

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Presented by the

# Harry Potter

READING CLUB

## YEAR 1 HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE



### Introduction to the Harry Potter Books

In 1997 Joanne Rowling, a single parent living in Edinburgh, Scotland, published her first book. It was the fulfillment of a dream she'd had since she was a child. Her story about an eleven-year-old orphaned boy who discovers his heritage of wizardry took the world by storm. Published as a children's book, it was embraced by readers of all ages, who found the engaging humor and gentle parody of the real world to be enjoyable and thought provoking.

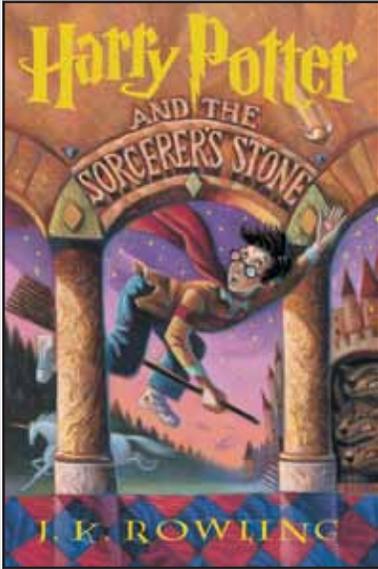
Rowling had planned, from the beginning, to tell the story in a series of seven books. The initial success of the first title (published in England as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and in America as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*)

guaranteed that she would be able to continue the story as she wished. Fans camped out overnight and lined up at bookstores in record numbers as each new installment in the series appeared.

This discussion guide is designed to help readers explore some of the deeper meanings underlying Rowling's world of wizardry and magic. Incorporating elements of fantasy, mystery, humor, sports, and friendship, the series has wide appeal for readers of all ages. On the surface the books are great adventure tales, but like all great fantasy literature, they also deal with universal human values, longings, wishes, and choices.



YEAR 1  
**HARRY POTTER**  
AND THE SORCERER'S STONE



Harry Potter has been raised by his horrible relatives, Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, who treat him with disdain while lavishing attention on their spoiled son Dudley. On the eve of his eleventh birthday, Harry receives news that changes his life: he is being summoned to attend the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry is astonished to learn that his deceased parents, James and Lily Potter, were both wizards, and that they died trying to protect infant Harry from a Dark wizard named Voldemort. He also discovers, much to his own discomfort, that he is famous in the wizarding world; Voldemort's attack on Harry has not only left a lightning-shaped scar on Harry's forehead, but has taken away Voldemort's power as well.

At school Harry soon makes both friends and enemies with equal ease. Ron Weasley becomes Harry's sidekick, and Hermione Granger, who at first appears to be a boring know-it-all, quickly proves that she is a fast friend too, and the three become a team. Draco Malfoy, a bully and a bigot, along with his cronies, Crabbe and Goyle, become Harry's enemies. Involved with classes, teachers, and Quidditch, an aerial sport played on broomsticks, Harry is also intrigued by the mystery of a hidden object, guarded by a three-headed dog. The attempt to solve the mystery with his friends brings Harry face to face with his nemesis, Voldemort, in the disguise of someone he least suspects.

### Discussion Questions for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

1. Why does Dumbledore decide to have Harry grow up with the Dursleys rather than with one of the wizard families? How does Harry's experience with his relatives build his character?
2. Why does it take so long for Harry's wand to choose him when he visits Diagon Alley? What is special about his wand? Why does Ollivander say, "The wand chooses the wizard"?
3. When Harry first meets Malfoy, he reminds him of Dudley. How are these two alike? How are they different?
4. Why do Harry and Ron dislike Hermione in the beginning? How does their friendship with her grow? What qualities and strengths does each of them bring to their adventures?
5. Why does Dumbledore give Harry the Cloak of Invisibility? Why is the Cloak so important to Harry?
6. Discuss the importance of the Mirror of Erised and the meaning of its name. Dumbledore tells Harry: "It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts . . . However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth." (p. 213) What does he mean by this? What would you see if you looked in the mirror?
7. Why do you think Harry and Professor Snape dislike each other so much?

8. Professor Quirrell tells Harry: "There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it." (p. 291) Discuss whether you agree or disagree with this statement. How do you see this idea at work in our own world?

9. Dumbledore tells Harry to "Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself." (p. 298) What does he mean by that? Why is it important to name a thing that you fear?

10. What explanation does Dumbledore give Harry for the protection he received during Voldemort's attack when he was a baby? What does he mean when he says: ". . . to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved you is gone, will give us some protection forever"? (p. 299) How does this protection keep Harry safe even in the most difficult circumstances?

11. While finding their way to the Sorcerer's Stone, what strengths do Harry, Ron, and Hermione each contribute to solving the puzzles? Were you surprised when Quirrell turned out to be the one who was after the Sorcerer's Stone? Was there anything in the plot that led you to suspect him?

12. J.K. Rowling has great fun creating names of people, places, and spells in this story. How does a name give us clues to a character's personality? The following are just a few suggestions of names to explore.

Severus Snape

Professor Quirrell

Argus Filch

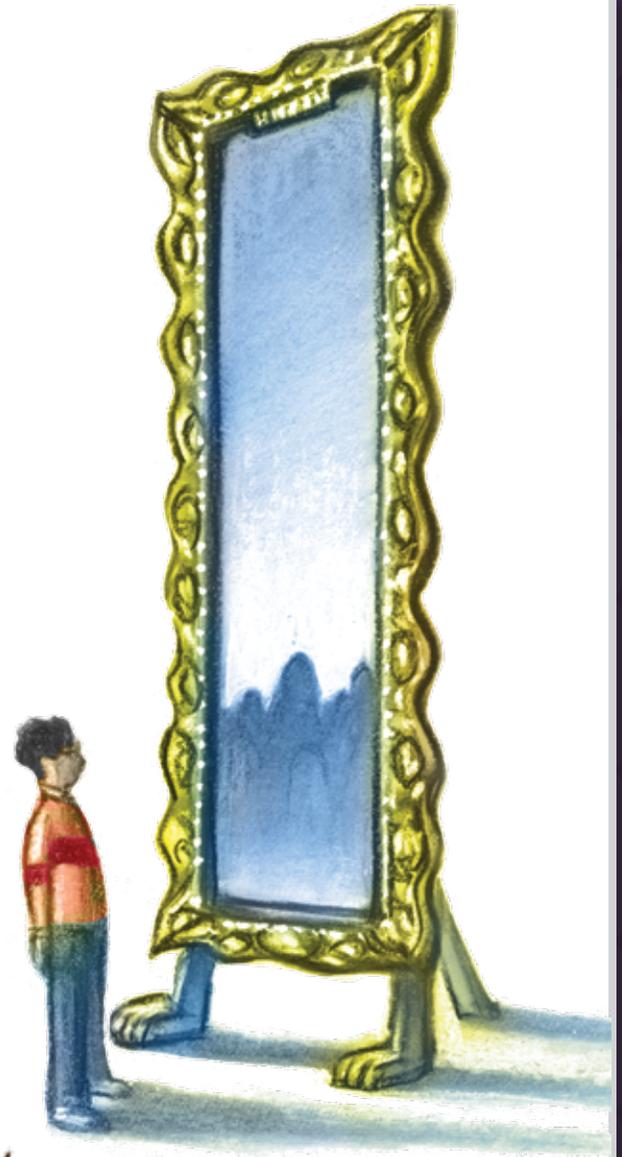
Professor Sprout

Draco Malfoy

Voldemort

Minerva McGonagall

Albus Dumbledore



## Talking About the Books

1. Discuss the idea that appears throughout the series of the power of a name. Dumbledore teaches Harry that fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself. Why are so many wizards afraid to say the name Voldemort, and why does Harry insist on using it? When Dumbledore faces Voldemort at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, and when Harry faces him in the final battle in, *Deathly Hallows*, why do they both call him by his given name, Tom Riddle?
2. Describe the growth and maturation of major characters throughout their seven years at Hogwarts. Who do you think has changed the most? What experiences and insights contribute to their growth? Which characters – students and/or adults – remind you of people you have known in your own life?
3. Comparing the six Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers Harry encounters, which one do you think was most effective and why? Which classes at Hogwarts prepare the students with skills for their future lives? In *Order of the Phoenix*, Dolores Umbridge tells her class: “I am here to teach you using a Ministry-approved method that does not include inviting students to give their opinions on matters about which they understand very little.” (p. 317) Discuss this point of view in relation to teaching methods of the other professors at Hogwarts and those that you have experienced in your own schooling.
4. Author Philip Pullman, in his 1996 Carnegie Medal acceptance speech, said: “There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book.” (<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/author/carnegie.php>) Discuss this quote in relation to the Harry Potter series. What do you identify as the major themes, that you can identify, and why are they best illuminated in a coming-of-age saga?
5. Susan Cooper, author of *The Dark Is Rising* sequence, has written: “Fantasy goes one stage beyond realism; requiring complete intellectual surrender, it asks more of the reader, and at its best may offer more . . . Fantasy is the metaphor through which we discover ourselves.” (Susan Cooper, *Dreams and Wishes: Essays on Writing for Children*, McElderry Books, 1996, pp. 44-45) How does the fantasy element of the Harry Potter series help readers discover more about themselves and others? What insights have you gained from reading these volumes?
6. In Harry Potter’s world, the magic community exists alongside our “real” world and provides a contrast to the institutions that are familiar to us: educational, governmental, medical, and sporting. Compare the Ministry, Hogwarts, St. Mungo’s, Azkaban, the Tri-Wizard Tournament, and the Quidditch World Cup to similar organizations and events in our own world. How do these parallel existences compare to the similar constructions in other books of fantasy?
7. Dumbledore tells Harry: “That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children’s tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence, Voldemort knows and understands nothing . . . That they all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped.” (*Deathly Hallows*, p. 709) Discuss this idea in relation to the truths of your own life. What are the important elements that have shaped your own character?



## Also Available from J.K. Rowling

*Quidditch Through the Ages*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*.

Discussion guide prepared  
by Connie Rockman, Youth  
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Junior Authors and Illustrators.



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