

## **Introduction**

What initially concerned John Granger about the Harry Potter books so much that he wouldn't allow his children to read them? What in his background allowed him to look beyond the "witchcraft trees" and see the "spiritual forest" of these books?

Mircea Eliade argued that reading "includes a mythological function." How does this explain the popularity of Harry Potter?

## **Chapter 1: Magic, Fantasy, and Transcendence**

Explain the difference between incantational magic and invocational magic as well as the distinction between the psychic and spiritual realms.

How is the magic in fantasy literature in general and Harry Potter in particular spiritually edifying, especially in our times?

## **Chapter 2: Cosmic White Hats and Black Hats**

What is the key difference between the choices made by the Gryffindor good guys and the Slytherin bad guys in the Harry Potter books? How is the Hogwarts parallel universe similar to a battle between the armies of Christ and Satan?

How does a story of good versus evil help us, if it does help us, make difficult choices in our daily life? In what ways do the Great Books train us in the "stock responses" and "instruct while delighting"?

## **Chapter 3: The Hero's Journey**

What journey elements are found in every Harry Potter book (i.e., starting point, conflict, crisis, etc.)? In what ways is the author using a writing formula?

Every Harry Potter book's crisis has Harry dying a figurative death and rising from death in the presence of a symbol of Christ. Discuss the possible relationship of this formula element and the popularity of the Harry Potter books even in non-Christian cultures.

## **Chapter 4: The Alchemy of Spiritual Growth**

Why are alchemy and its many images and symbols such a large part of the English literary tradition? Review the ways J. K. Rowling follows traditional usage in her symbols and story lines about alchemy and human change.

In what sense do the three stages of the alchemical work parallel the stages of growth in the Christian life? Can reading books with alchemical backdrops foster a more human life? In what ways could it hinder it?

## **Chapter 5: One Person, Two Natures**

Explain what a doppelgänger is and how the idea of a shadow self or complementary identity pervades the Potter novels.

In the fifth Harry Potter book, Albus Dumbledore uses explicitly Christian language to discern and describe the shared natures and essential differences between Harry Potter and the villain of the books, Lord Voldemort. In what way does this point to the Christian meaning of the books, and in what way is it exactly the opposite of the Christian understanding of Christ having two natures and one essence?

### **Chapter 6: Don't Judge, Lest You Be Judged**

What are the three tests of a Great Book? In what ways are these three elements common sense? Does J. K. Rowling pass the test with respect to the themes she explores in the Harry Potter novels?

In what ways does Rowling satirize the real world via the prejudices evident in almost every character in her magical sub-creation? What effect does a surprise ending have on a reader engrossed in a book?

### **Chapter 7: The Triumph of Love over Death**

Rowling has said that the books are about death and bereavement. Review the answers she gives to the question of how we are to understand and attempt to transcend death. What solution does she offer in our flight from death (Voldemort)?

Rowling (via the wizard Albus Dumbledore) teaches Harry and us readers that there is a greater death than physical death to be avoided at all costs. In what sense does her message conflict with the message we hear from schools, media, and institutions? What role do literature and the arts play in helping us pursue life and flee the death of the soul?

### **Chapter 8: The Question of Identity**

How does Harry change in each of the books? *In Order of the Phoenix*, what does Harry's discovery of his destiny mean in terms of his day-to-day decision making? In what sense do you and I have a destiny and free will simultaneously?

The conflict between fate and free will is central to much of English literature. How does J. K. Rowling resolve this overarching question in human life? Is this the answer to the question or a clever resolution of a non-problem? What would you answer if asked if humans are free or destined to a certain fate?

### **Chapter 9: Evidence of Things Unseen**

In what sense do literary or artistic symbols put us in touch with supernatural verities we cannot experience in themselves in this life? How does this differ from allegory? What scriptural support is there for understanding the world and man as symbol and image of supernatural reality?

Harry Potter sells well almost everywhere in the world, and many people who profess nothing but disdain or indifference to Christianity are powerfully moved and engaged by these stories that are laden with images and symbols of Christ. Explain possible reasons for Harry's popularity in light of images such as Harry's resurrection in each book.

### **Chapter 10: Fun with Names**

Give a few examples of names with several layers of meaning in the Harry Potter books, with special emphasis on the Potter and Malfoy families.

Harry Potter is less a name than a brand name now because of the successful marketing of the books, movies, and ancillary toys and products. If Harry Potter means heir of the heavenly Father, as Granger suggests, does this mean he is a symbol of Christ or a Christian Everyman? What would each mean for how we experience the story and identify with Harry?

### **Chapter 11: The Purification of the Soul (*Philosopher's Stone*)**

What is the meaning of the scene in the Forbidden Forest in which a character drinks the blood of the unicorn? Why is Harry the only character to face Voldemort/Quirrell before the Mirror of Erised? What protects him from the bad guy in the end? What is the lesson for us about the sameness and difference between heaven and hell in this ending?

Arthur Levine, the American publisher of the Harry Potter books, changed the title of the first book from *Philosopher's Stone* to *Sorcerer's Stone*. What difference, if any, might this have made in the reception of the books by Christian readers? Does it change the meaning of the books or just the popular perception of them?

### **Chapter 12: Dangerous Books and Edifying Books (*Chamber of Secrets*)**

What are the three books called within *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*? What sort of books is Rowling telling us are dangerous compared to the edifying books she is writing? In what sense are her books a throwback to medieval morality plays and Passion dramas?

Explore the power of the dramatic battle between the phoenix and the basilisk in *Chamber of Secrets*. In what sense are we, the readers, meant to identify with both Harry and the young Tom Riddle in this battle? How does Harry vanquish Riddle—on his own or in consequence to his faith?

### **Chapter 13: Despair and Delivery (*Prisoner of Azkaban*)**

What is the meaning of *Expecto Patronum*? In what ways is *Prisoner of Azkaban* about Harry's coming to a greater likeness of his biological father (and perhaps his heavenly Father)?

Harry has to learn the Patronus Charm in order to protect himself from the dreaded Dementors. These despair wraiths feed on his worst memories and suck the life and joy from him. What Dementors do we experience in the nonmagical world, and what weapons have we been given to combat them? Does a good story help deflect a Dementor or two?

### **Chapter 14: Girded with Virtue (*Goblet of Fire*)**

What is the Goblet of Fire that chooses the champions who will compete in the Triwizard Tournament? In what sense is this novel an exterior novel rather than an interior one? What symbols of the Holy Trinity appear in Harry's duel with Lord Voldemort at book's end?

The rebirthing party in the graveyard at the end of *Goblet of Fire* is a complete inversion of Christian sacraments from baptism to burial. What is Rowling saying about the bad guys who take part in this ghoulish sacrilege, and what is she parodying in secular culture? Does Harry's triumph and escape from this evil have a lesson for each of us?

### **Chapter 15: Dark Night of the Soul (*Order of the Phoenix*)**

In what ways is the very different seeming Harry Potter in the fifth book of the series much like the Harry Potter we met and grew to love in the first four books? How does he change in this book? In what senses is this a dark or black book, alchemically speaking?

How does this book weave a spell like the Disillusionment Charm Alastor Moody puts on Harry in the first chapters of *Order of the Phoenix*? What, if any, relationship exists between the lack of coming-of-age rituals in the United Kingdom and the United States and the cool reception given this book by many Harry Potter fans? Rubeus Hagrid is perhaps the key supporting actor in this series; what lessons does his care for his brother teach us?

### **Chapter 16: Baptism into a Sacrificial Death (*Half-Blood Prince*)**

Consider Rowling's theme of the importance of keeping the soul clean and whole--particularly as it relates to Lord Voldemort seeking immortality via putting pieces of his soul into physical objects (Horcruxes). How does this idea echo C. S. Lewis's idea that the gospel can be smuggled into works of fiction by stealing past the "watchful dragons" in readers' modern hearts? In what sense are the Horcruxes an admonition against materialism and idolatry?

As a rule, the Harry Potter books end with Harry's figurative death and his resurrection from this death in the presence of a symbol of Christ. Granger writes that there are three characters in this book who can be understood as Christ symbols but that the most important is Albus Dumbledore. In what ways does Rowling's description of the death of Dumbledore on the Astronomy Tower and his sacrificial actions in the cave point to Granger's conclusion? What is the importance of Harry's repeated confessions to the Minister of Magic that he is a "Dumbledore man"—and in what sense is Harry clearly not yet truly a Dumbledore man?

### **Chapter 17: Choosing to Believe**

Why is it common sense that Harry Potter is a “postmodern novel”? In what ways are Rowling’s stories typical of our age?

In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry struggles to believe in Albus Dumbledore and ultimately chooses to believe or trust in him (and pursue Horcruxes rather than Hallows). As we learn the importance of the choice to believe, what spiritual choices do we learn are bad choices for what to believe in? Why are they poor choices?

### **Chapter 18: Christian Birth and Baptism**

Where do Harry and Hermione spend Christmas Eve in *Deathly Hallows*? How does their Christmas experience there with Nagini and Voldemort represent the black stage of alchemy and the dark night of the soul in the spiritual life?

How is Ron’s reappearance in “The Silver Doe” an echo of the Theophany of Christ? How is his destruction of the necklace Horcrux a purifying experience? Explain the alchemical, Christian, and Arthurian elements in “The Silver Doe.”

### **Chapter 19: Victory Over Death**

List the parallels between Harry’s walk into the Forbidden Forest to face Lord Voldemort and the Via Dolorosa of Jesus Christ carrying the Cross.

What Gospel parable does the misshapen soul fragment at King’s Cross and Harry’s inability to help it point to? Why does Harry, in his final confrontation with Lord Voldemort, urge him to “try for some remorse”?

### **Chapter 20: FAQs**

Why are Albus Dumbledore’s spiritual connections more significant than what has been said about his homosexuality? Did the Pope condemn Harry Potter? Are Harry’s adventures a textbook in gnostic faith? Why are wands so smart?