

# Segregation and prejudice in harry potter and the chamber of secrets



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Although race discrimination exists as a major theme throughout the entirety of J. K Rowling's Harry Potter series, it is in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets that Harry, our protagonist for all seven books, becomes acutely aware of the discrimination of multiple groups in both Hogwarts and the Wizarding World in general. Harry is both introduced to and further familiarized with several oppressed groups in this novel, such as house elves, muggle-borns and squibs. His interactions with these groups often mirror the interactions of real children learning about and experiencing discrimination for the first time. These themes of segregation and prejudice serve to mark Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets as a more mature and complex novel than its predecessor.

The first new character Harry is introduced to in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets is Dobby the house-elf, who happens to be heavily discriminated against. House-elves, as portrayed in the series, are a race enslaved to wizarding kind. Each house elf is forced to obey his or her master at all times, a fact so heavily ingrained in their society that when Dobby tries to save Harry Potter from his master's evil plot, Dobby constantly punishes himself for his own disobedience, banging his head on Harry's window and shutting his ears in oven doors (Rowling 14). Neither Dobby nor any witches or wizards (besides Hermione in later books) seem to view the slavery of house-elves as a big issue, as evidenced by the matter-of-fact way George Weasley explains the concept of house-elves to Harry: " ' Yeah, Mum's always wishing we had a house-elf to do the ironing,' said George. ' But all we've got is a lousy old ghoul in the attic and gnomes all over the garden. House-elves come with big old manors and castles and

places like that..." (Rowling 29). There are some who have read the Harry Potter series and noticed similarities between house-elves and African Americans enslaved in the United States. "Harry and the Other: Answering the Race Question in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter" by Jackie C. Horne, states Rowling's depiction of Dobby and his fellow elves contains uncomfortable echoes of many of the stereotypes held by whites of enslaved African Americans. Simple, loyal, and childlike, happy to serve their betters, Rowling's house-elves speak in a patois closer to 1930s and 40s Hollywood misconceptions of "darky" dialect than to any actual African-American speech pattern. (Horne 80-81) Since Dobby is the first new character we meet in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Dobby's characterization of being a literal slave akin to slaves in America during the 18th and 19th centuries indicates to the reader that this novel focuses on darker and more mature topics in than Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

Another source of the maturing themes of discrimination in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets can be found in the main conflict of the novel. The titular Chamber of Secrets is a secret room located under Hogwarts, which houses an ancient creature intended to purge the school of Muggle-born students. Salazar Slytherin, the creator of the Chamber of secrets, disagreed with his fellow Hogwarts founders about blood purity (Rowling 150-151), which is another main source of prejudice in the wizarding world. Blood purists believe there are four unique categories of magical human, all of whom are displayed in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Pure-bloods, such as the Malfoys or the Weasleys, come from wizarding families with no muggles in their family tree. As Ron says in Chamber of Secrets, "

There are some wizards – like Malfoy’s family – who think they’re better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood.” (Rowling 115-116). And some, like Voldemort and his Death Eaters, even wish to eradicate those they see as lesser. There are also half-bloods, such as Harry, who have both muggle and wizard lineage. They are seen by blood-purists as less than pure-blooded wizards, but better than muggle-borns, who are classified as magical children with two muggle parents.

Throughout the novel there are attacks against muggle-born wizards at the school. In the midst of the chaos, Draco Malfoy, a prejudiced pure-blood, calls Hermione Granger, a muggle-born, a “ filthy little mudblood” (Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets pg. 112). This highly offensive slur is meant to remind Hermione that her blood is seen as dirty and inferior by Draco and those like him. Real life ideas very similar to wizarding blood purity are discussed by Susan Peppers Bates and Joshua Rust in their 2012 article “ House-Elves, Hogwarts, And Friendship: Casting Away The Institutions Which Made Voldemort’s Rise Possible”: The biologically false imagery of blood as possessing degrees of purity captures the imagination of prejudiced wizards as surely as similar imagery captivated Southerners who invented terms such as ‘ octroon’ and ‘ quadroon’ to rank the degree of black blood in racially mixed people. Surely, J. K. Rowling, a British citizen, meant to draw the reader’s mind to parallels with Hitler’s racialized obsession with Jewish blood as a pollutant that came in degrees. The Nazi regime shipped people off to concentration camps for even distant Jewish ancestry.” (Peppers-Bates and Rust 111). The introduction of such intense

and realistic prejudice within the wizarding community serves as further evidence of J. K. Rowling steadily maturing the themes of these books.

Finally, the fourth type of magical human are squibs. Squibs are individuals who come from wizarding families but possess no wizarding abilities themselves. An example of such a person can be found in Argus Filch, the caretaker of Hogwarts. While Filch was introduced in the first book, it is not until *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* that the audience discovers Filch is a squib. Filch is embarrassed by this fact and is desperately trying to teach himself magic, to seemingly no avail (Rowling 127-128). Squibs are treated almost as second-class citizens in the wizarding world, and are “often viewed in the same way as Muggles and Muggle-borns by those who are prejudiced towards the non-magical” (“Everything you need to know about Squibs”). With this final sub-group of wizard, one can discern just how complexly Rowling is beginning to craft this universe after she built the foundations in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

From differing levels of blood purity to deeply rooted wizard slaves, Harry Potter discovers new racial issues throughout nearly the entirety of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. However, just as Rowling’s series is maturing by introducing these new concepts in the novel, Harry is maturing by learning about them as well. Although it is clear to the audience from the moment Harry hears the word “mudblood” that Harry does not support the concept of blood purity, we see him take an official stand against Voldemort and his prejudiced way of thinking in their battle in the Chamber of Secrets when Harry says, “I know why you couldn’t kill me. Because my mother died to save me. My common Muggle-born mother” (Rowling 316). We also see <https://assignbuster.com/segregation-and-prejudice-in-harry-potter-and-the-chamber-of-secrets/>

Harry make a decision against house-elf slavery when he decides to trick Lucius Malfoy into freeing Dobby from his servitude. As Harry completes this final heroic act of the novel, Dobby exclaims “ Harry Potter is greater by far than Dobby knew!” (Rowling 339). This is correct on Dobby’s part, because in learning about the racial discrimination in his community, Harry matures, and decides to make positive change against it.

## **Work Cited**

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