

**One-page Summaries for Articles from
Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter, edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman**

"Controversial content in children's literature: Is Harry Potter harmful to children?" by Taub and Servaty-Seib

Taub and Servaty-Seib begin by pointing out the success of the Harry Potter series, citing its publishing records. However, some object to Rowling's portrayal of "the centrality of magic to the topic of death to scenes that some believe are too violent, intense, or scary for children" (13). I find that the authors' main argument after analyzing the controversial topics of magic, religion, violence, death, and frightening scenes, is to be educated about how and when children read the Harry Potter series, as illustrated by their list of guidelines at the end of the chapter.

Taub and Servaty-Seib first explore the controversy over religion and the Harry Potter series. Some religions, fundamental Christianity in particular, object to the content of the books because of their representation of magic, witchcraft, and the fear that those who read them will come to accept what Satan has created (14). Bible verses such as Deuteronomy 18:9-12 are cited as proof that the content of Harry Potter's magical world is against religions' principles. Taub and Servaty-Seib also cite text from religious leaders who admire the Harry Potter series for its promotion of "values such as courage, love, friendship, and loyalty, with a moral approach of good vs. evil" (16). Rowling is quoted later as saying she has based much of the themes of her books off of Christian themes themselves, only revealing them in the later books.

Taub and Servaty-Seib address the controversy over the occult and recognizing the difference between fantasy and reality. One author is cited as stating that there are correlations between fantasy role-playing and cult membership, and another author states that parents must control all aspects of what their child reads or hears in relation to fantasy (17). Much of the article continues to explore the notion of children not being able to distinguish fantastical elements from reality. Some worry that reading books such as the Harry Potter series will create confusion in children's minds between what is real and what is fictional. Research is cited to object to this argument; it has been found that children who engage in fantasy role-play are better able to distinguish fantasy from reality because they have engaged in the fantasy world and have a better understanding of it.

Taub and Servaty-Seib continue to address controversy by discussing the scariness of Harry Potter books, as well as death and grief. As for the scariness of the books, the authors point out that reading is much less scary than watching TV or movies, and that although there are violent or scary scenes in the books, adults should spend time discussing these scenes with their child if they are bothering them. Taub and Servaty-Seib point out that although Rowling portrays death as the result of violence or evil, she does a wonderful job of showcasing the grief process of teenagers, Harry in particular.

The authors maintain that adults should be sure their child is ready to read the books before letting them read them. If there are concerns, adults may want to read with their child or just be available in the room while their child reads independently. The Harry Potter series is not meant to be harmful to children, and probably will not be, as long as adults support their child throughout the reading of the entire series.

"From sexist to (sort of) Feminist: Representations of gender in the Harry Potter Series" by Heilman and Donaldson

Heilman and Donaldson begin their article by arguing that the Harry Potter books mostly reinforce stereotypical gender roles, which is not out of the usual when thinking about children's books throughout history (138). The authors claim that the reader of books that portray gender roles as such will have a sense of comfort in these recognizable images of male and female characters behaving the way they do in the pages of a story. When we do not see gender roles as they are stereotypically depicted, we may have a sense of discomfort and feel unsettled in what we are reading (139).

The authors continue their argument by discussing the numbers of males and females in each of the Harry Potter books. In each book, it seems that male characters outnumber female characters. The authors also point out that other children's books do this, as well, *Winnie the Pooh* among the selection. Interestingly, the authors point out that as the series progresses, the roles of the female characters become more important, and more female characters are added, especially in *The Order of the Phoenix* (143). Characters Molly Weasley and Professor McGonagall become more assertive and take over the roles of their commanding male counterparts near the end of the series. Rita Skeeter and Professor Umbridge, although undesirable characters, become symbols of female power.

Heilman and Donaldson continue on by discussing the portrayals of the female characters as they develop throughout the series. They use the examples of Molly Weasley fighting against Bellatrix LeStrange in *The Deathly Hallows* and using "vulgar" language, and the example of McGonagall shouting "Charge!" during the battle of Hogwarts as support for their statement that these scenes become funny, since the characters are acting out of the ordinary (144). The authors also state that when females look less than desirable, they are belittled. Examples of this are Rita Skeeter's description (found on page 145 of the article), Hermione's description in *The Sorcerer's Stone* as a bushy-haired, big-teethed girl, and the fat lady that guards the Gryffindor common room. The authors also describe the problems associated with the portrayal of women through examples of how "deception characterizes Umbridge's and Bellatrix's rise to powerful positions" (145).

Heilman and Donaldson continue on by discussing how the roles of Hermione and Professor McGonagall, no doubt important and intelligent female characters, are mostly meant as "helper roles" to the male characters of the series. "Hermione's knowledge is important, but it is primarily used for Harry's adventures, not her own" (147) is a prime example of this. Hermione often does the studying and has the know-how for how to help Harry out, teaching him how to get his broom during the Tri-Wizard Tournament competition and keeping all of the supplies needed during *The Deathly Hallows* for both Ron and Harry. Professor McGonagall is obviously a smart woman, always carrying around books or being found in her study. However, Dumbledore is the powerful leader of the school.

The authors continue on with discussing how the females of the series are often shown as emotional, either giggling uncontrollably or crying with ease (149-150). As discussed earlier, appearance is something the authors see most of the female characters being concerned with, especially in terms of Hermione, at the ball in *The Goblet of Fire* when she shrinks her teeth and straightens her hair out.

The authors conclude their article by cautioning parents, teachers, and other adults who help their children to pick books out to read, to think about how the books that children read can affect their view on gender and power.

"Harry Potter and the secrets of children's literature" by Nikolajeva

Nikolajeva praises Rowling's Harry Potter series for the aspects of children's literature that it so well displays throughout. She describes the time when the first book of the series was released as a time when a deeper, more than one-dimensional character was needed for more sophisticated readers (225). She continues her writing on discussing the various things that make the Harry Potter character and series fit into and go beyond the usual children's literature formula. She especially looks at the series while thinking about the "carnival" critical theory, which we see more often depicted in children's novels, which "focuses on the literary depiction of a temporary reversal of the established order when power structures change places" (226).

The first thing the author describes regards the fact that Harry is born into a world where he is quickly taken out of the place he belongs and put into a place where he doesn't fit in; therefore, deprived of his birthright (227). He was taken to live with the Dursley family, who is related to him, but definitely does not fit in to their way of life (nor do they want him to). The audience knows that he should be somewhere greater than the house on Privet Drive being mistreated. Harry constantly has to prove himself worthy of the title of "the boy who lived." Other characteristics that the stories of the series have that allow them to fit into the children's literature realm include the removal of parents or parent figures, ordinary children given special powers, and a male protagonist (227-228).

The Harry Potter series encompasses several genres of literature, as discussed next by the author of the article. Of course, the Harry Potter series is vastly fantastical in nature due to the magic that is in every entity of it. The author also describes the stories as fitting into the mystery genre. In each novel, Harry and his friends must solve a mystery, and do so with bravery and courage. The "naughty-boy story" and "boarding school story" are both present, as well, with various characteristics that make these "genres" present in the series.

Nikolajeva next argues how in each of the books, with possible exception to *The Deathly Hallows*, after all of the adventures have come and gone, order is restored and adults come back into control of the situation at hand. After Harry and the gang avert each disaster, everything goes back to "normal." The author continually says that adults take over at the end of most children's books (235).

She concludes her article discussing the values and deeper analytics of the characters in the series. Harry is constantly in a pre-pubertal stage, not seeming to care much about advancing sexually, dating, and so on. This is especially apparent in comparison to teens of his age in other teen fiction (237). She gives several examples supporting how themes of Christianity are present in the books, especially in the last book, when Harry is prepared to sacrifice himself for "the greater good" (239-240). Finally, she proclaims the Harry Potter books to be excellent examples of children's literature.

"Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series" by Pugh and Wallace

Pugh and Wallace argue that heteronormative heroism, the idea that a male, heterosexual character alone becomes the hero of a story, dominates Rowling's attempts at gender equality and sexual diversity in her novels. The authors concede that heteronormative heroism is the "status quo," or what readers and audience members are used to seeing, thus is something most people will feel comfortable reading or viewing. They also discuss the problems of using the feature of heteronormative heroism due to the fact that the story's plot cannot be culturally diverse. This occurs even though Rowling includes various other diverse characters, both ethnic and female characters in titles of power. The authors feel that it is harmful to children to read heteronormative stories where they read about stereotypical male and female characters, especially if the stereotypes are incorrect (263).

First, the authors review ways that a reader could read the Harry Potter series in a queer fashion, even though there are no queer characters in the story to speak of. They compare Harry's "coming out" as a wizard as similar to when someone "comes out" as a gay individual to the public. This idea is further capitalized through the Dursleys' vast hatred and embarrassment of all things wizard, constantly worrying that they will be found out as related to a wizarding family by their neighbors. The Dursleys also proclaim that they are very normal, right on the first page of *The Sorcerer's Stone*, no doubt as a defense against any claims that they are related to James and Lily Potter. The authors compare the Dursleys' behavior as similar to those who are homophobic (265). Harry also has to deny his identity of being a wizard when he is around these blood relatives, much like a gay person may have to do around family who is not ready to share in their relative's private life. Werewolves are also compared to the people who come out as gay and are looked down upon for their behaviors, often forcing families to readjust their expectations and relationships with one another (267). Mrs. Weasley worries about this happening when Bill is bit by a werewolf, wondering how it will affect his and Fleur's upcoming marriage.

Pugh and Wallace continue their discussion by looking next at how the female characters in the Harry Potter series are often marginalized. There are women in powerful areas of the school and government, but in these areas, along with the home, they are all in very traditional roles (Mrs. Weasley, Dolores Umbridge, Professor McGonagall). All of these women in social institutions have to defer to a superior, who is always a male (269). The authors cite examples of character descriptions for both male and female characters, and found that female descriptors most often include stereotypical, negative physical descriptions, while male descriptions always fit the character they are describing (Snape as oily, Dumbledore with a long white beard and half-moon spectacles).

Heteronormative heroism is also characterized by making sure there is only one hero at the end of a story. In this series, it is Harry Potter who must be the "last one standing" to take the reigns of the battle. Therefore, several strong male characters meet their demise along the way: Harry's father, Sirius, Lupin, Snape, and of course, Dumbledore. Although Ron is one of Harry's sidekicks, he is effeminized through his lack of skill compared to Harry, his "girly" dress robes, and lack of sports talent in Quidditch (274).

Finally, the authors conclude by saying that any attempts that Rowling made in order to make the Harry Potter series into less than a normative series, backfired due to leaving out key character interactions. By including some queer characters, not marginalizing women, and not keeping with the heteronormative hero story pattern, they argue that the series would have been queered and more diverse.

"Is there a text in this advertising campaign?: Literature, Marketing, and Harry Potter" by Nel

Nel argues that the vast amount of marketing revolving around the Harry Potter series is detrimental to both the marketing and an analysis of the literary achievements of the novels. The books and marketing currently are blended together in such a way that one is not separated from the other in either of these regards. The author discusses how children's literature publishers have grown more interested in the way they can market the books in order to make money, rather than in fostering more good children's literature (238).

Warner Brothers is given credit for all of the merchandising done in regards to Harry Potter, as the author describes how the company relies on this practice to make back the money spent in creating the film. In order to do this, they needed JK Rowling's permission (239). Because the trademark law in our country has been reversed from protecting the consumer to protecting the company, more and more merchandise related to Harry Potter is now created and distributed.

JK Rowling has not been known as a supporter of the merchandising attempts by Warner Brothers and Mattel, as one might think she would be. She refuses to let her characters be seen drinking Coca Cola and did not want the action figures to promote violence, so they are instead called "collectible characters" (241). She also has illustrated the negative effects of wealth and capitalism in her books, comparing the actions of the Dursleys and Malfoys with their money to the way Harry acts with his own money. Harry is much more generous and less showy with his profits from the Tri-Wizard Tournament, and often buys his friends treats with his own money (242). Rowling has also donated profits from other projects associated with her books to various causes: one-parent households, cancer and MS associations, and fighting poverty in Britain (242). Rowling also had to "scrape by" for many years before the Harry Potter books caught on, perhaps almost needing to have public assistance (244).

Nel moves next to delving into the argument that the vast amount of marketing revolving around Harry Potter takes away from the literary conversation we should be having around the series instead. Rowling gained inspiration from authors of the past like Jane Austen and Roald Dahl. Critics of her have said her characters are two-dimensional, but others defend her central characters as being more than two-dimensional because of their compassion for one another. Rowling also is praised for the way she uses third person narrative, but through the eyes of Harry. For this reason, the audience is often tricked into thinking the outcome of a particular novel in the series will turn out completely different from what actually happens (247). The Harry Potter novels also contain undertones of anti-racism, something they are applauded for. When Voldemort and his followers call Muggle-born witches and wizards "Mudbloods," the name is something of a racial slur. The Tri-Wizard Tournament is an event meant to bring many different wizards from different backgrounds together (249).

Nel compares Rowling's style of writing in each of the Harry Potter novels to the authors' work that she was inspired from as a child. Several of the books she loved as a child contain parts of the plot, characterizations of characters, and wordplay that is seen in her work. Although she is criticized for not writing a "normal" fantasy, reminiscent of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Nel praises her work nonetheless. He also points out that Rowling must have taken some inspiration from mystery and/or detective novels. There is always something that Harry, Ron, and Hermione are trying to figure out in each of the novels, and surprisingly, Rowling does a good job of providing red herrings and keeping things secretive until the end (254). She also is artful about the names she gives her characters. Voldemort translates to "flight from death" in French (256). Dolores Umbridge's full name translates to something like "sorrows" and "annoyance or displeasure" (256). It is also interesting to compare the word "Pensieve" to the word "pensive," to how Dumbledore feels when he uses the Pensieve (thoughtful and pensive).

Nell next critiques the critics who contend that Rowling does not depict women in a favorable light. He cites numerous examples of times that Hermione's sage intelligence has saved both the trio of friends and numerous others. Hermione often teaches Harry spells that will help him out in his various challenges in each of the books (260). Along with this, without Hermione, Harry would not have done so well academically. When he becomes busy with Quidditch or preparing for the Tri-Wizard Tournament, Hermione is there to help him get through his schoolwork.

He concludes his article by reiterating the importance of taking a closer look at the Harry Potter phenomenon, past all of the marketing and merchandising that several companies are taking part in. Nell describes Rowling's authorship as keeping readers' attention through her words, making it hard to take a break from reading the books of the Harry Potter series (262). He cautions against confusing "literary magic" with "marketing magic" and says that we should give both the respect they deserve in order to understand them.

"Children's literature at the turn of the century" by Taxel

Taxel's article analyzed the effects of children's book publishers focusing more on the mass marketing and merchandising of a potential book, rather on its literary merits, when deciding whether or not to publish an author's work. He refers to this phenomenon as "fast capitalism," or how the children's literature publishing industry makes most of its decisions on the ways books are marketed (146). He then discusses how the publication of books for young people "directly influence the kinds of books that are available to teachers in classrooms, to parents in bookstores, or from online vendors" (148). This means that when publishers make books just based off of the potential profits they can earn from extra merchandise, children may not have the best options of literature to choose from.

Fast capitalism is looked at more closely in the following section. The main goal of publishing companies is to "create, perfect and change" services at faster rates, in order to earn capital. Most of the time, impulses to buy products that are associated with books come from a social pressure, not an individual need (149). At one time, publishing books and creating literature were renowned activities because they were celebrating ideas and creativity of authors. However, nowadays, creating literature is more concerned with the values of the market (149). Children all over are now becoming consumers at younger and younger ages, due to the advertisements they see on television, movies, and in stores. This is no doubt creating a consumerism in the younger generations that will be hard to stop.

Taxel next looks at the publication of children's literature in the 20th century, analyzing how it has changed over time. In the 18th and 19th century, books published for children were "serious, didactic, and overtly religious, and the audience for these books consisted primarily of children of the aristocratic and middle classes" (152). However, over time, the topics of books for children have shifted from these conservative topics for a certain social class, to books that increased knowledge about the American civil rights movement, nonfiction books regarding math and science, and other multicultural books (153). This, along with cheaper costs of publishing books for young readers, has led to products "swamping" bookstores, toy stores, and other specialty stores in various locales with both good and bad books.

Publishers of children's literature are criticized for not providing serious enough forms of literature for young people, instead worrying more about their financial hold in the marketplace. Taxel quotes Haugland in saying that those who are a part of the industry are ignoring their "cultural responsibility" for educating young people through the books they choose to publish (159). He then describes the industry as changing from a "genteel industry dedicated to providing good books for libraries" to an industry more concerned with "big business" and "the bottom line" (159).

He takes a look at books being created from movies or television series, such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Angel*. These books that are created based off of the television series they are named for often do very well in making money for their publishers. This is not to say they are quality literature. Taxel quotes Boynton in saying that "books are increasingly being regarded less as discrete properties than as one vital link in a media food chain," thus demonstrating that the book is not the most important thing in these situations – just an item that comes along with a successful media representation (162). Publishers also do very well when movies are created from books, which is where we have been focusing our learning in TE 838. He cites examples of vast marketing strategies from the American Girls phenomenon. Books are tied to \$80 dolls created from their main characters; girls who buy the dolls then want to purchase outfits and accessories for themselves and their dolls, and then they want to visit the headquarters store where they can dine in a special café (164). Walt Disney's successes at merchandising for his films is also cited, along with using the Harry Potter books to demonstrate that the first four books in the series were translated into 42 languages. This, no doubt, contributed to its vast popularity across the globe, and set the stage for the mass marketing of Harry Potter merchandise and films.

Taxel looks next at the popularity of publishers creating books in series. Publishers may want to publish an author's idea because they can see a future of creating a series out of an initial idea. He cites Ritzer's work, saying that "sequels are favored by movie studios" due to using the same characters, actors, and basic plot over and over, thus attracting a large audience to each film (169).

He looks at the worries of those involved in the children's literature industry, as well. Some contend that once an author becomes well known for their work that is merchandised and found extensively throughout the media world, it creates less space for new authors/illustrators to become discovered and hired to publish their own work. An author's name becomes incredibly important when looking to get a publishing company's name out to the public (171). Another worry is that there is a lack of multiculturalism in the children's books of today. The characters that are of different cultures are often just glossed over in popular books, but included nonetheless so that the publisher can say they included different cultures. Sometimes, characters of color are only in the background of a story, and not at the forefront as a main character (177). Although their roles are minimized, it may still help the publisher make money because they are attempting to reach a wider audience by including characters of other ethnicities than just Caucasian/American. Other minorities are sometimes left out due to concerns with creating tension and controversy (181).

Taxel concludes his article by reiterating his concerns with publishing companies worrying too much about making money, instead of publishing quality literature that children can both enjoy and learn something from. Unknown, talented authors and illustrators can lose their chance to get their name out in the publishing world. Teachers and librarians may not have quality collections of literatures in our nation's schools, when in actuality, the goal should be to have book collections "where all children can see themselves reflected" (185). Books about pop stars, television shows, and other popular culture examples are not the books we want to be exposing young children to. The best books out there should be promoted to children so that children can experience the diversity of the world, while learning the importance of literature, not media.

Reflecting on *Harry Potter* as a Cultural Phenomenon

Heilman's quote that was referenced this week in Module 5 of TE 838 from the first edition of her book, "Harry Potter...is not just books we read or movies we see or things we buy. The text and images of Harry Potter become part of who we are. This is true of individuals and it is true of 'us' as a global culture," has been demonstrated as completely and utterly obvious to me after participating in various activities surrounding Harry Potter. Children and adults who began reading JK Rowling's beloved series when *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* when it was first published grew with the series and finished reading it when the seventh book was published. People read and reread these books each and every day. Children in our classrooms in 2012 and beyond will grow up eagerly awaiting the day they can open the first book, when they are ready to face the world of wizards and Muggles. This is not to mention that the vast world of merchandise, films, and marketing in places like theme parks and how it affects modern society. Rowling's literary creation of Harry Potter, his friends and family, and the parallel world of the wizards should be celebrated in its literary form. Even though fans around the world can and should enjoy the products and activities that have stemmed from the series, the original books should be given credit for their outstanding creativity with deep, multi-dimensional characters, settings, and themes.

I see the Harry Potter series, which is the books themselves, to be inspiration for the hundreds and thousands of products on the market now. Several critics of the marketing side of the books have criticized the publishing companies for their alliance with Warner Brothers, Coca Cola, and so on, for creating so many media representations, theme parks, films, costumes, and websites, that the literature that inspired it all is lost. I agree in some ways with these arguments. In my own teaching, my fourth graders are either on the verge of beginning the Harry Potter series, in the middle or end of reading the series, or not interested in reading it. What I have found from those who have not read the series yet is that they say that they have watched *The Sorcerer's Stone* and already knew what it was about. This, of course, elicits a strong response from me along the lines of, "You HAVE to read the book! The book is so much better than the movie!" However, as a lover of all seven books and their characters' intertwined stories, I have to say that without the books, I cannot imagine the success of the merchandise that has followed.

In my exploration of websites and in reading my group members' documentation of the exploring they did, I was astounded in the depth of the fan websites, fan activities like real-life Quidditch teams, and the conversations on the internet regarding the books and films. I spent some time researching a Quidditch league that over 300 high schools and universities take part in around the world, and watched a short documentary about a tournament the players were taking part in. I truly feel that without the books,

there would be nowhere near the following for this fictional-turned-real sport. Quidditch is shown in the Harry Potter films, but the detailed explanation from Oliver Wood about how the game actually works is in print in *The Sorcerer's Stone* (SS, 167). The film portrays the hoops that the Chasers need to get the Quaffles through in a different manner than the Quidditch league has them displayed in the real-life league. The players run around with broomsticks in between their legs, playing the game according to the book.

I discovered that the cultural phenomenon that is Harry Potter has also infiltrated the world in other ways. Wedding planning is of course, a huge industry in today's world. However, there is a website that shows couples who have used Harry Potter as inspiration for their weddings! Guests are placed into four groups based off of the four houses at Hogwarts. The bride and groom pose for a picture in front of a little cottage that looks like Hagrid's hut. The wedding favors given out by the bride and groom were magic wands carved with the couple's names and wedding date (<http://www.bridalguide.com/photo-galleries/real-weddings/harry-potter-wedding/harry-potter-theme-wedding-magic-wands-2>). There is also a genre of music called "Wizard Rock," that one of my group members brought to my attention. The bands may not be the most talented of all music groups, but the music they perform tells stories about the characters and plots of the Harry Potter books (www.wizardrock.org).

I see the merchandising that companies have taken part in based off of the Harry Potter series as a way for fans to show their pride in the books. Each year, several students in our school (and teachers, too!) dress up as characters from Hogwarts at Halloween. Fans from all over the world travel to Universal Studios Islands of Adventure in Orlando, Florida, to visit The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Fans can buy t-shirts, sweatshirts, magic wands, Quidditch robes, and stuffed animals made to look like Hedwig or Scabbers. We cannot forget that the films that the books have inspired are also hot commodities in stores. In fact, I learned that Warner Brothers has placed a moratorium on all of the Harry Potter films, much like what Disney does with their classic animated films. Warner Brothers is apparently rereleasing the films in September as a collection, starting at costs in the hundreds of dollars. I'm sure that fans of the series will spend the money to purchase these films, but it is one of the examples of how companies use quality literature to make as much money as possible.

The article written by Taxel, "Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century," focused largely on the problem of publishing companies only giving those authors who have ideas in which merchandise can be created from a chance at being published, instead of others. Critics of these companies and their alliances with other companies in order to market the books say that it takes away from the focus on the original

story, or published book, and instead creates a consumerist culture in children and adults. I agree that the number of spin-off products created from the Harry Potter franchise is a ridiculous number, but there wouldn't have been such a push for these products had the books not been something worth reading. JK Rowling's fantastical world was the basis for people wanting to buy magic wands like the ones the characters in the book used, wear t-shirts that say "Gryffindor" or "Slytherin," and spend money in a theme park based off of the story.

The original books are definitely the inspiration for all of the things that are out there for consumers to purchase, especially the films, the theme park, and the merchandise available for purchase. Although I felt that the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* was not satisfactory in comparison to the book, the filmmakers did try to include as many events, characters, and nuances from the book as they could. This, unfortunately, meant that they had to skim over important details and combine others in order to fit the story into the length of a full-length feature film. An example of skimming over details in the film was how the character of Neville Longbottom was not included in various scenes, but suddenly was an important character in the end when he didn't want Harry, Ron, and Hermione to leave the Gryffindor common room on the fateful night Harry met with Voldemort beneath the school. In Rowling's book version of *The Sorcerer's Stone*, Neville was present on the train, in the classrooms, and on other adventures throughout the castle before the last scene with him in the film. Although the films do not include everything that is important to a reader and lover of Rowling's books, they do include most things that keep the films in line with the stories themselves.

Having recently been to the Universal Studios Islands of Adventure theme park this summer, I can say that The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a fascinating and wonderful representation of the Harry Potter franchise. However, I would have to say that the theme park has interpreted the film versions of the story, especially the look of the Hogwarts castle, the Hogwarts Express, and Diagon Alley. This is not to say that the film versions of the Harry Potter books portrayed the settings in a negative way. The films' portrayal of a parallel universe where wizards go to school and live was detailed and well interpreted from the books' descriptions of the places shown in the films. I thought the detail that was put into this theme park was amazing; visitors could go to The Three Broomsticks to get a bite to eat, visit Honeyduke's candy shop, and Fred and George Weasley's joke shop. In regards to the marketing and merchandising, visitors could buy anything from t-shirts, to Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans. It is obvious that the Harry Potter franchise has made a lot of money, not only from the books, but also from extensions of the story such as this theme park.

I noticed in several articles that I read this past week that some groups of people do not favor Harry Potter books for a few reasons. One reason is the way that JK Rowling marginalizes the female characters. Professor McGonagall, Hermione, Mrs. Weasley, and Dolores Umbridge, to name a few, are female characters with some sort of power, but must defer to a male character for decision making. They are all knowledgeable and seemingly independent women, but at the end of it all, must answer to a man. Pugh and Wallace, in their discussion about heteronormative heroism, express their dislike for the way Rowling portrays these female characters as rising to power. Professor McGonagall and Mrs. Weasley both display confidence and power in leading the way in the fight against Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, but Pugh and Wallace contend that this was done in a way that the audience found it more humorous rather than admired (269).

I had a hard time with reading some of the opinions that Pugh and Wallace argued in their article regarding female marginalization because I find it hard to imagine the story that Rowling crafted so meticulously as moving along any differently. If Hermione had faced Voldemort in the basement of Hogwarts at the end of *The Sorcerer's Stone*, the reader/audience would not have witnessed Harry's first encounter with the evil lord since he was a baby. This event moves the story towards being a full circle story, although it takes several more sequels until Harry and Voldemort eventually have their greatest conflict together. Yes, Hermione offers up sage advice to Harry in each and every book in the series. She is the "brainy, know-it-all" friend who comes in handy to Harry and Ron throughout the series. This doesn't mean the reader should think any less of her, though. That is just her character. As a female reader, I did not find any offense in the way Rowling characterized the roles of females. There were just as many unfavorable male characters (Quirrell, Peter Pettigrew, Cornelius Fudge) as there were female characters. These characters could be argued as having feminine characteristics instead of male characteristics, as well as not being brave, throughout each of the books they appear in, as well.

Another argument that some make against the Harry Potter series is that it goes against religious values and instead puts witchcraft and wizardry on a pedestal. Taub and Servaty-Seib explored the question of whether or not Harry Potter is harmful to children, citing quotes from religious leaders who feel that Harry Potter is the work of Satan, teaching young children about magical spells and taking attention away from the work of God. Other religious leaders contend that Harry Potter teaches valuable life lessons about love, courage, and being a good friend to others. JK Rowling has specifically said in interviews that Taub and Servaty-Seib cited that she used Christian principles in the Harry Potter series, especially in the last books of the series. Of course, a parent can ultimately make the choice of whether or not their child can read the series, but because the Harry Potter series is everywhere in our world, it may be hard to

contain a child from reading it. The authors of the article cited in this paragraph contend that parents should be around to discuss the book with their children, helping them to understand the fictional world that Rowling has created.

Although the success of the Harry Potter books is apparent in today's world based off of the immense following of fans, products, and films, it makes me wonder a few things. In thinking about the ways that popular literature for children has spurred other authors to create books similar to books already in circulation, what would happen if something similar to the Harry Potter series was released and had a major following? Stephenie Meyers' *Twilight* series is an example of this. I remember when the *Twilight* books first became very popular, around the time that the first film of the franchise was released, bookstores everywhere began displaying other vampire-related books with covers that looked very similar to the covers of the *Twilight* books. There are no doubt other wizard books out there, but if there are, so far I haven't heard too much about them. Would children or adults accept something similar? I have a hard time imagining a world where the Harry Potter books are not the most popular fantasy books for children, especially when it is apparent that they are enjoyed by both children and adults alike.

I also wondered about the house system that is in place at Hogwarts. Each student is sorted into a house on their first day at Hogwarts, which they will stay a part of for their entire education at the school. This past year, my principal mentioned our district moving toward this in the future, as it is supposed to increase morale in students and help them when they are older and being corralled into a the high school to know older students. I did a search online and found that in England, many schools already practice a house system, especially boarding schools (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_system). The houses are described as fostering competition between students, while also providing the care necessary for students who are away from their parents. Harry Potter books were not the first to use a house system, which was new knowledge to me. They are featured in several school stories, and in *Tom Brown's School Days*, a book that was referred to in the articles we read this past week. I could not find much about using the house system in the United States. Would using a system such as this help our students? Would it give our students more confidence in knowing that they have a core group of people they can rely on, especially those students who fall between the cracks? Rowling shows the positive aspects of the house system in the way the Gryffindor house celebrates victories in Quidditch matches and in winning the House Cup. However, the rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin, as well as the more negative stereotypes of Slytherin, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw, lead me to wonder if there would be too much competition between houses.

Overall, JK Rowling's world of Harry Potter has changed the literary world for many children and adults. I have seen it turn nonreaders into lovers of reading in my classroom each year. I have read the books as a child and as an adult, each time finding more detail and finding myself transported into a different world. The world that Harry and his friends exist in has been interpreted into films, merchandise for purchase, and literally buildings that you can visit in Florida's Universal Studios. It is difficult to imagine all of this without the original stories that Rowling so carefully crafted. People will always find fault with something present in popular culture, as demonstrated by the arguments about religion, gender portrayal, and violence that several authors wrote about in their scholarly articles. However, I truly feel that without the literary versions of the Harry Potter series, the world of children's literature would not be the same. The themes of love, friendship, and family that each book demonstrates far outweigh the problematic issues that so many find in the books.