

# Major Paper 1.5: Why *Harry Potter*, Really?

engl 131 / sec. D / winter quarter 2010 / chang



Famed Judy Blume, no stranger to the controversy over “children’s literature,” says in her essay “Is Harry Potter Evil?” for the National Coalition Against Censorship website: “It’s a good thing when children enjoy books, isn’t it? Most of us think so. But like many children’s books these days, the Harry Potter series has recently come under fire. In Minnesota, Michigan, New York, California and South Carolina, parents who feel the books promote interest in the occult have called for their removal from classrooms and school libraries.” She continues, “I knew this was coming. The only surprise is that it took so long -- as long as it took for the zealots who claim they’re protecting children from evil (and evil can be found lurking everywhere these days) to discover that children actually like these books. If children are excited about a book, it must be suspect.” Clearly, Blume believes in the value of and the potential power of *Harry Potter*, of books in general. So, what is the value of and the power of *Harry Potter*? Are these books or other “children’s literature”

worth reading, critiquing, and teaching? Does *Harry Potter* belong in the classroom? A university classroom? And what is at stake in their study or in their dismissal?

## Goal and Outcomes

For this **5- to 7-page** formal paper, you will draw on the ideas, concerns, and arguments you made in Short Paper 1.3: Why Harry Potter? Keep in mind the arguments and evidence you have seen in the essays by Anatol, Loewen, or Smith or in the online articles about *Harry Potter* and higher education. Armed with the theoretical and cultural studies concepts from the readings, previous assignments, and class discussions **generate your own original claim, your own argument** to answer, interrogate, or complicate the role, place, value, and challenge of teaching *Harry Potter*.

In other words, your paper will investigate, analyze, and make a claim about whether Harry Potter belongs in the classroom, whether these books are worthwhile objects of study. The simplest approach is to write a pro or con paper, presenting the sides of the debate, and then choosing one. However, the general questions raised by this assignment can go beyond just for or against. Remember that a solid claim works with a specific population, a specific question, or a specific consequence. Consider 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):

- In what rhetorical or reading context is *Harry Potter* best suited? Primary school? Secondary school? University?
- Why teach *Harry Potter* in the writing classroom?
- Is there something subversive about *Harry Potter*? What might be problematic, risky, or dangerous about *Harry Potter*? Does Loewen’s argument about heroification apply to *Harry Potter*?
- What does *Harry Potter* and other children’s literature reveal about our culture, our world? Is that important?
- Who is the intended audience of *Harry Potter*? Is *Harry Potter* children’s literature? Is it for adults?
- Is there a relationship between *Harry Potter* the novels, the story and *Harry Potter* the brand, the product line, the business? What does this relationship reveal?
- What might *Harry Potter* offer to other disciplines? In contexts other than just in English or in the writing classroom?
- What are you trying to prove to your readers about *Harry Potter*? Why is your claim important?
- How would you convince your audience of your stance? What evidence and reasoning is required?
- What is **at stake** in your claim, argument, and evidence?

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, your own point of

view. You are required to include at least **five outside sources** including the 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 used in your paper.

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 stance 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:** At base, you will write for an audience that includes a general academic community, which includes 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 *Situating Inquiry* anthology or e.g. website 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):  
appropriate title for your paper  
55-77 inches, typed, no title page, proper heading, double-spaced, stapled  
works consulted page, at least 5 sources, correct MLA format

**Targeted outcomes:** 1, 2, 3, 4

**Paper Proposal/Conference Memo:** Bring to your conference on \_\_\_\_\_ your Conference Memo (Short Paper 1.4 to be assigned), which identifies key concepts, your overall claim, and a rough outline of your main ideas.

**First Draft:** Please bring a hard copy of your paper for peer workshopping to class on THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4.

**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 TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9.