

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Presented by the

# Harry Potter

READING CLUB

## YEAR 2 HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS



### 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.

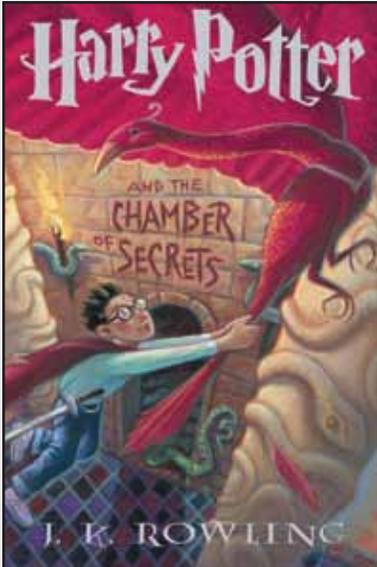
Rowling had planned, from the beginning, to tell the story in a series of seven books. The initial success of the first title (published in England as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and in America as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*)

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 2  
**HARRY POTTER**  
AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS



Harry escapes from a dismal summer with his relatives when Ron Weasley and his twin brothers, George and Fred, fly their father's bewitched Ford Anglia to the Dursleys' and take Harry back to their home, The Burrow. When Harry and Ron are unable to get through the barrier at Platform 9 ¾, they use the magic car to fly them to school. Crashing into the Whomping Willow on the school grounds, they start the term in big trouble for breaking school rules.

Soon Harry, Ron, and Hermione become involved in larger problems. Harry hears a sinister voice in the walls while students, especially those with Muggle blood, are being attacked. Writing on a wall declares that "The Chamber Is Open" and the "Heir of Slytherin" is responsible for the attacks. Hermione is rendered petrified, but not before she is able to leave clues to help Harry and Ron find the hidden chamber.

A mysterious diary, tales about past troubles at Hogwarts involving Hagrid and another student named Tom Riddle, a giant spider in the Forbidden Forest, and the disappearance of Ron's younger sister Ginny all lead to a stunning climax. Harry and Ron discover the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets, but Harry alone must rescue Ginny and escape the evil force that lurks there.

### Discussion Questions for *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

1. Should Ron and Harry have taken the car to Hogwarts?  
How else could they have gotten to school?
2. Why is it important for students to know the legends, as well as the history of Hogwarts? Discuss Hermione's question to Professor Binns: "Please, sir, don't legends always have a basis in fact?" (p. 149) How does knowing the history of the founding of Hogwarts help the students understand the present?
3. What does Hermione do in this book that seems out of character for her? Why is she willing to risk getting caught breaking the rules? What strengths does she contribute to solving the mystery of the Chamber of Secrets?



4. Why do you think Harry is able to understand and speak Parseltongue? Why doesn't he know when he is speaking?
5. Discuss the significance of Fawkes the phoenix. What is a phoenix? Why is this one so important to Dumbledore? What is the significance of the name Fawkes?
6. When they are in Dumbledore's office and Dumbledore asks Harry if he wants to tell him anything, Harry says no, even though many things are bothering him. Would you have told the headmaster your concerns and asked for his advice? Why is Harry reluctant to ask for help?
7. Who is Tom Riddle? Why did he keep a diary? How is he able to make Ginny Weasley do what he wants her to do?
8. Dobby says he has always known about Harry Potter's greatness, but not his goodness. What does Dobby mean? What is the difference between "greatness" and "goodness"? What role does Dobby play in this story?
9. Discuss the character of Gilderoy Lockhart. Why do most of the teachers dislike him? Why is losing his memory a fitting punishment for Lockhart?
10. In the first book we learned that both Harry's and Voldemort's wands contain a phoenix feather from the same bird. What further connections between Harry and Voldemort do we learn about in *Chamber of Secrets*? What are the important differences between Harry and Riddle?
11. Rowling introduces new characters and names in this second book: Gilderoy Lockhart, Tom Riddle, Dobby, Moaning Myrtle. How does the name fit the personality of each of these characters? What do you learn about the history and mythology of the legendary creatures and plants in this story – the Basilisk, the phoenix, and the Mandrake – that helps you understand their significance in the plot?
12. What does Dumbledore mean when he says to Harry: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." (p. 333) What choices do Harry make that define his character?



## 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  
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Junior Authors and Illustrators.



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