Ron realizes, with a “satisfied smile” that if Filch is a Squib, that explains why he hates students.

The attack on Mrs. Norris becomes the talk of the school. Filch paces the spot of the attack, and attempts to scrub the message off of the wall, without success. Ginny Weasley is especially disturbed. Hermione spends even more time than usual reading.

On the way to the library to meet Ron, Harry encounters Justin Finch-Fletchly, who abruptly runs away to avoid him. Ron is measuring his History of Magic homework, because [Professor Binns](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#professor-binns) has assigned a three-foot-long composition, and is frustrated that his is too short, while Hermione’s is extra-long. Hermione emerges from the shelves, irritated to find that all of the copies of “Hogwarts, a History” have been checked out, and there’s a waiting list. She says she wants it for the same reason everyone else does: to read up on the Chamber of Secrets. Ron tries to talk Hermione into letting him read her composition, but she refuses.

Ron, Hermione, and Harry attend History of Magic next, the dullest subject on their schedule. It is taught by their only ghost teacher, Professor Binns. Hermione puts up her hand in class, amazing Binns. She asks if he can tell them anything about the Chamber of Secrets. He refuses, saying that he deals with facts, not myths and legends, and then goes on with his lesson. Hermione raises her hand again, to say: “Please, sir, don’t legends always have a basis in fact?” He agrees, begrudgingly. Completely thrown by the students’ show of interest, Binns gives in, and tells the story.

Hogwarts was founded over a thousand years ago by the greatest witches of the age: [Godric Gryffindor](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list" \l "godric-gryffindor), Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and [Salazar Slytherin](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#salazar-slytherin). “They built this castle together, far from prying Muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution.” They worked in harmony for a few years, inviting children with magical abilities to the castle to be educated. Then a rift developed between Salazar Slytherin and the others when he wanted to limit admissions to Hogwarts to children of magical families, as he distrusted students of Muggle parentage. After a serious argument on the subject, Slytherin left the school. That’s a far as the facts go. The legend of the Chamber of Secrets says that Salazar Slytherin built a hidden chamber in the castle and sealed it so that it could only be opened by his own true heir. The heir alone would be able to unleash the “horror within” (a monster) to purge the school of everyone unworthy of studying magic.

Binns says that the castle has been searched many times by the most learned witches and wizards, and that no chamber has been found—it does not exist. The students argue with Binns, but he is unpersuaded. He returns to his lesson, and the students return to their usual torpor.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione fight their way through the crowded corridors to drop off their bags before dinner. Ron and Hermione agree that they’re glad that the Sorting Hat didn’t place them in Slytherin house, after learning that Salazar Slytherin started the pure-blood prejudice. Harry is uneasy because the Sorting Hat had seriously considered putting him in Slytherin last year, saying: “You could be great, you know, it’s all here in your head, and Slytherin would help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that…” Harry knew about Slytherin’s reputation for turning out Dark wizards, so had desperately thought “Not Slytherin!” to which the hat replied “Oh, well, if you’re sure” and placed him in Gryffindor. Harry has never told anyone about this.

They pass Colin Creevy, who says “Harry—a boy in my class has been saying you’re—” and then gets swept away by the crowd. When Hermione wonders what he meant, Harry guesses that other students think that Harry is Slytherin’s heir. Ron asks Hermione if she thinks there really is a Chamber of Secrets. She replies that she doesn’t know, but the fact that Dumbledore couldn’t cure Mrs. Norris might mean that she was attacked by something inhuman. They find themselves at the end of the corridor where the attack occurred, so decide to search for clues. Harry discovers scorch marks on the floor. Hermione notices spiders hurrying to get outside through a small crack in a windowpane. Ron is frightened of spiders because of a traumatic childhood experience when his brother Fred turned his teddy bear into a spider.

Harry reminds them of the water on the floor the night of the attack, and wonders where it came from. Ron says it was level with the door to the girl’s bathroom. When Ron is hesitant to enter, Hermione says it’s ok to go in–No one will be in there, as it’s Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. Moaning Myrtle is floating above the tank of the toilet in the end stall. They ask her if she saw anyone near her bathroom on Halloween night when Mrs. Norris was attacked. Myrtle replies that she wasn’t paying attention because Peeves upset her so much that she came in there to kill herself, but couldn’t, because she’s already dead. Then she dives, sobbing, into the toilet.

Percy is shocked to discover them in the girl’s bathroom. Ron explains that they’re looking for clues. Percy bustles them out of the bathroom, saying “Don’t you care what this looks like? Coming back while everyone’s at dinner—” Ron argues with his brother that they never laid a finger on the cat. Percy says that’s what he told Ginny, but she’s very upset. Ron replies that Percy doesn’t care about Ginny, he’s just worried about messing up his chances to be Head Boy. Percy takes five points from Gryffindor, and threatens to write their mother if Ron does any more detective work.

In the common room that night, both Ron and Hermione are preoccupied and unable to study. Hermione wonders “who’d want to frighten all the Squibs and Muggle-born out of Hogwarts?” Ron thinks that Draco Malfoy is the Heir of Slytherin, but Hermione is skeptical. Ron points out that Draco said “You’ll be next, Mudbloods!” when he saw the writing on the wall, and that all of his family has been in Slytherin house. The Malfoys could have had the key to the Chamber for centuries and handed it down through the generations.

Hermione agrees that it’s possible that Draco is the heir. Harry wonders how they can prove it. Hermione says there’s a way, but it would be difficult, and they would be breaking fifty school rules in the process. She proposes that they make Polyjuice potion, which they just learned about in Snape’s Potions class. With the Polyjuice potion, they can transform themselves into three Slytherin students to get into the Slytherin common room and ask Malfoy questions. Ron is worried that they will get stuck looking like Slytherins. Hermione, impatient, assures them that it wears off after a while. She says that getting the recipe will be difficult, as the book is likely to be in the restricted section of the library, which requires a note of permission from a teacher. She suggests that they pretend to be interested in the theory in the book. Ron says that no teacher will fall for that, “they’d have to be really thick…”

Ron’s feelings towards Hermione develop subtly throughout the book. Ron is jealous of Hermione’s crush on Lockhart. He is shocked when her face becomes hairy after the accident with the Polyjuice potion. He defends her against Draco. He is so upset when she is petrified that he’s willing to face his fear of spiders to save her, and is especially relieved when she is revived.

In the conflict of Hermine vs. Draco, Hermione claims that he had to buy his way onto the Quidditch team, because he has no talent. Draco replies, “No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood” exhibiting entitlement, disgust, and pureblood supremacism. Their contrast represents status based on blood vs. merit.

When Harry is in Lockhart’s office, he hears a horrifying disembodied voice. “It was a voice, a voice to chill the bone marrow, a voice of breathtaking, ice-cold venom.” There are clues within the writing that the monster is a snake, as snakes are cold-blooded, venomous creatures.

Nick and Harry are both frustrated by issues of class and status. Nick is excluded from the Headless Hunt, and has a lower position in ghost society, based on circumstances out of his control. This is enforced by Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore, an insufferable gatekeeper. Harry is frustrated because despite getting up earlier than everyone else and practicing in inclement weather, his team can’t keep up with the speed of the Slytherin team, because they have expensive broomsticks, and so an unfair advantage.

Filch is disgruntled because he has to clean up after thoughtless Hogwarts students. Harry discovers that Filch wants to study magic, like Hogwarts students. Hence, the Qwickspell course. It is revealed later that he is a “Squib,” someone born into a wizard family who doesn’t have any magical powers. They are treated as second-class citizens in the wizarding world. This is the reason for his bitterness, and his sadism towards students. When Harry discovers Flich’s secret desire, it embarrasses him, and saves Harry from punishment, though he doesn’t know why until later. It’s ironic when Nick asks Harry to vouch for how frightening he is, right after he kindly helps Harry escape Filch, by instigating Peeves. Like [Dobby](https://www.gradesaver.com/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/study-guide/character-list#dobby), Peeves the Poltergeist is a trickster figure, inciting random disruption. Sir Patrick, Harry Potter, and Filch all struggle with both class and the expectations of masculinity.

Seasons create a structure for the book. Because it’s October, Harry and Filch contend with the mud that results from rain. October also provides the perfect pretext for the death day party. Autumn is traditionally a liminal season, a transition from summer to winter, from life to death. Halloween has pagan roots and is a mainstay of Gothic literature. At the deathday party, the three friends find a combination of hospitality and grossness. Moaning Myrtle is introduced, who is key to the plot. This episode raises unanswered questions about ghosts in the world of Harry Potter: Why do some ghosts stick around the human world, but Harry Potter’s parents do not? There is a light-hearted quality to the death day party. It’s more like Dia de Los Muertos celebration than a horror show.

Then, in contrast, Harry experiences a truly horrifying voice, a predator who wants to kill but can’t be seen. Because Harry can understand Parseltongue (which is rare), he is able to hear the basilisk. This in turn causes suspicion in his fellow wizards. Harry’s difference isolates him. Ron is sensitive to common opinion as he often shares it himself—sniggering at Filch, telling Harry that hearing voices looks bad. He represents the average wizard. His instinct is to run when they find Mrs. Noris. Harry’s instinct is always to help.

Draco Malfoy represents the upper-class pureblood wizard. His family used to have more status, and is trying to hold on to it. He is sadistic, happy at the sight of the hanging cat, and tries to scare the Muggle-born out of Hogwarts. His father Lucius Malfoy has facilitated this moment, so Ron is not too far off to suspect Draco. But Draco Malfoy is a red herring in the plot, not Slytherin’s heir.

Hogwarts was founded in a time when “magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution.” It was built in isolation for the protection of a persecuted minority. Salazar Slytherin distrusted Muggles. This is the origin of the Chamber of Secrets. It is a protectionist desire, analogous to ethnonationalism, to protect an in-group from an out-group. Salazar Slytherin left the school when the other four founders disagreed, but placed the beast in the Chamber for his heir so that his pureblood ideology could regain power one day through ethnic cleansing. Harry has self-doubt about his identity. He is worried that he has inherited evil. The book overall considers a conflict between two models of human nature: essentialist identity and constructed identity.

Hermione represents rationality amid prejudice. She is good at suspending judgment, collecting empirical information, and coming up with hypotheses. She notices the spiders fleeing. And she reasons that because Dumbledore couldn’t cure Mrs. Norris, the cat must have been attacked by something inhuman.

Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom is a transgressive space. The rules are represented by Percy Wesley. He is shocked to find Ron and Harry in a girls' bathroom. Much has been made by psychoanalytic theorists about setting the Chamber of Secrets in a bathroom. It is also a plot point that alarmed some Christian parents groups who reviewed the book.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Filch](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/argus-filch) bursts through the crowd, stunned when he sees Mrs. Norris. He immediately turns on [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter), saying that he murdered Mrs. Norris. [Dumbledore](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-dumbledore) and other teachers arrive and escort [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter), [Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger), [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley), and Filch over to [Lockhart](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/gilderoy-lockhart)’s office, along with Mrs. Norris. Dumbledore concludes that Mrs. Norris is petrified, not dead, and that the magic is too advanced for Harry to have done it.

***Analysis Part 1:***

This incident begins the fear and the rumors that permeate the rest of the book. Filch, lacking any other information, turns immediately on Harry and his friends because of the circumstances, despite Dumbledore’s reassurance that it would have been impossible for Harry to commit the crime.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Filch](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/argus-filch), who has been sobbing, again accuses [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter), saying that Harry knows that he is a Squib. Harry argues that he didn’t touch Mrs. Norris and doesn’t even know what a Squib is. [Snape](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-snape) then steps forward and asks why he, [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) weren’t at the feast and why they went up to that corridor. They explain that they went to [Nick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/nearly-headless-nick)’s deathday party, but when Harry begins to explain why he went up to the corridor, he worries that explaining the bodiless voice no one else can hear will sound far-fetched. He says that they were too tired to go the feast, but Snape doesn’t believe him.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Filch also turns on Harry because he assumes that Harry has the prejudice Filch has experienced from many others because he is a Squib (a person of wizarding parentage but who does not have magical powers). But Harry does not dislike Filch because of his lack of magical powers, but rather because he treats the students terribly.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Dumbledore](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-dumbledore) says that the kids are innocent until proven guilty, and adds that the Mandrakes that [Professor Sprout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters) is growing will be able to cure Mrs. Norris. When the teachers leave, [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) asks [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) if he should have told them about the voice. Ron immediately says no: hearing voices isn’t good even in the wizarding world. Harry asks if Ron believes him and Ron immediately says yes, but he adds that what Harry described is admittedly strange.

***Analysis Part 3:***

This is one of the rare instances in which Harry feels a lack of support from his friends. As they are unsure of what Harry is hearing, Harry himself becomes uncertain whether he should confide in the teachers, even though it would help for the teachers to have as much information as possible about the incident.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) asks [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley) what a Squib is, and Ron chuckles. He explains that it’s someone who is born into a wizarding family but who doesn’t have any magical powers, like the opposite of a Muggle-born. He explains that it’s very rare, and it’s probably why [Filch](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/argus-filch) hates the students so much.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Ron explains another type of prejudice that people can experience because of their heritage or magical abilities. But Harry, Ron, and Hermione have a hard time treating Filch with respect not because he cannot do magic (which they didn’t previously know) but because he is mean to students.

***Summary Part 5:***

For a few days, the entire school talks about the attack on Mrs. Norris. [Ginny](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ginny-weasley) in particular seems very disturbed by what happened, though [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley) tries to assure her that they’ll “catch the maniac who did it.” [Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger), for her own part, does nothing but read, trying to find out information about what the Chamber of Secrets might be. Additionally, when [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) is walking to meet Ron in the library, he sees [Justin Finch-Fletchley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/justin-finch-fletchley), who sees him and immediately turns in the opposite direction.

***Analysis Part 5:***

As rumors start to fly throughout the castle, the lack of information instills fear. For Ginny, it later becomes clear that she is afraid because she worries that she might have been part of the attack. For Harry, he sees that the rumors have started to make people afraid of him. But Hermione, on the other hand, tries to combat this lack of information by finding out all she can about the Chamber of Secrets.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger) is unable to find information on the Chamber of Secrets, and so one day in their History of Magic class, she asks [Professor Binns](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-binns) (who is a ghost) about the Chamber of Secrets. Binns is hesitant at first, but then he reveals some of the backstory of Hogwarts’s founders. There were four founders, for whom the four Houses are named. They built the school at a time when “magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution.”

***Analysis Part 6:***

Hermione continues her quest of trying to find out information in the face of fear. Professor Binns sheds some light on the Chamber of Secrets, demonstrating how the prejudice against wizards had been the original source of Slytherin’s own prejudice. It is also notable that Binns states that magic was feared—Muggles presumably didn’t understand how magic worked, and therefore they feared what they did not know. This is also true in the present, as the Dursleys fear Harry’s magical ability.

***Summary Part 7:***

[Binns](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-binns) explains that at first, the founders worked together to seek out young wizards and witches, but then a rift grew between Salazar Slytherin and the other founders. He believed that magical learning should be kept only in all-magic families, believing Muggle-born students to be “untrustworthy.” This rift led Slytherin to leave the school, but legend has it that Slytherin had built a Chamber within the school that could only be opened by his heir.

***Analysis Part 7:***

The story reinforces the fact that had the Muggles not been prejudiced against wizards and vice versa—had they simply treated each other with respect and kindness—the prejudice might not exist in the present, and the hatred and attacks could have been avoided altogether. But instead, each group made generalizations about the other and caused harm as a result.

***Summary Part 8:***

[Binns](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/professor-binns) states, however, that no one has ever been able to find the Chamber. [Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger) asks what is in it, and Binns says that it is said to hold some sort of [monster](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/symbols/the-monster-basilisk), which the Heir of Slytherin alone can control, and which can be used to “purge the school of all who [are] unworthy to study magic.” However, he begins to get angry at the students’ questions, repeating that the Chamber is a myth.

***Analysis Part 8:***

Despite all of Binns’ information, he is still unable to tell the students what might have attacked Mrs. Norris, which is the mystery that sparks the most fear. Additionally, because Binns refuses to acknowledge that the Chamber might actually be real, it only leads the students to create more rumors about it—like the idea that Harry might be the heir of Slytherin.

Summary Part 9:

After class, [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley) says that he never knew the “pure-blood stuff” started with Slytherin, and that if the Sorting Hat had tried to put him in Slytherin, he would have taken the train straight home. [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) remains silent, because the Hat did consider putting him in Slytherin. He asked the Hat not to, knowing Slytherin’s bad reputation, and so the Hat put him in Gryffindor instead. Harry realizes that people are starting to believe that he is Slytherin’s heir, thinking of [Justin](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/justin-finch-fletchley) that afternoon.

Analysis Part 9:

Harry reveals an insecurity about his identity here, as he worries that he might actually belong in Slytherin because the Sorting Hat believed that he might belong there. This is the first hint of Harry’s worry there are aspects of his identity that are out of his control, and that might actually reveal a darker part of himself. As Hermione notes later, he does not actually know whether he is or is not the Heir of Slytherin.

Summary Part 10:

[Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter), [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) walk back to their dorm through the corridor where the attack happened. They look for clues, noticing scorch marks on the ground, and at the window near the message, about twenty spiders are scurrying to get outside. Ron mentions that he’s terrified of spiders. [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) remembers the water on the floor during the attack and wonders where it came from. [Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger) says that it’s coming from the bathroom nearby, which is the one that [Moaning Myrtle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/moaning-myrtle) haunts.

Analysis Part 10:

Again, in order to combat their fear and lack of knowledge, the three friends try and search for clues in order to gain more information about the attacks. The spiders ultimately lead Harry and Ron to more information about the Chamber of Secrets later in the book, and the water on the floor is key to solving the mystery of why Mrs. Norris was petrified there.

Summary part 11:

That night, [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter), [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) try to speculate who the Heir of Slytherin might be. Hermione asks who would want to “frighten all the Squibs and Muggle-borns out of Hogwarts.” Ron immediately jumps to [Draco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/draco-malfoy), who hates Muggle-borns and who comes from an old family that has always been in Slytherin. Harry suggests that the Malfoys could have handed down a key from generation to generation.

Analysis Part 11:

Despite the fact that Harry is experiencing some of the negative effects of students’ speculation, he and his friends also fall into the trap of not having information. Therefore they fill in the gaps with rumors of their own, assuming that because of Draco’s prejudice, he would be the one causing the attacks.

Summary Part 12:

[Hermione](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/hermione-granger) proposes a plan to find out if it is [Draco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/draco-malfoy): take Polyjuice Potion, which transforms a person into the appearance of someone else. She, [Ron](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/ron-weasley), and [Harry](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/characters/harry-potter) can then sneak into the Slytherin common room and ask Draco about the Chamber. They’d be “breaking about fifty school rules,” she says, and they’d need to get a note from a teacher in order to take the book with the recipe out of the Restricted Section of the library.

Analysis Part 12:

Again, Hermione’s strategy is always to find out more information about what is happening, rather than jump to conclusions. And in suggesting Polyjuice Potion, she demonstrates that she (like Harry and Ron) is willing to break the rules in order to help those in danger of being attacked.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

"He did it, he did it!" Filch spat, his pouchy face purpling. "You saw what he wrote on the wall! He found – in my office – he knows I'm a – I'm a —" Filch's face worked horribly. "He knows I'm a Squib!" he finished.

"I never touched Mrs. Norris!" Harry said loudly, uncomfortably aware of everyone looking at him, including all the Lockharts on the walls. "And I don't even know what a Squib is." (9.27-28)

***Explanation:***

Argus Filch is a pretty warped individual, since he seems to get positive pleasure from punishing Hogwarts students. On the other hand, he seems desperately isolated. His only friend is Mrs. Norris, his cat, and he genuinely appears to feel that he's being persecuted because he is a Squib. We can't imagine what it would be like to be a non-magical person totally aware of the magical world – how awful, to know about magic but not to be able to do it! If you were a Squib, would you choose to keep working around wizards and witches? Would you join the Muggle world?

***Quotation 2:***

"That will do," [Professor Binns] said sharply. "[The Chamber of Secrets] is a myth! It does not exist! There is not a shred of evidence that Slytherin ever built so much as a secret broom cupboard! I regret telling you such a foolish story! We will return, if you please, to history, to solid, believable, verifiable fact!" (9.116)

***Explanation:***

First of all, it's sad that Professor Binns seems to think that anything interesting has to be fake, while "solid, believable, verifiable" fact has to be boring. Why can't things be both true and interesting in his class? Second of all, what do you think of Professor Binns's claim that history is "solid"? Doesn't history depend on who's telling it? Yes, history is based on research into contemporary documents and "verifiable fact." At the same time, the way you put together a historical narrative can really influence the impressions people get about who was right, who was wrong, and why things happened the way they did. For example, if it was Slytherin's followers telling us about the Chamber of Secrets, they would probably make it sound like the other three founders were being unreasonable and prejudiced against Slytherin's teachings when they drove him out of the castle. So, we think Professor Binns has too much faith in the power of history to be objective – and since the Chamber of Secrets does turn out to exist, we think J.K. Rowling is also being critical of his idea of "solid, believable" fact.

***Quotation 3:***

For a few years, the founders worked in harmony together, seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated. But then disagreements sprang up between them. A rift began to grow between Slytherin and the others. Slytherin wished to be more selective about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy. (9.100)

***Explanation:***

Salazar Slytherin's argument with Godric Gryffindor and the other founders of Hogwarts shows that, no matter what happens between Harry, Draco, and Lord Voldemort, these tensions between "purebloods" and "Muggle-borns" will persist. After all, the wizarding world has a thousand year history of prejudice – it's never going to disappear entirely. That's human nature, we suppose (which is disappointing). At the same time, even if you can't get rid of prejudice entirely, at least you can fight back against it. We also wonder how much of Slytherin's suspicion of Muggle-borns comes from the fact that he lived in "an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution" (9.98). So the suspicion is mutual: Slytherin hates Muggles, but Muggles in this period also hate wizards. Why can't they all just get along?!

***Quotation 4:***

History of Magic was the dullest subject on their schedule. Professor Binns, who taught it, was their only ghost teacher, and the most exciting thing that ever happened in his classes was his entering the room through the blackboard. Ancient and shriveled, many people said he hadn't noticed he was dead. He had simply got up to teach one day and left his body behind him in front of the staffroom fire; his routine had not varied in the slightest since. (9.83)

***Explanation:***

There's something ironic about a dead man teaching history, since history is all about the past and the activities of long-dead people. We have to wonder a little at the wisdom of Professor Dumbledore leaving such a deadly dull instructor in charge of a subject that's actually really important. Not only is the history of the four founding wizards and witches essential to the plot of Book 2, but wouldn't it have been helpful for Harry to know about Grindelwald before Book 7?