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## Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone / Harry Potter en de steen der wijzen door J.K. Rowling

*Eva van Loo*

### Notes on the author:

Joanne Kathleen Rowling was born on July 31st, 1965, in Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire, England. Her sister Di was born less than two years later. Rowling claims she wrote her first story when she was about five or six years old. It was about a rabbit called Rabbit and a bee called Miss Bee. Ever since then she has wanted to be a writer, though she never told anyone.



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Rowling moved twice while growing up. When she lived in Winterbourne she had friends with Potter as their last name. She liked the children and their name and never forgot them.

When Rowling was nine years old her family moved to Tutshill. There she attended a primary school and later went to Wyedean Comprehensive. After she graduated there, she attended Exeter University where she studied French to become a bilingual secretary. However, it didn't take long before she realised she wasn't meant to be a secretary. When she was 26 she moved to Portugal to work there as an English teacher. It was during this period that she began working on a story about a wizard. Rowling married a Portuguese journalist and not long after their daughter was born in 1993, they divorced. She and her infant daughter moved to Scotland to live closer near her sister Di. During this period she got determined not only to finish her Harry Potter novel but also to get it published. She often wrote in restaurants so she and her daughter could stay warm. After several rejections Rowling finally sold her novel Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone to Bloomsbury for \$4000. In the meanwhile, she was working as a French teacher to maintain her and her daughter. After several months an American publisher bought the American rights for Harry Potter and she received enough money to give up her job as a French teacher.

Not long after Bloomsbury published Harry Potter Rowling was recognized as a major discovery. In 1997 the book won The British Book Awards Children's Book of the Year, and the Smarties Prize. The other series of Harry Potter also became very popular and received several prizes. By 2000 she had earned over \$400 million dollars for her first three Harry Potter books, which have been printed in 35 languages and had sold over 30 million copies.

Edition I read published by: Bloomsbury Publishing

Year of first publication: 1997

Number of pages: 223

Paperback

**Genre:**

Fantasy

**Short summary**

Harry Potter, an eleven year old boy, lives with his dreadful Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon and their son Dudley. His life isn't very bright; he has to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, never gets anything for his birthday (except a pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks maybe) and his nephew Dudley constantly bullies him. One day Harry starts receiving strange letters and is rescued by a giant man. Harry discovers his parents didn't die in a car crash (as his uncle and aunt always told him), but that they were wizards, and that he's one as well. But that's not all; he even seems to not just a wizard, but also a famous one. The reason for this is because a Dark Wizard named Voldemort who killed a lot of people, including Harry's parents, lost his power when he tried to kill Harry. Now Harry also knows where from he got the scar on his forehead.

He enrolls at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where he meets new friends, but also enemies. In the beginning of the year all the students at Hogwarts are told by Professor Dumbledore (the headmaster) not to enter the third floor corridor, unless they wish to "die a very painful death". As the year proceeds Harry finds that the Philosopher's Stone, a magical stone which is capable of turning anything into gold and prolonging life, is stored behind this corridor. He also discovers someone is trying to steal it.

Harry enters the forbidden corridor and passes the barriers set by the teachers of Hogwarts to protect the stone. But his Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher Professor Quirrel, does as well. It turns out that Voldemort shares the body of Professor Quirrel, as that is the only way he can live in his weakened state. Professor Quirrel, however, doesn't get past all barriers. He can't get over the last one, the Mirror of the Erised, placed by Dumbledore himself. In this mirror you will see what you most desire. Quirrel, of course, mostly desires the stone, but the mirror has been bewitched in a way that only someone who wants the Stone for itself, not for the powers it possesses, can see in the mirror where the stone is. Quirrel has the intention of giving the stone to Voldemort when he finds it, so he can't see where it is. But Harry does meet this need of the mirror and finds the stone in his pocket when he looks into the mirror. In the next moments Harry and Quirrel are fighting about the stone. Just when Harry can't bear it any longer, Professor Dumbledore comes to help and in the end Harry once again is able to overcome the Dark Wizard and keep the world save from his powers.

Some facts about Hogwarts: The pupils of Hogwarts are divided into four school houses: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. To be sorted into a certain school house you have to have certain characteristics. For example, for Gryffindor you have to have courage, for Slytherin you have to be sly and let nothing stop you from achieving your goal, for Ravenclaw you have to be intelligent and for Hufflepuff you have to have a good heart. Harry is sorted into Gryffindor, just as his

friends Ron and Hermione. Slytherin is known for producing a lot of dark wizards and witches.

**Social setting:**

The main character grew up in a middle class family, but he never got any pocket money or new clothes or toys or anything of that kind and he had to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, so in fact he was poor. But that was before he found out he's a wizard, because after that he discovers his parents left him a lot of money and he's very rich.

**Geographical Setting:**

The house of Harry's uncle and aunt is stationed in a village which meets every demand of the perfect village. All the lawns are mowed to the tiniest blade of grass, and its people are proud to never be involved in anything strange or mysterious. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is very different. It's located in a mysterious landscape of mountains, forests and a lake. In this area it would be odd if something would have nothing to do with magic! For example, there's a tree in front of the school which pounds you if you come too near and there lives a giant squid in the lake.

**Historical setting:**

The story takes place in the present, since modern things like cars occur in the story and nothing implies it might have taken place a longer time ago.

**Initial incident:**

The story begins with an introduction to the characters of Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, in which is said that they're perfectly normal, except for the fact that they're family of the Potters (Petunia's sister, Harry's mother was a witch and married to James Potter, a wizard and Harry's father). They tried to avoid meeting them as much as possible and it was working very well until one morning Uncle Vernon sees weird people with cloaks and hears rumours about the Potters and their son Harry. First he thinks he's probably heard it wrong, but eventually the Dursley's nightmare becomes reality; Harry (still a baby) is dropped by Dumbledore at their door to come to live with them after his parents were killed.

**Climax:**

The climax of the story is the battle between Harry and Quirrel (or actually Voldemort) over the Philosopher's Stone. This is the most important event of the book because the outcome of the battle is a matter of life and death not only to Harry, but for the whole wizarding world.

**Account for the title:**

title: Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Harry Potter is the main character in the story. When he's at Hogwarts he discovers that a valuable object is guarded there. Bit by bit he and his friends find out this valuable object is the Philosopher's Stone, a stone with magic powers that will turn anything into gold and gives prolonged life. It's obvious that the person trying to steal the stone is stealing it to give it to Voldemort, a dark wizard that was very powerful once but lost his powers after he tried to kill Harry. Harry wants to avoid Voldemort getting the stone, because if the dark wizard does it will mean death and destruction to the wizarding world. So he and his friends go to find the stone and keep this Voldemort/Quirrel from getting it.

### **Theme(s) of the work:**

Courage: To cross the barriers and face his mortal enemy Harry needs to be very courageous. Harry was also placed in the school house of Gryffindor because of the courage he possesses.

Good and evil: The characters in the book have a very obvious good or evil character. There's no in-between. Even their names and looks imply their character. For example, 'Slytherin', the school house that brought along produced a lot of dark wizards, really has an evil sound, and 'Draco Malfoy' does as well. Draco has a long, pointed face and sleek white hair. This are the typical looks for an evil boy.

The way the story is told: Third-person narration. As a reader you see everything from Harry's point of view and you only know his thoughts and feelings.

Types of language used: That depends on the person speaking. Hagrid speaks a sort of dialect, but on the whole the story is told in the persons speak everyday language.

### **Describing of the main characters:**

Harry Potter, 'The boy who lived': Harry Potter is an eleven year old boy who leads a miserable life with his aunt and uncle until a giant man comes to tell him he's a wizard and selected to go to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This changes his life completely. He also discovers his parents were killed by a powerful dark wizard and that when this wizard tried to kill him he somehow lost his power. This makes him famous in the wizard world. Harry is described as a small and skinny boy. He has a thin face, knobby knees, black, rambling hair, green eyes and a scar in the shape of a lightning on his forehead. The scar he got due to the curse tried Voldemort put upon him.

**Professor Dumbledore:** He's the headmaster of Hogwarts and the only wizard Voldemort ever feared. He helps Harry in the final battle between Harry and Quirrel over the Philosopher's Stone. Dumbledore's a very wise and noble man, who can get across very integrating, but at the same time is very humane and can enjoy the little things in life (such a sours and tenpin bowling). He's an old man, wears half-moon glasses, has a long crooked nose, a long silver beard and a moustache. He doesn't really appear very often in the book, but he's an important character because he probably impresses Harry the most from all the characters.

**Ron Weasley:** Ron Weasley becomes Harry's best friend when they meet in the train on their way to Hogwarts. He and Harry support each other in difficult times and have a lot of fun together. Ron's tall, thin and gangly, with freckles, red hair, big hands and feet and a long nose. He also plays an important part in helping Harry to get past the barriers set to defend the stone. He was born in a wizard family and has five older brothers and a younger sister.

**Hermione Granger:** Hermione was born in a ordinary Muggle family, a word used to describe non-magic humans. At the beginning of the year she and Harry aren't really friends and she and Ron practically hate each other. But after the three of them knock out a twelve-foot troll together they become friends. Hermione is a real eager student which comes in handy in some crucial moments in the book. She can remember all the spells from their schoolbooks and classes and also helps Harry to come across the barriers for the stone by solving a complicated puzzle (one of the barriers). She has a large tuft of brown hair and big front teeth.

**Hagrid:** Hagrid is the game keeper at Hogwarts. He lives in a hut on the edge of the Forbidden Forest and has a soft spot in his heart for big and dangerous animals such as dragons. At a certain moment in the book he even tries to hatch a dragon egg. However, he's also one of Harry, Ron and Hermione's best friends. They often visit him in his hut after school. He's a little incautious with keeping secrets and doing illegal things, but he means well. By this incautiousness he even helps Harry and his friends to find out more about the stone. He's also the one picking Harry up from his uncle and aunt to introduce him to the wizards world. For the rest, Hagrid isn't really important for the headlines of the story, but he does return often in the book and he's one of the characters that make the book sparkle. Hagrid is a giant man of about twice the length and width of a normal man. He has a long, saggy mane of hair, a wide tangled beard and black eyes glinting like beetles.

### **Minor characters in the story:**

**Draco Malfoy:** Harry and Draco can't stand each other. Draco is a mean, arrogant boy with a long, pale face and sleek white hair who does everything to get Harry

and his friends in trouble. He's very proud of the fact he comes from a family with 'pure' wizards blood and hates wizards and witches born in Muggle families. Malfoy's always accompanied by his 'bodyguards', Crabble and Goyle, who just like Malfoy, stay in Slytherin.

The Dursleys: Harry's Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and nephew Dudley, who Harry lives with after his parents died when he was a baby. They treat him like dirt; they make him sleep in a cupboard and while they're spoiling Dudley, Harry never gets anything. They also never told Harry he's a wizard, since they don't want to become involved in such business. Like anyone would be if they'd live with such people, Harry's happy to leave them and go to Hogwarts. The only minor problem is that he still has to live with them during the summer holidays.

Professor Quirrel: Professor Quirrel is Harry's teacher in Defence Against The Dark Arts. At first he seems just a poor, stuttering professor, but at the end of the book this changes. He appears to be the one trying to steal the stone to make Voldemort powerful again. He even 'lends' his body to Voldemort so that he (Voldemort) can live on. He always wears a turban, which later is seen to be for hiding the face of Voldemort.

Professor Snape: His Potions teacher, Professor Snape, is Harry's most hated one. This hate is mutual. Snape always favours people from his own house, Slytherin, and disadvantages the others. He has greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin.

Professor McGonagall: She's the department head of Gryffindor and the type of teacher not to cross.

Neville Longbottom: He's one of Harry's classmates, also in Gryffindor. He has the tendency to forget things and he always acts clumsy, so he often gets into trouble.

### **My opinion on the book:**

In my opinion Harry Potter is one of the most amusing books I ever read. Although the book might seem only for children, I think it can be read and enjoyed by people of all ages. The story is fictional and the things that happen can never happen in real life, but still the events that happen don't seem unreal when you're reading the book. The best feature of the book is that sometimes there are nice details in it. For example, Hagrid (the giant, robust looking man who picks Harry up from his home to introduce him to the wizards world) sits in the train knitting what looks like "a canary-yellow circus tent". All these little details make the book more interesting.

While reading the book you also get engaged more and more with the head character and you live along with every difficulty he has to face. A less positive thing about the main character is that he doesn't really go through a personality development in the story. The book is more about what happens around him than how he feels and what he goes through. Of course this is also described and this doesn't hold you from living along with him, but on the whole the book is more about the story than the characters. There is no real depth to the characters.

However, there are two characters that do go through a 'personality development'. When Harry first arrives at Hogwarts he (and you as the reader as well) immediately dislikes his Potions teacher Snape. So when Harry discovers someone is trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone, he suspects Snape right away. In the end however, not Snape but an other teacher, who seemed reliable at first, appears to be the one trying to steal the stone. It even turns out to be that Snape was protecting Harry when this other teacher tried to curse him. This leads to a surprising and exciting end of the book.

Also, the book is very funny. There were moments that I just sat laughing aloud. If I would give an example of this now it probably wouldn't be very funny, but it is when you're reading the book.