

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Presented by the

# Harry Potter

READING CLUB

## YEAR 6 HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE



### 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.

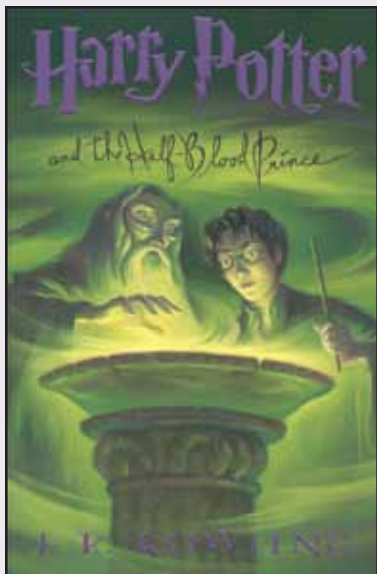
Rowling had planned, from the beginning, to tell the story in a series of seven books. The initial success of the first title (published in England as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and in America as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*)

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.



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AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE



Dumbledore takes a more active role in Harry's education, personally retrieving him from the Dursleys' home and taking him along to recruit a new teacher for Hogwarts, Professor Slughorn. In Slughorn's Potions class, Harry acquires a second-hand textbook once owned by someone who called himself the Half-Blood Prince, and he uses the notes in the book to his own advantage. Meanwhile, Harry is convinced that Draco Malfoy has become a Death Eater with a secret mission, which he is determined to uncover. But Dumbledore gives Harry a more important task: to retrieve a memory from Slughorn that will illuminate a mystery about Voldemort's past.

Voldemort's return to power has brought about murder and mayhem throughout the country. Dumbledore tries to provide Harry with knowledge he will need to ultimately defeat Voldemort, including glimpses into the past through the Pensieve and the awareness of the possible creation of Horcruxes that Voldemort used to contain pieces of his tattered soul. The story acquires a serious tone; it is now clear that only Harry can rid the world of this villain, as a long-ago prophecy stated: "Neither can live while the other survives."

### **Discussion Questions for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince***

1. What is the connection between the Ministry of Magic and the Prime Minister's office in London? Under what circumstances does the Minister of Magic visit the Prime Minister, and why will those visits never be disclosed?
2. Why does Narcissa Malfoy insist that Snape make an Unbreakable Vow to protect Draco? Describe the differences between Narcissa and her sister Bellatrix. Why does Narcissa feel it is necessary for Snape to make the Vow?
3. Why does Dumbledore take Harry with him to convince Slughorn to return to Hogwarts? What is Slughorn's weakness that Dumbledore hopes to exploit, and how does Harry's presence help recruit him? Why does Dumbledore feel it necessary to warn Harry about Slughorn's habit of "collecting" favored students?
4. Why doesn't anyone else share Harry's concern that Draco Malfoy has become a Death Eater? Review the enmity between Harry and Draco that has persisted since their first year at Hogwarts. Why does Harry risk sneaking into Draco's compartment on the train, and is Draco's attack on him more vicious than other attacks in the past?
5. Discuss Harry's assessment of Snape's first Defense Against the Dark Arts class: "It was surely one thing to respect the Dark Arts as a dangerous enemy, another to speak of them, as Snape was doing, with a loving caress in his voice?" (p. 178) Is this an indication of Snape's true feeling, or is it Harry's past perception of Snape that gives him this feeling? Discuss Lupin's comment to Harry that he has inherited an old prejudice against Snape from both James and Sirius. (p. 333)

6. Slughorn introduces students to four potions that play an important role in the story, particularly in this volume: Veritaserum, Polyjuice Potion, Amortentia, and Felix Felicis. Discuss how the name of each describes its properties and how each of these potions (or the knowledge of them) affects the plot in this book. What is Slughorn's answer to why more people don't use Felix Felicis? Discuss his warning about Amortentia, that it produces not love, but obsession.



7. Dumbledore's private lessons with Harry consist mainly of learning about Tom Riddle's history and background. Why is it important for Harry to have this information, even though much of it is conjecture? Compare the story of eleven-year-old Tom Riddle learning that he will attend Hogwarts to Harry's similar experience in *Sorcerer's Stone*. Compare Riddle's experience living in the orphanage to Harry's living with the Dursleys. Why was it easy for Harry to make friends at school, while Dumbledore tells him "Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor do I believe he has ever wanted one." (p. 277)

8. Discuss the theme of jealousy which surfaces in this volume as the Hogwarts students become more aware of their emerging feelings. Why does Ron get involved with Lavender? Why does Harry hold back his growing feelings for Ginny? How do Slughorn's private parties for students lead to further feelings of exclusion? How does Harry feel about being more "fanciable" as "The Chosen One" this year, as opposed to his dubious reputation in *Order of the Phoenix*?

9. Harry's borrowed copy of *Advanced Potion Making* gives him an advantage in the Potions class, but also access to some nasty and dangerous spells. Should he be using this book? Why is Hermione so opposed to him following the notations in the book? Who did you suspect was the "Half-Blood Prince"?

10. Why does Scrimgeour try to get Harry to act as if he is working with the Ministry during Christmastime? Why is Harry unwilling to do that? Why does Dumbledore also refuse to cooperate with the Ministry, instead pursuing his theories about Voldemort on his own?

11. Why does it take Dumbledore so long to tell Harry where he is going when he leaves Hogwarts? Discuss Harry's anger at the Headmaster for not taking his concerns about Malfoy seriously, and Dumbledore's comment: "Ah, Harry, how often this happens, even between the best of friends! Each of us believes that what he has to say is much more important than anything the other might have to contribute!" (p. 359)

12. How does Harry retrieve the important memory from Slughorn? Did he really need the Felix Felicis to get it? Discuss the concept of Horcruxes and how Tom Riddle coaxed the information from Slughorn. What effect has the creation of so many Horcruxes had on Voldemort?

13. What does Dumbledore mean when he tells Harry "Voldemort himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do!" (p. 510) Which tyrants throughout history might this statement describe? How would they compare to Voldemort? Why does Dumbledore believe that the ability to love is the "only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's"? (p. 511) Why does he refer back to the Mirror of Erised in *Sorcerer's Stone* when he explains this to Harry?

14. At what points in this volume could Harry have used the Felix Felicis potion for his own benefit? Discuss the times he does use it, or pretends to use it. What do these instances tell us about Harry's personality, and his growth in maturity, during this year at Hogwarts?

15. Why does Dumbledore immobilize Harry on the Astronomy Tower? Would Draco have used the Killing Curse on Dumbledore if Snape had not arrived? Why does Draco hesitate to finish the job? Describe the effects on Harry of each of the deaths at the ends of books four, five, and six. How does each affect his resolve to be the one to finish Voldemort?

## 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  
Literature Consultant, and editor  
of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Books of  
Junior Authors and Illustrators.



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