

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone**

by J. K. Rowling

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# Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

## Notes

It will be a rare student that has not yet heard of Harry Potter and J.K. Rowling, and it is likely that many will have encountered the story of *Harry and the Sorcerer's Stone* through pleasure reading or Chris Columbus's film adaptation. The goal of this unit is to treat the novel as a carefully and consciously crafted work of literature in the hopes that the exploration of it as such will significantly add to rather than take away from the reader's enjoyment.

Allusions and plays on words abound in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*; the study guide deals with those determined most suitable for the level of students likely to be studying the book in school. To this end, the fact that Minerva McGonagall is named for the Roman goddess of wisdom, for example, is mentioned; that Albus Dumbledore's name translates to "white bumblebee" (his first name from the Latin and surname from old English slang) and that Malfoy means "bad faith" in French are not. Teachers interested in a more exhaustive treatment of these are advised to look into "Harry Potter for Grownups" (HPFGU) online—a group of scholars that holds international academic symposiums on Harry Potter.

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* has faced a good deal of controversy and censorship in schools for supposedly glorifying witchcraft and paganism. John Killinger has written an excellent, well-researched book for teachers and parents on this topic called *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter: a Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels* (ISBN: 0312308698). Rowling's book is itself, of course, its own best defense against these criticisms.

All references come from the Scholastic paperback edition of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, copyright 1999.

# Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. define allusion, simile, dialect, pun, protagonist, antagonist, archetype, foreshadowing, irony, theme, foil, and tone, and find examples of each in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.
2. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
3. discuss Rowling's extensive use of wordplay and what it adds to the novel.
4. write character sketches of Harry, Hermione, Ron, Snape, Hagrid, and McGonagall.
5. discuss the importance of teamwork over individual heroism as it applies to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.
6. evaluate Harry as an archetypal hero and compare him to similar heroes in film and fiction.
7. compare and contrast Muggle and magical society.
8. discuss the novel in relation to the following quote from one of its characters, Professor Quirrell: "There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to see it."
9. discuss both Draco Malfoy and Dudley Dursley as foils for Harry's character.
10. discuss the crippling or dangerous effect of unchecked desire or longing as it relates to Hagrid, the Mirror of Erised, and Voldemort/Quirrell.

# Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Harry is almost a teenager before he learns of his destiny and sets off into a world of new adventures and challenges. A long tradition of heroes in literature and film share this circumstance: Theseus and Luke Skywalker, for two. What others can you think of? Why do you think this particular kind of hero—this “archetype”—has appealed to so many generations throughout history?
2. Compare and contrast Muggle and magical society. What social problems and prejudices do they have in common? Is one more fair than the other? Support your answer with details from the book.
3. Aside from the obvious (that he longs for his parents and has no intention of using the Sorcerer's Stone), what do the images Harry sees in the Mirror of Erised tell us about his character? What images might Malfoy or Dudley see? What might Hagrid or Hermione?
4. Discuss the issues of rule-breaking and going against authority as they are presented in the novel. What happens when Harry breaks a rule for a selfish reason (such as sneaking out to meet Malfoy for a wizard's duel in order not to be seen as a coward)? What happens when he breaks a rule for a selfless reason? What seems to be Rowling's overall stance on obeying rules and authority figures?
5. At first glance, Hermione's qualities suggest that she should have been sorted into Ravenclaw. Do you think she displays more Gryffindor-like than Ravenclaw-ish qualities over the course of the novel? Support your answer with details from the text.
6. Professor Quirrell says, “There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to see it.” Do you think the novel supports or refutes Quirrell's claim? Support your answer with details from the text.
7. Discuss Rowling's frequent use of wordplay in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. How does it help in setting the novel's tone and creating its settings?
8. What purpose do minor characters such as Peeves, Nearly Headless Nick, and the Bloody Baron serve in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*? Why do you think Rowling included them?
9. Discuss the ways in which Hogwarts castle itself can be considered a character in the novel. How does it help and hinder its human occupants?
10. While Harry is the hero of the novel, he is not—unlike some heroes—above help. Discuss the value of teamwork as it applies to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, using specific examples from the book.

# Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

## Chapter One: The Boy Who Lived

### Vocabulary

**chortled** – laughed heartily  
**faltered** – stammered; hesitated  
**gingerly** – very carefully

1. When describing the Potters, Rowling coins the term “UnDursleyish.” From what you know so far of the Dursleys, how would you define “UnDursleyish”?

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2. Mr. Dursley sees a cat reading a map and a street sign. Why does he dismiss this sight as “a trick of the light”?

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3. At first, Mr. Dursley assumes that the rash of people wearing strange clothes is due to “some stupid new fashion.” What makes him reconsider?

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4. What makes Mr. Dursley stop dead in his tracks on his way back from the bakery?

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4. What is unusual about photographs in the wizarding world?

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5. Why is eating Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans always a bit risky?

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6. How does Harry defy Draco on the train?

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### Chapter Thirteen: Nicholas Flamel

#### Vocabulary

**erupted** – burst into action  
**fanatic** – obsessed person  
**sinister** – evil; threatening

1. How has the time he spent in front of the Mirror of Erised affected Harry?

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2. How does an act of kindness on Harry's part lead to the group's finding out who Nicholas Flamel is earlier than they might have otherwise?

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3. Describe the tone of the following passage, which takes place just after Harry discovers who Flamel is: "Hermione jumped to her feet. She hadn't looked so excited since they'd gotten back the marks for their very first piece of homework."

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