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# Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by J. K. Rowling: A Blend of Realism and Supernaturalism.

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### ABSTRACT:

British author J.K.Rowling's maiden novel, 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' has been heralded as a classic, achieving unprecedented popularity and adulation across all age groups since its publication in June 1997. It has sold over 120 million copies making it one of the most popular and bestselling books in history. The series has been translated into more than 80 languages further cementing its place as the holder of the Guinness World Record for 'Best-selling book series for children'. The novel belongs to the fantasy literature genre, which has elements of magic, mystery, horror, thriller and romance interwoven into its plot, contributing to its alluring quality and charm which has kept its readers hooked for more than 25 years.

**Hypothesis:** this novel has become very popular because of its relatable characterization and narration technique.

The success of the novel can be attributed to the fantastic and supernatural elements perfectly blended with story.

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### Introduction:

The novel, with its young principal characters on their way to the fantastic world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, brings an element of surprise, fun and mystery and leads us into a story which occupies our minds with the trials and tests faced by the three friends; Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley in their first year at Hogwarts. The trio encounters difficult challenges together in the manner of detectives, finding clues and hints and putting the parts of the puzzle together to arrive at the climax, denouement and finally effecting the conclusion. Traversing their way together through the labyrinth of deceit, misleading impressions, malicious intentions and following their beliefs and instincts, they emerge victorious in their mission, developing their camaraderie and trust on each other to form really deep and lasting friendships.

The author, who is greatly influenced by Jane Austen's literary style, has employed a similar technique of foreshadowing important events in order to encourage re-reading of the whole series and still make the readers discover new information and re-ignite their interest. The most important example lies in the fact that the wands of Harry Potter and the primary antagonist of the series, Voldemort are intrinsically linked. This connection has profound impacts on the interactions between the two for most of the series. Secondly, the character of Sirius Black is mentioned in the first few pages of the book and turns into a major character starting book three. Another instance of this involves an important object. On Christmas Day, Harry receives a strange Invisibility Cloak as a present, without any indication of who gifted it to him. Later in the series, we discover that it is one of the three Deathly Hallows; three extremely powerful artefacts that were only thought of as legend or a myth. A fourth example takes the form of "Wizard Chess," a game that functions in ways similar to the real-world equivalent besides the fact that the pieces are sentient, and are destroyed when captured. This is of significant importance to the climax in ways that will be discussed later. We find in the novel the effect of "Magic realism, chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction," as the novel is set against a magic school backdrop.

There are also some misconceptions regarding the other characters which unravel themselves later in the story when it completely overturns our views about them. A seemingly timid, bumbling figure known as Professor Quirrel appears to be harmless while Professor Snape with his oddly spiteful behaviour towards Harry, seems to be the antagonist of the book. However, it is revealed in the climax, that Quirrel was a vessel for Voldemort. Meanwhile, Snape had actually been trying to protect Harry throughout multiple instances in the book, which is backed up by Headmaster Albus Dumbledore's insistence that he is working on the side of good. There is a perfect blend of magic and sentiments which keeps the readers hooked. Samuel Taylor Coleridge introduced "suspension of disbelief" in his 1817 text *Biographia Literaria*. This "suspension," also referred to as poetic faith, is meant to examine supernatural "persons and characters, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment."

Rowling's style of writing can be classified as inspired by Arthurian, Christian and fairytale motifs which are evident in instances like Harry drawing the Sword of Gryffindor from the Sorting Hat which finds a parallel in the Arthurian legend of the sword in the stone. The series has also been viewed as a Christian moral tale in the psychomachia tradition in which the good and evil try to establish their supremacy over a person's soul. Even the character of Harry resembles Jesus Christ in his selfless love for his friends, and how he is resurrected in order to end Voldemort. His life with the Dursleys draws comparisons with Cinderella as the tortured orphan forced to exist with absolutely mean and heartless relatives. In addition to this, Harry Potter can also be called a boarding school story in the manner of the popular writings of Enid Blyton. The writer has created characters that are with their flaws and weaknesses which is relatable to the audience. This aspect of her writing is appreciable as she blends them with a story which revolves around magic throughout.

The titular main protagonist of the series, Harry Potter is a skinny ten year-old child with below average height. He is further described as follows: "Harry had a thin face, knobby knees, black hair and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning." (pg. 21, line 11)

This description establishes one of Harry's most defining moments, in the form of the scar on his forehead. It was inflicted onto him when Voldemort failed to kill him as a child, due to the protection of his mother, Lily Potter. This monumental event in the wizarding world led to his fame and title of "The Boy who lived."

The above description of his appearance also fits his role within the Dursley household. The book begins with Harry being left at the doorstep of his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, who severely despise magic and especially the Potters, due to Lily being Petunia's "freak" of a sister. This environment leads to a constant emphasis on Harry being unimportant and a complete nuisance; someone who needs to make himself as small as possible to avoid setting off his abusive guardians, accompanied by the visual storytelling of him sleeping in a cupboard under the stairs. It also illustrates the constant bullying he faces at the hands of his bratty cousin, Dudley Dursley.

However, we see his character with more clarity once he finds his home away from home—Hogwarts. Throughout the story, we see that Harry is an adventurous soul who is constantly exploring the Hogwarts castle, even though it often involves breaking multiple school rules. He is a nuanced character; one who showcases a lot of courage and determination to overcome the large challenges he faces throughout the book, while making misjudgements with regards to the character of some people around him and being rather careless and rash at times.

The second main protagonist the book introduces us to is, Ron Weasley, a child who was raised in a family of wizards, unlike Harry. He meets Harry on the platform of the train to Hogwarts, and his introduction reads as follows: "She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet and a long nose." (pg. 99, line 8)

This description describes Ron as the youngest boy of the Weasley family. This is a significant piece of information for his character, as his motivations are formed around exiting the shadow of his older brothers. Throughout the book, he laments only owning items that belonged to others in his family, and not having his preferences respected by his mother due to how many children she needs to consider. These issues are exacerbated by his family not being particularly well off, while caring for 5 children.

Ron is shown to be a character who is not particularly gifted in many things. He frequently struggles to work on assignments and homework, doubts his ability to pass his exams with any decent marks and is not particularly good at executing the spells they learn in class. He can also be rude and insensitive at times. However, his value lies in his nature to rise to challenges and take action rather than staying passive. He also provides important context to the various aspects of everyday life in the wizarding world.

The third main protagonist of the series is Hermione Granger, born to a family of non-magic users. She meets Harry and Ron on the train to Hogwarts, while helping another child find his lost toad. Her first introduction states: "She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth." (pg. 112, line 9)

As illustrated by this short introduction, the character of Hermione Granger is introduced as more of an annoyance and unpleasant person than the previous two. Immediately after this description, she talks a lot about her doing a lot of reading before school beginning, about how she practiced a few simple spells, and how she wonders which house she would be placed into. This paints a picture of a very studious, hardworking, eager child. However, the narrative at this point emphasises the idea that she's an annoying, nagging 'know-it-all.'

However, her character is eventually broadened to showcase how significant her intelligence is. She is by far the best student in terms of academics, capable of absorbing information from all the books she reads and remembering it when needed. She also acts as the voice of reason when the other two are lacking the necessary information to do various tasks, or are about to do something reckless.

The relationship between these three characters evolves not only throughout the series, but also through this book. In their first interaction, Harry, Ron and Hermione meet aboard the Hogwarts Express. As mentioned earlier, Hermione walks in on Ron attempting to perform a spell that one of his older brothers told him. The spell turns out to be a fake, and she comments on it. Throughout this interaction, Harry and Ron perceive her as an irritating, bossy overachiever. This trend continues throughout the first third of the book, with the two boys finding her interruptions in their adventures to be insufferable.

The turning point in this dynamic takes place in the middle of the plot. After a class in which Ron and Hermione were partnered to try performing a basic levitation spell, Ron expresses his disdain for her in the following extract: 'It's no wonder no one can stand her,' he said to Harry as they pushed their way into the crowded corridor. 'She's a nightmare, honestly.' (pg. 184, line 16)

She had heard this exchange, which understandably upset her a lot. She was hurt by this to the extent that she did not attend the grand Halloween feast, since she had shut herself off in one of the girls' bathrooms to cry. This led to a lot of panic for Harry and Ron, when the news of a troll being set loose inside the castle broke. They sneaked off away from the queue to go to their dorms to help her, and barely managed to knock the troll out to save her. After this point, the friendship between the three forms.

The resolution of their combined character arcs takes place in the climax. The three had to go through a full gauntlet of various traps and puzzles to stop who they assumed to be Professor Snape. During the second trap, they are ensnared by a large cluster of tendril-bearing plants. Hermione accurately identifies the species and the fact that it is repelled by light. However, in her state of panic, she fails to act on lighting a fire using magic. Ron aggressively reminding her that she's capable of using magic is necessary for her to save them from being strangled. This showcases their roles- with Harry being calm despite not knowing much in a crisis, Hermione being intelligent, but tending to panic, and Ron being the one drive the others to act when they can't bring themselves to.

In the fourth trap, the three find themselves on a giant chessboard. To progress, they must win a game of Wizard Chess. However, the trap lies in the fact that the three have to take the places of three pieces on the board. Hence, if they are captured, they sustain serious injury. This section showcases Ron's talent for the game, as he commands the pieces on his side while trying to keep himself and his friends out of danger. But at the end of the game, he finds himself in a situation where he must sacrifice himself for the sake of Harry being able to deliver a checkmate to the opposing side. This is the most significant display of Ron's ability to compel his friends to carry on, as they vehemently refuse to let him do this, but end up doing as he says.

J.K. Rowling's use of supernatural and fantastic elements as integrating factors in the plot serves to increase the interest and apprehension in the readers. The wizarding world and the real world although completely segregated, are juxtaposed when the characters make use of their magical powers outside the confines of Hogwarts. Harry realises that he has the ability to converse with snakes (Parselmouth) when he liberates the boa constrictor at the London Zoo causing a huge chaos. He boards the Hogwarts' Express from the King's Cross Station at Platform 9 ¾ which is located between the platforms 9 and 10 but invisible to the huge multitude present there. He has to enter there by passing through a pillar between the two platforms. Incidents like these happen in full view of the non- magical people (Muggles) but are not noticed by anybody. We as readers get glimpses of these fantastic feats as a precursor to the more elaborate and enchanting world of Hogwarts awaiting us as our heroes formally start getting educated in Magical studies, Transfiguration, Potions, Charms etc. and begin their eventful journey in the story. The spells and incantations used are in modified Latin, Greek etc. which hints at their meanings. Even the characters' names have some quality attached to them which gives us a peek into their psyche, for e.g. Harry implies an everyman who came to be known as 'the boy who lived', Hermione can be related to the Greek Goddess Hermes, the bringer of good luck and guardian angel, Severus Snape gives an idea about his severe demeanour, and so on. These allusions from the legends and myths endow the characters with grandeur, making them extraordinary in our perception.

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## Conclusion:

To conclude, the characters discussed have a meaningful character progression throughout the book, which is instrumental to a triumphant resolution of the climax, since their teamwork and trust in each other was vital for their success. From where they began, the three mature as they put aside their differences in favour of recognising each others' strengths instead. The book showcases, through all these instances, that teamwork and friendship can lead to many great outcomes for those determined enough to work through the issues they encounter. The concept of "willing suspension of disbelief" has been beautifully used for a modern, enlightened audience where both the realistic portrayal of characters is interwoven with supernatural elements.

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