

Hannah said with a laugh.

“The fact of the matter is, if we keep pushing away everything muggle and refusing to learn about them, we’ll only stand out more,” Susan continued, bringing them back on track.

“Harry, you were at the World Cup, weren’t you? You saw what half the older folks thought was a good example of muggle clothing! How do they expect to stay incognito if they’ve got no idea about muggle life?”

Harry remembered some of the more... interesting outfits he’d seen at the Cup. Susan was right. How could wizards blend in with muggles if they didn’t know the first thing about them?

They were interrupted by the arrival of Ron and Hermione, who looked bewildered by the company Harry was keeping. “There you are!” Hermione said by way of greeting, dropping a stack of books on the table beside her. How she could have so many when they didn’t even have their timetables yet, Harry didn’t know.

She and Ron both seemed set on ignoring Harry’s Hufflepuff companions, talking to him as if he was alone. The two girls shared an annoyed look, getting to their feet. “See you later, Harry,” Susan said.

Once they were gone, Ron turned to him. “What you talking to Hufflepuffs for?” he asked suspiciously. Harry raised an eyebrow.

“I didn’t realise it was such a big deal,” he retorted a little sharply. “We were talking about the World Cup.” Sort of. Eventually. Tangentially.

Ron seemed a little wrong-footed that Harry didn’t immediately see the problem in speaking to those outside his own house. “Really, Ron, it’s not like they’re Slytherins,” Hermione pointed out diplomatically, buttering a slice of toast.

Harry wondered what they would’ve done if he *had* been talking to Slytherins, and scowled into his orange juice.

McGonagall came around to hand out timetables, and Harry eyed his over. Herbology with the Hufflepuffs first thing. Maybe Harry would sit with Hannah and Susan instead of Ron and Hermione, just to show them.

He couldn’t, though. He couldn’t risk Dumbledore getting suspicious of him, and it would be an obvious sign that the Compulsion charm was gone if Harry started socialising with people outside his own house. He was supposed to be the perfect little Gryffindor — and evidently that involved only valuing the opinions of other Gryffindors.

Was it normal, he wondered? Kids spending their whole Hogwarts career only talking to people inside their own house? He glanced around the hall; no, there were plenty of groups with mixed colours on their robes. It wasn’t *common*, but it wasn’t unusual either. Finishing his breakfast, Harry slowly began to plot. If he could get all the houses mixing together more without it being just him, maybe Dumbledore wouldn’t realise Harry knew the truth. He could pass it off as school unity in the face of international competition; they would all have