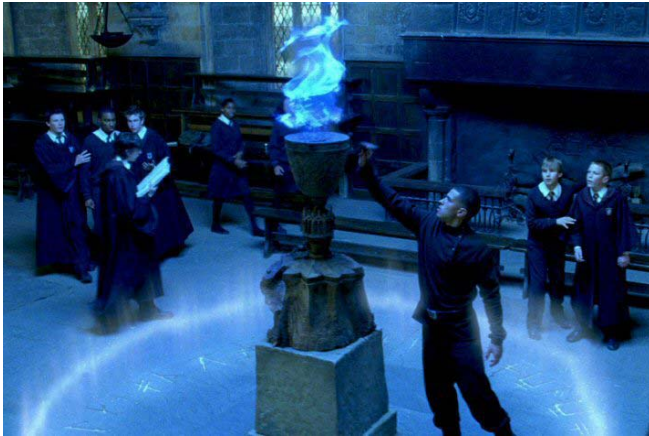


# Major Paper 2.5: Critiquing Harry Potter

engl 111 / sec. M / spring quarter 2006-07 / chang



Over the breadth and depth of your first and second sequence of assignments, we have considered, discussed, read, and written about more than just *Harry Potter*, about more than just children's literature. Underpinning all of our discussions, provocations, and explorations are arguments about representation, about the construction of categories, identities, and meanings, and about the intersections of cultural and social locations such as race, class, nation, gender, and sexuality. In fact, you have been participating in the very work of cultural studies.

The first sequence asked you to interrogate the place, value, and critical potential of *Harry Potter* in the classroom and in scholarship. The importance of

engaging these stories is clear: as Giselle Liza Anatol argues in her "Introduction" to *Reading Harry Potter*, these books can serve as a "powerful tool for inculcating social roles and behaviors, moral guides, desires, and fears. Whether these books serve as 'time-passers', literacy training, exercise for the imagination or the logical-thinking process, teachers of social norms, models for dealing with problems, and/or a means for improving a cantankerous or melancholy mood, they can affect and sway their readers" (xv). Now, the culmination of the second sequence asks you to take that exigence one step further, to critique and analyze the kinds and means and forms, obvious and inobvious, of training, exercise, norms, models, and affects *Harry Potter* materializes and argues within its many-thousand pages. In other words, you are going to "read too much into it" in order to excavate, explicate, and analyze *Harry Potter* as literature, as rhetoric, as cultural production. Like the spell *priori incantatem* in the *Goblet of Fire* that reveals all of the spells a wand has ever cast, this assignment asks you to unpack and unwind *Harry Potter* to show and to analyze the various cultural, political, and ideological "spells" it has cast, through its language, its characters, its plots, its constructions, its voices, and even its silences.

## Goal and Outcomes

For this **5- to 8-page** formal paper, you will identify **one** central issue, question, lens, or theory to close-read, analyze, and explicate *Harry Potter*. You may choose to work with one or more of the books we have read for class, but realize that your paper must be focused, specific, and deploy evidence carefully and strategically. Armed with the theoretical and cultural studies concepts from the readings and previous assignments and class discussions **generate your own original claim, your own argument** about *Harry Potter*. For example, how does your *Harry Potter* "make visible" race or gender or class? How does *Harry Potter* work in and work against the boarding school genre? Is *Harry Potter* an allegory for the US's "War on Terror" or Britain's immigration politics? Be selective and specific in your claim. Think about the following questions when you sit down to make your claim (pick and choose the best and most relevant questions to use as a way to generate ideas and subclaims):

- What are the central arguments (these can be more than just themes) of *Harry Potter*? Does it comment on identity, culture, or power? Are these arguments overt or covert?
- What stereotype or cultural assumption (about race, gender, sexuality, class, or nation) does *Harry Potter* make? How is this stereotype or assumption construction and deployed?
- What is the importance of *Harry Potter*? What does it tell its audience? Who is its intended audience?
- How is its production, circulation, and consumption important to its meaning or meanings?
- What are you trying to prove to your readers about *Harry Potter*? Why is your claim important?
- How might this paper be in conversation with your first sequence major paper? In conversation with the class's readings?
- What further research and outside evidence will you need to support your claim?
- What is **at stake** in your analysis and reading of *Harry Potter*?

Remember that the above questions **should not be a laundry list** for you to simply run down the answers. Be selective and focused about what you wish to write about and then generate your own claim about your artifact. You are required to include at least **five outside sources** including the secondary texts read for this class, scholarly journals, and credible newspapers and magazines and websites; the sources must be relevant and useful to your claim but all five need not be cited in your paper. The novels themselves do not count toward the five required outside sources.

Assume your audience is familiar with or has read the Harry Potter books. You need not spend a great deal of time summarizing plot or character. Your paper must demonstrate your ability to **close read** both text and research. Like your previous papers, you will be expected to **critically argue and persuasively articulate** your argument with **direct quotes** from your research as support. Also, keep in mind the **course outcomes** as you work and write.

## Guidelines and Due Dates

**Audience:** Because this paper requires a strong understanding of cultural studies concepts, you will write for an audience that is more of an academic community, which can include your instructor, your classmates, and the authors of the essays we have read. Keep in mind that your audience is varied in many ways, including academic experience and familiarity with the texts, so you'll need to consider of what information each type of reader will need to make sense of your essay. Another good way to think about your audience is to imagine the publication in which your essay could appear such as the *Reading Contexts* anthology or the *Reading Harry Potter* collection or a scholarly journal. Your audience analysis will further define and reveal who you are writing to and writing for.

**Format:** This assignment is a formal, academic paper and should follow the manuscript guidelines outlined in the course policies (see the course website for an example of a major paper's formatting):

formal title page, appropriate title for your paper

1 paragraph audience analysis

55-88 inches, typed, double-spaced, with MLA citations, stapled  
works consulted page, at least 5 sources, correct MLA format

**Targeted outcomes:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Paper Proposal/Conference Memo:** Bring to your conference on \_\_\_\_\_ your Conference Memo (Short Paper 2.4 to be assigned), which identifies key concepts, your overall claim, and a rough outline of your main ideas.

**First Draft:** Please bring an e-copy of your paper for peer workshopping to class on MONDAY, MAY 16.

**Final Draft:** Make revisions based on comments and responses from me and your peers and hand in the revised final draft at the start of class on MONDAY, MAY 21.