

The terrifying traits
keeping harry potter
from being a positive
influence in a c...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* — later retitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for the book's release in the United States — was first published in 1997. Beloved by young readers worldwide, the novel recounts the exploits of the titular Harry Potter, an orphan who discovers he is a wizard when he is accepted into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As he takes in this new world, it becomes clear that not every all its inhabitants are as welcoming as they seem; for there are dark forces seeking to destroy Harry and the balance of the wizarding world in the process. Rowling's book focuses on the theme of good's triumph over evil. However, because it excuses rule-breaking and presents a biased perspective on "evil characters," *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* should not be included in the school board curriculum.

Be it federal laws or classroom regulations, an important lesson for children to learn is that the rules apply to everyone equally. Unfortunately, this lesson is not applied in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as it partakes in a number of double standards, exempting the main characters from consequence when they break the rules. For example, Draco Malfoy points out that "first years aren't allowed [broomsticks]" (131) when he discovers Harry's new Nimbus Two Thousand. However, not only does Professor Flitwick ignore Draco as he tries to report Harry, the broom is actually a gift from Professor McGonagall after she sees Harry disobey the instruction to stay on the ground during the flying lesson. She even acknowledges that it is against the rules but allows it anyway, explaining in a note that arrived with the broomstick: "DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE. It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got

a broomstick or they'll all want one" (131). Similar scenes of the main character not being punished, or even being rewarded for major infractions can be found throughout the novel, however when a side character or even an antagonist breaks the rules, they are swiftly punished without second thought. The reader sees this exact scenario unfold when Draco once again attempts to report Harry, this time to McGonagall: " Detention! And twenty points from Slytherin! Wandering around in the middle of the night, how dare you" (192). Unlike with Harry, McGonagall is unwilling to make an exception. She will not even entertain the notion that Draco may have a legitimate reason for breaking the curfew. When Draco tries to explain the situation, McGonagall refuses to listen, saying, " What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies" (192)! Her reaction is completely justified as she is an authority that must uphold certain values in the environment she looks after, but there can be no exceptions. If Harry can defy the rules for a good reason, then so should Draco be afforded the same liberty when he has a similarly valid reason, yet this is not the case. Harry Potter's explicit use of double standard in regard to rule breaking conveys the dangerous message that rules do not apply to everyone equally. This message, if taught to young children, can be toxic and is one of the reasons why Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone should not be included in the school board curriculum.

In many respects, Harry Potter's main theme is the triumph of good over evil. However, the way in which novel portrays evil is extremely conducive to bigoted thinking, specifically in the way it portrays the Slytherin house and the characters associated with it. One of the first things said about Slytherin comes when Harry asks Hagrid about the houses, and Hagrid explains, "

There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin" (62). Hagrid does not acknowledge in his statement that not all Slytherins grow to be evil. He ignores facts to justify his prejudice. A young reader can easily adopt an exclusionary mindset from this attitude. One can see this exact effect take hold of Harry at the sorting ceremony: " Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked like an unpleasant lot" (95). Overcoming prejudices is hard even for adults who know the harm bigotry can cause, so modern education tries to encourage a more accepting mindset in children. People know not to assume things about others simply because they have certain traits, but one cannot read Harry Potter, with its open, unchallenged hatred of a group, and say it champions this understanding, or that it encourages overcoming ignorance. For this reason, it is plain to see that this novel would be a detriment to the goal of the education system, and should therefore not be included in the school curriculum.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone should not be included in the school board curriculum because it presents no consequences for rule breaking and encourages a bigoted mindset. The book is extremely well-written; it is a beautifully crafted world that comes from a place of innocence and wonder. No one could claim that J. K. Rowling set out to write a corrupting influence. However, the attitudes presented in this novel can be damaging if adopted by children — one cannot exempt themselves from the rules, nor can they go about their lives deciding that a person is good or evil because of what they are, rather than who. If the purpose of school is to teach children to be a part of society, then this novel is counterproductive to intention.