

Study Guide

Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince 1



A. Journey of Life

Harry Potter's experiences represent a classic hero's journey. Joseph Campbell, a literature-history scholar, recognized and described the hero's journey in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Campbell identified that, across cultures and time, societies repeatedly shared common stories of heroism. The heroes in these stories consistently had adventures that were similar to heroes in other stories. Campbell further posited that these stories were helping to shape the values and attitudes of the people in their audiences. I.e., not only do many people find these stories compelling as entertainment, but also find them compelling because the stories reflect their own life experiences. Sometimes people even use some of the heroes' attitudes and strategies in their own life adventures.

Some of the defining features of the hero's journey are:

Unusual Beginning — The hero has an unusual parent, a strange birth, or some other unique infant adventure that sets him/her apart from other children.

Separation — often as a result of the strange beginnings, the hero is separated, or alienated from, others in his culture.

Initiation — Possibly as a result of the unusual birth, the hero learns more of his/her uniqueness, and that he/she may be part of another community. The hero is taken into that other community.

Trial and Quest — This might be one trial, or a series of trials. Through the trials, the hero learns about his/her opponent and develops the skills needed to successfully confront the opponent. The quest is the adventure of becoming a hero.

Transformation — A culminating, life-changing encounter between the hero and his/her nemesis, in which the nemesis is destroyed, but at a huge cost to the hero. As a result of the encounter, the hero is profoundly transformed, becoming a new being, sometimes a new person, maybe a spirit.

Return — The hero returns to the home culture wiser, more powerful and ready to use the hard-won wisdom and power to improve that culture.

There are other common features of the hero's journey that include the presence of a guide, often an older, wiser member of the community who takes a special interest in the hero and is his/her mentor. Heroes also often have an animal companion, called a 'familiar,' that extends their senses or powers. While the final confrontations are solo efforts, heroes rarely succeed alone. They need relationships with others, and often others of the opposite sex, to help them notice key information or prepare for their final encounters.

1. Harry Potter fans will notice many features of the hero's journey in Harry's story. But Harry Potter is not the only hero we see who presents these qualities. Dorothy, in the *Wizard of Oz*, and Neo, in the *Matrix* trilogy, have very similar experiences.

What other movies can you recall that contain elements of the hero's journey?

2. How might the qualities of the hero's journey help viewers to understand why the Harry Potter stories are so successful?

How might they help readers understand why the numerous translations have sold well in other cultures?

3. As you recall Harry's many experiences in the first five movies, (*the Philosopher's Stone*, *the Chamber of Secrets*, *the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *the Goblet of Fire*, and *the Order of the Phoenix*), try to identify some

moments that you found particularly compelling. A compelling scene might be one in which Harry felt anger at the Dursleys, Harry seeing his parents in the Mirror of Erised, or a scene where Harry confronts Voldemort.

How might audience members' differing ages and sexes influence the scenes they choose as particularly compelling?

4. Harry Potter's audience ranges from young to seniors and is both male and female.
 - a) Choose an audience member who is different from you. Try to imagine their worldview and predict which scenes they might name.
 - b) Now reflect on the movies and predict a scene that you think would appeal to most of the audiences, crossing age and gender categories.
 - c) How does this exercise help you understand the wide appeal of the Harry Potter stories?
5. One of Harry's epiphanies is that both his power and his fear are within him.

Is that true for you too?

When did you first realize this?

What experience helped you realize it?

Now that you know it, how have you been able to use this awareness to your advantage?

6. Harry is able to stand up to Voldemort on several occasions, overcoming his fear and trepidations successfully. Yet his encounters with the dementors leave him completely exhausted and powerless.

What might these imaginary dementors represent in the real lives of Potter fans?

Is that part of why the Harry Potter stories are so compelling?

B. Moral compasses and choices

The stakes are high, and the world is being divided into two camps: those who support the Death Eaters and those who oppose them. The choices have both and mortal consequences.

1. Which of Harry's choices throughout the series really impressed you? How have these actions inspired you?
2. Ron and Hermione choose to remain Harry's friends, despite mortal threats.

Why might they do that?

What might we learn from their actions?

3. Harry and Tom Riddle both suffered abuse and neglect as children. Harry became a caring magician who used his magic to protect his friends. Tom renamed himself Voldemort (death-stealer) and used the death eaters to consolidate his dominance over other magicians and, especially, over death.

What might have influenced them to respond so differently?

What might viewers learn from their contrasting responses?

C. Self Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the act of willingly giving up something valuable. Chess players might sacrifice a bishop to take a rook. Hockey players might take a penalty to stop a scoring play. Self-sacrifice is the act of willingly giving up oneself, possibly to injury, possibly to death. Lily Potter sacrificed herself, stepping in front of Voldemort's curse, to save Harry's life.

1. Why was this a worthy sacrifice for her?

What self-sacrifices do we see made by Hermione, Ron and Harry?

How do we know they are willing sacrifices?

Do the self-sacrifices risk embarrassment, injury or death?

What do the sacrifices gain?

2. Who in your life makes self-sacrifices?

Why do they do that?

Who might be our current models of self-sacrifice?

3. Terry Fox day falls on September 19 of each year.

Did Terry Fox sacrifice himself? Why?

Do we make self-sacrifices when we join the Terry Fox run?

4. Over 100 Canadian soldiers have died in Afghanistan, and many have been injured.

Are these people current models of self-sacrifice?

How do their sacrifices compare to Harry's?

5. What might Harry Potter viewers learn about self-sacrifice?

How might Harry's experiences guide us when we choose self-sacrificial acts?

D. Power, Good and Evil

Voldemort states, "There is no good or evil, only power and those too weak to seek it."

Lord Acton wrote, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."

Consider these two statements. Cogitate over some of the powerful people you may have admired or observed.

1. Based on your experiences and observations, do you agree with Voldemort or Lord Acton?
Is power amoral?

If it is, can the people who wield power be amoral?

If someone is moral, is his or her morality challenged by the acquisition of power?

2. How do Harry's experiences with the Dursleys and at Hogwarts help to prepare him for his increasing power?

What might viewers learn about the hazards of power from Harry, Dumbledore and Voldemort?

E. Who owns Harry Potter?

JK Rowling originated Harry Potter with her first book. Ms. Rowling legally owns the name and the stories.

Ms. Rowling negotiated movie rights with Warner Brothers. She retained an unusually high level of control over the movies. But in this multimedia world, can an author really own her creation, or does the act of sharing Harry with her fans include the sharing of ownership?

1. Does JK Rowling now share Harry with Warner Brothers and the people they hired to bring Harry Potter to movie, video and computer screens?

Does she share Harry with Daniel Radcliffe, who has portrayed Harry in all of the movies?

Does she share Harry with the millions of people who have read her books and seen the movies?

2. Fanfiction.net is a website that hosts stories and other works created by fans of books, movies and TV shows. The Harry Potter section contains over 1,500 Discussion Forums and more than 403,800 stories, songs, and poems, all created by fans. Fans have imagined the lives of all the Harry Potter characters and created original stories using JK Rowling's characters and settings. They have imagined stories that predate all of Ms. Rowling's stories. They have created stories told by minor characters.

The Leaky Cauldron (www.the-leaky-cauldron.org) and (www.mugglenet.com) are websites that have not been authorized by either Warner Brothers or JK Rowling. Yet these sites are very active, and attract many fans with their information and enthusiasm.

Do these people own a part of Harry Potter?

Do they own as much of him as Ms. Rowling?

How important are these people to the success of the Harry Potter movies?

How likely are they to see and discuss the movies?

How likely will they influence their friends to see the movies?

Study Guide written by Neil Andersen

Neil Andersen has taught film and/or media studies for over 30 years. He has been a computer resource teacher, a literacy consultant, and has given educational keynotes and workshops across Canada, in the US, Asia, Australia and Europe.

Andersen has taught at the University of Toronto, York University and at Mount Saint Vincent University. He is an executive member of the Association for Media Literacy (Ontario) and on the Education Committee of the Media-Awareness Network.

He has made movies and videos, authored student textbooks, teacher resource books, over 200 study guides, and designed posters, interactive CDs, websites, and programs.

His awards include the Jesse McCanse Award (National Telemedia Council) and The Magic Lantern Award (The Association for Media and Technology in Education). His writing has also received numerous awards.

Neil can be contacted at mediacy@sympatico.ca