

Specialis Revelio: Harry Potter and Reader-Text Interactions at Your Library

November 16, 2007

New Jersey Association of School Librarians Annual Conference, Long Branch, NJ

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I. Introduction

Arguably, Harry Potter has inspired young people to read, has raised reading scores (Trelease), and has even reduced emergency room visits (Gwilym et al). Harry has also inspired children and teens to think, create, socialize, and engage with texts in meaningful ways. We'll be looking at what these effects are all about, and how you can tap into these energies at your library.

II. Why is Harry Potter still interesting, even after the publication of the seventh book?

- "Closed canons" are still interesting
- Rowling actively challenging the notion of a closed canon
 - "interview canon" (apocrypha?)
 - newly revealed information hidden on website (Oct. 2007)
- Two movies yet to come
- Apply principles of textual involvement to other texts of interest

III. What do children and teens DO with Harry Potter?

- "regurgitate and forget" model versus involvement
- activities: intertextuality, fan fiction (gapfillers and documents), shipping, character games, the past and the future, alternate universes

IV. What advantages does textual involvement with Harry Potter have for young readers?

A. HP textual involvement is SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL

- point of connection with other people (Smith & Wilhelm, Thomas)
- point of connection with other texts - intertextuality
- interpretive communities (Fish, Vandergrift)
- core cultural myths, shared cultural meanings (Jung, Campbell, Jenkins)

B. HP textual involvement is EDUCATIONAL

- more motivating, easier than original writing; higher level of enthusiasm (Lewis, Moore, Almagor, Borah)
- fanfiction writing as a form of scaffolding (Bond & Michelson, Vygotsky)
- revision process - providing and receiving feedback rapidly (Lewis, Borah)
- apprenticeship model (Jenkins)

- encourages long-term projects, re-visitations of earlier work (Lewis)
- encourages close readings, textual analysis, research skills

C. HP textual involvement is EMPOWERING

- knowledge of evolving events, being an expert (Smith & Wilhelm)
- "I figured that out" - theorizing rewarded
- opportunities for publishing to audiences of more than one (Jenkins, Moore)
- foregrounding unusual and unique voices (Bond & Michelson, Thomas)
 - main roads versus side streets (Jenkins)
- explorations of gender/romance/sexuality, emotions, growing up (Moore)
- unanswered questions can be explored and resolved

D. HP textual involvement ALLOWS US TO SEE EMERGING DEFINITIONS OF TEXTS, AUTHORS, AND AUDIENCES

- reader-response theory: how much of meaning resides in texts versus in readers? (Rosenblatt, Fish, Vandergrift)
- co-ownership, co-creation, and redefinition of authorial authority (Jenkins)
- participation versus consumption, "Book 2.0" (Bond & Michelson, Jenkins)
 - is Rowling attempting to prevent this?
- are even "closed" texts inherently incomplete?
 - so maybe Rowling's attempts are in vain?
- what is the (author)itative text?
- emerging definitions of quality: process versus product

V. How can you incorporate these principles into programs at your library?

- General principles:
 - Complement artificial activities with authentic ones
 - Avoid mindset that writing fanfiction constitutes "wasting time"
- Program ideas:
 - Contests and challenges
 - Literary magazines, art displays
 - Writing and art workshops, beta reading
 - Collaborations with language arts/visual arts departments
 - Discussion groups
 - Collaborative programs across grades
 - Other creative ideas - trials of ambiguous characters, etc.

VI. What challenges might you face, and how might you deal with them?

- Copyright: what are the guidelines for derivative works? - HP Lexicon as ex.
- Setting limits: fanfiction rating systems
- COPPA and providing personal information online
- Lack of knowledge of source texts
- Accusations of promoting witchcraft
- Time and resource allocation

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Sample Activity Ideas

These activities are Harry Potter-specific, but the principles can be applied to any text of interest to your students.

Intertextuality:

Dueling Club:

(thanks to MuggleCast for the name, and to the Ratzan, Bratnick, Carey, and Dunsavage families for the pairings!)

If each pair of characters got into a fight, who would win, and why?

Voldemort vs. Sauron

12-year old Harry Potter vs. 12-year old Anakin Skywalker

Ginny Weasley vs. Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Dolores Umbridge vs. Snow White's evil stepmother

Fred and George Weasley vs. Bugs Bunny

Dudley Dursley vs. Augustus Gloop (from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory)

Harry, Ron, Hermione, Neville, and Luna vs. the Power Rangers

House affiliations

If each of the following characters went to Hogwarts, what Houses would they be Sorted into, and why?

Han Solo (from Star Wars)

Sam Gamgee (from Lord of the Rings)

Artemis Fowl

Violet Baudelaire (from A Series of Unfortunate Events)

Fan fiction/writing ideas:

Gapfillers:

- Something that happens to one of the characters during a summer
- How Dumbledore acquired the Mirror of Erised
- Something in Filch's files about the Marauders (James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew)
- The letter that Dumbledore leaves with baby Harry on the Dursleys' doorstep
- Snape's start of term address
- Something that happens to Neville during his seventh year at Hogwarts

Alternative points of view:

- The scene where Hagrid arrives at the Hut-on-the-Rock to deliver Harry's Hogwarts letter (*Sorcerer's Stone*), from one of the Dursleys' point of view
- The scene where Harry and Ginny share their first kiss (*Half-Blood Prince*), from Ginny's point of view

-The scene where Mad-Eye Moody turns Draco into a ferret (*Goblet of Fire*), from Crabbe or Goyle's point of view

Shipping:

Rowling has paired up many of her characters, or otherwise told us about their romantic pasts and futures. But some loose ends remain - as do possibilities with other texts, and across texts.

- Lee Jordan (a friend of Fred and George Weasley's) likes Angelina Johnson (a Gryffindor Quidditch player). Do you think they wind up getting together, and if so, how?
- Did Sirius Black ever have a romantic relationship with anyone? If so, who, and how did it go?

Character Games:

For each character (from HP or another story), ask:

- What would they see if they looked in the Mirror of Erised? ("I show not your face but your heart's desire")
- What form would their Patronus take? ("a kind of positive force," animal form)
- What form would their Boggart take? ("it can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most")
- What would the Amortentia potion smell like to them? ("the most powerful love potion in the world...it's supposed to smell differently to each of us, according to what attracts us")

(thanks to The Leaky Cauldron's Valentine's Day contest for this latter idea!)

The past and the future (formerly Theories and Predictions):

- What is Peeves' backstory? Why is he afraid of the Bloody Baron?
- What happens to Mundungus Fletcher after the events of *Deathly Hallows*?
- How do - or don't - James II, Albus, and Lily II Potter (Harry and Ginny's children) get along with Scorpius Malfoy?
- Does Dudley Dursley have children? How do - or don't - they get along with Harry's?
- What is the Fat Friar's backstory?
- What are the seven uses of dragon's blood, as discovered by Dumbledore? How did they discover them?

Alternate Universes:

How would the story have been different if...

- Snape had heard all of Trelawney's prophecy, not just the first half?
- Harry had been Sorted into Slytherin?
- Sirius hadn't fallen through the veil?

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Resource List

Scholarly and professional sources:

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Trelease, Jim. "Six Lessons from Harry Potter." In Jim Trelease, *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. 6th ed. New York: Penguin, 2006, pp. 142-148.

Vandergrift, Kay E. *Children's Literature: Theory, Research, and Teaching*. Englewood, California: Libraries Unlimited, 1990.

(Also note a summary of Vandergrift's views on reader response criticism and interpretive communities, available on her website:

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/readerresponse.html>.)

Wilkes, David. "Bottom-ranked School Shoots to Top After Introducing Harry Potter-Themed Curriculum." *London Daily Mail* Nov. 13, 2007, retrieved Nov. 14, 2007 from <http://tinyurl.com/2t5u2l>.

Websites:

J.K. Rowling's official website <http://www.jkrowling.com>
or text-only version at
<http://www.jkrowling.com/textonly/en>

The Leaky Cauldron <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org>
One of the best places on the web to find HP news, Leaky also features a weekly Pottercast podcast, a fan art gallery, discussion forums, and writing and art contests.

Mugglenet <http://www.mugglenet.com>
Started by a teen webmaster in 1999 and now, with Leaky, one of the two largest HP sites on the web. Check out their World Famous Editorials and their weekly MuggleCast podcast.

Beyond Hogwarts <http://www.beyondhogwarts.com>
This site, best known for its "Dumbledore is Not Dead" theories of several years back, provides an excellent model of using quotations from the Harry Potter texts to support its arguments.

Harry Potter Lexicon<http://www.hp-lexicon.org>

This reference source for Harry Potter facts (great for checking details while creating fan works!) includes an Encyclopedia of Spells, a Handbook of Quidditch, a Wizard's Atlas, time lines, and other resources. Note that the creator of this resource is currently (Nov. 2007) being sued by J.K. Rowling over the right (or not) to publish a print edition.

FictionAlley<http://www.fictionalley.org>

This Harry Potter fanfiction and fanart site, "the largest fanfic site specific to the Harry Potter fandom," features monthly challenges, fics categorized by genre (romance, angst, humor), art categorized by subject matter (character, setting, book chapter), writing tips and proofreading services (click on Write Fanfiction -> Fundamentals of Writing), and a detailed Advanced Search function. Submissions may have up to an R rating, but all ratings must be clearly marked.

The Sugar Quill<http://www.sugarquill.net>

This self-described "highly biased and selective archive of Harry Potter fanfiction" bills itself as "a place where...writers who want more than just raves can come for actual (gentle - think Lupin, not McGonagall) constructive criticism and technical editing." Submitted stories are matched with a beta reader (revision and proofreader); writing resources listed under their Floo Network include links to online dictionaries, grammar resources, and encyclopedias of folklore and mythology. Their policy on sex, violence, and swearing is, "If you have to ask, then we probably won't accept it."

Fanfiction.net<http://www.fanfiction.net>

Possibly the largest, open (no review process) fanfiction archive on the internet, Fanfiction.net contains categories for fics based on hundreds of books, movies, anime/manga series, and other source texts. As of Nov. 15, 2007, it contained 328,805 Harry Potter fics. A search function allows searching by genre, fic length, and other factors. Fic ratings range from K (content suitable for most ages) to M (content suitable for adults), but default screens will only display stories up to T (content suitable for ages 13 and older). See an explanation of Fanfiction.net's rating system at <http://www.fictionratings.com/guide.php>.