

Harry Potter and Sorcerer's Stone

Introduction

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is a young adult novel by J.K. Rowling. On his eleventh birthday, orphan Harry Potter receives an acceptance letter from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he learns about magic and his own past.

Harry lives with his aunt and uncle. Harry's parents were killed by the evil wizard Voldemort when he was an infant.

At Hogwarts, Harry quickly befriends Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, and makes an enemy of Draco Malfoy.

Harry encounters Voldemort, who is working with one of his professors. With the help of his friends, Harry defeats Voldemort and the professor.

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Brief Summary

After murdering Harry's parents, James and Lily Potter, evil Lord Voldemort puts a killing curse on Harry, then just a baby. The curse inexplicably reverses, defeating Voldemort and searing a lightning-bolt scar in the middle of the infant's forehead. Harry is then left at the doorstep of his boring but brutish aunt and uncle, the Dursleys.

For 10 years, Harry lives in the cupboard under the stairs and is subjected to cruel mistreatment by Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon and their son Dudley. On his 11th birthday, Harry receives a letter inviting him to study magic at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Harry discovers that not only is he a wizard, but he is a famous one. He meets two best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and makes his first enemy, Draco Malfoy. At Hogwarts the three friends are all placed into the Gryffindor house. Harry has a knack for the school sport, Quidditch, and is recruited onto the Gryffindor team as its star Seeker.

Perusing the restricted section in the library, Harry discovers that the Sorcerer's Stone produces the Elixir of Life, which gives its drinker the gift of immortality. After realizing that Voldemort might be after the stone, Albus Dumbledore had it moved it to Hogwarts for safekeeping.

Harry finds out that when she died, Lily Potter transferred to her son an ancient magical protection from Voldemort's lethal spells. This protection is what allowed Harry as an infant to

survive Voldemort's attack. It also helps Harry keep Voldemort from possessing the Stone, which Dumbledore agrees to destroy.

Detailed Summary

Mr. Dursley, a well-off Englishman, notices strange happenings on his way to work one day. That night, Albus Dumbledore, the head of a wizardry academy called Hogwarts, meets Professor McGonagall, who also teaches at Hogwarts, and a giant named Hagrid outside the Dursley home. Dumbledore tells McGonagall that someone named Voldemort has killed a Mr. and Mrs. Potter and tried unsuccessfully to kill their baby son, Harry. Dumbledore leaves Harry with an explanatory note in a basket in front of the Dursley home.

Ten years later, the Dursley household is dominated by the Dursleys' son, Dudley, who torments and bullies Harry. Dudley is spoiled, while Harry is forced to sleep in a cupboard under the stairs. At the zoo on Dudley's birthday, the glass in front of a boa constrictor exhibit disappears, frightening everyone. Harry is later punished for this incident.

Mysterious letters begin arriving for Harry. They worry Mr. Dursley, who tries to keep them from Harry, but the letters keep arriving through every crack in the house. Finally, he flees with his family to a secluded island shack on the eve of Harry's eleventh birthday. At midnight, they hear a large bang on the door and Hagrid enters. Hagrid hands Harry an admissions letter to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry learns that the Dursleys have tried to deny Harry's wizardry all these years.

The next day, Hagrid takes Harry to London to shop for school supplies. First they go to the wizard bank, Gringotts, where Harry learns that his parents have left him a hefty supply of money. They shop on the wizards' commercial street known as Diagon Alley, where Harry is fitted for his school uniform. Harry buys books, ingredients for potions, and, finally, a magic wand—the companion wand to the evil Voldemort's.

A month later, Harry goes to the train station and catches his train to Hogwarts on track nine and three quarters. On the train, Harry befriends other first-year students like Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, a Muggle girl chosen to attend Hogwarts. At school, the first-years take turns putting on the "Sorting Hat" to find out in which residential house they will live. Harry fears being assigned to the sinister Slytherin house, but he, Ron, and Hermione end up in the noble Gryffindor house.

As the school year gets underway, Harry discovers that his Potions professor, Snape, does not like him. Hagrid reassures Harry that Snape has no reason to dislike him. During their first flying lesson on broomsticks, the students are told to stay grounded while the teacher takes an injured boy named Neville to the hospital. Draco Malfoy, a Slytherin bully, snatches Neville's prized toy and flies off with it to the top of a tree. Harry flies after him. Malfoy throws the ball

in the air, and Harry speeds downward, making a spectacular catch. Professor McGonagall witnesses this incident. Instead of punishing Harry, she recommends that he play Quidditch, a much-loved game that resembles soccer played on broomsticks, for Gryffindor. Later that day, Malfoy challenges Harry to a wizard's duel at midnight. Malfoy doesn't show up at the appointed place, and Harry almost gets in trouble. While trying to hide, he accidentally discovers a fierce three-headed dog guarding a trapdoor in the forbidden third-floor corridor.

On Halloween, a troll is found in the building. The students are all escorted back to their dormitories, but Harry and Ron sneak off to find Hermione, who is alone and unaware of the troll. Unwittingly, they lock the troll in the girls' bathroom along with Hermione. Together, they defeat the troll. Hermione tells a lie to protect Harry and Ron from being punished. During Harry's first Quidditch match, his broom jerks out of control. Hermione notices Snape staring at Harry and muttering a curse. She concludes that he is jinxing Harry's broom, and she sets Snape's clothes on fire. Harry regains control of the broom and makes a spectacular play to win the Quidditch match.

For Christmas, Harry receives his father's invisibility cloak, and he explores the school, unseen, late at night. He discovers the Mirror of Erised, which displays the deepest desire of whoever looks in it. Harry looks in it and sees his parents alive. After Christmas, Harry, Ron, and Hermione begin to unravel the mysterious connection between a break-in at Gringotts and the three-headed guard dog. They learn that the dog is guarding the Sorcerer's Stone, which is capable of providing eternal life and unlimited wealth to its owner and belongs to Nicolas Flamel, Dumbledore's old partner.

A few weeks later, Hagrid wins a dragon egg in a poker game. Because it is illegal to own dragons, Harry, Ron, and Hermione contact Ron's older brother, who studies dragons. They arrange to get rid of the dragon but get caught. Harry, Ron, and Hermione are severely punished, and Gryffindor is docked 150 points. Furthermore, part of their punishment is to go into the enchanted forest with Hagrid to find out who has been killing unicorns recently. In the forest, Harry comes upon a hooded man drinking unicorn blood. The man tries to attack Harry, but Harry is rescued by a friendly centaur who tells him that his assailant was Voldemort. Harry also learns that it is Voldemort who has been trying to steal the Sorcerer's Stone.

Harry decides that he must find the stone before Voldemort does. He, Ron, and Hermione sneak off that night to the forbidden third-floor corridor. They get past the guard dog and perform many impressive feats as they get closer and closer to the stone. Harry ultimately finds himself face to face with Quirrell, who announces that Harry must die. Knowing that Harry desires to find the stone, Quirrell puts Harry in front of the Mirror of Erised and makes him state what he sees. Harry sees himself with the stone in his pocket, and at that same moment he actually feels it in his pocket. But he tells Quirrell that he sees something else. A voice tells Quirrell that the boy is lying and requests to speak to Harry face to face. Quirrell removes his turban and reveals Voldemort's face on the back of his head. Voldemort, who is inhabiting Quirrell's body, instructs Quirrell to kill Harry, but Quirrell is burned by contact with the boy. A

struggle ensues and Harry passes out.

When Harry regains consciousness, he is in the hospital with Dumbledore. Dumbledore explains that he saved Harry from Quirrell just in time. He adds that he and Flamel have decided to destroy the stone. Harry heads down to the end-of-year banquet, where Slytherin is celebrating its seventh consecutive win of the house championship cup. Dumbledore gets up and awards many last-minute points to Gryffindor for the feats of Harry and his friends, winning the house cup for Gryffindor. Harry returns to London to spend the summer with the Dursleys.

The story is narrated by a detached third-person observer close to the action, but not involved in it.

Point Of View: For most of the story, the narrator, who knows everything about all of the characters, generally stays close to Harry Potter's point of view, registering surprise when Harry is surprised and fear when Harry is afraid. But while Harry is a baby in the first chapter, the narrator takes the point of view of Mr. Dursley, who is perplexed by signs of wizards around town. The shift in point of view from a Muggle's perspective to a wizard's emphasizes the difference between the two worlds.

Tone: As fitting for a children's book, the tone is straightforward and simple, with few purely decorative elements or artistic features, few metaphors and figures, and little playful irony. The language is easy to grasp. The narrator never imposes moral judgments on any characters, even the wicked Voldemort, but allows us full freedom to praise or condemn.

Tense: Past

Setting (Time): An unspecified time, modern and roughly contemporary (late 1990s)

Setting (Place): Surrey, England, and the Hogwarts wizardry academy

Protagonist: Harry Potter

Major Conflict: Harry attempts to stop Voldemort, who killed Harry's parents, from stealing the Sorcerer's Stone.

Rising Action: Harry's arrival at Hogwarts, the news of the break-in at Gringotts, and Hermione's revelation of the trapdoor under the guard dog in the third-floor corridor bring Harry and Voldemort closer to confrontation.

Climax: Professor Snape's apparent hex on Harry during the Quidditch game brings the simmering tension between good and evil out into the open, shifting Harry's concern from winning the game to surviving.

Falling Action: With the conflict out in the open, the forces of good and the forces of evil draw closer together: Harry, Ron, and Hermione explore the school and learn about the Sorcerer's Stone; Voldemort drinks unicorn blood to sustain himself and attacks Harry in the Forbidden Forest; Harry faces Professor Quirrell and Voldemort, who orders Quirrell to kill Harry.

Themes: The value of humility, the occasional necessity of rebellion, the dangers of desire

Motifs: Muggles, points, authority

Symbols: Harry's scar, Quidditch, the Mirror of Erised

Foreshadowing: The pain that Harry feels at the end of Chapter 7 when Snape stares at him hints that there is some underlying tension between the two. Rowling exploits our misgivings about Snape by leading us to believe that he and Harry will eventually confront each other in a

climactic battle for the Sorcerer's Stone.

Themes

The Value of Humility

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone emphasizes the virtue of humility by showcasing the extraordinary modesty of its hero and by making this modesty an important part of Harry's success in obtaining the Sorcerer's Stone. Harry's humility is no doubt ingrained in him during his ten miserable years of neglect and cruelty with the Dursleys. But Harry does not stop being humble when he gains fame, wealth, and popularity at Hogwarts. His reaction to the discovery that everyone seems to know his name on the train to Hogwarts does not make him primp and pose, but rather only makes him hope that he can manage to live up to his reputation. In this respect, he contrasts sharply with Draco Malfoy, who prides himself on his family reputation and downplays achievement.

Similarly, when it becomes apparent that Harry has an astounding gift for Quidditch, his reaction is not to glory in his superstar abilities, but rather to practice more industriously than before. When Harry breaks Quidditch records by catching the Golden Snitch in the first five minutes of the game, he does not even pause to appreciate the applause of the crowd, but rushes off. Harry's refusal to glorify himself is instrumental in getting the stone because he differs from wicked wizards like Quirrell in that he desires only to find the Stone for the common good, not to use it to acquire personal fame or fortune. If Harry were less humble, he would be unable to seize the stone. He is the extreme opposite of Voldemort, who strives only to achieve his own selfish goals.

The Occasional Necessity of Rebellion

Hogwarts is a well-run institution, with clearly spelled out rules that are strictly enforced. Midlevel teachers and school administrators like Professor McGonagall constantly police students for violations, and the rules are taken seriously. Even at the highest level of the Hogwarts administration, there is a clear respect for the rules. Dumbledore is a stern taskmaster. He makes a very gentle and warm welcome speech to the first-year students, but he throws in a few menacing reminders about the prohibition of visits to the Forbidden Forest and the third-floor corridor. None of these Hogwarts rules ever seems arbitrary or unfair. On the contrary, we generally approve of them, feeling that in a world imperiled by misused magic, strict control over student behavior is necessary.

Even so, it soon becomes clear that Harry is unable to abide perfectly by the rules. He enters the third-floor corridor in the full knowledge that it is forbidden territory, and he dons the invisibility cloak to inspect the restricted-books section of the library. After the flying instructor has clearly prohibited broomstick flying until she returns, Harry does not hesitate to take off after Malfoy to retrieve Neville's stolen toy. And Harry approves of infractions of the rules by others as well. When Hagrid reveals that he is engaged in an illegal dragon-rearing endeavor, Harry not only fails to report Hagrid to the authorities, but actually helps Hagrid with the dragon.

Harry's occasional rebellions against the rules are not vices or failings. Rather, they enhance his heroism because they show that he is able to think for himself and make his own judgments. The contrast to Harry in this respect is the perfectionist Hermione, who never breaks a rule at the beginning and who is thus annoying to both Harry and us. When she eventually lies to a teacher, showing that she too can transcend the rules, Hermione becomes Harry's friend. One of the main lessons of the story is that while rules are good and necessary, sometimes it is necessary to question and even break them for the right reasons.

The Dangers of Desire

As the pivotal importance of the desire-reflecting Mirror of Erised reveals, learning what to want is an important part of one's development. Excessive desire is condemned from the story's beginning, as the spoiled Dudley's outrageous demands for multiple television sets appear foolish and obnoxious. The same type of greed appears later in a much more evil form in the power-hungry desires of Voldemort, who pursues the Sorcerer's Stone's promise of unlimited wealth and life. While Voldemort and Dudley are obviously different in other respects, they share an uncontrollable desire that repels Harry and makes him the enemy of both of them. Desire is not necessarily wrong or bad, as Dumbledore explains to Harry before the Mirror of Erised—Harry's desire to see his parents alive is touching and noble. But overblown desire is dangerous in that it can make people lose perspective on life, which is why Dumbledore advises Harry not to seek out the mirror again. Dumbledore himself illustrates the power and grandeur of one who has renounced desires almost completely when he says that all he wants is a pair of warm socks. This restraint is the model for Harry's own development in the story.

Symbols

Harry's Scar

The lightning-shaped scar that Harry receives from Voldemort symbolizes everything unique and astounding about Harry, though he never thinks twice about the scar until its history is finally told to him. Like the famous scar of Odysseus in Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, Harry's forehead lightning bolt is a badge of honor, an emblem of having survived a great battle and of being destined to wage still more battles in the future. It constantly connects Harry to the past, not just to the trauma of the struggle against the evil Voldemort, but also to the loving parents who tried to protect him. The scar is also a symbol of Harry's emotional sensitivity, because it hurts him whenever hatred is directed at him, as when Snape first sees him at Hogwarts or when Quirrell tries to grab him.

Quidditch

As the preferred sport and pastime of the wizard world, Quidditch is entertainment, but the game is also a symbol of the deeper virtues taught at Hogwarts. The all-consuming importance

of Quidditch at the school shows that magic is not just a bookish pursuit, but has a physical and practical application as well. Hermione may learn all of her textbooks perfectly, but she is not a hero for doing so; heroism is won on the Quidditch fields. Quidditch also shows that wizardry is intended for much more than the self-centered use of magic powers for personal glory. Any wizard who uses it for such ends alone is, like Voldemort, no longer a part of the team-spirit philosophy of Hogwarts. A person should use magic with an awareness of others' needs and values, just as winning at Quidditch depends on the successful interaction of several players acting cooperatively. No matter how talented a single Quidditch player like Harry might be, he or she cannot play the game alone.

The Mirror of Erised

Harry's encounter with the Mirror of Erised symbolizes his growing self-awareness, as the magic mirror forces him to look within himself and face the question of what he really wants. Harry has never had to inquire into his own desires before, because the Dursleys never cared about his desires and, upon arriving at Hogwarts, he seems to have everything he needs in his daily schedule of classes and meals. But the Hogwarts experience is meant to be more than a routine of memorizing formulas and learning to transform matches into pins. It is meant to bring personal growth and character development, for which it is necessary to examine one's soul.

Harry's desires, as reflected in the mirror, are noble ones; he wants to see his family alive and then wants to find the Sorcerer's Stone for the common good. Voldemort, on the other hand, is driven by nothing but his ego, and his desires are wholly selfish. The Mirror of Erised shows us that who we are (literally, the reflection of ourselves that we see in the mirror) is defined by what we want—our desires shape our identities. That Harry is the one who ends up with the Stone teaches us that we must temper our desires.

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Muggles

The world of the Muggles, or ordinary, nonmagical human beings, is an obvious contrast to the realm of the wizards in a variety of ways. Wizards appear grand and colorful, but Muggles are bland and conventional. The story's main representatives of the Muggle world are the Dursleys, who are cruel, closed-minded, selfish, and self-deluded. When we first encounter wizards in the story, we do so through the strongly disapproving eyes of Mr. Dursley, who is contemptuous of the wizards' emerald-green capes and purple robes. Our reaction is most likely to object to Mr. Dursley's lack of imagination, as the wizard world seems a refreshing contrast to the constraining boredom of Muggle life.

But in going off to Hogwarts, Harry does not leave behind his Muggle existence forever. The same qualities that make the Muggles objectionable are present among wizards as well. Mrs. Dursley's snobbery is fully apparent in Malfoy's snooty name-dropping, as Harry is soon disappointed to observe. Dudley's self-centered and uncaring greed is present in a more

grandiose and powerful way in the evil Voldemort's greed. And Hogwarts itself is composed of students from wizard and Muggle backgrounds alike. The point of the story is not that Muggles are bad and wizards are good, or even that Muggles are boring while wizards are exciting. It is rather that the world is made up of different types of people with different aptitudes and different desires who should be able to coexist. Muggles must be free to develop into wizards if they have the gift and the calling. If they do, they can liberate themselves and find their true selves.

Points

One of the central aspects of life at Hogwarts is the ongoing competition for the house championship, which is determined by the greatest accumulation of points. Students accumulate points for their houses by performing particularly good actions and by winning at Quidditch, and they lose points for performing particularly bad actions. The points system thus symbolizes the need for a careful accounting of one's actions, as a careless penalty could result in a defeat for one's peers. It also shows an interesting twist on morality, as points can be earned not only for good or righteous behavior, but also for athletic excellence. Moral and spiritual achievement is rewarded but so is physical achievement. This fact brings the world of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* out of a Christian ethical system (in which pure intentions of the spirit matter most) and brings it closer to an ancient notion of human excellence. The word "virtue" derives from the Latin word *virtus*, which referred in ancient times to manly successes in martial and physical exploits. This quality saw the body and the soul as one entity and recognized excellence as a mixture of different kinds of achievement. Harry, with his mental and physical prowess, embodies this ancient quality.

Authority

Both admirable and bogus versions of authority pop up throughout the story. Bogus authority first appears in the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, who order Harry around with no sense of appropriateness. Their authority is based solely on power: they are the adults, with financial and physical superiority over children, and in their minds, they feel entitled to treat Harry like a slave. But we see the emptiness and limits of Mr. Dursley's authority as soon as the wizard world makes its appearance. Mr. Dursley is suddenly unable to control even the mail that arrives at his house. His power vanishes completely and with it so does his authority. By the time he flees to the shack on the island with his family, he has become a ridiculous figure, desperately clinging on to an idea of control that he lacks utterly. Even the uncouth and oafish Hagrid, who appears on the island, has more authority than Mr. Dursley. By the end of the story, Dumbledore emerges as the true authority figure. Dumbledore has immense power but does not use it. When he wants Harry to stop visiting the Mirror of Erised, he recommends that Harry stop going instead of ordering him to stop. Based on wisdom and kindness rather than raw power, Dumbledore's model of authority becomes Harry's own.

Harry Potter

Harry Potter is the hero of the story. Orphaned as a baby, he is brought up by his aunt and uncle, the Dursleys, maltreated by them, and tormented by their obnoxious son, Dudley.

Neglected and disdained, Harry grows up to be a timid boy unsure of his abilities. His sudden fame as a wizard at Hogwarts comes not just as a total contrast to his earlier forgotten misery, but as a fate that we feel is very much deserved after his youthful suffering. Yet even after he becomes famous, Harry never loses his modesty and humility. Even by the end of the story, when he has obtained the Sorcerer's Stone and saved Hogwarts (and perhaps the whole world) from Voldemort, Harry does not revel in his success. He simply asks Dumbledore a few factual questions and is satisfied with the answers, never expecting any praise. Moreover, he does not wish to use his powers to fulfill grandiose wishes. Dumbledore wisely knows that, unlike Voldemort, Harry will desire only to get the magic stone, not to use it. He does not covet riches or power, or harbor any secret wild ambition; he just wants to make sure that the stone and its power do not fall into the wrong hands. The simplicity of his desire is part of what makes him a hero.

Harry's capacity for loyal friendship is another of his attractive features. It is also one of the surest proofs that Harry is developing at Hogwarts, where he is a lonely individual at the story's beginning but has a circle of loyal friends and admirers by the end. His faithful membership in Gryffindor is a symbol of his newly developing team spirit. He prefers maintaining good relations with his schoolmates to basking in individual glory. Similarly, rather than boast of his immense talent at Quidditch, he rejoices in the communal victory for his house and does not stop for applause even when he breaks Quidditch records. He is willing to put himself at risk for the sake of a friend, sometimes foolishly, as when he battles a troll to save Hermione and when he gets himself severely punished for helping Hagrid with his dragon. Harry's success at forging true friendships and overcoming his early loneliness is almost as inspiring as his defeat of the evil and powerful Voldemort.

Hermione Granger

Hermione's character develops significantly over the course of the story and sheds light on Harry's character as well. At the outset, she is an annoying perfectionist, a goody-two-shoes who has read all the books for her classes in advance, has learned all about Hogwarts, and never breaks the rules. When she first speaks to Harry on the train ride to school, she is eager to impress him with her knowledge, whereas Harry only wants to make friends. Her intellectual talents are indeed worthy of pride, as we find out later when she scores 112 percent on her final exam. But we sense that her show-off side is a defense against her feelings of inferiority, because she comes from a Muggle family and, like Harry, is unfamiliar with the wizard world. In both Hermione and Harry we see that learning wizardry requires a great deal of social adjustment and self-confidence.

Hermione's development into a likable character and a friend begins in the troll episode, when Harry and Ron are reprimanded for trying to save her from the monster and she coolly delivers a bold-faced lie to the teacher. The little girl who has been abiding by all the school rules now dares to lie to her superiors, and a new friendship is born. Hermione's decision to support her friends rather than obey the rules showcases what is perhaps truly valuable about Harry's Hogwarts experience. The school teaches him not just facts from books and how to follow

procedures, but also—and perhaps more important—loyalty, compassion for others, and solidarity.

Draco Malfoy

The son of a long line of wizards, Malfoy is the opposite of Harry in his familiarity with the Hogwarts experience, his sense of entitlement, his snobbery, and his generally unpleasant character. Rowling includes Malfoy in the story partly as a foil to Harry's character; in seeing how unlikable Malfoy is, we appreciate all the more Harry's kindness and generosity of spirit. For example, right after Malfoy insults Ron's poverty on the train ride to Hogwarts, Harry buys double the number of pastries that he needs and shares them with Ron. Malfoy's snobbish insistence on only socializing with children of the best families, his selfishness, and his overwhelming aura of superiority all resemble similar characteristics in Dudley Dursley, Harry's nemesis in the Muggle world. The similarity between Malfoy and Dudley is important in reminding us that Harry's new life will not be an escape from his old problems. Malfoy's presence throughout the preparatory stages of Harry's educational adventure is a rude awakening to the realities of the wizards' world, which includes detestable characters like Malfoy. At Hogwarts, Harry will not be surrounded simply by kindness, but will have to face unpleasantness as well, just as he has earlier in his life.

But Malfoy also plays a somewhat deeper role in the story, at least symbolically. He is mean-spirited and nasty, but there are hints that in time he may become far worse than nasty; he may blossom into a truly evil character like Voldemort. The Latin word *draco* means "dragon," and the French words *mal* and *foi* mean "bad faith." We sometimes suspect that Draco Malfoy may indeed be a "bad faith dragon," a monster of ill will. Perhaps he is a dragon still being incubated, like Hagrid's baby dragon that will soon grow into a destructive monster. Malfoy belongs to the darkly powerful house of Slytherin, as did Voldemort. His total lack of redeeming features makes him almost as flat a villain as Voldemort. Like Voldemort, Malfoy is not so much a realistic character as a caricature of badness. Of course, we do not know what Malfoy will become in the future. But his presence at Hogwarts reminds us that every generation will have its heroes and its villains, and that the struggle between right and wrong will always continue.

Ron Weasley

A shy, modest boy who comes from an impoverished wizard family. Ron is Harry's first friend at Hogwarts, and they become close. He lacks Harry's gusto and charisma, but his loyalty and help are useful to Harry throughout their adventures. Ron's mediocrity despite his wizard background reminds us that success at Hogwarts is based solely on talent and hard work, not on family connections. Ron's willingness to be beaten up by the monstrous chess queen shows how selfless and generous he is.

Hagrid

An oafish giant who works as a groundskeeper at Hogwarts. Rubeus Hagrid is a well-meaning creature with more kindness than brains. He cares deeply for Harry, as evidenced by the tears

he sheds upon having to leave the infant Harry with the Dursleys. His fondness for animals is endearing, even if it gets him into trouble (as when he tries raising a dragon at home). Hagrid symbolizes the importance of generosity and human warmth in a world menaced by conniving villains.

Albus Dumbledore

The kind, wise head of Hogwarts. Though he is a famous wizard, Dumbledore is as humble and adorable as his name suggests. While other school officials, such as Professor McGonagall, are obsessed with the rules, Dumbledore respects them (as his warnings against entering the Forbidden Forest remind us) but does not exaggerate their importance. He appears to have an almost superhuman level of wisdom, knowledge, and personal understanding, and it seems that he may have set up the whole quest for the Sorcerer's Stone so that Harry could prove himself.

Voldemort

A great wizard gone bad. When he killed Harry's parents, Voldemort gave Harry a lightning-shaped scar. Voldemort has thus shaped Harry's life so that Harry's ultimate destruction of him appears as a kind of vengeance. Voldemort, whose name in French means either "flight of death" or "theft of death," is associated both with high-flying magic and with deceit throughout the story. He is determined to escape death by finding the Sorcerer's Stone. Voldemort's weak point is that he cannot understand love, and thus cannot touch Harry's body, which still bears the traces of Harry's mother's love for her son.

Neville Longbottom

A timid Hogwarts classmate of Harry's. Neville is friendly and loyal, but like Ron, he lacks Harry's charisma. Like Hermione, he is initially too obedient, and when the time comes to go after the Sorcerer's Stone, he fears punishment and threatens to report his friends to the teachers.

Professor McGonagall

The head of Gryffindor House at Hogwarts and a high-ranking woman in the wizard world. Minerva McGonagall is fair but extremely stern and severe in her punishments. Her devotion to the letter of the law is impressive but a bit cold, and we constantly feel that she could never become a warm and wise figure like Dumbledore. Rowling named her after a notoriously bad nineteenth-century Scottish poet named William McGonagall who was nevertheless highly confident of his own talents.

Professor Snape

A professor of Potions at Hogwarts. Severus Snape dislikes Harry and appears to be an evil man for most of the story. His name associates him not only with unfair snap judgments of others