

## *Using Harry Potter as a “Mirror of Erised”*

What can Swedish teenagers learn from reading the book series as a school project?



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*To my Parents – My inspiration and conscience, without who, life would be very dull. Thank you for believing in me, even when I don't.*

*To my Cousin – For supplying a benevolent ball plank in life, and for being a very good friend*

## **2) Abstract**

- Title:** Using *Harry Potter* as a “Mirror of Erised”. What can Swedish teenagers learn from reading the book series as a school project?
- Author:** Charlotte Mörk
- Term and year:** Autumn term, 2008
- Faculty and Department:** The Education and Research Board for Teacher Training, and the English Department at the University of Gothenburg at the University of Sussex, in Brighton, England, UK
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- Key words:** Identity, teenagers, school, *Harry Potter*, reading, influence, teacher responsibility, reflection, syllabus
- Summary:** This essay is about identity development and what affects it. I claim that we are affected by what we read, and that this therefore influences our identity. What then, can be learned from the Harry Potter book series when it comes to identity development? This is what the essay will try to answer. As well as how we can take responsibility for what we read and thereby for what we may become. As a teacher-to-be I am particularly interested in a teacher’s choice when we set course materials and tasks to be performed during the school year. The goal is to use the books as a school project and as a positive influence to identity development.

### **3) Opening the door to the essay**

#### **3.1) Introduction**

This research essay is an interdisciplinary research project and as such it has a slightly different structure than most C-level essays. I am studying to be an upper secondary teacher in the subjects of Religion and English in Sweden, and am currently attending my last term of English studies, in Brighton, England, UK, before I graduate next term. C-level studies in English include a research essay in either the literary or linguistic genre and I have chosen the literary angle to my essay. This essay is thus a combination of a literary research essay concerning English literature (as part of my C-level studies in English) and a pedagogical research essay (as part of my final examination in the teacher trainee program).

#### **3.2) Aim and purpose**

The aim of this essay is to forge a single topic from the two fields mentioned above. I have always been very interested in identity and identity development, or maturation, and I believe that teenagers not only use other people to try out their opinions etc. on, but use every media available to them, including books. I believe that books can function as a mirror, where teenagers (as well as adults and younger children) can see positive sides of themselves reflected in the books, or find role models that inspire them to grow or develop new sides. Sometimes we can also find personality traits reflected in the mirror that we do not want to have, and therefore need to work on or avoid. The title of the essay refers to “The Mirror of Erised” which is an actual mirror that figures in the *Harry Potter* books. Its job is to show whoever sees into it their heart’s deepest desire (“erised” is simply “desire” spelled backwards). My desire then, is to use the *Harry Potter* book series as a mirror that can reflect personality traits that are worth exploring and inspire a positive identity development in Swedish teenagers. I also want to discuss what this process means to us teachers when we plan courses and set course materials. If we know that what we read affects our identity, we should take responsibility for this as teachers when we decide what the students are to read and which tasks are to be performed during the school year. This is a concern also expressed by Heilman when she describes how she encourages her son to read:

*“When I select books for him I think about the contributions they will make to his existential and cultural understanding.”<sup>1</sup>*

#### **3.3) Theoretical context and critical approach**

I will mainly be regarding the *Harry Potter* books as a bildungsroman. This is because most of the seven books take place at Harry’s school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, during the academic year, and they are to a large extent about how he and other characters mature during that year. Each book takes place over one school-year and the first one starts shortly after Harry’s eleventh birthday. In accordance with this, he turns 17 at the beginning of the last book. Incidentally, in the wizarding world, you come of age at 17 instead of 18. Harry thus comes of age both at the beginning of book seven, and at the end of it,

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<sup>1</sup> Heilman, Elizabeth E., *Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 221

making sure readers know he is regarded as an adult when the series end. This is something which will be very relevant to my future students as they will turn 18 during their time in upper secondary school.

Another advantage to reading the series as a bildungsroman has to do with me reading all of the books in one go in preparation for this essay. This gives me a very clear picture of how the different characters develop throughout the whole series. This is a valuable tool for me to use when I consider how the characters start out when they are introduced and how they come off at the end of the last book.

Since this is an interdisciplinary essay, the overall structure is a bit complicated. Focusing on both literary studies as well as a pedagogical basis for how to look at identity development and its effects, this essay draws on many critical approaches. There is no clear cut approach, but a mixture of many. The reader of this essay who looks for a clearly defined single approach will be confused and disappointed.

### **3.4) Method and materials**

I have conducted literary research to find answers to my questions. Simply put, I tried to find all the material available that is relevant to my essay. To find the material I needed, I used the extensive library at the University of Sussex, course material recommended by the Education and Research Board for Teacher Training, the Swedish National Syllabus and Curriculum, critical works on the *Harry Potter* book series, and obviously the *Harry Potter* books themselves.

There are many ways of analysing these books, some of which are concerning gender roles, social criticism, cultural comparison, being a good parent and attitudes about school and learning. All of these approaches are very interesting and could easily be the topic of many future essays, but I have chosen to see them as parts of what makes an identity instead of as separate parts. I will therefore mention them in my discussion, but not give them overdue attention, or devote time to explaining them further.

I have tried to limit the essay by looking at the big picture or the series as a whole and not each book separately. I will of course use the individual books for references and examples, but my overall interest is how the main characters develop over time. How do they start out and how are they portrayed in the end? This approach also gives me a clearer connection to the bildungsroman as a critical approach to the series.

Another issue to be taken into account is regarding time. At the time I am writing this essay, the final book in the series has only been available for about a year. Critical reviews of the books are so far sparse, and the ones that are available deal primarily with the first four or five books. In the last two books, many of the characters undergo several changes, and I imagine the critical analysis of Rowling's entire series will be a bit different from the analysis of the first books in the series. In fact, this was always meant to be a series, which is why it is so important to regard the series as a whole:

*"The fact that all four stories, and the three yet to come, had already been planned when Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone was published, so that they are an integral part of the original conception and not a later*

addition brought out on the unexpected success of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, adds to the tendency to view the series as a single unit."<sup>2</sup>

This means that further research, which would include all the books, is very welcome.

#### **4) Results and Discussion**

##### **4.1) Learning from the settings and genres of the *Harry Potter* books**

The most important approach to this essay is that of the bildungsroman. In Reynolds' book, a bildungsroman is simply and effectively defined as a book, or book series, in which "*the characters grow up as we progress through the series*"<sup>3</sup>, and that there is also a (supposed) future that the books lead up to. The very purpose of such a novel is to allow the characters to grow up and mature. As such, the genre has strong ties to identity development and this is the reason it is such an important approach for this essay. Reading *Harry Potter* as a bildungsroman is what makes it possible to connect the series to identity and how and what affects it. The overall purpose to this essay is to find positive uses of the *Harry Potter* book series for Swedish teenagers in upper secondary school. In this respect, the bildungsroman approach applies twice over. The books themselves contain a plot in which the characters mature over time, but the target readers (for the purposes of this essay) are also maturing. They will be students at an upper secondary school for three years, and naturally mature during these years.

Depending on what education the students have chosen to pursue, they will be taking between one and three courses in English while in upper secondary school. English is a compulsory school subject in Sweden and everyone takes the first one of these courses (English A) as a minimum. This means that teachers regularly meet students in this subject twice a week for a whole academic year as a minimum. If the students continue with their English studies after English A, this procedure is repeated for courses English B and English C with some variations to the intensity of the course concerning time allotted due to what program they have chosen. The length of these courses makes them very suitable for long-term projects. They also have room for discussions. As we can see in the syllabuses for English (see chapter 4.3.2) Syllabus for the subject of English, below) students should at this time be confident enough of their level of proficiency in English to be able to discuss abstract matters and to be able to express their own thoughts and opinions in a competent way. This means that talking about aspects of identity is not only a tool for teachers to use trying to find positive influences, but it can also be highly relevant in terms of language acquisition – a critical point to this essay. The issues raised by the individual characters in the *Harry Potter* book series are therefore excellent topics for discussion. Having deep conversations about serious issues in today's society is something students gladly do, and indeed consider to be very important. My experience so far from talking to upper secondary students during the practical parts of my education is that they appreciate the opportunity to express themselves. They also often think adults have outdated and "boring" solutions to these things and that their own solutions are far more applicable and credible. These things taken together paints a picture of a theme reading and discussion around identity as being very welcome in Swedish upper secondary schools. Concentrating on different themes when reading stimulates students to develop existing ideas

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<sup>2</sup> Eccleshare, Julia, *A guide to the Harry Potter novels*, London, Continuum, 2002, p 18

<sup>3</sup> Pinsent, Pat, *Theories of Genre and Gender: Change and Continuity in the School Story*, in Reynolds, Kimberley (Ed.), *Modern Children's Literature: An Introduction*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p 14

or to discover new ones. In the introduction to Kimberley Reynolds' book the author has some well-placed words to say that are highly relevant to this essay, which speaks to the benefits of focusing on different themes when reading. She says that children learn about the world around them, and of its rules, through books. Reading literature is a door to a larger world since the:

*"books children encounter provide them with the images, vocabularies, attitudes and structures to think about themselves, what happens to them, and how the world around them operates."*<sup>4</sup>

She goes on to say that this also means that *"the books read in childhood affect the adults we become"*.

Rowling draws from many different genres in the *Harry Potter* book series. One of the more prominent ones is the school story genre. Pinsent describes the benefits of that genre as having to do with:

*"aspects of socialization – including gender, education, friendship, attitudes to institutions, and the inculcation of ideas about the values, mores and power structures of society"*<sup>5</sup>

I have indeed been able to find examples of all of these topics in the series through my analysis of the characters, confirming that there is a lot to be learned from this book series. Pinsent continues by explaining some of the typical ingredients in the school story genre that help draw the reader's attention to these characteristics<sup>6</sup>. The first ingredient is the train ride. The function of the train is to mark a boundary between the "normal world" and the school world by the journey there. In *Harry Potter* however, Harry does not always take the train to school, and sometimes the important journey from the Dursleys to the magical world take place before school even starts for the term, so there is some room for variation. Another ingredient is the actual school. Pinsent argues that the school becomes a character in itself. And we certainly get an insight to Hogwarts, off all its odd details, like vanishing steps, stairs that move, the enchanted ceiling, forbidden areas and secrets passages. The school takes on a role of a very benevolent place that offers endless adventures and possibilities for exploration. Even Dumbledore himself doubts he has full knowledge of every detail of the school: *"'Oh, I would never dream of assuming I know all of Hogwarts' secrets, Igor'"*<sup>7</sup> Pinsent also points out school activities as ingredients in the school story genre, like certain annual events and school sports. These are definitely things we get examples of from Rowling; Hagrid can be seen to bring the traditional twelve Christmas trees before the Christmas dinner in the Great Hall every year. And who can forget the Triwizard Tournament? The obvious sport is of course Quidditch. Many of the central events in the plot takes place during one match or another; like when Harry gets attacked by Dementors in the third book, or when Ron tries out for Keeper in the fifth book. Lee Jordan's commentaries up to the fifth book, and Luna's in the sixth for that matter, are examples of highly amusing passages that give the books an air of authenticity. Pinsent also mentions that a school environment make the characters learn tolerance towards others, as a kind of social training ground. Whether Malfoy, or any of the Slytherins, ever achieve this is doubtful, but certainly the students in the other Houses do. This is indeed one of the things that make Harry special, a part of what makes him a hero:

*"Harry is able to cross all the complex social or racial barriers that are threaded through the wizarding world. He is able to act as a conduit for Rowling's ideas of an inclusive society. Because of his isolated childhood, he is*

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<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, Kimberley (Ed.), *Modern Children's Literature: An Introduction*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p 3

<sup>5</sup> Pinsent 2005, p 8

<sup>6</sup> Pinsent 2005, p 12-15

<sup>7</sup> Rowling 2000, p 456



*unfamiliar with the concepts of 'pure blood' and the derogatory 'mud blood' which defines those from mixed or non-wizard marriages. Through his choice of friends, Ron and Hermione, he shows that he takes a stand for toleration on matters of birth and social status. Ron, though from an unimpeachable Wizarding family, is poor; Hermione, though the best student of her year, is a first-generation wizard – her parents are dentists in the Muggle world. She makes up for her lack of breeding through the power of knowledge (a familiar device in socially divisive societies): she keeps herself better informed than the pure bloods and so has important views to add. Between the three of them, they represent a wide spectrum of types of wizards in terms of birth and wealth, and challenge the orthodoxy that an inherited place in society is superior.”<sup>8</sup>*

These are not the only examples of how Harry shows his disregard for purity of blood or supposed social status through his choice of friends however. He is also friends with the half-giant Hagrid, and the werewolf Lupin. Other odd friends, though they do not have non-human blood, are the eccentric ex-auror Mad-Eye Moody and the presumed mass-murderer Sirius Black. Pinsent goes on to give a few more examples of what characterises the school story genre, the most important of which is the bildungsroman approach.

But the school story is not the only genre that the *Harry Potter* books draw on. They also have a lot in common with the fantasy genre. The fantasy genre is one that not everyone enjoys, but it has specific positive attributes that are hard pressed to be found in others, since there are no limits to possible events in the fantasy world. At Hogwarts it is perfectly possible for a gigantic dragon to enter the plot, fly about a bit breathing fire, and then to disappear again. In the everyday world, or book, this is of course impossible. This possibility for extraordinary things to happen generates a possibility for readers to make equally unlikely, or impossible, leaps of thought and try out situations through their imagination that would have been uncomfortable in the real world. Taub & Servaty say (partly quoting another author in turn) that:

*“Fiction/fantasy can vividly portray very real issues. In fact, it may amplify these issues, making them more vividly real. Perhaps the realistic issues faced by Harry (e.g., isolation, conflicts with friends, difficulty with authority, etc.) could provide catalysts for discussion about issues that would be too difficult to discuss in a direct manner, as pertaining to their own lives. It may be that the fantastical presentation of these topics actually makes such discussions safe and possible for children.”<sup>9</sup>*

As I will try to show in the section 4.1.1) Identity development, trying out (new) thoughts and ideas is key to identity development, and the *Harry Potter* books certainly give readers a chance to try out strange new situations.

But Rowling draws on even more genres than this. Alton argues that the very fact that many genres are identifiable in the books contribute to their popularity; there is something for everyone in them. She also argues that many of the genres represented to some extent in the series are not held in high regards, but receive an upsurge in Rowling's books:

*“Genres traditionally dismissed as “despised” genres – including pulp fiction, mystery, gothic and horror stories, detective fiction, the school story and the closely related sports story, and series books – appear throughout the Harry Potter books, along with more “mainstream” genres (at least in children's literature) such as fantasy, adventure, quest romance and myth. Rather than creating a hodgepodge with no recognizable or specific pattern, Rowling has fused these genres into a larger mosaic, which not only connects readers' generic*

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<sup>8</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 76-77

<sup>9</sup> Taub, Deborah, J. & Servaty, Heather, L., *Controversial Content in Children's Literature: Is Harry Potter Harmful to Children?*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 61-62

*expectations with the tremendous success and popularity of the Harry Potter series but also leads to the ways in which the series conveys literary meaning.*"<sup>10</sup>

As we can clearly see from these lines, there are numerous genres involved in the series. But since there are so many genres involved, none of them is adhered to completely since that would create conflicting elements in the storyline. A more accurate way of explaining how these literary styles are represented in the books would be to say that the *Harry Potter* books contains streaks from all of these genres and indeed Alton goes on to give examples of how these different genres are represented in the series.

#### 4.1.1) Identity development

A very important notion in terms of identity development is that of social reference. This section of the essay will focus on showing that there is a need for teenagers to use social reference and physical objects when it comes to their own identity development. Wrangsjö describes this process as a basic and necessary one and as something we do from a very early age. Social references are made when the child needs them, for example in situations of insecurity. We then instinctively turn to the Other for reassurance<sup>11</sup>. This Other is in this case someone who is important to us, someone whose opinion we care about, also known as a significant Other. The first significant Other we meet as children is our mother, very soon followed by our father. As we get older the circle of significant Others expand (as does the circle of non-significant Others): more and more people are added to the circle, like other members of the family as well as friends, and later on school friends and teachers. The process of social reference is something we continue to do all our lives, including at adult age. It is the situations when we feel we need support and reassurance that change, not the process itself. This social interaction is also what make us aware of what others are feeling and thinking and as such is the basis for our communications skills. Knowing that we can get support from the people who are important to us if and when we need it, builds up an inner support world<sup>12</sup>. We no longer always need to ask the actual question – we can often anticipate the answer, especially from someone we know well – meaning that our significant Others have become internalized. We now have an inner dialogue guiding us in terms of morals. It is this process of social reference that is at the core of this essay since it is the basis for our need to relate identity to others – to learn something for and about ourselves from someone else.

The goal of the internal monologue is for the teenager to mature into an autonomous person, to stand on his or her own two feet. After the teenager discovers that he/she can stand on his/her own feet, the next question quickly becomes where these feet are supposed to carry him/her. The maturation process now becomes about choices, like “what sort of person do I want to be?” and “which education is right for me?” The choices we end up making are based on our inner thoughts and emotions: our identity<sup>13</sup>. Wrangsjö describes identity as something that answers the question “who am I?” as well as the question “who do I feel like/how do I perceive myself?”. He also states that identity is not a fixed thing, it continuously evolves, and throughout the process needs to be confirmed by the Other. But an inner core is nonetheless

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<sup>10</sup> Alton, Anne Hiebert, *Generic Fusion and the Mosaic of Harry Potter*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 141

<sup>11</sup> Wrangsjö, Björn, *Tampas med tonåringar. Ungdomsutveckling i familjeperspektiv*, Stockholm, Natur och Kultur, 2004 (2nd ed.), p 16

<sup>12</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 19

<sup>13</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 53

stable, even if you have changed over time you still “feel like yourself”<sup>14</sup>. The new task before the teenager is to form, and indeed discover, his/her identity through experience and experimentation. These experiments are performed in the teenagers’ different worlds, like the home and the school<sup>15</sup>. The tests are done on two planes simultaneously – against the Other, where the teenager will try different ways of expressing themselves and read how others react towards them; and against him- or herself, to find out if he or she is comfortable with that choice<sup>16</sup>.

This experimentation has to do with the teenager trying out things like clothes, hairstyles, opinions and books, among others, and when these things are displayed to a significant Other, the reactions from the Other gives the teenager a clue to if these things are accepted or not. In this way both the reactions from the Other, and the things reacted to, determines who I am. Indeed, who I am depends on who other people treat me as<sup>17</sup>. A teenager will try out a number of things in this way, reading the reactions of people in their environment, to answer questions like if this “feels right” or “is this me?”<sup>18</sup>. The teenager is dependent on experimenting, and the things experimented with, to discover and develop his or her identity! Since human beings are highly social and dependent on others to form their identity it is not enough to just “have” an identity, the identity also needs to be shown and expressed in order for others to have a chance to react to it. Communication between people occurs only partly with words but also with body language, facial expressions, attitudes, intonation and looks<sup>19</sup>. In other words, identity is expressed in a very physical way, through tangible means. The teenager uses physical objects in order to express his/her identity. This can be things like books, style, clothes, possessions, music and language<sup>20</sup>. Since this process is something that applies to all teenagers, it contains a positive opportunity to bridge differences between people. Sernhede writes that to be young today is to be in a position of complex outer and inner search and creation of an identity. This applies to all young people, regardless of things like class, gender and ethnic background<sup>21</sup>. The key to belonging to a group lies in the members regarding expressions of identity in the same way, a common system of interpretation, rather than in things like social status, gender and religion<sup>22</sup>. A notion that should give hope to those who struggle against prejudice in today’s society. However, a common background concerning things like class and gender often creates similar ways of interpretation.

As mentioned above, part of maturation is to become an autonomous person. But at the same time there is need to be part of a group<sup>23</sup>. Belonging to a group is a goal in itself. This belonging is not only inclusive, this is “us”, it is also exclusive, those are the “them”<sup>24</sup>. Berglund continues to say that what defines “us” is that we use the same symbols and ways of expressing ourselves to create a sense of belonging and a social identity. Borgström and Goldstein-Kyagas clarifies the difference between individual identity and social identity as individual identity answering the question “who am I?” and social identity answers the question “who are we?”<sup>25</sup>. It is important to know that the ways teenagers choose to express

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<sup>14</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 53-54

<sup>15</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 55

<sup>16</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 56-58

<sup>17</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 56

<sup>18</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 56-57

<sup>19</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p 104

<sup>20</sup> Berglund, Stig-Arne, *Val av livsstil. Problemungdomars sätt att hantera verklighet och konstruera identitet*. Umeå; Umeå Universitet, Institutionen för Socialt arbete, 1998, p 39

<sup>21</sup> Sernhede, Ove, *Alienation is my nation: hiphop och unga mäns utanförskap I Det nya Sverige*, Stockholm, Ordfront, 2002, p 87

<sup>22</sup> Berglund 1998, p 26

<sup>23</sup> Lalander, Philip & Johansson, Thomas, *Ungdomsgrupper i teori och praktik*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2002, p. 13

<sup>24</sup> Berglund 1998, p. 26

<sup>25</sup> Borgström, Maria & Goldstein-Kyagas, Katrin (red.), *Gränsoverskridande identiteter i globaliseringens tid – ungdomar, migration och kampen för fred*, Huddinge, Södertörns Högskola, 2006, p. 22

themselves are dynamic and changing. Young people also move through many different worlds (for example school, home, football club, stable, and the gym) and can to some degree have different identities in these worlds. Lalander and Johansson draws attention to the importance of the group and argue that in the teenage years participating in the group and in group activities have a crucial importance for teenagers' maturation and process of creating their identity<sup>26</sup>. Friends and the group increase in importance over time and function as a complement, or even a kind of substitute, to the parents<sup>27</sup>, which might indeed be the reason parents are so interested in who their children spend time with. Lalander and Johansson also mentions that fashion and styles are dynamic and that what is "in" and what is "out" quickly change. In order to understand teenagers' dynamic world one has to keep up<sup>28</sup>. Wrangsjö adds that teenagers have a strong need to express a certain way of life and may be greatly worried if they are denied the possibility to do this. Parents might be surprised by the level of emotion that can be displayed when teenagers do not have the latest outfit or if they are lacking merchandise that carry a certain social status that would verify belonging to the group<sup>29</sup>.

In my future role as a teacher I will meet many different teenagers. I believe that through working with these questions my understanding of the students I will work with will increase and therefore improve the quality of my work. I also believe that it is necessary to understand processes of creating an identity and to use this as an asset in a learning environment. Berglund writes that methods of expressing yourself varies greatly from person to person and that it is therefore important to be sensitive to individual methods and to let the students themselves have control over conversations about identity – in order to be able to express their own identities. It is also important to use the frameworks and language the teenagers are surrounded by in their everyday culture. He mentions examples of these things; like photo albums, diaries, letters, what is in their bookshelves, clothes, music, athletic interests, role models, hobbies, values and opinions<sup>30</sup>. Using the *Harry Potter* novels, which many of the students have already read voluntarily, in a language classroom to discuss identity, and then letting the students lead the discussions as much as possible, in accordance with the values expressed in the National Curriculum, seems like a very good idea indeed.

#### **4.2) Learning from the characters**

In this section I have chosen to focus on a rather small group of characters and I have chosen these characters for two reasons. The first is that they are central to the overall plot. Since my essay is about what can be learned from the books, the characters I choose to include have to be prominent in the *Harry Potter* series. The second reason is that the characters have to present a clear topic to learn from, one that is also important to identity development. Keeping to a small focus group also helps me read the series as a bildungsroman. The topics I want to present have a close connection to identity development as expressed by the Swedish National Curriculum at the very beginning of the first chapter:

*“The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between men and women and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school*

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<sup>26</sup> Lalander & Johansson 2002, p. 22

<sup>27</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p. 43

<sup>28</sup> Lalander & Johansson 2002, p. 23

<sup>29</sup> Wrangsjö 2004, p. 131

<sup>30</sup> Berglund, 1998, s.39

*shall represent and impart. ... The task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals ... The school should promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise.*"<sup>31</sup>

Another reason for choosing this group of characters has to do with target audience. My future students will be in their late teens and I believe they are more likely to identify with characters close to their own ages or their own situations than with, for example, Ron's father Arthur Weasley or any of the teachers at Hogwarts (outside of their roles as teachers). There is a plethora of interesting characters to choose from in the series and I simply do not have the space to introduce them all. A few characters I have ignored due to lack of space are Severus Snape, Albus Dumbledore and Dolores Umbridge. These would all make for very interesting analyses, as would many others. There are indeed many opportunities for character studies.

The group I have selected to study closer consists of: Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom and Lord Voldemort. They all have very specific topics to learn from. As the discussion of the results from my literary study will show, Voldemort is associated with a negative self-image and racism; Neville is associated with bullying and its consequences; Hermione with gender issues and attitudes towards education; Ron personifies questions of friendship, family and loyalty and Harry himself is mainly concerned with notions of identity and the reasons for, and consequences of, this.

#### 4.2.1) Lord Voldemort

This is the only character that is all evil. It is never plainly stated why he is evil, he just is. But we do get a description of his childhood, and this holds many explanations as to why he is the way he is. Voldemort is an orphan and was raised in an orphanage where he did not have any friends. While in his teens he learned that his father gave him up before he was even born and that his mother literally would rather die than live on to raise him.<sup>32</sup> But his evilness is never questioned. Unlike Malfoy (both senior and junior), Voldemort is altogether evil and always has been. Voldemort also never give any signs that he might regret his choices in life or ponder the consequences of those choices. In the sixth book we learn that he had "*obvious instincts for cruelty, secrecy and domination*" even as a small boy, when he was called Tom Riddle and had not yet become the feared Lord Voldemort<sup>33</sup>.

Much of Voldemort's efforts are centred on ridding himself of what he sees as weaknesses. Not so incidentally, they are the same weaknesses he despises in others and punishes them for:

*"he showed his contempt for anything that tied him to other people, anything that made him ordinary. Even then, he wished to be different, separate, notorious. He shed his name, as you know, within a few short years of that conversation and created the mask of 'Lord Voldemort' behind which he has been hidden for so long. 'I trust that you also noticed that Tom Riddle was already highly self-sufficient, secretive and, apparently, friendless? He did not want help or companionship"*<sup>34</sup>

Because his father gave him up, he detests his own name as he gets both his given name and his surname from his father. And so he creates a new name for himself. His given name, "Tom Marvolo Riddle", becomes an anagram that contains the new name, "I am Lord

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<sup>31</sup> Skolverket – Swedish National Agency for Education, *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system, Lpf 94*, Stockholm, Skolverket and Fritzes, 1994, edition of 2006, p3

<sup>32</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005, p 341-346

<sup>33</sup> Rowling 2005, p 259

<sup>34</sup> Rowling 2005, p 259

Voldemort”.<sup>35</sup> This new name and how it was created is something readers learn early on in the series. It certainly raises a few of the questions mentioned in 3.2) Aim and purpose. Voldemort sees sides of himself that he is very uncomfortable with and tries to literally remove them. But unfortunately for him, we cannot choose our parents, but are inescapably related to them even though we might not like them, or are even ashamed of them. Perhaps this reluctance to be connected with his biological parents is the reason Dumbledore is the only one Voldemort fears. Dumbledore knows about Voldemort's background, including the bits about his childhood and the disappointments in his parents, and refuses to call him Lord Voldemort, in favour of his given name, thus forcing Voldemort to stay connected to the sides of himself that he despises:

*“They do not call me “Tom” anymore,’ he said. ‘These days, I am known as – ‘I know what you are known as,’ said Dumbledore, smiling pleasantly. ‘But to me, I’m afraid, you will always be Tom Riddle. It is one of the irritating things about old teachers, I am afraid, that they never quite forget their charges’ youthful beginnings.’”<sup>36</sup>*

Conforming to the style of the bildungsroman, these deeper and more complicated sides to Voldemort are revealed towards the end of the series. But as with Hermione's rebellious side, readers will start to notice hints of his underlying personality early on.

Since Voldemort never reflects upon himself, at least not so readers can partake of it, it is more difficult to learn anything from this character. Readers looking for signs that he is not altogether evil or that there is a likable person underneath the surface are looking in vain. It is mainly Voldemort's self-loathing that is an obvious angle for readers to learn from regarding this character's personality. Indeed, this is the only side of him that is explored in any details in the series (mainly in books six and seven). Voldemort becomes a warning of what low self-respect, or even self-loathing, can generate in a person. He is a tragic example of everyone's desire to be seen and loved for who they are; but do not receive it. The risk of this topic is that readers who have doubts about themselves might find this topic too discouraging and be influenced towards lower self-respect if they have sides of themselves that they do not like. On the other hand, it is so very obvious from the very beginning whose side the reader is supposed to be on, that all that Voldemort represents is immediately seen as evil and as something to be avoided, giving the effect that the reader is not encouraged to identify with him.

There is another theme to Lord Voldemort, and this is about racism. This theme is introduced in the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. More specifically when Draco Malfoy insults Hermione by calling her a Mudblood: *“No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,’ he spat.”<sup>37</sup>* The issue here is not of colour of skin, but another form of ethnicity having to do with how many generations of magical ancestry you have. Ron explains the issue (after trying to hit Malfoy with a curse that makes you belch slugs, unfortunately the spell backfired on Ron):

*“It’s about the most insulting thing he could think of,’ gasped Ron, coming back up. ‘Mudblood’s a really foul name for someone who was Muggle-born – you know, non-magic parents. There are some wizards – like Malfoy’s family – who think they’re better than everyone else because they’re what people call pure-blood.’ ... ‘It’s a disgusting thing to call someone,’ said Ron, wiping his sweaty brow with a shaking hand. ‘Dirty blood,*

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<sup>35</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1998, p 337

<sup>36</sup> Rowling 2005, p 414

<sup>37</sup> Rowling 1998, p 123

*see. Common blood. It's mad. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out.*"<sup>38</sup>

In other words there is a rank-scale of how "pure" you are with pure-blood as highest on the scale. Depending on the situation, being a half-blood is more or less considered acceptable. But the lowest on the scale, mudblood, is not accepted at all. The only people who care about this in the *Harry Potter* book series are Voldemort and his fellow Death Eaters. By only having people who are clearly identified as evil caring about purity of blood, Rowling makes sure every reader knows that racism is connected with evil. None of the characters defined as good care about others' parentage. Eccleshare makes relevant comments on the issue of this darker message in the books:

*"There is a clear link, which develops throughout the series, between those who are racially prejudiced and those who are followers of Voldemort, the 'Dark Lord', part of whose darkness is a hatred of Muggles and those who, like himself, are of mixed blood, a hatred that is fuelled by his Muggle father's rejection of his witch mother before he was born and his subsequent upbringing in a Muggle orphanage."*<sup>39</sup>

Voldemort once again shows his desire to get rid of weaknesses. He himself is a half-blood, having a Muggle father and a witch mother, but he lies about this to pass himself off as pureblood, a fact Harry uses to distract the Death Eaters so that he and his friends can escape in the fifth book:

*"'Did you know he's a half-blood too?' said Harry recklessly. ... 'Voldemort? Yeah, his mother was a witch but his dad was a Muggle – or has he been telling you lot he's pure-blood?'"*<sup>40</sup>

This lie about his supposedly pure blood is so important to Voldemort that even those who are closest to him do not know about it. The theme of purity of blood becomes more and more emphasized throughout the series. The conversation above is from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and in the next book, as hinted at by the title, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the issue is more developed. The title refers to Harry's Potions teacher Severus Snape and has a double meaning. Technically it applies twice over to Snape since his mother is a witch but his father is a Muggle, making him a half-blood. But his mother's maiden name is Prince, making her son "half a Prince". *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* sees the climax of this issue. Voldemort has now infiltrated the Ministry of Magic, taking control of all its departments, and enforcing new laws. He also handpicks the new headmaster of Hogwarts, making Severus Snape the new principal. Snape is not revealed to be an agent of Dumbledore's until the very, very end and the news of his appointment comes as a very nasty shock to those who believe him to be corrupted by evil<sup>41</sup>. When Harry, Ron and Hermione have a secret quest to undertake at the newly overpowered Ministry, they come across Voldemort's attitude towards Muggles depicted in a statue at the entrance to the Ministry. The statue, bearing the emblem "Magic is Might", is of a witch and wizard sitting on elaborate thrones overlooking the Ministry. The thrones themselves are actually made up of people massed in large numbers of men, women and children into the shapes of thrones. Harry, Ron and Hermione realise that the Muggles are seen to be put in their rightful place in this statue.<sup>42</sup> The most noticeable new law passed by the new regime at the Ministry is the decision to create the "Muggle-Born Registration Commission" which is headed by their old enemy from the fifth book, Dolores Umbridge. The Commission's task is to determine "blood status" of

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<sup>38</sup> Rowling 1998, p 127-128

<sup>39</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 78

<sup>40</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003, p 862

<sup>41</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007, p 186

<sup>42</sup> Rowling 2007, p 198-199

everyone in the magical community (meaning to document if they are pure-blood, half-blood or mud-blood). Those who are deemed to be of questionable decent, or who might protest the situation, are either imprisoned, excommunicated and stripped of their possibilities of performing magic or tortured (often a combination of all). Harry himself is declared by the Muggle-Born Registration Commission to be “Undesirable No. 1” and all those who have had any contact or sympathies with him are being “Tracked”. The Commission also has the job of supplying political pamphlets to the community, bearing messages and information like *“MUDBLOODS and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pure-Blood Society”*<sup>43</sup>. Later on Neville tells us that two Death Eaters now act as teachers at Hogwarts, and that they are also in charge of discipline:

*“‘Amycus, the bloke, he teaches what used to be Defence Against the Dark Arts, except now it’s just the Dark Arts. We’re supposed to practise the Cruciatius Curse on people who’ve earned detentions – ‘... ‘Alecto, Amycus’s sister, teaches Muggle Studies, which is compulsory for everyone. We’ve all got to listen to her explain how Muggles are like animals, stupid and dirty, and how they drove wizards into hiding by being vicious towards them, and how the natural order is being re-established. I got this one,’ he indicated another slash to his face, ‘for asking her how much Muggle blood she and her brother have got.’”*<sup>44</sup>

The connections to historical events in our world are obvious. Here is perhaps the easiest lesson to learn from the books, the lesson that Xenophobia, in any form, is very wrong. A lesson also reinforced by Hermione’s efforts to free the house-elves. This is a lesson that is very much at the heart of the Swedish National Curriculum. In no uncertain terms is it stated that opinions such as these must be confronted.<sup>45</sup> Here is a concrete basis for future lessons that invites endless possibilities for discussion.

#### 4.2.2) Neville Longbottom

Neville is a character who makes a remarkable journey throughout the series. We first meet Neville on the platform, next to the train to Hogwarts, as Harry:

*“passed a round-faced boy who was saying, ‘Gran, I’ve lost my toad again.’ ‘Oh, Neville,’ he heard the old woman sigh.”*<sup>46</sup>

Like Hermione he does not make a good first impression. Neville’s development is more slow and gradual than many others’ and this first impression takes a long time to dissolve. The very first thing said about him hints that he is overweight, forgetful, unpopular, he has a very un-cool pet (Trevor the toad) and is very much under the influence of his grandmother. In other words, he is the perfect target for bullying. At first, Harry only passes him when boarding the train, and then Neville is forgotten. But he turns up again a few pages later, still looking for his toad, and in considerable distress about this. Ron’s comment makes it clear that he and Harry are not impressed:

*“‘Don’t know why he’s so bothered,’ said Ron. ‘If I’d brought a toad I’d lose it as quick as I could.’”*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rowling 2007, p 205

<sup>44</sup> Rowling 2007, p 462

<sup>45</sup> Lpf 94, p 3

<sup>46</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997, p 105

<sup>47</sup> Rowling 1997, p 115-116



Neville leaves again, miserable and wailing, but comes right back, this time in the company of Hermione, as she makes her introduction in the books. In this passage, Neville and Hermione reinforce each other's weak impressions<sup>48</sup>.

Neville appears sparsely throughout the first book. When he does, it is either to contribute to a humorous situation (like during the tense Sorting Ceremony when he first falls over, and then, so relieved to be sorted, runs off still wearing the Sorting Hat, and has to run back "*amid gales of laughter*" to give it back again<sup>49</sup>) or to emphasise Harry's extraordinary abilities in contrast to his own inadequacy (during their first flying lesson Neville is "*nervous and jumpy and frightened*" and, as always, quite clumsy, resulting in Neville breaking his arm when he falls off his broomstick. When Malfoy picks up the Remembrall Neville had been carrying that Neville's gran sent him, and takes off into the air with it, Harry flies after him, discovering to his satisfaction that he is a natural at flying. Harry flies so well that he not only gets the Remembrall back in one piece (Malfoy threw it, intending for it to brake), and in the process is awarded a place on the Gryffindor Quidditch team with the coveted position of Seeker<sup>50</sup>). It is not until towards the end of the first book that Neville finally makes his first independent move in trying to keep Harry, Ron and Hermione in Gryffindor tower instead of leaving after they are supposed to be in bed. He stands up to his friends with the purpose of keeping Gryffindor out of more trouble, demonstrating his loyalty towards his house<sup>51</sup>. Neville does not receive any praise for this from Harry or the others (in their hurry Neville is only seen as a hindrance), but at the very end of the book, when the first adventure has ended, he is rewarded for this by Dumbledore himself:

*"'There are all kinds of courage,' said Dumbledore, smiling. 'It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr Neville Longbottom.' ... Neville, white with shock, disappeared under a pile of people hugging him. He had never won so much as a point for Gryffindor before."*<sup>52</sup>

Neville's ten points are what secures Gryffindor's winning the House Cup, making Neville a bit of a hero, setting him on a path towards better self-confidence and less of a target for bullying. It takes Neville a lot of time to make his first move, but he serves as an example that anyone can overcome their insecurities.

But the second book does not see much of an improvement in Neville's character. In their first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson of the term, Neville is lifted by his ears towards the roof and is hung on a candelabra, dangling from the ceiling, by "*electric blue and about eight inches high*" pixies<sup>53</sup>. Neville is also bullied by the teacher Snape, both in the newly started Duelling Club, where Snape says that:

*"'Longbottom causes devastation with the simplest spells. We'll be sending what's left of Finch-Fletchley up to the hospital wing in a matchbox.' Neville's round pink face went pinker."*<sup>54</sup>

But most of all Neville gets bullied in Snape's own class of Potions where he more than once "*walked off to bully Neville*"<sup>55</sup>. Much of the second book contains these sorts of comments about Neville, where he is not a prominent figure in the plot.

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<sup>48</sup> Rowling 1997, p 116-117

<sup>49</sup> Rowling 1997, p 132

<sup>50</sup> Rowling 1997, p 161-166

<sup>51</sup> Rowling 1997, p 293-295

<sup>52</sup> Rowling 1997, p 329

<sup>53</sup> Rowling 1997, p 112-113

<sup>54</sup> Rowling 1998, p 209-210

<sup>55</sup> Rowling 1998, p 203

In the third book however we start to see more of Neville. He is first mentioned when Harry runs away from home and, in trying to stay hidden and incognito, lies and says his name is Neville Longbottom. Harry demonstrates in choosing this name, that Neville is someone who is safe to be. In contrast to Harry himself, Neville is an inconspicuous person, not hunted by any evil wizards, which will generally go unnoticed<sup>56</sup>. In Potions, Snape reaches his highest level yet of bullying Neville by insulting his potion-making-skills: “*Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours?*”, he then goes on about how awful Neville is at heeding instructions and finishes by promising to feed the less-than-perfect potion to Neville’s toad to see if he had finally got it right. Snape goes through with his threat, but is highly disappointed when the potion works, and then punishes Hermione for helping Neville<sup>57</sup>.

Some pages later we see a dramatic change in Neville’s situation. Not only is Neville defended from Snape, by not only Harry, but also by another teacher, marking a much higher level of acceptance. When Snape continues to insult Neville, their new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lupin, gives Neville the spotlight in that day’s lesson. The lesson is about how to go about finishing off a Boggart, a creature that takes the form of whatever frightens us most. Neville’s Boggart promptly turns into Snape when it advances on Neville. But Neville, having been instructed that you need to think of something funny and then laugh to finish a Boggart, has the Boggart-Snape dressed in his grandmother’s clothing and succeeds in finishing it off:

*“This time Neville charged forward looking determined. ‘Riddikulus!’ he shouted, and they had a split second’s view of Snape in his lacy dress before Neville let out a great ‘Ha!’ of laughter, and the Boggart exploded, burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.”*<sup>58</sup>

Neville has finally learned to face his fears – and to conquer them!

We are reminded of the heightened level of acceptance we can see of Neville in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in the fourth book right from the start, as Neville now shares the compartment with the others on the Hogwarts Express. He is now one of the gang, although he is not yet quite as cool as the others<sup>59</sup>. He still has troubles with Snape in Potions, being given detention in the very first week of term when he has to “*disembowel a barrelful of horned toads*” without using magic<sup>60</sup>. But Neville has clearly learned something from his previous year, because he starts to volunteer information in other subjects than Herbology, his best subject in school. The information he supplies is also correct, with the result that “*Neville looked surprised at his own daring.*”<sup>61</sup> Slowly Neville is coming out of his shell as a very shy boy who is still mostly known for being clumsy and forgetful. He, for example, manages to get a date to the Yule Ball before both Harry and Ron, making them thoroughly dispirited<sup>62</sup>.

But it is in the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, that we see the most dramatic change in Neville. He is again included in the group when they meet on the train to Hogwarts. This time he is much more included in the conversation, which goes on for several pages, and he also shows his new interesting plant to his friends with pride, which reminds us that Neville’s best subject in school is Herbology, and indeed, the very fact that Neville is

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<sup>56</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1999, p 43-51

<sup>57</sup> Rowling 1999, p 138-141

<sup>58</sup> Rowling 1999, p 144-152

<sup>59</sup> Rowling, J.K., *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2000, p 186-189

<sup>60</sup> Rowling 2000, p 230

<sup>61</sup> Rowling 2000, p 235-236

<sup>62</sup> Rowling 2000, p 438

good at something.<sup>63</sup> Later, on the same night, when they are getting ready for bed, there is an uncomfortable tension in their dorm room when Seamus Finnigan and Harry have had a row about whether or not Voldemort really is back. Seamus thinks Harry has lied about it, but Neville demonstrates his loyalty and sticks by Harry declaring that *“We believe Harry”*<sup>64</sup>. Neville has great personal interest in resisting Voldemort since his parents were tortured by one of his followers into insanity, and he is the first one to show up when Harry, Ron and Hermione start an illegal defence group<sup>65</sup>. The threatening presence of Voldemort goads Neville into action again when Malfoy starts handing out insults concerning parents who should be hospitalized<sup>66</sup>. He charges at Malfoy and it takes both Harry and Ron to restrain him. Harry has learned what happened to Neville’s parents in book four, but the others learn of it when they run into Neville and his grandmother, who gives them a full account of the details, visiting his parents in the hospital over Christmas.<sup>67</sup> Neville is unlikely to overcome that embarrassing encounter since Bellatrix Lestrange, the witch who tortured his parents, and several others of Voldemort’s followers, escape from prison a short while later. The effect on Neville upon learning of this is that:

*“Harry was pleased to see that all of them, even Zacharias Smith, had been spurred on to work harder than ever by the news that ten more Death Eaters were now on the loose, but in nobody was this improvement more pronounced than in Neville. The news of his parents’ attackers’ escape had wrought a strange and even slightly alarming change in him. He had not once mentioned his meeting with Harry, Ron and Hermione on the closed ward in St Mungo’s and, taking their lead from him, they had kept quiet about it too. Nor had he said anything on the subject of Bellatrix and her fellow torturers’ escape. In fact, Neville barely spoke during the DA meetings any more, but worked relentlessly on every new jinx and counter-curse Harry taught them, his plump face screwed up in concentration, apparently indifferent to injuries or accidents and working harder than anyone else in the room. He was improving so fast it was quite unnerving and when Harry taught them the Shield Charm – a means of deflecting minor jinxes so that they rebounded upon the attacker – only Hermione mastered the charm faster than Neville.”*<sup>68</sup>

When the book reaches the dramatic finish, Neville is one of the people in the group who come with Harry to the Ministry of Magic to rescue Sirius and help fight Voldemort, giving the motivation:

*“‘We were all in the DA together,’ said Neville quietly. ‘It was all supposed to be about fighting You-Know-Who, wasn’t it? And this is the first chance we’ve had to do something real – or was that all just a game or something?’ ... ‘Then we should come too,’ said Neville simply. ‘We want to help.’”*<sup>69</sup>

When they arrive at the Ministry, they are soon faced with the Death Eaters, including Bellatrix Lestrange, who taunts Neville about his parents’ current situation. Neville’s response to her remarks is a fierce defiance and a refusal to give up. He stays with Harry as long as he can, even after the others have been incapacitated, fighting to protect himself and Harry and the prophecy that started it all<sup>70</sup>.

Neville’s status is abruptly upgraded after his foray to the Ministry. At the start of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry greets Neville *“in relief”*, having been much ogled on his way onto the train<sup>71</sup>. They go on to discuss what happened at the Ministry and Neville

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<sup>63</sup> Rowling 2000, p 207-218

<sup>64</sup> Rowling 2003, p 240-245

<sup>65</sup> Rowling 2003, p 374

<sup>66</sup> Rowling 2003, p 399-401

<sup>67</sup> Rowling 2003, p 565-568

<sup>68</sup> Rowling 2003, p 609-610

<sup>69</sup> Rowling 2003, p 836

<sup>70</sup> Rowling 2003, chapters 34-36

<sup>71</sup> Rowling 2005, p 131

confides that his formidable grandmother is very pleased with him for his efforts there. In fact, overall, Neville is now much more relaxed in his behaviour. When some girls come by their compartment wanting to talk to Harry, he stays with Neville and Luna instead since they are cooler. Indeed, Harry has started to identify with Neville on a very personal level, since he has found out that their destinies were very nearly reversed<sup>72</sup>. The fact that Harry ponders Neville's and his destinies makes the readers more focused on Neville's role in the series. Neville has also experienced an upswing in his school work; apart from Herbology, he has also qualified in other subjects, even in one his grandmother never passed when she was at school. Professor McGonagall's comment on all of this is that:

*"It's high time your grandmother learned to be proud of the grandson she's got, rather than the one she thinks she ought to have – particularly after what happened at the Ministry."*<sup>73</sup>

It is the first time Neville is given a compliment by her.

At the end of the sixth book, Neville again demonstrates his courage by fighting the Death Eaters yet again when Hogwarts is attacked. This is a very dramatic battle which includes not only Dumbledore's death but also the presence of a particularly nasty werewolf who likes to eat children, and who injures Ron's elder brother Bill<sup>74</sup>. Neville also gets injured in this fight, but recovers completely. The outcome of this dramatic battle changes the prerequisites for the last book completely and starts to separate all the characters in the books in terms of who is good and who is evil. Neville undoubtedly belongs with the good guys.

The last book is to a large extent focused on Harry, Ron and Hermione's actions, and Neville does not come into the story in an active way until towards the end. At the end of chapter 28 the trio come back to Hogsmeade meaning to re-enter Hogwarts for the final confrontation. The person who helps them doing this is Neville. He has had a very rough time at Hogwarts since he is very much involved in the resistance of Voldemort and the Death Eaters. On their way back to the school Neville takes over the role of having inside knowledge Ron usually occupies and explains what has been happening in their absence, which has mostly to do with various degrees of punishment and torture. Neville himself has suffered greatly from this treatment and shows the unmistakable signs of it with *"his hair overgrown, his face cut, his robes ripped"*<sup>75</sup>. On their way back to Hogwarts when Neville is talking about all the horrible things that have happened at their school Harry, Ron and Hermione marvel at the information and at Neville's attitude towards it:

*"But they've used you as a knife sharpener," said Ron, wincing slightly as they passed a lamp and Neville's injuries were thrown into even greater relief. Neville shrugged. 'Doesn't matter. They don't want to spill too much pure blood, so they'll torture us a bit if we're mouthy but they won't actually kill us.' Harry didn't know what was worse, the things that Neville was saying or the matter-of-fact tone in which he said them."*<sup>76</sup>

Neville has obviously reached a level of indifference towards being subjected to terrible treatment, fuelled by his resistance of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Neville does not accept any kind of evil and is absolute in his determination to fight it, willing to endure almost anything to keep this up. When they finally reach Hogwarts, he has already rallied their defences – the DA, the remnants of the Order of the Phoenix, the Quidditch teams, old pupils and all the adults he knows from outside the school. None of the teachers that are on their side

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<sup>72</sup> Rowling 2005, p 131-134

<sup>73</sup> Rowling 2005, p 165-166

<sup>74</sup> Rowling 2005, chapters 28-29

<sup>75</sup> Rowling 2007, p 459

<sup>76</sup> Rowling 2007, p 462

have been alerted since the school is under the rule of those who support Voldemort. But once the others start to make their move, they are immediately roused. The result of all this is a full scale revolution and the Battle of Hogwarts begins. Neville is in the thick of it, using all that he has learned in both the DA and in school. He coldly uses his skills in Herbology brandishing pots of Mandrakes (tiny ugly creatures buried in dirt with leaves for hair, who's cry is fatal to anyone who hears it, unless they are still seedlings, then the cry will only render you unconscious for several hours). Nearing the end of the battle, Harry gives Neville the task of killing Voldemort's pet snake Nagini, so that Voldemort himself might at last be killed. This task is carried out with great courage by Neville, who comes face to face with Voldemort in his struggles to kill Nagini:

*“‘Ah, yes, I remember,’ said Voldemort, looking down at Neville, who was struggling back to his feet, unarmed and unprotected, standing in the no-man’s-land between the survivors and the Death Eaters. ‘But you are a pure-blood, aren’t you, my brave boy?’ Voldemort asked Neville, who stood facing him, his empty hands curled into fists. ‘So what if I am?’ said Neville loudly. ‘You show spirit, and bravery, and you come of noble stock. You will make a very valuable Death Eater. We need your kind, Neville Longbottom.’ ‘I’ll join you when hell freezes over,’ said Neville. ‘Dumbledore’s Army!’ he shouted ... ‘Neville here is now going to demonstrate what happens to anyone foolish enough to continue to oppose me,’ said Voldemort, and with a flick of his wand, he caused the Sorting Hat to burst into flames. ... In one swift, fluid motion Neville broke free of the Body-Bind Curse upon him; the flaming Hat fell off him and he drew from its depths something silver, with a glittering, rubied handle – ... With a single stroke, Neville sliced off the great snake’s head, which spun high into the air, gleaming in the light flooding from the Entrance Hall, and Voldemort’s mouth was open in a scream of fury ”<sup>77</sup>*

The last we hear of Neville before the postlude is that he is sitting in the Great Hall eating, the Sword of Gryffindor next to him (which we have learned only a true Gryffindor, who embodies courage and chivalry, can pull from the hat), surrounded by a *“knot of fervent admirers”*. Voldemort is now defeated and everyone’s lives can finally get back to normal. The postlude reveals that Neville is now a teacher of Herbology at Hogwarts and is known as Professor Longbottom.<sup>78</sup> His transformation, from the awkward bullied boy we first met on the train into a knowledgeable Professor who has bravely stood up to the most evil wizard in the world, is complete. But, as I tried to show, Neville’s transformation from nerd to cool is slow and does not really take off until the fifth book. A reader must include the last three books in his or her interpretation of Neville to reach anything other than a very negative outlook on Neville. If, however, the reader only reads the last books, Neville will come off as a normal boy, or even cool, but without the complicated background or any realisation that a change has taken place. The bildungsroman-approach is essential to an understanding of this character.

There is, however, one problem with this character. Although readers get many examples of what Neville has had to endure and examples of things said to him, we never see much of a reaction from Neville. We can see a reaction on a large scale, such as resistance towards evil, but Neville never breaks down, cries or even shows frustration or anger at his treatment. We are never introduced to an inner monologue on the subject. We can only wonder what Rowling’s purpose of this is. Perhaps Neville is meant to be too manly to show weakness, perhaps it is meant that boys do not react much to being bullied all the time, or maybe Neville is armed with an inner strength that allows him to completely ignore all of this. But none of these examples satisfies what we know about Neville. He is unlikely to react for any of these reasons, being introduced the way he is. Can it be that Rowling does not know how to describe the inner emotions of someone who has these experiences, or that she deems them unnecessary to the plot? In order to use Neville as a positive example in a classroom one has

<sup>77</sup> Rowling 2007, p 586-587

<sup>78</sup> Rowling 2007, chapters 28-36, Nineteen Years Later

to try to answer these questions. This can possibly make for a lesson in itself where students can reflect and try to answer questions on bullying, perhaps making their own conclusions on how they think Neville feels. Since discussions of an ethical nature is a “task to be learned”, set by the national curriculum<sup>79</sup>, Neville’s and his bullies’ feelings can be a valuable topic for discussions in the literature classroom. A lesson plan that would call for a great deal of diplomacy since most students have come into contact with the problem in one form or another.

#### 4.2.3) Hermione Granger

Hermione is a very interesting character in my opinion. When we first meet her, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, she “*had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth*”<sup>80</sup>. She does not make a good first impression; in fact Harry and Ron say more than once that she is very annoying. It is not until four chapters later that the trio become friends because they have bested a twelve-foot mountain troll together. At this point the reader will have read 59% of the book already<sup>81</sup>.

From the start, Hermione is quite keen to adhere to rules. She respects the teachers and always does her homework. During class her hand is often in the air since she knows the answer to most of the teachers’ questions. Her obvious interest in her studies earns her both loathing and respect from students and teachers. Even though Professor Snape never warms to her, and neither do the students in Slytherin house, the students in the other three houses, as well as the other teachers, grow to like her over time. In one scene from the third book, most of her class is involved in defending Hermione from Professor Snape (proving that she is indeed accepted as a welcome member of the class) when he takes points from Gryffindor house with the motivation:

*“That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,” said Snape coolly. ‘Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all. ... It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once, and Ron, who told Hermione she was a know-it-all at least twice a week, said loudly, ‘You asked us a question, and she knows the answer! Why ask us if you don’t want to be told?’”*<sup>82</sup>

One can easily read these books from a feminist point of view, analyzing the female characters’ behaviour, thoughts etc. Heilman has a very bleak outlook of this perspective in the series:

*“the Harry Potter books feature females in secondary positions of power and authority and replicate some of the most demeaning, yet familiar, cultural stereotypes for both males and females.”*<sup>83</sup>

Eager to see if this was true, I applied this perspective when reading about Hermione. I discovered that she can be found to look “*as if she was about to faint*”<sup>84</sup>, to speak “*timidly*”<sup>85</sup> and to be “*flushing furiously*” when thinking of the handsome Lockhart<sup>86</sup>. She can be seen to

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<sup>79</sup> Lpf 94, p 6

<sup>80</sup> Rowling 1997, p 116

<sup>81</sup> Rowling 1997, p 195

<sup>82</sup> Rowling 1999, p 186-187

<sup>83</sup> Heilman 2003, p 222

<sup>84</sup> Rowling 1997, p 191

<sup>85</sup> Rowling 1997, p 273

<sup>86</sup> Rowling 1998, p 106

“come over rather giggly”<sup>87</sup>, talking in a “squealed” voice<sup>88</sup>, she gasps “in a petrified whisper”<sup>89</sup> and instead of yelling or talking she “shrieked” in concern for a Quidditch player<sup>90</sup>. Nobody believes her when she says she has a date to the Yule Ball.<sup>91</sup> She takes such offence when Ron insults her knitting (saying her hats looked like “woolly bladders”) that she “did not speak to him all morning”<sup>92</sup> and she yet again displays herself as a know-it-all when she declares:

“‘one day,’ said Hermione, sounding thoroughly exasperated, ‘you’ll read *Hogwarts: A History*, and perhaps it will remind you that you can’t Apparate or Disapparate inside Hogwarts.’”<sup>93</sup>

Talking about Voldemort with Harry, she “stared at him, then whispered, ‘Are you scared?’”<sup>94</sup>. Surprised by the arrival of the house-elf Kreacher “Hermione let out a little shriek”<sup>95</sup>, and faced with Mad-Eye Moody’s spells to detect the presence of Snape “Hermione whimpered” and has to be helped up from the floor where she was crouching with her arms over her head<sup>96</sup>. After a big row, which ends with Ron leaving for a while, “she cried for a week. Probably longer”, crying silently at night so Harry wouldn’t notice<sup>97</sup>.

But apart from all of these, less than flattering, descriptions, Hermione is also known for “telling a downright lie to a teacher”<sup>98</sup>, being fascinated with difficult problems<sup>99</sup> and to come up with dangerous plans which involves “breaking about fifty school rules”<sup>100</sup>. She is often the first to solve complicated mysteries all on her own.<sup>101</sup> When Malfoy insults their friend and teacher Rubeus Hagrid, Hermione “slapped Malfoy around the face with all the strength she could muster” so that he staggered, and then left, when she went for her wand<sup>102</sup> and she even goes so far as to attack a teacher, leaving him unconscious on the floor.<sup>103</sup> She shows a very noble side as she takes great interest in promoting freedom and justice for enslaved house elves<sup>104</sup> and manages to physically trap and imprison an adult witch and continues to force said witch to do as Hermione wants through blackmail.<sup>105</sup> Hermione is the one who encourages the students to start questioning and contesting their new teacher who is sent as a not-so-covert spy<sup>106</sup> and she suggests they take a night off because she is “feeling a bit... rebellious”<sup>107</sup>. Hermione often shows a deep understanding of other people’s thoughts and feelings<sup>108</sup> and when Harry realises that he has to go after Voldemort and finish him once and for all, Hermione’s comment is:

“‘You said to us once before,’ said Hermione quietly, ‘that there was time to turn back if we wanted to. We’ve had time, haven’t we?’”

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<sup>87</sup> Rowling 1998, p 255

<sup>88</sup> Rowling 1999, p 105

<sup>89</sup> Rowling 1999, p 365

<sup>90</sup> Rowling 2000, p 128

<sup>91</sup> Rowling 2000, p 441

<sup>92</sup> Rowling 2003, p 285

<sup>93</sup> Rowling 2003, p 551

<sup>94</sup> Rowling 2005, p 97

<sup>95</sup> Rowling 2005, p 422

<sup>96</sup> Rowling 2007, p 142-143

<sup>97</sup> Rowling 2007, p 308

<sup>98</sup> Rowling 1997, p 193

<sup>99</sup> Rowling 1997, p 307

<sup>100</sup> Rowling 1998, p 174

<sup>101</sup> Rowling 1998, p 312-313

<sup>102</sup> Rowling 1999, p 317

<sup>103</sup> Rowling 1999, p 389-390

<sup>104</sup> Rowling 2000, p 246-247

<sup>105</sup> Rowling 2000, p 788-790

<sup>106</sup> Rowling 2003, p 267-273

<sup>107</sup> Rowling 2003, p 698

<sup>108</sup> Rowling 2005, p 206-207

and with that it is decided that she and Ron will go with him to the very end<sup>109</sup>. When the Order of the Phoenix execute a plan to keep Harry alive by disguising his friends as decoys, who look exactly like Harry, by drinking Polyjuice Potion, Hermione ignores the dangers and instead comments on the potion: “‘Ooo, you look much tastier than Crabbe and Goyle, Harry, ’said Hermione”.<sup>110</sup> Lastly, not only does she partake in the final battle, duelling the cruel Bellatrix Lestrange who tortured Neville’s parents into insanity and killed Harry’s godfather Sirius Black<sup>111</sup>, but Hermione endures repeated torture, by the same witch, without betraying her friends or their plans<sup>112</sup>.

In short, Hermione clearly displays sides that can be interpreted in both a rather weak way and also in a forceful way. A positive impression of this character is largely dependent on reading through the entire series (when Heilman’s book was published, only four of the *Harry Potter* books had been), as her strengths develop over time, starting out as a bossy know-it-all and ending up taking an important part of the fight against evil. Her many sides allow for several simultaneous analyses, and as such she is a very rewarding character to ponder. What a reader can eventually learn from her comes down to how you choose to see her. She can be both an example of girls being strong leaders and of being a bit of a nerd. Something I look forward to as a teacher is to see if there is any difference as to how girls and boys view Hermione respectively. Does one gender group tend to prefer a particular way of interpreting Hermione? As Malu says, readers have their own reader-identity which will determine the meaning of what is read. These identities are “*dependent upon an individual’s experiences*”<sup>113</sup>. This in turn means that how one chooses to see certain characters in a book, reflects their own personal opinions, which is a central thought to my essay. Students discussing different characters and their personalities have a clear connection to their own identities, and personal thoughts come through into the discussion. Thus, teachers should take great care not to hinder the flow of conversation between students since it is a chance for them to develop (new) ideas. On the other hand, if a conversation takes a more sinister tone, the teacher should also be ready to intervene and to discourage values that are described as unsuitable in the national curriculum:

*“No-one should be subjected to discrimination at school based on gender, ethnic belonging, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability, or subjected to other degrading treatment. Tendencies toward harassment or other degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be met with knowledge, open discussion and active measures.”*<sup>114</sup>

Because of, and thanks to, my mother, I firmly believe in choices. We always have a choice, even when we do not think we do. Sometimes the choice we have can seem so obvious that it almost ceases to be a choice (Do I want to breathe or not?) and sometimes it almost ceases to be a choice because we do not like the alternative, or the alternative seems unacceptable (Do I want to flush the toilet after I have used it?). But there is in fact always a choice. Regarding the roles of women in *Harry Potter*, the reader can either choose to see them as inferior bystanders or as active participants. As I wanted to show with my numerous examples above (both positive and negative and from all of the books), the reader can easily find support for both views depending on how he or she chooses to see women. Indeed, as Heilman says, we can use our ability to choose as:

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<sup>109</sup> Rowling 2005, p 607

<sup>110</sup> Rowling 2007, p 48

<sup>111</sup> Rowling 2007, p 589

<sup>112</sup> Rowling 2007, p 375-385

<sup>113</sup> Malu, Kathleen, F., *Ways of Reading Harry Potter: Multiple Stories for Multiple Reader Identities*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 86

<sup>114</sup> Lpf 94, p 3



*“a reminder that text can be interpreted against the grain and that sexism can be struggled against through acts of interpretation.”*<sup>115</sup>

Certainly, Hermione makes for a very interesting discussion on how girls and women are supposed to, and can, behave and why.

Another aspect of this character is her attitude towards school work. Hermione is ambitious about this right from the start. She is even disappointed by not receiving the highest mark in *all* her subjects when she receives the second highest mark in *one* of her subjects<sup>116</sup>. Her attentiveness in class also saves her and her friends' lives on more than one occasion when she uses her knowledge to their benefit, making her a very positive influence on teenagers who feel that school work is only mildly important. On the other hand, Hermione also inspires active thought on what goes on in school. She does not think that you should do everything a teacher asks you to, just because they are teachers. This is something she gives examples of when she declares one of her classes as *“such a waste of time”*, storms out and permanently gives up that class<sup>117</sup>. Hermione again questions her school, and one particular teacher, when she decides that there are more important things than attending classes and doing homework; meaning her and her friends preparing themselves for the difficulties and dangers of adult life, when she suggests they start their own, illegal, defence group<sup>118</sup>. The overall impression from Hermione's attitude towards school is that it is indeed very important, as long as there is a good motivation for what is to be learned. She inspires readers to question what they do in school and to think for themselves. Something I think teenagers should find easy to take to heart.

#### 4.2.4) Ronald Weasley

Ronald (or Ron as he is called in the books) and Harry meet for the first time, when they are eleven years old, at the train station King's Cross in London, where they are taking the Hogwarts Express to school for the first time. From this first meeting and onwards, Ron represents friendship, loyalty and a loving family. Throughout the series, Ron symbolizes these things and the benefits of having them; friendship, loyalty and family are central ideas in Rowling's books.

When Ron is introduced he is significantly surrounded by his family, emphasizing his strong social connection. Three of his brothers are also at Hogwarts at the time and his mother and younger sister have come to see them all off. Ron's mother, Molly, helps Harry find his way to platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , showing her caring nature from the start. While Harry gets on the train the Weasleys are right outside his compartment, talking to each other in a very relaxed and informal way. When the twins divulge that they have just met the famous Harry Potter, Molly immediately forbids them to badger him with questions of how his parents died or if he remembers what Voldemort looks like. When everyone is finally on the train we are properly introduced to Ron since he asks to share a compartment with Harry. We already know that Ron is *“tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet and a long nose”*<sup>119</sup>. But Ron is also open and honest. Harry's earlier excursions into the wizarding world have

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<sup>115</sup> Heilman 2003, p 222

<sup>116</sup> Rowling 2005, p 101

<sup>117</sup> Rowling 1999, p 320-323

<sup>118</sup> Rowling 2003, p 361-365

<sup>119</sup> Rowling 1997, p 104

included people staring at him and his scar and whispering behind his back, but Ron simply asks him if he really is the famous Harry Potter.

As the two boys continue their initial discussion on the train we are quickly introduced to another aspect of Ron's character. This aspect has to do with moral questions and being decent. Since Harry has grown up with Muggles he knows next to nothing about the wizarding world. Ron on the other hand is from a wizarding family and is privy to much information. It is Ron who gives Harry most explanations on the wizarding world, acting as a security net of information, making it possible for Harry to avoid awkward situations:

*"'Are all your family wizards?' asked Harry, who found Ron just as interesting as Ron found him. 'Er – yes, I think so,' said Ron. 'I think Mum's got a second cousin who's an accountant, but we never talk about him.' 'So you must know loads of magic already.' The Weasleys were clearly one of those old wizarding families the pale boy in Diagon Alley had talked about."*<sup>120</sup>

As I showed above, in the discussion about Voldemort, Ron also has insight into the issue of pureness of blood, where he also demonstrates his moral conscience. Other examples of Ron's superior knowledge, which he uses to his friends' benefit, are about wizard's duels<sup>121</sup>, dragons<sup>122</sup> and what Parselmouths are and why they are connected to Slytherin.<sup>123</sup>

Apart from helping Harry avoid awkward moments, Ron also starts to demonstrate his friendship and loyalty early on. After Harry and the others have been discovered out of bed in the dead of night and are severely punished for this, affecting the whole of Gryffindor House, *"only Ron stood by him"*, trying to comfort and cheer him up<sup>124</sup>. Perhaps one of Ron's finest moments (at least in the first book) is when he sacrifices himself playing wizards chess for Harry, and Hermione, in order for them to be allowed to continue towards the Philosopher's Stone and saving it from Voldemort:

*"'Yes...' said Ron softly, 'it's the only way... I've got to be taken.' 'NO!' Harry and Hermione shouted. 'That's chess!' snapped Ron. 'You've got to make some sacrifices! I take one step forward and she'll take me – that leaves you free to checkmate the king, Harry!' 'But – ' 'Do you want to stop Snape or not?' 'Ron – ' 'Look, if you don't hurry up, he'll already have the Stone!' there was nothing else for it. 'Ready?' Ron called, his face pale but determined. 'Here I go – now, don't hang around once you've won.' He stepped forward and the white queen pounced. She struck Ron hard around the head with her stone arm and he crashed to the floor ... the white queen dragged Ron to one side. He looked as if he'd been knocked out."*<sup>125</sup>

Ron shows his friendship and loyalty to Harry again, as well as how he includes his whole family in these things, at the beginning of the second book, when the whole family is upset for Harry when he suffers serious neglect and punishment, being locked in his bedroom with bars at the window and half-starved. Ron, Fred and George borrow their father's flying car and come to rescue Harry, taking him to their own house, The Burrow, just outside the village Ottery St Catchpole. However, they did not have permission to do this and Molly Weasley gives them the first moral lecture Harry has ever listened to with any lasting effect. After much anger over things like empty beds, no idea where her sons are and if they are all right, she calms down and invites them into the house, though she says that when their father gets home it will not be exactly fun for them<sup>126</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup> Rowling 1997, p 110

<sup>121</sup> Rowling 1997, p 167-168

<sup>122</sup> Rowling 1997, p 249-253

<sup>123</sup> Rowling 1998, p 212-213

<sup>124</sup> Rowling 1997, p 265

<sup>125</sup> Rowling 1997, p 304-305

<sup>126</sup> Rowling 1998, chapter 3

When it comes to family, Ron offers Harry a part of family life in a dual sense. He, Hermione and Harry form their own home away from home and their own version of a family at Hogwarts. Through everything they experience together they show “*trust, loyalty and attachment*”<sup>127</sup> to each other, the very things that signify a family. And through their everyday life together and the “*actions and relationships forged among individuals*” they form their own family unit, by choice, rather than by biological relationships. But Ron goes further than this and also invites Harry into his own family, making their relationship very close indeed. The Weasleys are a large family with the two parents, Molly and Arthur, and seven children, Charlie, Bill, Percy, the twins Fred and George, Ron himself and Ginny. All of Ron’s brothers are older than he is, only his sister Ginny is younger. Coming from a family that does not like him, into a large family where the sense of inclusion is strong, is a powerful experience for Harry. The Weasleys care for him, and:

*“The generosity that the Weasleys demonstrated even though they were not blood relatives of Harry’s, showed their concern for his well-being in giving him what he needs emotionally.”*<sup>128</sup>

Even though different family constellations are not explored within the *Harry Potter* books, the importance of family life is. The fact that Harry, Ron and Hermione form their own family points to a voluntary choice of who you *want* to belong with as being a condition for what counts as a family. Indeed, as the postlude shows, they do become part of the same family (in the traditional sense) in the end since Ron marries Hermione and Harry marries Ginny<sup>129</sup>. The students I will encounter in the future are likely to illustrate the different kind of families that Turner-Vorbeck points out are not present in the books:

*“The Harry Potter books feature images of nuclear families without the inclusion of representations of the divorced, step, single, gay or lesbian, or adoptive or foster families of our contemporary society.”*<sup>130</sup>

I have no way of knowing if I will encounter all of these family constellations in my profession, or if my future students will even want to describe their family lives, but I feel certain that at least some of these examples will be relevant. A relevant lesson plan about how family life is expressed in the *Harry Potter* books can therefore include a discussion of, for example, if families are described in a realistic way or if they are representative for all the different kinds of families we know about. What do students think family life should be like?

Rowling also very realistically includes a few downsides about having so large a family; Ron has a lot to compete with:

*“I’m the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I’ve got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left – Bill was Head Boy and Charlie was Captain of Quidditch. Now Percy’s a Prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they’re really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it’s no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five older brothers. I’ve got Bill’s old robes, Charlie’s old wand and Percy’s old rat.”*<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Kornfeld, John & Prothro, Laurie, *Comedy, Conflict and Community: Home and Family in Harry Potter*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 193

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, Hollie, *Reading Harry Potter with Navajo Eyes*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 104

<sup>129</sup> Rowling 2007, *Nineteen Years Later*

<sup>130</sup> Turner-Vorbeck, Tammy, *Pottermania: Good, Clean Fun or Cultural Hegemony?*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 20

<sup>131</sup> Rowling 1997, p 110-111

These feelings are further explained later on when Ron looks into the Mirror of Erised. When Ron sees into the Mirror, he sees himself having won both the Quidditch Cup and the House Cup as well as being Head Boy. When he looks at himself, he says *“I’m different – I look older”*<sup>132</sup>. What Ron sees is clearly an ideal version of himself, an interpretation easy to make because of the inscription on the Mirror: *“Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi”* (the trick to understanding the inscription is to read it backwards)<sup>133</sup>. Dumbledore sheds more light on Ron’s feelings when Harry asks him how the Mirror works:

*“Ronald Weasley, who has always been overshadowed by his brothers, sees himself standing alone, the best of all of them.”*<sup>134</sup>

We get many examples of how Ron’s family, and especially Ron himself, include Harry, and to some extent Hermione, into his family. These examples show many sides of family life, like for example coming together at Christmas or birthdays, bickering, sibling rivalry, love, jokes, respect for your parents, concern and a steady loyalty. The family Harry usually live with serve only as a reminder of how nice and normal Ron’s family is. The role of the Dursley family is to emphasize the good qualities of the Weasleys. We also understand that the Dursleys are the very worst example of family life, and that the Weasleys constitute a more or less ideal situation. Rowling sets a norm for how family life should be.

As the plot gets more and more dark the central characters spend more and more time with each other and family life has a large part of the happenings in the books. Ron also demonstrates his tendency to be interested in people who he feels are somehow left out, and wants to include them, again when he talks about Sirius being lonely at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix: *“you wouldn’t want to be stuck inside this house without any company”*<sup>135</sup>. But Ron soon has other things to think about than Sirius’s happiness since he has been made prefect. And it is now of course his turn to be teased about this by Fred and George, like Percy was before him:

*“‘What’s the matter?’ said Fred impatiently, moving around Ron to look over his shoulder at the parchment. Fred’s mouth fell open, too. ‘Prefect?’ he said, staring incredulously at the letter. ‘Prefect?’ ... ‘No way,’ said George in a hushed voice. ... Well, at least one of you’s got their priorities right.’ He strode over to Harry and clapped him on the back while giving Ron a scathing look. ‘Prefect... ickle Ronnie the Prefect.’ ‘Ohh, Mum’s going to be revolting,’ groaned George”*<sup>136</sup>

His parents are of course delighted of Ron’s new badge and Mrs Weasley displays her joy by saying:

*“I’m just thrilled, oh, Ronnie – ‘Fred and George were both making loud retching noises behind her back but Mrs Weasley did not notice; arms tight around Ron’s neck, she was kissing him all over his face, which had turned a brighter scarlet than his badge. ‘Mum... don’t... Mum, get a grip...’ he muttered, trying to push her away.”*<sup>137</sup>

This is the first tangible step for Ron to become what he saw in the Mirror of Erised.

But even though Ron *“sees himself standing alone”* in the Mirror of Erised, he is part of a trio of friends. Ron has an interesting, and necessary, part to play in this trio – he is the one who

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<sup>132</sup> Rowling 1997, p 228

<sup>133</sup> Rowling 1997, p 225

<sup>134</sup> Rowling 1997, p 231

<sup>135</sup> Rowling 2003, p 178

<sup>136</sup> Rowling 2003, p 181-182

<sup>137</sup> Rowling 2003, p 184

keeps it balanced. Ron does this by challenging the friendships and the individual characters' status and behaviour towards each other. This is a very important function in the book since it balances out the prominent role otherwise occupied by Harry, because of everything that has been, and are now, happening to him. Ron also challenges Hermione's behaviour, concentrating on questions of integrity, for example when Ron blames Hermione's cat Crookshanks for his rat, Scabbers's, disappearance. Crookshanks has indeed shown an inappropriate level of interest in the rat (Ron finds blood on the sheets where Scabbers slept, along with some cat hairs) and the rift between Hermione and Ron is created when Hermione refuses to acknowledge that Crookshanks is responsible and insists that there must be another explanation. Ron resolutely does not talk to Hermione again until Hagrid's ordeals about Buckbeak the Hippogriff take precedence.<sup>138</sup> In the end it turns out that Hermione was right, as usual, and that Scabbers is really an animagus by the name of Peter Pettigrew. The same Peter Pettigrew who betrayed Harry's parents to Voldemort. Scabbers had been hiding as a rat to avoid being made to answer for his crimes<sup>139</sup>. This rift between Ron and Hermione is permanently resolved when Ron asks Crookshanks his opinion about his new owl Pigwidgeon: *"'What d'you reckon?' Ron asked the cat. 'Definitely an owl?' Crookshanks purred."*<sup>140</sup>

There are two major rifts between Ron and Harry that have a large impact on the plot, the first of which occurs in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* during the Triwizard Tournament. When Harry gets chosen as a champion, he suspects someone has put his name in the goblet for a reason, and probably an evil reason at that. When he hurries to find Ron to talk about it, his reaction is not what Harry had hoped for:

*"'Oh, hello,' said Ron. He was grinning, but it looked a very odd, strained sort of grin. ... 'So,' he said, ... 'Congratulations.' 'What do you mean, congratulations?' said Harry, staring at Ron. There was definitely something wrong with the way Ron was smiling; it was more like a grimace. ... 'Listen,' said Harry, 'I didn't put my name in that Goblet. Someone else must've done it.' ... 'It's OK, you know, you can tell me the truth,' he said. 'If you don't want everyone else to know, fine, but I don't know why you're bothering to lie ... I'm not stupid, you know.' 'You're doing a really good impression of it,' Harry snapped. 'Yeah?' said Ron, and there was no trace of a grin, forced or otherwise, on his face now."*<sup>141</sup>

Hermione, very wisely, has to explain to Harry why Ron is upset:

*"'Look,' said Hermione patiently, 'it's always you who gets all the attention, you know it is. I know it's not your fault,' she added quickly, seeing Harry open his mouth furiously, 'I know you don't ask for it... but – well – you know, Ron's got all those brothers to compete against at home, and you're his best friend, and you're really famous – he's always been shunted to one side whenever people see you, and he puts up with it, and he never mentions it, but I suppose this is just one time too many...'"*<sup>142</sup>

Hermione draws on what we know about Ron from what he sees in the Mirror of Erised and what he says to Harry on the train to Hogwarts the first time they meet, thus keeping to our knowledge of Ron's character; there are a few downsides to being part of a big family where all of your brothers have already managed to make something out of themselves. This more serious side of sibling rivalry is something I can imagine many of my future students will recognize.

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<sup>138</sup> Rowling 1999, chapters 12 - 15

<sup>139</sup> Rowling 1999, chapters 17-19

<sup>140</sup> Rowling 1999, p 467

<sup>141</sup> Rowling 2000, p 314-315

<sup>142</sup> Rowling 2000, p 318

This, more moody Ron, is expressed in a number of scenes. The very fact that Ron is allowed to be moody marks a contrast between him and Harry. Harry's maturation is concerned with his own identity, his past, and his future and he requires loyalty and support. But Ron, who is not responsible for taking on Voldemort (although he does anyway because of his and Harry's friendship), has the possibility of being a normal teenager. In this sense Ron is who Harry would have been without all his responsibilities. Ron gets away with being angry, moody and to sometimes behave very foolishly. An example of this is when Hermione goes to the Yule Ball with Viktor Krum. Ron clearly has objections to this and we start to get an inkling that there is more going on between Ron and Hermione than just friendship:

*"Ron, however, walked right past Hermione without looking at her. ... 'How's it going?' Harry asked Ron, sitting down and opening a bottle of Butterbeer. Ron didn't answer. He was glaring at Hermione and Krum, who were dancing nearby. ... Hermione came over and sat down in Parvati's empty chair. She was a bit pink in the face from dancing. 'Hi,' said Harry. Ron didn't say anything. 'It's hot, isn't it?' said Hermione, fanning herself with her hand. 'Viktor's just gone to get some drinks.' Ron gave her a withering look. 'Viktor?' he said. 'Hasn't he asked you to call him Vicky yet?' Hermione looked at him in surprise. 'What's up with you?' she said. 'If you don't know,' said Ron scathingly, 'I'm not going to tell you.'"*<sup>143</sup>

And a few pages later Harry:

*"found Ron and Hermione having a blazing row. Standing ten feet apart, they were bellowing at each other, each scarlet in the face. 'Well, if you don't like it, you know what the solution is, don't you?' yelled Hermione; her hair was coming down out of its elegant bun now, and her face was screwed up in anger. 'Oh yeah?' Ron yelled back. 'What's that?' 'Next time there's a ball, ask me before someone else does, and not as a last resort!' ... Ron turned to look at Harry. 'Well,' he spluttered, looking thunderstruck, 'well – that just proves – completely missed the point – 'Harry didn't say anything ... but he somehow thought that Hermione had got the point much better than Ron had.'"*<sup>144</sup>

When it comes to love, Ron clearly could do with a bit more tact. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* the complicated love life of Ronald Weasley gets even worse. After finding out from his sister Ginny that *"Hermione snogged Viktor Krum"*<sup>145</sup> Ron is first very upset, and then remedies this feeling by getting his first girlfriend, Lavender Brown, and not being very discrete at all about it, especially towards Hermione whom he takes great revenge from because of Viktor Krum. What Ron does not know, however, is that the same situation where he found out about Hermione and Krum, also gives him a bit of leverage over Harry, again balancing their relationship. Before Ginny tells Ron about Hermione, she was busy kissing her boyfriend. Harry's reaction to this is that:

*"he felt disorientated, dizzy; being struck by a lightning bolt must be something like this. It's just because she's Ron's sister, he told himself. You just didn't like seeing her kissing Dean because she's Ron's sister... But unbidden to his mind came an image of that same deserted corridor with himself kissing Ginny instead... the monster in his chest purred... but then he saw Ron ripping open the tapestry curtain and drawing his wand on Harry, shouting things like 'betrayal of trust'... 'supposed to be my friend'..."*<sup>146</sup>

As Ginny's elder brother Ron suddenly has, to him, unknown power (since Harry does not confide his feelings about Ginny to Ron) over Harry. Again we see Ron balancing the relationship between two of the trio, although, for the time being, he does not know it. Several chapters later, Ron does find out though, when Harry, forgetting all about decorum:

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<sup>143</sup> Rowling 2000, p 452-460

<sup>144</sup> Rowling 2000, p 472

<sup>145</sup> Rowling 2005, p 269

<sup>146</sup> Rowling 2005, p 270

*“without thinking, without planning it, without worrying about the fact that fifty people were watching him, Harry kissed her. ... Hermione was beaming, but Harry’s eyes sought Ron. At last he found him, still clutching the Cup and wearing an expression appropriate to having been clubbed over the head. For a fraction of a second they looked at each other, then Ron gave a tiny jerk of the head that Harry understood to mean, ‘Well – if you must.’”*<sup>147</sup>

But Ron’s superior right of judgement on this new situation is not challenged by Harry. Ron still has leverage over Harry in this. Ginny however, does not agree, and it is she, and not Harry, who challenges Ron’s right to question the relationship:

*“‘Watch it,’ he said, pointing warningly at Harry and Ginny. ‘Just because I’ve given my permission doesn’t mean I can’t withdraw it – ‘ ‘Your permission’,’ scoffed Ginny. ‘Since when did you give me permission to do anything?’”*<sup>148</sup>

When we reach the last book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Ron has again and again proven his friendship and loyalty to Harry and Hermione. He helped Harry get to the Philosopher’s Stone in the first book by winning at wizards chess<sup>149</sup>. He goes with Harry down to the Chamber of Secrets (although due to a cave-in he cannot go with him all the way since the way is blocked) in the second book<sup>150</sup>. In the third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, he helps find out the truth about Sirius Black and, before they know that Black is innocent, defiantly says to Sirius that *“If you want to kill Harry, you’ll have to kill us, too!”*<sup>151</sup>. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Ron does not go with Harry into the maze, since it is a task in the Triwizard Tournament, but he helped Harry prepare for it the best he can, volunteering to be used as a guinea pig when Harry tries out new curses and jinxes in preparation<sup>152</sup>. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* Ron plays a more active part by going to the Ministry of Magic and duelling the Death Eaters (attaining serious injuries in the process)<sup>153</sup>. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* again sees Ron battling Death Eaters in defence of the school when Death Eaters have infiltrated the school at night<sup>154</sup>.

Since the trio spend their last year away from Hogwarts, in pursuit of Voldemort, their relationships become much tighter. The examples of Ron’s friendship and loyalty towards Harry and Hermione, as well as how they form their own family unit, are numerous and too many to describe. The most important contributions Ron makes in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* all have to do with what Ron has characterized all through the series. In the beginning of the book, Ron is one of the decoys posing as Harry in order for Harry to escape with his life. Like Hermione, he ignores the dangers and when Harry protests and says that he does not want to risk his friends’ lives, Ron ironically comments that *“because it’s the first time for all of us”*<sup>155</sup>.

Before the three friends leave for their quest of destroying Voldemort’s Horcruxes, they make preparations. In order to protect his family, again showing his strong social character and concern for the people he cares about, Ron enchants the ghoul in the Weasleys’ attic, making it look like himself, though with the horrible and contagious disease Spattergroit. That way,

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<sup>147</sup> Rowling 2005, p 499

<sup>148</sup> Rowling 2005, p 501

<sup>149</sup> Rowling 1997, chapter 16

<sup>150</sup> Rowling 1998, chapters 16-17

<sup>151</sup> Rowling 1999, p 366

<sup>152</sup> Rowling 2000, chapter 31

<sup>153</sup> Rowling 2003, chapters 32-36

<sup>154</sup> Rowling 2005, chapters 27-29

<sup>155</sup> Rowling 2007, p 46

any Death Eaters who come looking for Ron when he does not show up at school will be fooled into thinking that Ron has never left and that his family is innocent of any crimes<sup>156</sup>. Harry, Ron and Hermione wait until after Bill and Fleur's wedding to leave. But before that happens, Dumbledore has left a will and it includes all three of them. Dumbledore says in his will that to "*Ronald Bilius Weasley, I leave my Deluminator, in the hope that he will remember me when he uses it.*"<sup>157</sup> No further explanation for this is given at this point though. Ron and Harry have their second big row in the series several chapters later. Before this happens, they have successfully managed to find the next Horcrux (Dolores Umbridge had it and they went to the Ministry of Magic to steal it from her), but they have not yet been able to destroy it since this requires a powerful weapon, a weapon they do not yet have. The onset to the rift between Ron and Harry is that they have managed to procure the Horcrux, but have no means of destroying it, or any idea of what to do next. Hunger is also becoming an issue since they are camping in a tent in desolate places around the countryside. To add insult to injury, the Horcrux is not at all passive, but works on their minds, making a bad situation worse. Ron, who has never experienced tough times like these before, finally snaps:

*"It's not like I'm not having the time of my life here," said Ron, "you know, with my arm mangled and nothing to eat and freezing my backside off every night. I just hoped, you know, after we'd been running around a few weeks, we'd have achieved something." ... "We thought you knew what you were doing!" shouted Ron, standing up; and his words pierced Harry like scalding knives. "We thought Dumbledore had told you what to do, we thought you had a real plan!" ... Ron made a sudden movement: Harry reacted, but before either wand was clear of its owner's pocket, Hermione had raised her own. "Protego!" she cried, and an invisible shield expanded between her and Harry on the one side and Ron on the other ... Harry and Ron glared from either side of the transparent barrier as though they were seeing each other clearly for the first time. ...something had broken between them. ... "Ron, no – please – come back, come back!" She was impeded by her own Shield Charm; by the time she had removed it, he had already stormed into the night. Harry stood quite still and silent, listening to her sobbing and calling Ron's name amongst the trees. After a few minutes she returned, her sopping hair plastered to her face. "He's g-g-gone! Disapparated!"<sup>158</sup>*

It is a long while before Ron returns. When he finally does, he finds Harry in the midst of trying to get hold of the Sword of Gryffindor from a pool of icy water, but the Horcrux around his neck (Slytherin's locket) is strangling him and Ron arrives just in time to save Harry's life. Ron jumps in the water and drags both Harry and the Sword out and yanks the locket off of Harry. Since it was Ron who managed to get the Sword, it has to be Ron who uses it. When they talk about destroying the Horcrux the things said in their argument resurfaces, but in a more calm and controlled way. After deciding that Harry is going to open the locket using Parseltongue and then Ron will stab it, Ron confesses what being around the locket did to him:

*"'Because that thing's bad for me!' said Ron, backing away from the locket on the rock. 'I can't handle it! I'm not making excuses, Harry, for what I was like, but it affects me worse than it affected you and Hermione, it made me think stuff, stuff I was thinking anyway, but it made everything worse, I can't explain it, and then I'd take it off and I'd get my head on straight again, and then I'd have to put the effing thing back on – I can't do it Harry!'"<sup>159</sup>*

The Horcrux inside the locket puts up a real fight, speaking to Ron, showing him images of the things he fears; things about his family and Hermione and Harry. Taunting him that Hermione would much rather be with Harry than him, that his mother thinks he is a

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<sup>156</sup> Rowling 2007, chapter 6

<sup>157</sup> Rowling 2007, p 106

<sup>158</sup> Rowling 2007, p 251-254

<sup>159</sup> Rowling 2007, p 305



disappointment and that she would rather have Harry as a son. Ron has to muster all his strength and resolve to stab the locket with the Sword:

*“The sword flashed, plunged ... The monstrous versions of himself and Hermione were gone: there was only Ron, standing there with the sword held slackly in his hand, looking down at the shattered remains of the locket ... The thing that had lived in the Horcrux had vanished; torturing Ron had been its final act. ... it was only now that Ron was here again that Harry fully realised how much his absence had cost them.”<sup>160</sup>*

When the things that caused their argument are forced to the surface by destroying the locket Harry and Ron are finally honest with each other. Ron apologises for his behaviour, but Harry says that:

*“‘You’ve sort of made up for it tonight,’ said Harry. ‘Getting the sword. Finishing off the Horcrux. Saving my life.’ ‘That makes me sound a lot cooler than I was,’ Ron mumbled. ‘Stuff like that always sound cooler than in really was,’ said Harry. ‘I’ve been trying to tell you that for years.’”<sup>161</sup>*

The rift is resolved and Ron finally gets a first hand experience of what it is like to be Harry and the responsibilities that come with it. Ron has now single handily destroyed one of Voldemort’s Horcruxes and knows what truly facing him means. The relationship between the two friends is at last perfectly equal and balanced due to Ron’s contributions. Ron goes back with Harry to their tent and receives a mouthful from Hermione who wants to know where he has been and why he did not come back sooner amongst other things. Eager to make up for his leaving, Ron explains what has happened to him while he was gone. And again we see Ron’s tendency for having more information of the wizarding world than the others. He is the only one of them who has been in touch with other people for months and because of it knows things Harry and Hermione do not. He also explains how he found his way back to Harry and Hermione using the Deluminator Dumbledore gave him. The Deluminator has worked like a kind of homing beacon, giving off a light in the direction towards where Harry and Hermione were. Discussing Dumbledore and the Deluminator Ron and Harry reach a conclusion of what it signifies:

*“‘Sometimes I’ve thought, when I’ve been a bit hacked off, he was having a laugh or – or he just wanted to make it more difficult. But I don’t think so, not any more. He knew what he was doing when he gave me the Deluminator, didn’t he? He – well,’ Ron’s ears turned bright red and he became engrossed in a tuft of grass at his feet, which he prodded with his toe, ‘he must’ve known I’d run out on you.’ ‘No, Harry corrected him. ‘He must’ve known you’d always want to come back.’”<sup>162</sup>*

Almost everything we know about Ron comes together in these chapters – his superior knowledge of the wizarding world, his willingness to help his friends, his devotion to them and most of all, his loyalty. Indeed, these are the things Dumbledore, who we have learned early on is always dead on and definitely to be trusted, himself think characterises Ron by giving him the Deluminator.

From here, Ron finds a renewed sense of purpose and is central in pushing Harry and Hermione onwards towards a conclusion. After several more ordeals, which include Ron having to endure hearing Hermione tortured by Bellatrix and breaking into Gringotts Bank and escaping on the back of a vicious dragon, they reach Hogwarts and the final confrontation. As I discussed above, talking about Neville’s contributions to this, they manage to reach the castle. As soon as they get there the rest of Ron’s family is called, and Ron is, like

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<sup>160</sup> Rowling 2007, p 307-308

<sup>161</sup> Rowling 2007, p 308

<sup>162</sup> Rowling 2007, p 317

in the beginning of the first book, once again surrounded by his whole family. It is Ron who figures out how to destroy the last Horcruxes by managing to open the Chamber of Secrets to fetch a few of the Basilisk's teeth. He also graciously suggests that Hermione be the one to destroy Hufflepuff's Cup, since *"she hasn't had the pleasure yet"*. But the act that really wins Hermione over, completely forgiving him for leaving after the big fight and of anything he has ever done wrong, is when he suggests they go back for the house-elves since they should not be trapped in the castle to die for them:

*"There was a clatter as the Basilisk fangs cascaded out of Hermione's arms. Running at Ron, she flung them around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth. Ron threw away the fangs and broomstick he was holding and responded with such enthusiasm that he lifted Hermione off her feet. 'Is this the moment?' Harry asked weakly."*<sup>163</sup>

Ron, like both Hermione and Neville, take a very active part in the Battle of Hogwarts<sup>164</sup>. Perhaps even a more active part since his brother Fred is killed in the battle before Ron's eyes, leaving the Weasleys in terrible grief and anger. The final scene of the battle sees Ron duelling the werewolf Greyback, the same Greyback who maimed one of Ron's other brothers, Bill, taking some revenge for what has befallen his family. A fight Ron and Neville wins. Through all his acts in all the books in the series, Ron has achieved balance between himself, Hermione and Harry giving them all equal status, and equal parts in destroying Voldemort. He has truly become what he saw in the Mirror of Erised.

The last we hear of Ron, he has married Hermione and they have two children together, Hugo and Rose. Ron still has not lost his boyish charm though, confessing to Harry that he Confunded the instructor so that he could pass his Muggle-driving test (he had forgotten to look in the wing mirror when parking). Because of everything that happened, especially to Harry, but really to all of them, in finishing Voldemort, their little gathering at the train station as their children board the train to Hogwarts, draws quite a few looks. When Harry's son Albus complains about this, Ron gives his last farewell to his readers: *"Don't let it worry you," said Ron. 'It's me. I'm extremely famous.'"*<sup>165</sup> And so he is.

#### 4.2.5) Harry Potter

This section does not contain as many references as the other characters do, since the material on Harry himself are so abundant in Rowling's books. The overall structure of the book series includes a highly foreseeable type of ending to each individual book. The plot of each book takes place over a school year with a climax towards the beginning of summer, usually just before the summer holidays. At the end of each book, Harry struggles to understand what has happened to him during that school year. In all the books, except for one, he faces his nemesis Voldemort in some way and this raises a lot of questions for Harry. These questions are both about concrete events from the school year or its climax, but also questions that have to do with Harry himself – his identity, why he is the way he is and what that means for him, why he is the one everything keeps happening to – and are thus both a summary of each book and of what can be learned (about Harry) from that particular book. The questions Harry asks about his own identity, and about identity at large, is what made me decide to write this essay. These questions are by no means minor to Harry, or to the readers of these books. For Harry, the answers he finds determine quite literally who he is.

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<sup>163</sup> Rowling 2007, p 502

<sup>164</sup> Rowling 2007, chapters 28-36

<sup>165</sup> Rowling 2007, Nineteen Years Later

These ponderings on identity mainly take place between Harry and Dumbledore, who acts as his principal, mentor and also like a kind of substitute father figure. Indeed, since one of the major issues Harry has to work through is how to cope with being an orphan, he cannot turn to a parent for these highly personal conversations, but has to turn to someone who most resembles this function. But even though, as Dumbledore himself says, *“our relationship was ... closer than that of headmaster and pupil”*<sup>166</sup>, there are also other adult persons who care for Harry and adopt a parenting role towards him. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry discovers that he has a godfather, Sirius Black. As soon as Harry is convinced of Sirius’s innocence, he and Sirius become friends and start to form a deeper bond:

*“‘You know what this means?’ Sirius said abruptly to Harry, as they made their slow progress along the tunnel. ‘Turning Pettigrew in?’ ‘You’re free,’ said Harry. ‘Yes...’ said Sirius. ‘But I’m also – I don’t know if anyone ever told you – I’m your godfather.’ ‘Yeah, I knew that,’ said Harry. ‘Well... your parents appointed me your guardian,’ said Sirius stiffly. ‘If anything happened to them...’ Harry waited. Did Sirius mean what he thought he meant? ‘I’ll understand, of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle,’ said Sirius. ‘But... well... think about it. Once my name’s cleared... if you wanted a... a different home...’ Some sort of explosion took place in the pit of Harry’s stomach. ‘What – live with you?’ he said ... ‘Leave the Dursleys?’ ‘Of course, I thought you wouldn’t want to,’ said Sirius quickly. ‘I understand. I just thought I’d –’ ‘Are you mad?’ said Harry, his voice easily as croaky as Sirius’. ‘Of course I want to leave the Dursleys! Have you got a house? When can I move in?’ Sirius turned right around to look at him ... ‘You want to?’ he said. ‘You mean it?’ ‘Yeah, I mean it!’ said Harry. Sirius’ gaunt face broke into the first true smile Harry had seen upon it. The difference it made was startling, as though a person ten years younger was shining through the starved mask; for a moment, he was recognisable as the man who had laughed at Harry’s parents’ wedding.”*<sup>167</sup>

But Sirius is not the only other adult who cares about Harry, so do Mr and Mrs Weasley, and they have done from the start. We meet Mrs Weasley at the beginning of the first book at the train station, and Mr Weasley makes his entrance in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as the boys are made to answer for flying his car to and from Harry’s house during the night. We immediately get an impression of Mr Weasley as a kind-natured man since his reply to his boys’ misbehaviour is that he wants to know how the trip was and how the car flew instead of chiding them. The Weasleys demonstrate over and over again how much they care for each other and for Harry. Mr Weasley even gives the Dursleys a lesson in manners when he arrives to pick Harry up for the Quidditch World Cup before the start of their fourth school year. The Dursleys are not going to see Harry again for almost a year but they do not want to say goodbye to him:

*“‘Well ... bye then,’ Harry said to the Dursleys. They didn’t say anything at all. Harry moved towards the fire, but just as he reached the edge of the hearth, Mr Weasley put out a hand and held him back. He was looking at the Dursleys in amazement. ‘Harry said goodbye to you,’ he said. ‘Didn’t you hear him?’ ‘It doesn’t matter,’ Harry muttered to Mr Weasley. ‘Honestly, I don’t care.’ Mr Weasley did not remove his hand from Harry’s shoulder. ‘You aren’t going to see your nephew ‘til next summer,’ he said to Uncle Vernon in mild indignation. ‘Surely you’re going to say goodbye?’”*<sup>168</sup>

Harry’s Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher Professor Remus Lupin is also someone who takes an active part in Harry’s life. They spend a lot of time together during the year when he teaches at Hogwarts, which is also the year when Harry meets Sirius Black<sup>169</sup>. From Lupin and Sirius Harry learns a lot about his parents since Lupin and Sirius were close friends with them. As such, they represent a link to Harry’s parents and a way for Harry to get to know the parents he will never meet since they died when he was only a year old. Harry’s and Lupin’s

<sup>166</sup> Rowling 2003, p 909

<sup>167</sup> Rowling 1999, p 407-408

<sup>168</sup> Rowling 2000, p 56-57

<sup>169</sup> Rowling 1998

relationship evolve quite a bit in the books, starting with Lupin as the teacher and Harry as the student, and ending with Harry being godfather to Lupin's son. To Harry's great sorrow, Lupin and his wife die during the Battle of Hogwarts, leaving him to raise Lupin's son, Teddy, as his own. In this respect, Harry becomes to Teddy what Lupin was to him – the only available link for Teddy to get to know his father, through Harry's memories of him<sup>170</sup>.

Perhaps the most touching display by the people who care about Harry takes place at the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Harry has been feeling thoroughly dispirited because of Sirius' death and is approaching his stay with the Dursleys over the summer with dread. But when he gets off the train with Ron, Hermione and Ginny he finds a group of people waiting for him; Mad-Eye Moody, Tonks, Lupin, Mr and Mrs Weasley and Fred and George Weasley. Even Hermione's parents are there. The group of friends and family take it upon themselves to have a little chat with the Dursleys about how they think Harry's summer should be:

*"'Well – shall we do it then?' 'Yeah, I reckon so, Arthur,' said Moody. He and Mr Weasley took the lead across the station towards the Dursleys, who were apparently rooted to the floor. ... 'Good afternoon,' said Mr Weasley pleasantly to Uncle Vernon as he came to a halt right in front of him. 'You might remember me, my name's Arthur Weasley.' ... 'We thought we'd just have a few words with you about Harry,' said Mr Weasley, still smiling. 'Yeah,' growled Moody. 'About how he's treated when he's at your place.' ... 'I am not aware that it is any of your business what goes on in my house – 'I expect what you're not aware of would fill several books, Dursley,' growled Moody. 'Anyway, that's not the point,' interjected Tonks, whose pink hair seemed to offend Aunt Petunia more than all the rest put together ... 'The point is, if we find out you've been horrible to Harry – '– And make no mistake, we'll hear about it,' added Lupin pleasantly. ... '– Yeah, if we get any hint that Potter's been mistreated in any way, you'll have us to answer to,' said Moody. Uncle Vernon swelled ominously. ... 'Are you threatening me, sir?' he said, so loudly that passers-by actually turned to stare. 'Yes, I am,' said Mad-Eye, who seemed rather pleased that Uncle Vernon had grasped this fact so quickly.'"<sup>171</sup>*

The scene ends with Moody advancing on the Dursleys, scaring them by showing them his magically revolving eye, and confirming the threat. Everyone in the group wish Harry a happy summer, wanting updates on how he's doing, and particularly the Weasleys promise to take him away from the Dursleys as soon as they can. Harry is very touched and *"could not find words to tell them what it meant to him"*<sup>172</sup>.

The theme of Harry being an orphan is very strong throughout the series and inextricably tied to Harry's self-image. When Ron looks into the Mirror of Erised, he sees an ideal version of himself, but not so with Harry. When Harry sees into the Mirror, he sees his family for the first time. It takes him a while to realise who they are, but through things like the colour of her eyes and how his hair sticks up in an odd angle – just like what Harry looks like – he knows that he sees his parents<sup>173</sup>. When Harry and Dumbledore discuss what he saw in the Mirror, among other things, Dumbledore tells Harry:

*"In spite of all the temptation you have endured, all the suffering, you remain pure of heart, just as pure as you were at the age of eleven, when you stared into a mirror that reflected your heart's desire ... Harry, have you any idea how few wizards could have seen what you saw in that mirror? Voldemort should have known then what he was dealing with"*<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Rowling 2007

<sup>171</sup> Rowling 2003, p 953-955

<sup>172</sup> Rowling 2003, p 956

<sup>173</sup> Rowling 1997, p 225-226

<sup>174</sup> Rowling 2005, p 477-478

Harry's desperation to learn all he can about his parents through the help of others who met them, and Ron's rich family life both serve to impress upon the reader the importance of having a family. According to Eccleshare this is the central theme in the books:

*"The central juxtaposition, in terms of family love, lies between Harry's unloved situation as an orphan housed by unwilling relatives and Ron's position within an over-large, ebullient and loving family. Ron's abundance of family support and the emotional strength it gives him enable him to support Harry emotionally."*<sup>175</sup>

There is one other person at Hogwarts who displays as much care for Harry as the Weasleys do and that is Hagrid. Hagrid was the one who arrived at the Potters' ruined house to pick up Harry after Voldemort had blasted it apart<sup>176</sup>. He also understands Harry's desire to find out all he can of his parents and gives him one of Harry's most treasured possessions, a photo album:

*"It seemed to be a handsome, leather-covered book. Harry opened it curiously. It was full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father. 'Sent owls off ter all yer parents' old school friends, askin' fer photos... Knew yeh didn' have any... D'yeh like it?' Harry couldn't speak, but Hagrid understood."*<sup>177</sup>

Hagrid plays a large part in Harry's life. He is the one who tells Harry he is really a wizard and that he will be going to a new school to learn magic. Tea-time at Hagrid's is a regular event for Harry and his friends when they are at Hogwarts, since Hagrid lives on the school grounds<sup>178</sup>. They even take lessons from Hagrid – Care of Magical Creatures<sup>179</sup>. The same rules that make Harry, Ron and Hermione part of a family unit, also apply to Hagrid. Indeed, he trusts them with his most private matters (which are of questionable legal status), like the hatching of his pet dragon Norbert and of teaching his half-brother, Grawp the giant, to speak English and become civilized. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* Hagrid even identifies with Harry since they share certain similarities:

*"'Yeh know wha', Harry?' he said, looking up from the photograph of his father, his eyes very bright. 'When I firs' met you, you reminded me o' me a bit. Mum an' dad gone, an' you was feelin' like yeh wouldn' fit in at Hogwarts, remember? Not sure yeh were really up to it... an' now look at yeh, Harry! School champion!' He looked at Harry for a moment and then said, very seriously, 'Yeh know what I'd love, Harry? I'd love yeh ter win, I really would. It'd show 'em all... yeh don' have ter be pure-blood ter do it. Yeh don' have ter be ashamed of what yeh are. It'd show 'em Dumbledore's the one who's got it righ', lettin' anyone in as long as they can do magic. How you doin' with that egg, Harry?' 'Great,' said Harry. 'Really great.' Hagrid's miserable face broke into a wide, watery smile. 'Tha's my boy... You show 'em, Harry, you show 'em. Beat 'em all.'" <sup>180</sup>*

Knowing Hagrid certainly contributes to Harry's sense of morals and of his sense of belonging.

But being an orphan is only one of the issues that Harry has to deal with in order to mature as a person. The first book in the series sees Harry facing his nemesis Voldemort for the first time; prohibiting Voldemort from getting his hands on the Philosopher's Stone which would have made him virtually immortal. Afterwards, when Harry is lying in the hospital wing in Hogwarts, Dumbledore visits him and they talk about what happened between Harry and Voldemort and the Stone. This is when Harry understands what his mother has meant to him,

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<sup>175</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 96

<sup>176</sup> Rowling 1999, chapter 10

<sup>177</sup> Rowling 1997, p 326

<sup>178</sup> Rowling 1997

<sup>179</sup> Rowling 1999

<sup>180</sup> Rowling 2000, p 497-498

and that even though she is dead, she is still with him in sense, giving him a sense of connection to his family that he has not experienced before this:

*“‘But why couldn’t Quirrell touch me?’ ‘Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realise that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been so loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.’”<sup>181</sup>*

For Harry, who until he looked into the Mirror, did not even know what his parents looked like, it is a powerful feeling, that he was loved by his parents. The fact that Quirrell could not touch him is physical proof of it. The love from his parents is not just something Harry hopes for, it is very real to him.

One of Harry’s most important realisations about identity takes place at the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Harry has gone into the Chamber and once again fought Voldemort, along with a gigantic Basilisk. When he met Voldemort this time however, Voldemort compares the two of them to each other, forcing Harry to come to terms with the likenesses between them, a likeness he is repulsed by and does not want to acknowledge. When Harry, Ron, Ginny and Lockheart have come back from the Chamber they head directly to McGonagall’s office, and the events in the Chamber, and of the year, get an explanation. When everyone but Harry and Dumbledore have left, they touch upon what Harry really wants to discuss. The first question they discuss is loyalty. In the Chamber, when everything seemed to be lost, it was Harry’s loyalty to Dumbledore that saved him, calling Fawkes the phoenix to him. Fawkes is Dumbledore’s pet bird and it brought Harry everything he needed to defeat Voldemort and to survive the encounter. Without the aid of Fawkes, Harry would have been lost, impressing the importance of loyalty on the reader. Fawkes pecks out the eyes of the Basilisk making Harry able to face it without turning to stone. But Fawkes also brings the Sorting Hat, which supplies Harry with the Sword of Gryffindor, which he uses to kill the Basilisk. And when Harry is mortally injured by the snake, the last reason for the bird’s presence is revealed – phoenix tears are the only antidote to Basilisk venom. This lesson on loyalty also reinforces Ron’s character, as the most loyal person in the series. The other thing Harry wants to discuss is about the similarities between him and Voldemort, since Voldemort himself said that he and Harry were alike. Harry confides his worst fears to Dumbledore:

*“‘Professor,’ he started again after a moment, ‘the Sorting Hat told me I’d – I’d have done well in Slytherin. Everyone thought I was Slytherin’s heir for a while... because I can speak Parseltongue...’ ‘You can speak Parseltongue, Harry,’ said Dumbledore calmly, ‘because Lord Voldemort – who is the last living descendant of Salazar Slytherin – can speak Parseltongue. Unless I’m much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do, I’m sure...’ ‘Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?’ Harry said, thunderstruck. ‘It certainly seems so.’ ‘So I should be in Slytherin,’ Harry said, looking desperately into Dumbledore’s face. ‘The Sorting Hat could see Slytherin’s power in me, and it –’ ‘Put you in Gryffindor,’ said Dumbledore calmly. ‘Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his handpicked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue... resourcefulness... determination... a certain disregard for rules,’ he added, his moustache quivering again. ‘Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.’ ‘It only put me in Gryffindor,’ said Harry in a defeated voice, ‘because I asked not to go in Slytherin...’ ‘Exactly,’ said Dumbledore, beaming once more. ‘Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.’ Harry sat motionless in his chair, stunned.”<sup>182</sup>*

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<sup>181</sup> Rowling 1997, p 321-322

<sup>182</sup> Rowling 1998, p 357-358

What Dumbledore does in this discussion is to show Harry that the things he does have in common with Voldemort are not necessarily evil. But also that Harry is very unlike Voldemort, that Harry has qualities that Voldemort does not have – a wish to be good. The reason Harry is stunned at the end is that he has wrongly thought that he has connotations with evil, and have been repulsed by that, but has discovered that he has nothing to do with evil since he wants, and chooses, to be good. As I said about Hermione, it all comes down to our choices. The realisation is very liberating for Harry, he is now free to be whoever he wants to be, making his own rules.

The third book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is the only book where Harry does not face Voldemort in some way. Instead the plot centres on Harry discovering that Sirius Black is not only innocent but also his godfather. This version of a climax emphasises that questions about family are just as important as facing and standing up to your enemy. In order to help Sirius, Harry has to overcome a few obstacles, including defeating several Dementors. A Dementor is a creature that feeds on your positive memories, things like hope and happiness, leaving you with nothing but your very worst memories, with things like despair. The Dementors affect Harry particularly much and Harry feels that he is somehow weak because they target him on several occasions. Professor Lupin disagrees:

*“‘Why? Why do they affect me like that? Am I just –?’ ‘It has nothing to do with weakness,’ said Professor Lupin sharply, as though he had read Harry’s mind. ‘The Dementors affect you worse than the others because there are horrors in your past the others don’t have.’”*<sup>183</sup>

When the Dementors get near Harry, he can hear Voldemort murdering his parents, creating very conflicting feelings in Harry, pitting survival against desperately wanting to get to know his parents:

*“‘Terrible though it was to hear his parents’ last moments replayed inside his head, these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a very small child. But he’d never be able to produce a proper Patronus if he half wanted to hear his parents again...’”*<sup>184</sup>

This book is not so much about Voldemort, but about parents – about Harry getting to know his parents through those who knew them, and about creating new relationships that resembles parenthood. Sirius Black and Remus Lupin represent both roles. This book is also about betrayal. When Harry, Ron and Hermione discover that Sirius is innocent, they also find out that Ron’s rat Scabbers is really a man named Peter Pettigrew. As mentioned above in the section about Ron, Pettigrew/Scabbers is the one who betrayed Harry’s parents to Voldemort. Harry meets Pettigrew at the end of this book and he finally learns how and why his parents died. But even after Harry learns of this, he does not allow Pettigrew to be killed, but instead wants to turn him over to the Dementors, who are the guards of the prison Azkaban:

*“‘We’ll take him up to the castle. We’ll hand him over to the Dementors. He can go to Azkaban... just don’t kill him.’ ‘Harry!’ gasped Pettigrew, and he flung his arms around Harry’s knees. ‘You – thank you – it’s more than I deserve – thank you –’ ‘Get off me,’ Harry spat, throwing Pettigrew’s hands off him in disgust. ‘I’m not doing this for you. I’m doing it because I don’t reckon my dad would’ve wanted his best friends to become killers – just for you.’”*<sup>185</sup>

Even though Pettigrew manages to escape and return to Voldemort as his servant, this might not be such a bad thing. The conversation between Dumbledore and Harry explains:

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<sup>183</sup> Rowling 1999, p 203

<sup>184</sup> Rowling 1999, p 263-264

<sup>185</sup> Rowling 1999, p 404

*“You did a very noble thing, in saving Pettigrew’s life.’ ‘But if he helps Voldemort back to power –!’ ‘Pettigrew owes his life to you. You have sent Voldemort a deputy who is in your debt. When one wizard saves another wizard’s life, it creates a certain bond between them... and I’m much mistaken if Voldemort wants his servant in the debt of Harry Potter.’ ‘I don’t want a bond with Pettigrew!’ said Harry. ‘He betrayed my parents!’ ‘This is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable, Harry. But trust me... the time may come when you will be very glad you saved Pettigrew’s life.’”<sup>186</sup>*

This is a passage that deeply resembles the one between Frodo and Gandalf in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Frodo wishes that Gollum had been killed. Gandalf informs Frodo that because of the fact that Bilbo did not kill Gollum when he had the chance, is the very reason the Ring, and its evil, have had such little power over him. Gandalf believes that Gollum still has a part to play, as does Pettigrew in this story, and that *“the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many”*<sup>187</sup>. By letting Pettigrew escape, in his debt, Harry has saved his own innocence as well as set up the prerequisites for future events.

The fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, sees Harry struggle against the writings of the journalist Rita Skeeter. He is made out to be attention-seeking, prone to madness and dangerous behaviour and to be duped into ill-advised friendships with half-bloods like werewolves and giants. He has also been entered into the Triwizard Tournament against his will, and he knows that Voldemort is somehow behind it. These prerequisites make for a year of misunderstandings and half-truths, always casting doubts over Harry. For Harry, this is a year when he has to practise patience and to be on the alert, always on the defence. But through all this, Harry learns to trust his own instincts and conclusions. It is also a year for putting things in humorous perspective as Harry starts paying attention to girls:

*“A week ago, Harry would have said finding a partner for a dance would be a cinch compared to taking on a Hungarian Horntail. But now that he had done the latter, and was facing the prospect of asking a girl to the ball, he thought he’d rather have another round with the Horntail.”*<sup>188</sup>

Their new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Alastor Moody, goes through what are known as the Unforgivable Curses during class. These three curses are so severe that anyone who uses them will be rewarded with a lifetime in prison. When Moody demonstrates these curses on a few spiders Harry gets the last piece of the puzzle to how his parents died:

*“So that was how his parents had died... exactly like that spider. Had they been unblemished and unmarked, too? Had they simply seen the flash of green light and heard the rush of speeding death, before life was wiped from their bodies? Harry had been picturing his parents’ death over and over again for three years now, ever since he’d found out they had been murdered, ever since he’d found out what had happened that night: how Wormtail had betrayed his parents’ whereabouts to Voldemort, who had come to find them at their cottage. How Voldemort had killed Harry’s father first. How James Potter had tried to hold him off, while he shouted at his wife to take Harry and run... and Voldemort had advanced on Lily Potter, told her to move aside so that he could kill Harry... how she had begged him to kill her instead, refused to stop shielding her son... and so Voldemort had murdered her, too, before turning his wand on Harry...”*<sup>189</sup>

This is a puzzle that Harry has been laying since the start and he has figured out the details largely through his encounters with the Dementors who force him to relive these painful events. When Harry now has this final piece about the past, he can start to look forward and into other aspects of what happened to him and his parents. The end of the fourth book focuses on exactly this. Voldemort, through the help of Peter Pettigrew (or Wormtail as he is

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<sup>186</sup> Rowling 1999, p 459

<sup>187</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Fellowship of the Ring*, London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1994, p 79

<sup>188</sup> Rowling 2000, p 424

<sup>189</sup> Rowling 2000, p 238



now called), rises from the dead and is restored to his body, and his first task is to get hold of Harry. He does this through the Triwizard Tournament. The hints that Harry has seen all year that something is wrong and that there is a sinister purpose to entering him in the Tournament are confirmed as we learn that Alastor Moody is really an impostor; one of Voldemort's Death Eaters who has been disguised as Moody, while the real Moody has been imprisoned. The impostor helped Harry win the Tournament, and when he does, he is directly transported to Voldemort. The spell that will bring Voldemort back to life requires the blood of an enemy (meaning Harry's) and since Wormtail is the one who has to perform the spell, he and Harry meet again. When Voldemort has risen he calls all his old followers to him, and Harry as well as his readers, learn who they are. Voldemort also explains about all that has happened to him since the last time he tried to kill Harry, supplying much needed information in order to make sense of the books. Since he plans to kill Harry that night, he does not leave out any details. But that plan backfires since Harry does in fact make it back to Hogwarts and the first thing he does once he is back is to tell Dumbledore everything he heard and saw. Sitting in Dumbledore's office, hurt in several places, he tells Sirius and Dumbledore about what happened when Voldemort attacked him. The first thing Voldemort did was to try and take control over Harry with the Imperius Curse, a curse that would have turned Harry into a marionette. But Harry is able to resist the curse and he refuses to beg Voldemort not to hurt him again:

*"I asked you whether you want me to do that again?" said Voldemort softly. 'Answer me! Imperio!' And Harry felt, for the third time in his life, the sensation that his mind had been wiped of all thought... ah, it was bliss, not to think, it was as though he was floating, dreaming... just answer 'no'... say 'no'... just answer 'no'... I will not, said a stronger voice, in the back of his head, I won't answer... Just answer 'no'... I won't do it, I won't say it... Just answer 'no'... 'I WON'T!' And these words burst from Harry's mouth; they echoed through the graveyard, and the dream state was lifted"*<sup>190</sup>

When his attempt to control Harry does not work, Voldemort instead attacks Harry using the same curse that killed his parents. But when Harry attacks back something odd happens. The two wands connect through a beam of light and up and down this beam flows the power of the persons wielding the wands. Harry:

*"concentrated every last particle of his mind upon forcing the bead backwards towards Voldemort, his ears full of phoenix song, his eyes furious, fixated... and slowly, very slowly, they began to move the other way... and it was Voldemort's wand that was vibrating extra hard now... Voldemort who looked astonished, and almost fearful... One of the beads of light was quivering, inches from the tip of Voldemort's wand. Harry didn't understand why he was doing it, didn't know what it might achieve... but he now concentrated as he had never done in his life, on forcing that bead of light right back into Voldemort's wand... and slowly... very slowly... it moved along the golden thread... it trembled for a moment... and then it connected..."*<sup>191</sup>

What has happened is that Harry's wand has forced Voldemort's to perform the last spells it had performed in backwards order. Since the last thing Voldemort did before trying to kill Harry was to murder Harry's parents, a pale image of them, almost like ghosts, appear. Since Voldemort has also murdered other people, quite a few of the almost-ghosts appear. They talk to Harry, describing what is going to happen next and how he might escape. The plan works and Harry is able to get back to Hogwarts. What he has discovered that night, first when Voldemort tried to control him and then when he forced the light towards Voldemort's wand, is that he is stronger than Voldemort. He could not be controlled and it was his stronger will that made the light go towards Voldemort and not towards himself. Although Voldemort is

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<sup>190</sup> Rowling 2000, p 716-717

<sup>191</sup> Rowling 2000, p 720-721

not to be underestimated, Harry does not fear him. When Dumbledore asks Harry to tell him and Sirius what happened that night he says that although it might seem like a good idea to:

*“postpone the moment when you would have to think about what has happened tonight, I would do it. But I know better. Numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it. You have shown bravery beyond anything I could have expected from you. I ask you to demonstrate your courage one more time. I ask you to tell us what happened.”*<sup>192</sup>

The moral is that you have to face your fears, because when you have, they no longer have control over you. And Voldemort certainly does not have control over Harry. In the last scene of this passage Dumbledore tells Harry something that illustrates how important it is to face your fears and that insight into your identity and maturation is the key to this:

*“I will say it again,” said Dumbledore, as the phoenix rose into the air, and resettled itself upon the perch beside the door. ‘You have shown bravery equal to those who died fighting Voldemort at the height of his powers. You have shouldered a grown wizard’s burden and found yourself equal to it’*<sup>193</sup>

If the fourth book saw Harry struggling against being misunderstood, it is nothing to what he experiences in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. The Ministry of Magic is terrified and does not want to deal with the fact that Voldemort is back again. They try their best to keep it quiet or to convince everyone that it is a lie. Harry is again made out in the paper (which the Ministry controls) as being:

*“this deluded, attention-seeking person who thinks he’s a great tragic hero or something,” said Hermione, very fast, as though it would be less unpleasant for Harry to hear these facts quickly. ‘They keep slipping in snide comments about you. If some far-fetched story appears, they say something like, “A tale worthy of Harry Potter”, and if anyone has a funny accident or anything it’s “Let’s hope he hasn’t got a scar on his forehead or we’ll be asked to worship him next” – ‘*<sup>194</sup>

In order to keep track of if anyone believes Voldemort is back, and especially if Harry and Dumbledore insist upon it, the Ministry appoints the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher at the school. This teacher, Dolores Umbridge, is generally unpleasant and her mission in life seems to be to make life as awful as possible for Harry. When he is given detention for saying that Voldemort is back in her class, he at first does not think the detention will be very bad, since all he gets is lines. But as he starts writing *“I must not tell lies”* over and over again with Dolores’s own quill without being given ink, Harry soon realises that he is writing in his own blood. Every time he writes the line his hand is scratched open and starts bleeding while the text appears in shiny red letters on the paper<sup>195</sup>. This is the way the whole year passes for Harry. His mail is opened, so that he cannot write to Sirius anymore, students are not allowed to talk to teachers about anything but schoolwork, making such everyday pleasantries as going down to Hagrid’s for tea difficult. He is banned for life from playing Quidditch and his broomstick is confiscated. Life is generally miserable and lonely for Harry. The only way he has to relieve his feelings is through the DA (Dumbledore’s Army); the illegal defence group Hermione suggests they start since they are not allowed to practice any spells of a defensive nature anymore since Umbridge took over their class:

*“Harry felt as though he were carrying some kind of talisman inside his chest over the following two weeks, a glowing secret that supported him through Umbridge’s classes and even made it possible for him to smile*

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<sup>192</sup> Rowling 2000, p 753

<sup>193</sup> Rowling 2000, p 757

<sup>194</sup> Rowling 2003, p 87

<sup>195</sup> Rowling 2003, chapter 13

*blandly as he looked into her horrible bulging eyes. He and the DA were resisting her under her very nose, doing the very thing she and the Ministry most feared”<sup>196</sup>*

Things get worse for Harry as Christmas arrives. During the night he has something of a vision. He sees Voldemort’s pet snake attack Mr Weasley, seriously injuring him. When Harry wakes up he immediately tells Dumbledore about this, who ensures that Mr Weasley is moved to the hospital. But the thing that really upsets Harry is that he is convinced that he was not just watching it happen, he felt like he was there, like he was the snake. Harry’s old fears from the second book about being somehow evil are resurrected, and he once again has to deal with his own self-image:

*“He felt dirty, contaminated, as though he were carrying some deadly germ, unworthy to sit on the Underground train back from the hospital with innocent, clean people whose minds and bodies were free of the taint of Voldemort ... A truly terrible thought then occurred to him, a memory bobbing to the surface of his mind, one that made his insides writhe and squirm like serpents. What’s he after, apart from followers? Stuff he can only get by stealth... like a weapon. Something he didn’t have last time. I’m the weapon, Harry thought, and it was as though poison were pumping through his veins, chilling him, bringing him out in a sweat as he swayed with the train through the dark tunnel. I’m the one Voldemort’s trying to use, that’s why they’ve got guards around me everywhere I go, it’s not for my protection, it’s for other people’s, only it’s not working, they can’t have someone on me all the time at Hogwarts... I did attack Mr Weasley last night, it was me. Voldemort made me do it and he could be inside me, listening to my thoughts right now –”<sup>197</sup>*

It turns out that Harry is not possessed, but readers do not know it until after a while, and Harry has had some time to try to figure out how to deal with what he thinks is a darker side of himself. It is not until his friends have cornered him (Harry was hiding) and ask him about all of this, that he is finally convinced he is not evil. Ron was awake when Harry was having the vision and can tell Harry that he definitely did not leave his bed to magically travel to London and back in 10 seconds. And Ginny, who was possessed by Voldemort in the second book and knows what it is like, gives Harry proof that he never was. This is definitely an identity crisis Harry would not have come out of without his friends. The crisis comes to its climax at the end of this book<sup>198</sup>. Voldemort has now realised that there is some kind of connection between him and Harry and uses it to trick Harry into believing that Voldemort has got hold of Sirius and is torturing him. Harry panics and immediately sets out for London and the Ministry of Magic. With him come his friends: Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Neville and Luna. This is the first time he ever brings anyone along when he is facing Voldemort, since they keep insisting that they want to help and that Harry is being silly not to trust them to come. The final part of the puzzle of why Voldemort tried to kill Harry as a child is finally revealed in this book. The whole reason Voldemort lured Harry to the Ministry of Magic and to the Department of Mysteries is to require a prophecy. This prophecy is the reason Voldemort tried to kill Harry in the first place, since Voldemort knows that it tells of how he can be killed and who is going to do it. But unfortunately for Voldemort, he did not hear the whole prophecy and that is why he failed to kill Harry. Alone with his friends in the Ministry, Harry now has to escape from around twelve Death Eaters as well as try to keep everyone safe, including the prophecy. Help arrives in the form of the Order of the Phoenix, but before Dumbledore himself arrives, Bellatrix Lestrange has killed Sirius and Harry runs after her in a blind rage. When Harry and Bellatrix reach the entrance hall to the Ministry they are joined by Voldemort and Dumbledore. Bellatrix escapes but Harry is held back by Dumbledore’s spell and is forced to watch him duel with Voldemort. A duel Voldemort seems to be losing until he suddenly disappears:

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<sup>196</sup> Rowling 2003, p 439

<sup>197</sup> Rowling 2003, p 542-543

<sup>198</sup> Rowling 2003, chapters 31-38

*“Then Harry’s scar burst open and he knew he was dead: it was pain beyond imagining, pain past endurance – He was gone from the hall, he was locked in the coils of a creature with red eyes, so tightly bound that Harry did not know where his body ended and the creature’s began: they were fused together, bound by pain, and there was no escape – And when the creature spoke, it used Harry’s mouth, so that in his agony he felt his jaw move... ‘Kill me now, Dumbledore...’ Blinded and dying, every part of him screaming for release, Harry felt the creature use him again... ‘If death is nothing, Dumbledore, kill the boy...’ Let the pain stop thought Harry... let him kill us... end it, Dumbledore... death is nothing compared to this... And I’ll see Sirius again... And as Harry’s heart filled with emotion, the creature’s coils loosened, the pain was gone; Harry was lying face down on the floor, his glasses gone, shivering as though he lay upon ice, not wood”<sup>199</sup>*

Voldemort's possession of Harry does not last since Voldemort cannot possess Harry without serious risk to himself. Harry gets transported back to Dumbledore’s office after this scene and he waits for Dumbledore to come back to explain what has happened. Because of Sirius’s death Harry is extremely upset and paces round and round the office not even caring that other people arrived at the Ministry in time to see that Voldemort is indeed back, he does not care that everyone now knows he had been telling the truth all along. When Dumbledore gets back and Harry finally gets the explanation he has been desperate for all year he hardly cares about it:

*“There is no shame in what you are feeling, Harry,” said Dumbledore’s voice. ‘On the contrary... the fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength.’ ... ‘My greatest strength is it?’ said Harry, his voice shaking ... It was too much. Harry turned around, shaking with rage. ‘I don’t want to talk about how I feel, all right?’ ‘Harry, suffering like this proves you are still a man! This pain is part of being human – ‘THEN – I – DON’T – WANT – TO – BE – HUMAN!’ Harry roared ... ‘I DON’T CARE!’ Harry yelled ... ‘I’VE HAD ENOUGH, I’VE SEEN ENOUGH, I WANT OUT, I WANT IT TO END, I DON’T CARE ANYMORE – ‘... ‘You do care,’ said Dumbledore. ... ‘You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it.’ ‘I – DON’T!’ Harry screamed, so loudly that he felt his throat might tear ... ‘Oh, yes, you do,’ said Dumbledore, still more calmly. ‘You have now lost your mother, your father, and the closest thing to a parent you have ever known. Of course you care.’ ... ‘It is my fault that Sirius died,’ said Dumbledore clearly. ... ‘Please sit down,’ said Dumbledore. It was not an order, it was a request.”<sup>200</sup>*

When Harry finally gets his explanation, readers might feel that they have known all along what it will be. Dumbledore realises that the time has come to tell Harry the truth and that:

*“tonight, I know you have long been ready for the knowledge I have kept from you for so long ... ‘Voldemort tried to kill you when you were a child because of a prophecy made shortly before your birth. He knew the prophecy had been made, though he did not know its full contents. He set out to kill you when you were still a baby, believing he was fulfilling the terms of the prophecy. He discovered, to his cost, that he was mistaken, when the spell intended to kill you backfired. And so, since his return to his body, and particularly since your extraordinary escape from him last year, he has been determined to hear that prophecy in its entirety. This is the weapon he has been seeking so assiduously since his return: the knowledge of how to destroy you.”<sup>201</sup>*

The prophecy they are talking about is the same one Harry was holding at the Ministry. It was made by Harry’s eccentric Divinations teacher Trelawney, and it said that:

*“‘The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...’”<sup>202</sup>*

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<sup>199</sup> Rowling 2003, p 896-897

<sup>200</sup> Rowling 2003, p 904-907

<sup>201</sup> Rowling 2003, p 922

<sup>202</sup> Rowling 2003, p 924

The prophecy could have referred to Neville instead of Harry, since Neville is also born in July and had parents who had escaped Voldemort three times, and this is why Harry starts to identify with Neville, as stated above in the section on Neville. But Voldemort thought that it referred to Harry, and acting upon that assumption, he made it so and “marked Harry as his equal” (meaning giving him his scar). The power the prophecy says Harry will have, but not Voldemort, is love. His mother’s love worked as a shield when he was little and his love for Sirius and the sorrow of his death was what saved him from being possessed by Voldemort. Love for his family and friends is what will save Harry in the end. Again, Rowling reinforces strong moral values in the series.

The sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, has a different structure than the previous books. This is perhaps because Rowling intends that Dumbledore will die at the end of this book, or perhaps because the shift towards a more sinister mood in the books requires a different setting. Since Harry has found out about the prophecy at the end of the previous book, there are no more reasons for Dumbledore to keep anything from Harry about Voldemort or his intentions:

*“‘So, Harry,’ said Dumbledore, in a businesslike voice. ‘You have been wondering, I am sure, what I have planned for you during these – for want of a better word – lessons?’ ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘Well, I have decided that it is time, now that you know what prompted Lord Voldemort to try and kill you fifteen years ago, for you to be given certain information. ... ‘Sir,’ said Harry tentatively, ‘does what you’re going to tell me have anything to do with the prophecy? Will it help me... survive?’ ‘It has a very great deal to do with the prophecy,’ said Dumbledore, as casually as if Harry had asked him about the next day’s weather, ‘and I certainly hope that it will help you to survive.’”<sup>203</sup>*

Harry and Dumbledore set out to collect as much information about Voldemort as they can since the key to destroying Voldemort lies in understanding him. This process of gathering information about Voldemort continues throughout the entire book and readers do not see the usual discussion after the climax at the end of the book as they have done in the previous ones, but rather the whole book consists of talks between Harry and Dumbledore, a series of important discussions. Harry finds out that Voldemort has created something known as Horcruxes and that they have made him virtually immortal. A Horcrux is an inanimate object that a witch or wizard has attached a part of his or her soul to. That means that even if your body is injured beyond healing, a Horcrux will keep you alive because the piece of your soul hidden in the Horcrux is not dead. But in order to take a part of your soul and make it live somewhere outside your body, you first have to literally rip your soul apart. This is done by performing murder, and Voldemort saved this process for murders he thought particularly important. It turns out that the diary Harry stabbed with the Basilisk fang in the second book was a Horcrux, but there are seven in all. Since Harry is the one destined by the prophecy to kill Voldemort, he needs to destroy all the Horcruxes. The last piece of Voldemort’s soul is in Voldemort himself and that is why Harry has to go after all the Horcruxes before he can face Voldemort for the final confrontation. He has to make sure that Voldemort really can be killed before he tries it. Harry and Dumbledore set out on a hunt for these Horcruxes, and in order to find them, they need to know what places Voldemort might have hidden them in. Hence the need to gather so much information about him – to know what to look for and where to look for it. At last, the importance of one’s identity becomes the distinguishing and outspoken factor in the books.

Harry and Dumbledore have several of these “lessons” about Voldemort. In the first one they talk about Voldemort’s background. Dumbledore shows Harry a memory, playing it like a

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<sup>203</sup> Rowling 2005, p 186-187

film on TV, from someone who met Voldemort's family before he was born. Voldemort belongs to a wizarding family who are the last descendants of Salazar Slytherin, but have become extremely poor. The family is a very old one, noted for:

*"a vein of instability and violence that flourished through the generations due to their habit of marrying their own cousins. Lack of sense coupled with a great liking for grandeur meant that the family gold was squandered several generations before Marvolo was born. He, as you saw, was left in squalor and poverty, with a very nasty temper, a fantastic amount of arrogance and pride, and a couple of family heirlooms that he treasured just as much as his son, and rather more than his daughter."*<sup>204</sup>

Voldemort does not come from a happy family. Even though he never knew his parents his family has had its impact on him. Harry understands through this lesson that Voldemort has a weakness for being of grand decent and appreciates heirlooms. This information is crucial to finding the Horcruxes - two of them are shown in this memory and discussed in the first lesson.

In the second lesson, Harry and Dumbledore visit Dumbledore's own memory, which shows Harry the day when Dumbledore went to see an eleven-year-old Voldemort to tell him that he was welcome to Hogwarts school. This is the same discussion I mentioned above in the section about Voldemort, when we learn that he had *"obvious instincts for cruelty, secrecy and domination"* even as a small boy<sup>205</sup>. Visiting the orphanage where Voldemort stayed as a boy, Dumbledore learns that Voldemort was a bully and that he already has control of his magical powers, using them to control others for his own gain. He also liked to hurt other children or punish them. The final message from this lesson is that Voldemort likes to collect trophies from the people he hurts, like a modern serial killer. If this lesson is put together with the first, we understand that Voldemort is likely to hurt you, just for fun, and that he will keep a remembrance from the occasion, and as grand a remembrance as possible.

In the third lesson, the teenager Voldemort finds out who his parents are, that his father was a Muggle and that it was his mother – a mother who Voldemort had previously despised and had thought *"could not be a witch if she had succumbed to the shameful human weakness of death"*<sup>206</sup> – who had magical blood. Voldemort went to the house where his mother used to live and found his uncle who told him more about his family and who his father was. Dumbledore tells Harry that the same night Voldemort learned about his father, the father and his parents in turn, mysteriously and suddenly died, and that Voldemort was responsible for it. The third lesson also concerns the memory of another teacher at Hogwarts. In it, Voldemort is wearing a ring he had stolen from his uncle. Since he is already wearing the ring, we know that he has already murdered his father even though he is still at school. The memory from the other teacher is the one where Harry sees proof that Voldemort, at the same age that Harry is at the time, was asking about Horcruxes, meaning that he was already thinking about ways to avoid death.

Their next lesson concerns what Voldemort might have been up to after he left school. A memory Dumbledore and Harry visit shows that he was working for the suspicious shop "Borgin and Burkes" in a position as someone who bought valuable objects from customers. Objects that had a grand history. The memory tells them that Voldemort found out where Helga Hufflepuff's cup and Salazar Slytherin's locket were. The locket once belonged to Voldemort's mother and he saw it as rightfully his. His fascination with punishment and of

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<sup>204</sup> Rowling 2005, p 200-201

<sup>205</sup> Rowling 2005, p 259

<sup>206</sup> Rowling 2005, p 339

taking things from the people he hurts tell Harry and Dumbledore that he probably took both the locket and the cup from the customer since she, like Voldemort's father, mysteriously died after meeting him. The second memory Harry and Dumbledore look at that evening is again Dumbledore's and it shows how Voldemort comes to Hogwarts to apply for the job of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. In it, Voldemort wants Dumbledore to call him just that, but Dumbledore sticks with "Tom Riddle", a scene described above in the section about Voldemort. We also learn that Hogwarts is the only place where Voldemort felt at home. Indeed, Dumbledore's memory contains a warning to all teachers to appreciate the importance of taking responsibility for their jobs and to consider possible consequences:

*"'Firstly, and very importantly, Voldemort was, I believe, more attached to this school than he has ever been to a person. Hogwarts was where he had been happiest; the first and only place he had felt at home.' Harry felt slightly uncomfortable at these words, for this was exactly how he felt about Hogwarts, too. 'Secondly, the castle is a stronghold of ancient magic. Undoubtedly Voldemort had penetrated many more of its secrets than most of the students who pass through the place, but he may have felt that there were still mysteries to unravel, stores of magic to tap. 'And thirdly, as a teacher, he would have had great power and influence over young witches and wizards.'"*<sup>207</sup>

Just as in the second book, we are reminded that there are many similarities between Harry and Voldemort. But where Voldemort turned to dark things to ease his situation, Harry turned the other way to deal with the same issues. Readers are again reminded that there is a choice in everything we do.

The last lesson before the climax of the sixth book is about Horcruxes. Harry has recovered a memory that shows that Voldemort knew about Horcruxes, what they do and how to create them. It also showed that Voldemort wanted more than one of them, just to be sure they would work:

*"'But now, Harry, armed with this information, the crucial memory you have succeeded in procuring for us, we are closer to the secret of finishing Lord Voldemort than anyone has ever been before. You heard him, Harry: 'Wouldn't it be better, make you stronger, to have your soul in more pieces... isn't seven the most powerfully magical number...'" Isn't seven the most powerfully magical number. Yes, I think the idea of a seven-part soul would greatly appeal to Lord Voldemort' 'He made seven Horcruxes?' said Harry, horror-struck, while several of the portraits on the wall made similar noises of shock and outrage. 'But they could be anywhere in the world – hidden – buried or invisible – ' I am glad to see you appreciate the magnitude of the problem, said Dumbledore"*<sup>208</sup>

Harry now has everything he needs to finish Voldemort: knowledge that he likes to hurt people and is willing to commit murder, that he likes to take trophies from his victims, that those trophies are usually of great importance, that Voldemort is very fond of Hogwarts, that he knew about Horcruxes, and that he thought it was a very interesting idea to have a seven-part soul. Since Harry has destroyed a Horcrux (the diary from book two) and Dumbledore has destroyed one (the ring Voldemort's uncle wore that was a family heirloom) Harry now also knows how many more there are before Voldemort himself can be killed. From all of these lessons Harry has understood what it means to be destined to be the one to finish Voldemort:

*"he understood at last what Dumbledore had been trying to tell him. It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but Dumbledore knew –*

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<sup>207</sup> Rowling 2005, p 403-404

<sup>208</sup> Rowling 2005, p 470

*and so do I, thought Harry, with a rush of fierce pride, and so did my parents – that there was all the difference in the world.*”<sup>209</sup>

Through these lessons Harry is armed with the knowledge he needs, as well as the attitude, to be the hero he is destined to be.

But the sixth book is not only about dark and depressing things, this is also the book where Harry and Ginny become a couple as I described in the section about Ron. We get an insight into Harry’s feelings when he and Ron stumble upon Ginny and Dean in the deserted corridor, and Harry’s inner conflict escalates after this incident. Rowling describes Harry’s feelings (before Ron knows about this) as a monster that either growls or purrs depending on what Ginny is doing at the moment. Another amusing detail in this book is Fred and George’s newly opened joke-shop. They are now old enough to have left Hogwarts and have their own shop in Diagon Alley in London. While everyone else is afraid of Voldemort and his followers and tries to be as inconspicuous as possible, Fred and George have decorated their shop with eye-catching gigantic purple posters in the windows that say *“Why Are You Worrying About You-Know-Who? You SHOULD Be Worrying About U-NO-POO – the Constipation Sensation That’s Gripping the Nation!”*<sup>210</sup> Although some of these lighter contents might be childish they are a very effective break from the otherwise serious tone in this book, offering readers a bit of a break.

As already mentioned above, the sixth book ends with Death Eaters invading Hogwarts. While this happens Harry and Dumbledore have been away from Hogwarts, hunting down another Horcrux. But Dumbledore is weakened from the effort of acquiring the Horcrux and is overpowered by Draco Malfoy of all people. As Harry is immobilised by a spell, and hidden under his Invisibility Cloak, he can but watch as Dumbledore is killed. Readers have been encouraged to question and dislike Snape from the first book, and since he is the one who kills Dumbledore, readers are not likely to doubt his guilt. Snape runs away from the castle with Draco Malfoy and Harry never manages to catch up to him before they disappear into the night. The book ends with Dumbledore’s funeral and with Harry’s determination to keep his promise to Dumbledore and go after Voldemort:

*“Then I’ve got to track down the rest of the Horcruxes, haven’t I?” said Harry, his eyes upon Dumbledore’s white tomb, reflected in the water on the other side of the lake. ‘That’s what he wanted me to do, that’s why he told me all about them. If Dumbledore was right – and I’m sure he was – there are still four of them out there. I’ve got to find them and destroy them and then I’ve got to go after the seventh bit of Voldemort’s soul, the bit that’s still in his body, and I’m the one who’s going to kill him.’*”<sup>211</sup>

This is the same scene where Hermione says that she and Ron will go with Harry to the end, confirming their equal desire to see Voldemort finished and their equal importance to achieving this.

The last book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, begins with Harry turning seventeen. Since wizards come of age at seventeen, Harry is now considered to be an adult man. When Harry comes of age, the spell that has protected him from Voldemort will break and that is why he and the Dursleys have to leave. The first thing that happens is that Harry says goodbye to the Dursleys for the last time, and to his amazement, Dudley is quite polite towards him, very slightly redeeming himself for sixteen years of bullying. The second thing

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<sup>209</sup> Rowling 2005, p 479

<sup>210</sup> Rowling 2005, p 113

<sup>211</sup> Rowling 2005, p 606



that happens is that Harry's friends arrive to play decoys in the plan to get Harry away in safety. Rowling plays on Harry's age in the beginning chapters, reminding readers of things like when he used to sleep under the stairs, or when Dudley got attacked by Dementors outside the house, and as they prepare to depart and Harry climbs into the sidecar of Sirius's motorbike he says:

*"'Is this it? Is this Sirius's bike?' 'The very same,' said Hagrid, beaming down at Harry. 'An' the last time you was on it, Harry, I could fit yeh in one hand!' Harry could not help but feel a little humiliated as he got into the sidecar. It placed him several feet below everybody else: Ron smirked at the sight of him sitting there like a child in a bumper car."*<sup>212</sup>

The effect is that readers come to think of how far Harry has come in terms of maturation and finding his place in the world since the first book, once again drawing attention to identity development, comparing the starts of all the books to each other, leading up to this last one. But not all of Harry's friends make it alive from this initial escape. His snowy owl Hedwig is the first to go, followed by the grizzled Mad-Eye Moody. George Weasley has his ear blasted off by a curse. We are also reminded of the innocence Harry kept in the third book when he would not let Wormtail be killed. As he is attacked during his escape, he refuses to kill a person he knows to be controlled by the same spell Voldemort tried to use on Harry at the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. When Harry refrains from killing him, the Death Eaters know he is the real Harry and not one of the decoys. Harry defends himself and explains why he would not kill Stan:

*"'They recognised you? But how? What had you done?' 'I...' Harry tried to remember; the whole journey seemed like a blur of panic and confusion. 'I saw Stan Shunpike... you know, the bloke who was the conductor of the Knight Bus? And I tried to Disarm him instead of – well, he doesn't know what he's doing, does he? He must be Imperiused!' Lupin looked aghast. 'Harry, the time for Disarming is past! These people are trying to capture and kill you! At least Stun if you aren't prepared to kill!' ... Lupin was making Harry feel idiotic, and yet there was still a grain of defiance inside him. 'I won't blast people out of my way just because they're there,' said Harry. 'That's Voldemort's job.'"*<sup>213</sup>

Harry goes further to keep the innocence he has worked so hard to attain. Since all of them, decoys, protectors and the real Harry, were attacked the second they left the Dursleys house, they know someone has betrayed them. But Harry disagrees and refuses to doubt his friends:

*"'No,' Harry said aloud, and they all looked at him, surprised: the Firewhisky seemed to have amplified his voice. 'I mean... if somebody made a mistake,' Harry went on, 'and let something slip, I know they didn't mean to do it. It's not their fault,' he repeated, again a little louder than he would usually have spoken. 'We've got to trust each other. I trust all of you, I don't think anyone in this room would ever sell me to Voldemort.' More silence followed his words. They were all looking at him; Harry felt a little hot again, and drank some more Firewhisky for something to do. As he drank, he thought of Mad-Eye. Mad-Eye had always been scathing about Dumbledore's willingness to trust people. 'Well said, Harry,' said Fred unexpectedly. 'Yeah, 'ear, 'ear,' said George, with half a glance at Fred, the corner of whose mouth twitched. Lupin was wearing an odd expression as he looked at Harry: it was close to pitying. 'You think I'm a fool?' demanded Harry. 'No, I think you're like James,' said Lupin, 'who would have regarded it as the height of dishonour to mistrust his friends.'"*<sup>214</sup>

If the interjections of jokes and amusing comments were important in the sixth book, they are even more important in this one. By far the most serious book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* needs these moments of humour to lift the mood. Ron's birthday present to Harry, a book called "Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches", is such an example. Harry opens the

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<sup>212</sup> Rowling 2007, p 50-51

<sup>213</sup> Rowling 2007, p 63-64

<sup>214</sup> Rowling 2007, p 71-72

gift away from everyone else and is told by Ron that it is “*pure gold*” and that it “*explains everything you need to know about girls*”<sup>215</sup>.

On the subject of girls, Harry and Ginny have now split up because of his quest for Horcruxes. In the second book, Voldemort targeted Ginny because she was Harry’s best friends’ sister and Harry fears what Voldemort would do to Ginny if he knew they were together. But this does not stop Harry from thinking of her often and before the trio of friends set out after the wedding he and Ginny share a tender moment alone in her room at the Burrow. Ron of course, is upset and wants Harry to stop “*messing her around*”<sup>216</sup> and leading her on if they cannot be together. The inner emotional lives of Harry, Ron and Hermione are explored in more detail in this book, especially when it comes to Ron and Harry. Harry starts to be more aware of how he affects those around him – how what he says and does influences moods, morale and reactions in Ron and Hermione. The scene described about Ron, when he destroys Slytherin’s locket, the next one of the Horcruxes, contains reflections on feelings between the two friends. Harry acknowledges Ron’s importance to the quest of destroying Voldemort and to his value as a friend. This is what truly balances their relationship, mutual respect:

*“When Ron offered the sword, however, Harry shook his head. ‘No, you should do it.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because you got the sword out of the pool, I think it’s supposed to be you.’ He was not being kind or generous. As certainly as he had known that the doe was benign, he knew that Ron had to be the one to wield the sword. Dumbledore had at least taught Harry something about certain kinds of magic, of the incalculable power of certain acts.”*<sup>217</sup>

After Ron has stabbed the Horcrux Harry tells him how sorely Ron has been missed:

*“With you gone...’ He could not finish; it was only now that Ron was here again that Harry fully realised how much his absence had cost them.”*<sup>218</sup>

After many ins and outs Harry and the others end up at the Malfoys’. While Bellatrix amuses herself with torturing Hermione, Harry and Ron are locked in the cellar, trying to find a way to escape. The one who is sent to fetch them to be interrogated next is Wormtail. Wormtail, who has gone the opposite way from Harry and his friends: starting out as the boy Peter Pettigrew, spending many years the rat Scabbers and ending up as the pathetic Wormtail, servant to Voldemort. Harry’s choice to refrain from killing Wormtail in the third book is justified as they make a run for it when Wormtail opens the cellar door to collect them. Wormtail first tries to hurt them and prevent them from escaping, but Harry reminds him of their previous encounter:

*“‘You’re going to kill me?’ Harry choked, attempting to prise off the metal fingers. ‘After I saved your life? You owe me, Wormtail!’ The silver fingers slackened.”*<sup>219</sup>

The innocence Harry showed in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is what saves his life in the seventh book, underlining the continuous storyline and that all events are interconnected. The inner emotions and understandings of Harry are further explored after they have escaped from the Malfoys’. Dobby the House-Elf is the one who help them accomplish this but he is killed in the process. Harry buries the Elf, by hand, not by using magic. And as he stands in the slowly growing hole in the ground he has an epiphany:

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<sup>215</sup> Rowling 2007, p 97

<sup>216</sup> Rowling 2007, p 100

<sup>217</sup> Rowling 2007, p 304

<sup>218</sup> Rowling 2007, p 308

<sup>219</sup> Rowling 2007, p 380

*“He dug with a kind of fury, relishing the manual work, glorying in the non-magic of it, for every drop of his sweat and every blister felt like a gift to the elf who had saved their lives. His scar burned, but he was master of the pain; he felt it, yet was apart from it. He had learned control at last, learned to shut his mind to Voldemort, the very thing Dumbledore had wanted him to learn from Snape. Just as Voldemort had not been able to possess Harry while Harry was consumed with grief for Sirius, so his thoughts could not penetrate Harry now, while he mourned Dobby. Grief, it seemed, drove Voldemort out... though Dumbledore, of course, would have said that it was love...”*<sup>220</sup>

Harry discovers that the roles between him and Voldemort have reversed. Voldemort could not control him in the graveyard after the Triwizard Tournament and he can not read Harry's mind now. It is Harry who is in control and can choose to look into Voldemort's mind if he needs to. This reversal comes from Harry's superior development to Voldemort's. Harry has come further in developing his identity, and as said above, the key to destroying Voldemort lies in understanding him:

*“he wanted Ron and Hermione to understand about Gringotts before they spoke to Ollivander. ‘I think he would have envied anyone who had a key to a Gringotts vault. I think he'd have seen it as a real symbol of belonging to the wizarding world. And don't forget, he trusted Bellatrix and her husband. They were his most devoted servants before he fell, and they went looking for him after he vanished. He said it the night he came back, I heard him. Harry rubbed his scar. ‘I don't think he'd have told Bellatrix it was a Horcrux, though. He never told Lucius Malfoy the truth about the diary. He probably told her it was a treasured possession and asked her to place it in her vault. The safest place in the world for anything you want to hide, Hagrid told me... except for Hogwarts.’ When Harry had finished speaking, Ron shook his head. ‘You really understand him.’ ‘Bits of him,’ said Harry.”*<sup>221</sup>

In the end Harry learns what he has to do in order to finally be rid of Voldemort once and for all, and it is not something to look forward to. Snape's memory of his discussion with Dumbledore tells Harry that:

*“‘Tell him that on the night Voldemort tried to kill him, when Lily cast her own life between them as a shield, the Killing Curse rebounded upon Lord Voldemort, and a fragment of Voldemort's soul was blasted apart from the whole, and latched itself on to the only living soul left in that collapsing building. Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry, and it is that which gives him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort's mind that he has never understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to, and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die.’ ... ‘So the boy... the boy must die?’ asked Snape, quite calmly. ‘And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential.’ ... Snape looked horrified. ‘You have kept him alive so that he can die at the right moment?’”*<sup>222</sup>

Horrible as this is, it is not entirely news to Harry. He has come into contact with death many times before. Through the loss of his parents it has been a large part of his life. The deaths of Sirius, Dumbledore, Hedwig, Fred, Cedric, Lupin, Tonks and many others have made Harry think about death many times before he hears this last piece of information. Indeed, since most of the people Harry has cared for most are now dead, those that are dead do not scare him. He tries to explain this to Hermione when they discuss the Hallows but she does not understand and he only succeeds in frightening her, talking about living with dead people.<sup>223</sup> After all this time Harry does no longer fear death. But even though he does not fear death, it is not something he wants or looks forward to. As he sets off to face Voldemort he sees Ginny and the sight of her sums up his feelings:

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<sup>220</sup> Rowling 2007, p 387

<sup>221</sup> Rowling 2007, p 397

<sup>222</sup> Rowling 2007, p 550-551

<sup>223</sup> Rowling 2007, p 346

*“Ripples of cold undulated over Harry’s skin. He wanted to shout out to the night, he wanted Ginny to know that he was there, he wanted her to know where he was going. He wanted to be stopped, to be dragged back, to be sent back home... But he was home. Hogwarts was the first and best home he had known. He and Voldemort and Snape, the abandoned boys, had all found home here...”*<sup>224</sup>

And so he faces Voldemort one more time and the end readers dread comes to pass: Voldemort uses the curse we know will kill Harry. But Harry does not seem to die when this happens. He finds himself in a very strange place full of white mist and there he meets Dumbledore, who this last time is the one who explains everything that has happened. Harry asks him if he is dead and Dumbledore answers *“That is the question, isn’t it? On the whole, dear boy, I think not.”*<sup>225</sup> The fact that Harry does not fear death is the very thing that made him survive:

*“‘But...’ Harry raised his hand instinctively towards the lightning scar. It did not seem to be there. ‘But I should have died – I didn’t defend myself! I meant to let him kill me!’ ‘And that,’ said Dumbledore, ‘will, I think, have made all the difference.’ ... ‘Explain,’ said Harry. ‘But you already know,’ said Dumbledore. ... ‘I let him kill me,’ said Harry. ‘Didn’t I?’ ‘You did,’ said Dumbledore, nodding. ‘Go on!’ ‘So the part of his soul that was in me...’ Dumbledore nodded still more enthusiastically, urging Harry onwards, a broad smile of encouragement on his face. ‘... has it gone?’ ‘Oh, yes!’ said Dumbledore. ‘Yes, he destroyed it. Your soul is whole, and completely your own, Harry.’ ... ‘But if Voldemort used the Killing Curse,’ Harry started again, ‘and nobody died for me this time – how can I be alive?’ ‘I think you know,’ said Dumbledore. ‘Think back. Remember what he did, in his ignorance, in his greed and cruelty.’ ... ‘He took my blood,’ said Harry. ‘Precisely!’ said Dumbledore. ‘He took your blood and rebuilt his living body with it! Your blood in his veins, Harry, Lily’s protection inside both of you! He tethered you to life while he lives!’ ... ‘He took your blood believing it would strengthen him. He took into his body a tiny part of the enchantment your mother laid upon you when she died for you. His body keeps her sacrifice alive, and while that enchantment survives, so do you and so does Voldemort’s last hope for himself.’”*<sup>226</sup>

In the end, Voldemort’s own evil is his destruction; his failure to understand is the thing that undoes him. In trying to strengthen himself, he made sure Harry would be the stronger one. And it is Harry’s understanding of this that has armed him against coming to any harm from Voldemort.

The postlude lets us know that Harry is now married to Ginny, their interrupted relationship back on track again, and that they have three children: James, Albus and Lily. The last words in the book are: *“The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well.”*<sup>227</sup> Harry’s own process of finding his identity, of maturing and developing the qualities that he has needed to be able to cope with facing Voldemort has come to their climax and he can now get on with his life the way everyone else does, without having evil wizards breathing down your neck every chance they get.

This part about Harry has turned out much longer than the parts about the other characters and it is partly fused with the part about Voldemort, and I could easily have moved some of these parts to the section about Voldemort. My defence for keeping to this structure is the same as what Dumbledore tells Snape: *“In the case of Harry and Lord Voldemort, to speak of one is to speak of the other.”*<sup>228</sup> Since Harry is the main character, lending his name to the series, I thought this longer draft belonged to this section.

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<sup>224</sup> Rowling 2007, p 558

<sup>225</sup> Rowling 2007, p 567

<sup>226</sup> Rowling 2007, p 567-568

<sup>227</sup> Rowling 2007, p 607

<sup>228</sup> Rowling 2007, p 549

### 4.3) Swedish prerequisites

This section will present the Swedish National Curriculum and the Syllabus for the subject of English for upper secondary school as set by the Swedish National Agency for Education, as well as pedagogical views of teaching English in a language classroom with special focus on reading activities. Or in other words, the theoretical backgrounds and basis for the framework Swedish upper secondary teachers and students work within. This chapter will also explain how books can be used in a more concrete way in a classroom and how this contributes to maturation. Thus connecting this issue with the one on the need for reference introduced in the section on identity development.

#### 4.3.1) National curriculum

In Sweden, there are materials available from the Swedish National Agency for Education regarding both national curriculum and syllabuses for individual courses. In the beginning of the chapter 4.2) Learning from the characters, I wrote about the Swedish National Curriculum and what it says about democracy being the basis for school activities. A closer look at the curriculum reveals that this approach is further explained and that it is taken very seriously. The overall democratic values must be observed and when it comes to the individual students:

*“All pupils shall be stimulated into growing with different tasks and have the opportunity to develop in accordance with their own abilities. ... Pupils shall be conscious that new knowledge and insights are the preconditions for personal development. ... The school shall strengthen the pupils’ belief in themselves and give them a belief in the future.”<sup>229</sup>*

Note the repeated use of the word *shall*. There are no vague hints or phrases like “it would be good if the students learned this”. A deliberate concern for individual students and their identity development is emphasised. Because of this it is essential that teachers have some insight into what affects identity development.

Later on in the curriculum are stated specific goals to strive for and to be achieved in Swedish schools. One of these goals is that *“the school shall strive to ensure that all pupils believe in their own ability and opportunities for development”<sup>230</sup>* The role of Swedish schools is thus not only to impart knowledge in school subjects, which is of course the main objective, but also to involve itself in the social upbringing of tomorrow’s citizens. This is something Bartholdsson reflects on. She states that Swedish schools have taken upon themselves to assist parents in the upbringing of students and that schools also to some extent take over the parenting role while the students are at school. She also says that the national curriculum determines that the school shall function as a help and complement to students’ home environment.<sup>231</sup> The additional parental role of Swedish schools is investigated and both positive and negative consequences are part of the debate<sup>232</sup>. A positive consequence is, for example, the encouragement of a “free and independent individual” that can shape his or her life in whatever way desired, and a negative one is, for example, that what “cultural diversity” means is not explained or defined, and that even though students are encouraged to make

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<sup>229</sup> Lpf 94, p 7

<sup>230</sup> Lpf 94, p 10

<sup>231</sup> Bartholdsson, Åsa, *På jakt efter rätt inställning – att fostra positiva och reflekterande elever i en svensk skola*, in Persson, Anders (Red.), *Skolkulturer*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2003, p 125

<sup>232</sup> Bartholdsson 2003

decisions based on their cultural background, this only applies as long as it does not conflict with a majority vote<sup>233</sup>.

Those interested in the Swedish National Agency for Education and/or its overall curriculum or syllabuses for individual courses, can find this information, available in many different languages, for free on their website: [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se). It should also be said that curriculum and syllabuses are made available to students at the start of the school year (normally at the start of every school year), stressing the importance of these values.

#### 4.3.2) Syllabus for the subject of English

In this section it is worth mentioning something about the development of the subject of English. The syllabuses for the courses in upper secondary school underwent a reformation in the year 2000 and new syllabuses were created by the Swedish National Agency for Education. The previous versions were from the year 1992. However, both sets of syllabuses are tied to the curriculum issued in 1994. There are some differences between the versions from 1992 and 2000 that have made an impact on today's teaching methods.

In the introductory part of the syllabus for English we can read about relevant information on the subject. Malmberg writes about differences and development between the syllabuses of 1992 and 2000<sup>234</sup>. In the syllabus from 1992 the course English A consisted of 110 points, corresponding to 110 hours of education in the subject. Similarly, English B consisted of 40 points. English A was taken by everyone, but English B only by those who planned to continue with further studies after upper secondary school. In the syllabus from 2000, the points of the course no longer correspond to number of hours of education, but to the work effort expected by the students. Course points are now dividable by 50, with the upper limit of 200 points for one course. All the English courses in Swedish upper secondary schools today are worth 100 points. English A is, in the syllabus from 2000, a core subject, meaning it is obligatory for all students. English B is obligatory for four of the seventeen national programs (Social Science, Natural Science, Technology and Arts) and available as an independent course for the other programs. Since upper secondary schools offer students the opportunity to influence their programs, English C is available, if the student so chooses, as a core subject for those programs where English B is obligatory. For other students English C is available as an independent course<sup>235</sup>.

The structure of the syllabus for English contains one overall section and one individual section for each of the courses A, B and C<sup>236</sup>. The sections put together have the topics: Purpose of the subject, Structure and character of the subject, Goals to strive for, Goals to be achieved after the completion of the course and Criteria for all the different grades (dealt with grade by grade). We can thus read about the overall purpose of English as a school subject. It is stated that an ability to use English is essential for: studies, travels to other countries and social as well as professional interaction. These individual purposes are illustrated further and it is explained that these purposes are the reason the subject of English has a central role in

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<sup>233</sup> Runfors, Ann, *Fostran till frihet? Värdeladdade visioner, positionerande praktiker och diskriminerande ordningar*, in Sawyer, Lena & Kamali, Masoud (Red.), *Utbildningens dilemma. Demokratiska ideal och andrafixerande praxis*, A part of SOU 2006:40 Rapport av Utredningen om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering, Stockholm, 2006, p 139-142

<sup>234</sup> Malmberg, Per, *De moderna språken i grundskolan och gymnasieskolan från 1960 och framåt*, in Skolverket, *Gy 2000:18. Språk. Grundskola och gymnasieskola. Kursplaner, betygskriterier och kommentarer*. Stockholm, Skolverket och Fritzes, 2000

<sup>235</sup> Malmberg 2000, p 19-20

<sup>236</sup> Skolverket, *Gy 2000:18. Språk. Grundskola och gymnasieskola. Kursplaner, betygskriterier och kommentarer*. Stockholm, Skolverket och Fritzes, 2000, p 84-95

Swedish schools<sup>237</sup>. In other words, English is seen as a tool or key to a wider personal world for the individual students. The purpose of the subject immediately classifies it as important for the students' identity development and self-realisation.

On the overall level the subject of English has 10 goals to strive for<sup>238</sup>. They illustrate skills in the four traditional aspect of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. But they also have the added perspective of communication as the most important issue. The addition of the communicative aspect is the major difference between the syllabuses from 1992 and 2000. The issue of communication also incorporates grammar and vocabulary in order to achieve successful communication. Concerning goals to strive for, the school in its teaching of English should aim to ensure that pupils:

- 1) develop their ability to communicate and interact in English in a variety of contexts concerning different issues and in different situations,
- 2) deepen their understanding of English as spoken in different parts of the world, and improve their ability to understand the contents communicated by different media,
- 3) develop their ability to take part in conversations, discussions and negotiations and express with subtlety their own views and consider those of others,
- 4) develop their ability to speak in a well structured way, adapted to the subject and situation,
- 5) deepen their ability to read, understand and reflect critically over non-fiction and specialist texts within their area of interest and competence or studies,
- 6) improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives,
- 7) refine their ability to express themselves in writing in different contexts, as well as develop their awareness of language and creativity,
- 8) develop their ability to analyse, work with and improve their language in the direction of greater clarity, variation and formal accuracy,
- 9) reflect over ways of living, cultural traditions and social conditions in English-speaking countries, as well as develop greater understanding and tolerance of other people and cultures,
- 10) take increasing responsibility for developing their language ability.

It is worth noticing here that the actual wording of the syllabus is hard to translate. In English, calling a student "it" would be offensive, but Swedish has a possessive pronoun tied to a gender-neutral subject, eliminating the need to specify students as "him" or "her", instead simply addressing "the student". Thus encouraging the equality between men and women expressed in the national curriculum as mentioned above in the beginning of chapter 4.2) Learning from the characters. The translation used here is from the Swedish National Agency of Education as seen on their webpage [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se) under the link "Syllabuses and

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<sup>237</sup> Gy 2000:18, p 84

<sup>238</sup> Gy 2000:18, p 84-85

grading criteria”<sup>239</sup>. Another thing worth mentioning is that these goals clearly not only concern skills specific to language, but also how the language should be used. Linguistically, the students should be at a level that allows them to be able to use English in order to express themselves in a refined and creative way talking about their own opinions, as well as considering those of others, including being tolerant towards other people and cultures. We can clearly see that maturation is closely tied to language use.

In the section on structure and character of the subject<sup>240</sup>, it is added that students should learn to develop strategies to avoid, prevent and solve language problems and misunderstandings. Examples of such strategies are reformulation, synonyms, questions and body language. The consequence of such strategies is that students gain confidence in their ability to use English by learning to cope with errors and misunderstandings. Typical situations where students encounter English outside of school are also mentioned, like TV, music, books and other media. Teachers are encouraged to use these situations as learning opportunities. Since goal 10 in the overall goals to strive for states that students shall take responsibility for their own learning process, knowing what English students meet in their everyday life is an important observation as it may help the students gain insight into their own learning opportunities. This everyday use of English is an ingredient in the communicative approach. As Hedge says, a simple example like “It’s so hot today” can mean different things:

*“It might be a statement about the physical atmosphere, a request to open the window, or an attempt to elicit the offer of a cold drink.”*<sup>241</sup>

Learning to decipher meaning is certainly an important part of communicative skills. Håkansson describes deciphering meaning (partly quoting another author) as having to do with both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. It is about knowing “*when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner*”<sup>242</sup>.

The goals and criteria from the individual courses in English are meant to progress over time. The same goals apply in all the courses; instead of adding new goals, the old ones are to be even further developed than before, creating a natural progression. Relevant additions from the goals of the individual courses to the overall goals are for example that the students shall want, dare to venture into and be able to participate in a conversation on familiar topics and exchange information, personal opinions and experiences<sup>243</sup>. When it comes to the need for reflection, critical approach and evaluation, these things are given greater and greater emphasis in the courses. There is clearly an importance of students being able to use the language in a highly personal way. Indeed, being able to express one’s own opinion as well as reacting to others’ is what characterises the process of social reference in terms of identity development mentioned above. The subject of English seems to have excellent opportunities for discussions on identity. The concern expressed for students’ personal development in the national curriculum can be clearly seen in the syllabuses for English.

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<sup>239</sup> accessed 2008-11-23

<sup>240</sup> Gy 2000:18, p 85-86

<sup>241</sup> Hedge, Tricia, *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p 48

<sup>242</sup> Håkansson, Ulla, *Moderna språk i gymnasieskolan*, in Fern, Rolf & Malmberg, Per (Red.), *Språkboken. En antologi om språkundervisning och språkinläring*, Stockholm, Skolverket, 2001, p 60

<sup>243</sup> Gy 2000:18, p 87



### 4.3.3) Reading as a classroom activity

There is whole chapter on reading as a classroom activity in Hedge's book. In its introduction she mentions something that is very interesting concerning reader response for someone reading a text in a second language. She says that:

*"the term 'interactive' ... has been used to describe the second language reading process. The term can be interpreted in two ways. First, it describes a dynamic relationship with a text as the reader 'struggles' to make sense of it. ... In trying to make sense of the text, you were undoubtedly involved in an active process, a process ... called a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'. In playing the game and engaging in the struggle, you combined information from the text and knowledge you brought with you to reading it. From this perspective, reading can be seen as a kind of dialogue between the reader and the text, or even between the reader and the author. There is an interesting distinction to be made here: the reader may be interested in constructing a personal interpretation of a text or, on the other hand, may be more interested in trying to get at the author's original intentions. 'Making sense of a text' can imply either approach."*<sup>244</sup>

It would appear that a reader who is confronted with a text in a second language (which the *Harry Potter* books present to a Swedish reader) is automatically engaged in a process of trying to make sense of the text: in trying to translate or comprehend the text, the process of contemplating meaning is embedded. The identification process between reader and text that has been referred to throughout this essay seems to occur naturally. If the teacher then adds an exercise or two as a task to go with the reading this process might be enhanced even more. It is important to be aware that even if a teacher adds a task to the reading, this does not have to control the students' reading experience. The task can, for example, be for the student to point out his/her most important observations on the text.

Hedge makes another important observation in her chapter on reading. She talks about critical reading and its purposes and states that:

*"Critical reading views reading as a social process, texts are constructed in certain ways by writers in order to shape the perceptions of readers towards acceptance of the underlying ideology of the text. To take a simple example, a political writer using the pronoun 'we' attempts to create a bond with the reader"*<sup>245</sup>

This is why it is so important to reflect on what we read: to know if we as readers might be affected by the text. Sometimes this is not a bad thing, as indeed this essay argues, an example can be if we are reading a text that encourages understanding and empathy. But on the other hand it can be a very bad thing, like if you are reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and suddenly find yourself with anti-Semitic opinions. But this is also important for a teacher when setting course materials. By choosing certain materials it is inevitable for some values to come across by your very choice of texts. This is why Hedge also argues that *"controversial areas should have discussion rather than instruction at its core"*<sup>246</sup>. In this way a teacher can direct the spotlight to certain issues without deciding what the students should think about the issue at hand. It is possible to avoid telling someone what to think and instead focus on acquiring a critical approach, but it takes a bit of planning.

According to Lundahl, contemplating the author's intention and the readers' interpretation is what characterises a reader response approach<sup>247</sup>. As such, reading is a socio-cultural experience where there is always interaction. The interaction can, for example, be between

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<sup>244</sup> Hedge 2000, p 188-189

<sup>245</sup> Hedge 2000, p 197

<sup>246</sup> Hedge 2000, p 200

<sup>247</sup> Lundahl, Bo, *Att läsa aktivt, kreativt och kritiskt*, in Ferm, Rolf & Malmberg, Per (Red.), *Språkboken. En antologi om språkundervisning och språkinläring*, Stockholm, Skolverket, 2001, p 94-95

different readers talking about their opinions of the text or it can be between author and reader. He goes on to say that reading is not only about the individual's way of reading different texts, but also about previous reading experiences, the purpose of our reading and the wider context for what we understand and how we understand it. We learn to read from, and interacting with, others. This strongly resembles the theories about identity development discussed in section 4.1.1) Identity development. Lundahl goes on to say a few words that summarize how reader response and identity go together. He says that after writing a text the author's work is finished and the text now passes to the reader. According to this point of view a text can only be understood through the readers' previous knowledge and reading experiences. The reader's background, feelings, knowledge and experiences and all the associations that grow through the reading process is at the heart of understanding a text. Since we share values and experiences with many others, people with similar reading experiences will understand the same text in a similar way<sup>248</sup>.

In today's modern Swedish view on Pedagogics the influence from the socio-cultural theory is prominent. Igländ and Dysthe describe a few central aspects to this pedagogical approach contributed by the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin. They explain how all methods of communication are parts of an ever growing chain of communication. Everything a person says is in response to something – a book read, a previous comment, a thought expressed by someone else, just to mention some examples. In this sense we are always part of a socio-cultural context and world. What is expressed can vary from confirmation to rejection. The last stage of the chain is that the message is directed towards someone, either a specific individual or even an unknown crowd. The entire chain of communication thus consists of past, present and future<sup>249</sup>. For the purposes of this essay the author Rowling is then a part of the past (having written and formed the ideas in the books reacted to here), my future students will constitute the present (their reading experience of the books) and the students' reactions will make up future responses (expressed in the classroom).

Lev Vygotskij is another Russian who worked in a very similar field to Bakhtin, but with a clear-cut pedagogical angle. He is the one who contributed most to the socio-cultural theory and is often mentioned as its creator. Part of this theory is mediation. Dysthe describes mediation as all available forms of support or help used by the individual throughout the learning process, and that this can be either people or objects<sup>250</sup>. Mediation is about using intellectual and practical tools in order to understand the world around us. Since neither people nor even physical tools are severed from a socio-cultural historical context the emphasis on people being part of a chain of events is repeated. The tools used for mediation contain previous knowledge. Vygotskij would undoubtedly say that *Harry Potter* functions as a tool that mediates students' understanding of the world they live in.

But it is not only people and things that can mediate knowledge, both Vygotskij and Bakhtin regard language as a tool for mediation. Like physical objects and people, words carry previous meaning. The word "communist" for example will mean different things for a Russian and an American, being either a big part of a nation's history or something that was to be fought against. As soon as we start communicating we express both the immediate meaning of the word (the meaning you can look up in a dictionary) as well as values inherited from previous experiences and the context of those. As bearer of meaning language is a

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<sup>248</sup> Lundahl 2001, p 95

<sup>249</sup> Igländ, Mari-Ann & Dysthe, Olga, *Mikhail Bakhtin och sociokulturell teori*, in Dysthe, Olga (Red.), *Dialog, samspel och lärande*, translation by Inger Lindelöf, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2003a, p. 99-101

<sup>250</sup> Dysthe, Olga, *Sociokulturella teoriperspektiv på kunskap och lärande*, in Dysthe, Olga (Red.), *Dialog, samspel och lärande*, translation by Inger Lindelöf, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2003, p. 45-46

powerful tool to learning. Dysthe says that language and communication are not only means for learning but the very condition for learning and thinking to occur. We inherit ways of speaking, writing, defining and solving problems and use these for our own purposes. Communication is also a link between culture and the human thought process. We use language to understand and think for ourselves as well as conveying what is understood to others<sup>251</sup>. Reading is then, in a language classroom, both a way for students to understand various situations as well as a tool to use in order to be able to express themselves. It is this process of assigning meaning in order to understand communication that is described as internalisation by Igland and Dysthe: the process of acquiring something from someone else and then make it your own in order to master that knowledge<sup>252</sup>. This description of internalization is very much like the one made above by Wrangsjö in chapter 4.1.1) Identity development.

Bakhtin makes one last important contribution to this essay with his dialogicicm. His term is about, not surprisingly, the importance of dialogue. As shown above communication is a crucial point to learning and understanding. If a teacher wishes the students to learn something they, per definition, have to be allowed to communicate about what is being taught or learned. Igland and Dysthe warn teachers that trying to guide students too strongly to make certain conclusions might have an opposite effect. If the teacher has control of what is being said, to the point of having a monologue, the students are denied the possibility to communicate through dialogue and make their own conclusions and internalize knowledge<sup>253</sup>.

In order to achieve successful communication in the classroom it can be very helpful to draw on two of Bae's concepts: definisjonsmakt and anerkjennelse. The Norwegian author's article concerns how the relationship between teacher and student (or adult and child) will affect the learning process and the two concepts are of great importance to this. She describes definisjonsmakt (which can be roughly translated as "power to define") as a position of power adults have over children, or someone in a position of higher authority has over someone with lower (or no) authority. What is defined is the person with the lower authority's view of him- or herself. The term concerns things like how adults or teachers respond to children's' or students' communication, what words are used by the adults to describe (and thereby assigning meaning to) the children's' actions and experiences and what is reacted to or not. By using their definisjonsmakt the adults are deciding what is important or not for the children, which thoughts and experiences that matter. This power can be used in a way that will increase the confidence and development of the children or students, or in the opposite way, creating insecure children and students with a low self-confidence<sup>254</sup>. In order to exercise the power to define communication in a positive manner, Bae suggests you use an anerkjennelse way of approach. Anerkjennelse (a quantified form of the word "acknowledgement"), Bae stresses, is not a method in itself, but something to keep in mind as you talk to others. She goes on to state that the term means that you view the person you are talking to as an individual with supreme rights over their own experiences, a person that is worth understanding and respect. Anerkjennelse also means that you acknowledge the other person and act with empathy towards him or her<sup>255</sup>.

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<sup>251</sup> Dysthe 2003, p 47-50

<sup>252</sup> Igland, Mari-Ann & Dysthe, Olga, *Vygotskij och sociokulturell teori*, in Dysthe, Olga (Red.), *Dialog, samspel och lärande*, translation by Inger Lindelöf, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2003b, p 79

<sup>253</sup> Igland & Dysthe 2003a, p 105

<sup>254</sup> Bae, Berit, *Voksnes definisjonsmakt og barns selvpoplevelse*, i Bae, Berit (Red.), *Det interessante i det alminnelige – En artikkelssamling*, Oslo, Pedagogisk Forum, 1996, p. 147

<sup>255</sup> Bae 1996, p 148

## 5) Conclusion

This essay has tried to show that identity development and maturation are very important to students and teachers. Not only are they a goal in themselves, but they are also a large part of language studies. For students the process of creating identity is inevitable as well as stimulating. For teachers this is a process that should be respected, encouraged and where possible drawn on as inspiration for ideas on lesson plans. This essay has also tried to show that questions about identity are closely connected to studying language and that the Swedish curriculum and syllabuses reflect this. It has also focused on how questions about identity can be discussed in a language classroom, and indeed that from a pedagogical view having a critical discussion about such things may be preferable over arriving at an actual answer to any questions concerning identity. Since a significant part of the essay has focused on how identity develops and that books are essential to this process, due attention has been paid to the importance of reading books. As mentioned in the introduction, this essay has the overall purpose of fusing a pedagogical essay and a literary one. The literary part of this essay has been to study the *Harry Potter* book series and to analyse what can be learned from it in terms of identity. Through discussion on the various characters in the books topics that affect identity have been introduced. In conclusion, this essay has claimed that readers' identities are affected by what they read, that this process does in fact occur, and what can be learned in terms of identity from reading the *Harry Potter* books.

As seen through examples in the discussion of the characters in the books, there are many things that can be learned from the *Harry Potter* series. Some of them have to do with gender roles and self-image. Perhaps the truest result of what can be learned is one expressed by Malu: that we all have different ways of reading and that we read, in a way, different stories depending on our backgrounds<sup>256</sup>. Ultimately, what can be learned from this book series depends upon the reader and his or her background. It is up to the reader to take something from all the available themes in the books and extract learning from them. A reader occupied by their parents' divorce might find issues of family the most important in the *Harry Potter* books and a reader who is concerned about being bullied in school might find Neville's ordeals to be equally important. A teacher's role seems to me to be to help find available themes and characters to learn from, but the actual work has to be done by the student.

Since literature does in fact affect identity this is something to be taken into consideration when designing lesson plans. As argued in this essay, a teacher needs to make a careful choice on which books to read in the language classroom. I chose this book series for my essay since many students have already read the books voluntarily or in some way had contact with the characters through, for instance, the films and as such are likely to apply to the identification process. Heilman says that because of the popularity of the *Harry Potter* book series (as well as related films and paraphernalia) they:

*“become part of the identity of people who read and consume the images and narratives. Harry Potter then is not just books we read or movies we see or things we buy. The text and images of Harry Potter become part of who we are.”*<sup>257</sup>

She goes on to say that “*we are what we read*”. But there is also a specific way in which fantasy books affect identity. Eccleshare explains:

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<sup>256</sup> Malu 2003, p. 77-80

<sup>257</sup> Heilman, Elizabeth E., *Fostering Critical Insight through Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 1-2

*“The simplicity of its storyline illustrates exactly how many children see themselves as children and how they would like to see themselves as adults: it allows them to move from a position of dependence, which can feel like drudgery, to one of supremacy. Metaphorically, it allows them to grow up and take control of their own lives.”*<sup>258</sup>

This in turn can be interpreted as that teachers who take the responsibility of their students’ maturation seriously would do well to not only use books in a conscious way, choosing classroom literature with care, but to specifically target fantasy books. An added dimension of reading fantasy books is that it allows the author to ventilate current social problems on a hypothetical plane, allowing students to reflect on modern issues outside of a potentially explosive context:

*“Rowling fulfils one of the key functions of fantasy which is to enable children to achieve beyond their capabilities; to act heroically and to take on adult responsibilities.”*<sup>259</sup>

When it comes to the increasing popularity of fantasy, in which both books and films have had a great impact – apart from the *Harry Potter* series, J.R.R. Tolkien’s works is another recent example of enormous popularity. This very popularity means that young people today *“are effectively growing up in a fantasyland”*. The availability and popularity of the genre makes it:

*“imperative to analyze examples of these popular forms of entertainment (no matter how inconsequential or artless they may at first appear); we should understand that we are learning from these stories, and what sorts of adults we are becoming as a result.”*<sup>260</sup>

When it comes to future lesson plans a very important aspect, already mentioned above, is to keep in mind that the teacher will preferably allow the students to have control of the discussion of the topic at hand. The task of the teacher would then be that of guiding the conversation or suggesting new angles when (if) the discussion dies out, or if the argument somehow gets out of hand. In the national curriculum we can read that:

*“Pupils shall train themselves to think critically, to examine facts and their relationships and to see the consequences of different alternatives. In such ways students will come closer to scientific ways of thinking and working.”*<sup>261</sup>

If the students *shall* train themselves to think critically, they must be given the opportunity to do so. The task at hand then for a teacher of English when it comes to reading activities in the classroom is illustrated by Hedge as:

*“The teacher’s responsibilities in helping learners achieve these goals will be to motivate reading by selecting or creating appropriate texts, to design useful reading tasks, to set up effective classroom procedures, to encourage critical reading, and to create a supportive environment for practising reading. Each learner will have different strengths to build on and different weaknesses to overcome. Therefore there can be no single, set, rigid methodology for reading. The teacher will need to focus on different goals at different times and to use a range of materials and tasks.”*<sup>262</sup>

This is no small task, but an important one.

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<sup>258</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 16-17

<sup>259</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 75

<sup>260</sup> Appelbaum, Peter, *Harry Potter’s World: Magic, Technoculture, and Becoming Human*, in Heilman, Elizabeth E. (Ed.), *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, New York and London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p 46

<sup>261</sup> Lpf 94, p 5

<sup>262</sup> Hedge 2000, p 205

Lastly I would like to say that I aspire to be the kind of teacher who is a blend between Professor McGonagall and Professor Sprout in the *Harry Potter* books: slightly eccentric, taking education seriously and in a professional way, but also

*“as the enthusiastic, slightly dotty biology teacher who expects everyone to be as interested in her subject as she is herself”*<sup>263</sup>

In other words, a teacher whose classes are fun to attend.

## **6) Bibliography**

I have given the titles to Rowling’s books in the order they were published (i.e. reading order) and not in alphabetical order. I also chose the British, original, title for her first book: in the UK, as well as other parts of the world (unless translated), it is known as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, but in the US it is known as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Concerning translations of the books: expressions, idioms, collocations etc. are altered to fit the language they are being translated into, this is also true of the US version of the books, meaning that observant readers might find quotes to be a bit different than what they remember. Since I bought almost all of my books on a book sale in Dundee during a stay in Scotland, I am using the British versions of all the books.

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<sup>263</sup> Eccleshare 2002, p 93

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