

Harry potter: a hero on a magical journey

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Observing the extreme popularity of the Harry Potter series, success which had been previously unimagined, some wonder if Potter author J. K. Rowling is, perhaps, a magical being herself. Never before has a children's writer created such fervor in young readers and adults. The New York Times was forced to succumb to publisher pressure and create a new category on its bestseller list to accommodate the phenomenal book sales attained by Rowling and her Potter series. Critics either praise or attempt to discredit Rowling's literary contribution. Some view her as the savior of children's literature and rejoice in her success. Others, such as critic John Pennington, claim that Rowling's writing has little literary merit and that her series has achieved such fame due entirely to publisher hype and excellent marketing.

[1] While there will never be a consensus on why the Potter series has achieved such success, I argue that Rowling's use of traditional archetypal figures and patterns play a dramatic role in the story of the "boy who lived." Readers first meet Harry as an orphaned infant in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Although the reader is initially unaware of Harry's future reluctant hero status, there is an almost stately importance surrounding Harry as he arrives on Privet Drive. Professor McGonagall asks, "You think it — wise — to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?" [2] To which the clever Professor Dumbledore replies, "I would trust Hagrid with my life." [3] There is no doubt in the reader's mind that Hagrid carries precious cargo — Harry. However, Harry's noble status is short-lived once he is placed on the Dursley doorstep. Mr. and Mrs. Dursley care little about the boy. The couple has a young son Harry's age, Dudley. The Dursleys treat the two boys to extreme opposite conditions. Dudley is doted on, overstuffed, and

receives everything he wishes for while Harry is hungry and deprived of all material objects and affection. Again, Rowling presents opposite pairs as she portrays Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, "(Mr. Dursley) was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a large mustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbors. "[4] Harry is subjected to daily verbal assaults and abuse by his new family. The Dursleys have forced Harry to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs for the majority of his ten years. [5] The dreary cupboard adds to the texture of Harry's life on Privet Drive. Here is a boy with great celebrity in the wizarding world. However, in an almost ironic turn by Rowling, in the " Muggle, "[6] non-wizarding world, Harry is treated as an animal. Harry's initiation with magic unexpectedly occurs when he is at the zoo with the Dursley family.[7] As Harry carries on a surprising conversation with the zoo's Boa Constrictor and eventually sets him free, Harry realizes that perhaps previous episodes of unexplained events were not coincidence and that he might be different from other boys. It is not until Harry learns the extent of his powers and the truth behind them that he finishes the initiation phase of the journey. This moment arrives on the eve of Harry's eleventh birthday. Harry is shocked to be joined by Hagrid, Hogwarts' Keeper of the Keys. Hagrid has come to collect Harry and return him to the wizards' school. " Did yeh never wonder where yer parents learned it all? "[8] Harry's parents are an unspeakable topic in the Dursley household. Other than the false explanation of their death, this is the first Harry hears of his parents. " Maybe he (Voldemort) thought he could persuade ' em ... maybe he just

wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where you was all living, on Halloween ten years ago. You was just a year old. He came ter yer house an' — an'"[9] When Harry learns that his parents were great wizards and were murdered, this is Harry's withdrawal from the Dursleys and the beginning of his initial quest. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is tucked away from the " Muggle" world, snug in the mountains and surrounded by water. " The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers. "[10] Mountains are an archetypal setting symbolizing aspiration and ascent while the water represents on-flowing life and change. These are important archetypal patterns which foreshadow Harry's journey. Harry meets several traditional archetypal characters along his voyage. Harry's friend, Ron Weasley, has two older twin brothers, George and Fred. These brothers readily fall into the trickster role. The two boys are constantly up to mischief. It is only fitting that they open a joke shop in Diagon Alley called Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes whose window is " emblazoned with flashing yellow letters: Why are you worrying about You-Know-Who? You should be worrying about U-No-Poo — the constipation sensation that's gripping the nation! "[11] Prior to opening the joke shop, the boys were renown for pulling pranks and creating havoc. Mrs. Weasley, Ron and the twins' mother, is also a typical archetypal character. Mrs. Weasley, with her seven children plus Harry, easily accommodates the role of Earth mother. In greeting Harry for the first time in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, " Oh, Harry, it's lovely to see you! " she whispered, pulling him

into a rib-cracking hug before holding him at arm's length and examining him critically. " You're looking peaky; you need feeding up ..." [12] Mrs. Weasley is a nurturing soul who worries endlessly about her loved ones. The Weasley clock symbolized Mrs. Weasley's concern and attachment to her family. " It had nine hands, each inscribed with the name of a family member, and usually hung on the Weasleys' sitting room wall ... every single one of its nine hands was now pointing at " mortal peril. ""[13] The wise and caring Howarts' Headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, is clearly seen as the series' helping character. Professor Dumbledore immediately takes Harry under his tutelage and asks as the facilitator of Harry's journey. By book six of the series, one senses a new urgency to educate and prepare Harry for the future. Professor Dumbledore sets out on a dangerous journey with Harry, " Undoubtedly, this potion must act in a way that will prevent me taking the Horcrux. It might paralyze me, cause me to forget what I am here for, create so much pain I am distracted, or render me incapable in some other way. This being the case, Harry, it will be your job to make sure I keep drinking, even if you have to tip the potion into my protesting mouth. You understand? "[14] Throughout the Potter series, it is evident that Rowling follows what scholar Joseph Campbell refers to as " the road of trials. "[15] Campbell states, " Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. "[16] In Rowling's first Potter book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry defeats the Voldemort-possessed Professor Quirrell. In the second book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Harry again faces Voldemort in the form of Tom Riddle. Book Three, Harry Potter

and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Harry is challenged once more by the evils of Voldemort. However, unlike past trials, Harry learns that he has a devoted, yet incarcerated godfather, Sirius Black. The addition of Sirius on the scene increases Harry's reason for fighting these battles. The trials continue in books four through six. In the fourth book, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, Harry encounters a revived Voldemort in a face-to-face battle. Now that Harry has confronted Voldemort, he realizes the necessity to proceed with toward the final stages of his journey. Books five and six, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix and Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince drive Harry toward this transformation stage. As the final Potter book hits the shelves in 2007, it is most certain that Rowling will finish Harry's journey with death. The question remains — will it be Harry or Voldemort who finishes this journey. Traveling from a world of abuse into one filled with celebrity and admiration, Harry begins his life as a reluctant hero. However, after his initiation, Harry easily glides into the hero role, accepting trial after trial. Only time will tell if Harry reaches his final destination with the success he has encountered during his past six years at Hogwarts. -----

[1] Pennington, John. " From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter. " *The Lion and the Unicorn* 26. 1 (2001): 82. [2] Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997, p. 17. [3] *ibid*. [4] Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997, p. 1. [5] *ibid*, p. 36. [6] *ibid*, p. 65. [7] *ibid*, p. 34. [8] Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997, p. 61. [9] *ibid*, p. 68. [10] *ibid*, p. 139. [11] Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005, p. 116. [12]

Rowling, J. K. Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2003, p. 61. [13] Rowling, J. K. Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005, p. 85. [14] Rowling, J. K. Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005, p. 569. [15] Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. New York: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 97. [16] *ibid*