

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

by  
J.K. Rowling

## Book Information

J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone  
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Rescued from the outrageous neglect of his aunt and uncle, a young boy with a great destiny proves his worth while attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This is the British version of HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE.

**Award:** Bilby Award; Nestlé Children's Book Prize/Smarties Book Prize

**Topics:** Adventure, Misc./Other; Family Life, Misc./Other; Fantasy/Imagination, Magic; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Series, Harry Potter

## Main Characters

Draco Malfoy a nasty and jealous boy at Hogwarts who causes trouble for Harry

Dudley Dursley Harry's selfish cousin who loves to torment him

Fluffy the three-headed dog guarding the Philosopher's Stone

Fred, George, and Ron Weasley the brothers who befriend Harry at Hogwarts

Harry Potter a bright eleven-year-old wizard in training; his parents were killed by Voldemort, but baby Harry survived and is a living legend

Hedwig Harry's snowy owl; a gift from Hagrid that delivers messages to him

Hermione Granger a talented student at Hogwarts who becomes friends with Harry

Lily and James Potter the deceased parents of Harry; both were killed by Voldemort

Percy Weasley a prefect at Hogwarts

Petunia and Vernon Dursley Harry's cruel aunt and uncle

Professor Albus Dumbledore the headmaster of Hogwarts School

Professor Quirrell a seemingly nervous professor at Hogwarts; he is actually the one helping Voldemort steal the Philosopher's Stone

Professor Snape the Potions professor who detests Harry; Harry thinks he is trying to steal the stone, but Snape is actually trying to protect him

Rubeus Hagrid the loveable, oversized Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts; he is a good friend to Harry

Voldemort the evil wizard who has been missing since the death of Harry's parents; he seeks to return to power with the Philosopher's Stone

## Vocabulary

**"blimey"** a British expression similar to "for crying out loud" or "for Pete's sake"

**alchemy** the attempt to change things into gold

**herbology** the study of herbs

**poltergeist** a mischievous ghost who haunts the living

## Synopsis

As the story begins, Mr Dursley begins to suspect that something odd is happening near his house when he sees many strange things. Soon, Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, arrives on the corner of the Dursleys' street and greets a cat, who is really Professor McGonagall of the same school. It is revealed that an evil wizard called Voldemort killed two good wizards, Lily and James Potter. Curiously, their little boy, Harry, survived Voldemort's wrath. In this process, Voldemort's "power somehow broke." Now McGonagall and Dumbledore are awaiting the arrival of the rescued baby, to be placed with his only surviving relatives, the Dursleys. The giant-sized, yet tender-hearted Hagrid soon arrives with the baby Harry. Dumbledore inserts a letter, explaining about Harry's past, with the bundled baby, and leaves him on the Dursleys' doorstep.

The story then jumps ahead about ten years. Harry's life is absolutely miserable. He sleeps in a closet

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near the stairs, and he is forever tormented by his overweight and spoiled cousin, Dudley. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia Dursley are constantly finding reasons to punish Harry. Remarkably, every now and again, signs of Harry's magical abilities surface. Harry's life continues in this fashion until a letter arrives for him addressed to his closet in their home. The Dursleys are immediately suspicious that someone is aware of Harry's cruel living situation. They do not allow young Harry to read his letter, but instead move him to an upstairs bedroom. More letters arrive, addressed to his new location. Angered, Uncle Vernon determines to move his family to a place where he believes the letters can never find them. Eventually they reach a tiny shack on a secluded rock just off the coast, and streams of letters arrive.

Harry is just moments away from his eleventh birthday when Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts, arrives. Hagrid is indignant that the Dursleys have kept Harry's history and legacy from him. He explains that young Harry is a wizard, as were both his mother and father. Harry Potter is famous and written about in the wizard history books because he has survived an encounter with Voldemort. Harry has been invited to attend Hogwarts School as a first-year student. Hagrid soon takes Harry to purchase all the things he will need to attend Hogwarts. Harry finds he has a great deal of money that has been left to him by his parents, and Hagrid removes a small and mysterious package from inside a vault in a wizard bank.

In a short time, Harry finds himself aboard the Hogwarts Express heading for Hogwarts. There he meets the Weasley twins, their younger brother, Ron, and Hermione Granger. For the first time, Harry experiences strange candies, wizard trading cards, and learns of Quidditch, the wizard sport. Harry takes part in the Sorting Ceremony, which places new students in one of four houses. Harry and his new friends Ron and Hermione all go to the honourable house of Gryffindor. He makes an enemy in the spiteful Draco Malfoy, and he is detested by Professor Snape, his Potions instructor.

During Harry's first broomstick lesson, Harry shows incredible skill and dexterity for a first-time rider. He is secretly asked to be the Seeker on the Gryffindor Quidditch team, which has not won the Quidditch Cup in many years. Harry practices diligently, wins his first game, and becomes very popular.

Later, Harry and his friends find a door which no student is ever to enter. Behind the door is a beastly, three-headed dog named Fluffy, who is a protector of the coveted Philosopher's Stone. Harry suspects Professor Snape of attempting to steal the stone when he sees that Snape's leg has been bitten. He is also presented with an invisibility cloak that once belonged to his father. Later, using the cloak, he finds the Mirror of Erised, which shows whatever the viewer most wishes to see. So far, the stone is safe because no one can figure out how to get past Fluffy. That changes when an unsuspecting Hagrid leaks the information after he has had too much to drink. One need only play music to lull the beastly dog to sleep. Harry assumes Snape has given this information to Voldemort and realizes he must act soon to rescue the stone before Voldemort can be brought back to power.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione lull Fluffy to sleep and then enter the dungeons below Hogwarts where the coveted stone is kept. Each uses special skills to defeat the obstacles before them, but Harry is soon accosted by Professor Quirrell. He learns it has been Quirrell trying to revive Voldemort all this time, not Snape. Quirrell cannot find the stone, so he needs Harry's help. The secret is in the Mirror of Erised, but it shows nothing to Quirrell. To Harry, however, it not only reveals the location of the stone, but it places the stone in his pocket. Quirrell is harbouring Voldemort's weakened spirit inside himself, and Voldemort orders him to kill Harry. Quirrell's skin burns and blisters, though, whenever he touches Harry. Moments later, Harry becomes unconscious and he awakens in the hospital ward at Hogwarts and is greeted by Dumbledore. Professor Dumbledore had returned from London in time to keep Voldemort from getting the stone. He explains that Harry received the stone because he only

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wanted to find it, not use its power. Later, Harry and his friends are awarded many points, and their house of Gryffindor beats the house of Slytherin for the coveted house cup. Harry returns to the Dursleys for summer vacation but looks forward to the next year at Hogwarts.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Why does Harry think Snape is the one trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone?

*Snape always treats Harry with contempt both in and out of class. He is rude to the boy and has no qualms about making his hatred known. Additionally, after learning of the stone, there are a few very suspicious encounters between Snape and Quirrell in which it seems that Snape is trying to learn Quirrell's spell that protects the stone. Also, Snape appears limping one day with a nasty dog bite on his leg, which leads Harry to believe he has tried to get past Fluffy. Another example takes place at the Quidditch game when Hermione mistakenly tries to stop Snape from jinxing Harry and his broomstick.*

### Literary Analysis

Why are the Dursleys so mean to Harry?

*The main reason is probably that they know he is a wizard and his parents were wizards. In fact, Aunt Petunia complains about the wizard activities her sister engaged in when they were children. They may also be afraid of what Harry is capable of doing and that he might outshine Dudley. In addition, they may resent the extra burden on their resources.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Why does Harry see his parents when he first looks in the Mirror of Erised? How is Harry's vision different from Ron's?

*An orphan would naturally want to see his or her parents. It is normal to be curious about one's origins. Harry has heard many stories about the other students' parents. Plus, his parents are legendary. This would make him that much more curious about his heritage. Harry's visions are different from Ron's because Harry wants to see his past, while Ron wants to see his future.*

### Constructing Meaning

What purposes do the centaurs serve in this story?

*First, they serve as an aid to Harry. Centaurs do not like humans to ride on them, yet Firenze allows Harry to ride on his back. This illustrates Harry's importance as well as his good nature. Second, centaurs are mysterious creatures who are concerned with the stars and the future. Their dark visions about the future help to foreshadow the dangerous climax at the end in which Harry must face Voldemort and Quirrell.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** There are many mysterious creatures in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: centaurs, unicorns, and even a baby dragon. For a project, have students learn about these and other mythical creatures. Students could choose a creature and make posters with drawings and informational reports of their particular creatures, which they can share with the class.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Harry takes a Potions class with Professor Snape. In class, students learn the functions of a variety of herbs, such as wormwood and powdered root of asphodel. Have students research a variety of herbs that are popular today to find their effects. Some examples of popular herbs today are St John's Wart, Echinacea, and Kava Kava. Good sources of information include health food stores,

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pharmacies, health magazines, and the Internet. Have students present their findings to the class.

**Recognizing Details** Quidditch is explained in such detail in this book that the tournaments take on a sense of realism. Have students closely reread the sections concerning Quidditch and describe the rules and gameplay. Have students use this information and craft materials to construct a small playing field. Students could even string wires across the top that would allow them to dangle model players atop their broomsticks in the air. Everyone can be responsible for a different task such as cutting, drawing, pasting, etc. Students might enjoy acting out a game and taking turns as commentators and players.

**Responding to Literature** Chess is a popular game among the students and wizards in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Ron is quite skilled at the game and teaches Harry and Hermione. Ron also helps his friends get the Philosopher's Stone when he wins a game of chess played with living chessmen down in the dungeons below Fluffy's lair. Ask students to find another student or an adult to teach them to play chess. Then hold a chess tournament for the class. The winner might receive a copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as a prize!