



Jennifer Wood

jennifer.wood@sturgeon.ab.ca
mrswoodsonlineclassroom.weebly.com
school phone: (780) 939-3445

OUR READ-ALoud NOVEL STUDY: HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

This year, we will be opening up the school year with a novel study of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. As with any novel study, there are multiple factors to consider: the reading level of the material, and the content.

Reading Level:

As unique individuals, we all have individual reading abilities. This can make selecting a novel that fits all readers a difficult task. However, there can be many benefits to reading a novel as a whole class. Specifically, it enables us to share and discuss as well as to learn what it means to study a novel. This novel study will be used as a "read-aloud," meaning that students will be predominantly read to, with opportunities for students who feel confident to read aloud to their peers as well. As we progress through the year, students will begin to build independence through our various book studies. Following our read-aloud novel study, we will complete a second novel study on *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. This second study will utilize a combination of whole class and small group organization. Finally, if time permits, the students will be given an opportunity to select their own novel or book to study in small groups based on their reading abilities and interests. Using this method of scaffolding growth, students will have opportunities for increasing independence as they build their skills.

Content Level:

Book censorship exists all over the world as societies make decisions about the circulation of controversial literature. Many of the challenges are aimed at books categorized as children's literature. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is no stranger to being challenged in the public arena. Many of the challengers criticize the *Harry Potter* series for the promotion of magical use. When looking at whether or not a novel is appropriate for the classroom it is important to consider the following:

1. **Does the novel promote the use of magic? Or does it use magic as a means to progress the story?**

Magic has traditionally been used for story telling in a variety of ways. Some popular uses of magic in narratives include fairy tales and major series such as C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. *Harry Potter*, as described by J. K. Rowling, is a fantasy book. Rowling openly admits that she herself does not believe in magic, but rather uses magic as a vehicle for the plot – a literary device for the story's themes. Furthermore, when a character casts a spell, they simply recite Latin words or phrases taught in school. Ultimately, the source of the magic found within *Harry Potter* is not discussed; Rowling herself places far more emphasis on how characters choose to use their powers and abilities – for good or for evil.

2. **What are the underlying themes of the novel?**

Within the series, the characters often display admirable qualities in the face of adversity. One of the strengths of the series is Rowling's treatment of right versus wrong. Often times, Rowling will highlight the duality within characters, the struggle between good and evil, while still clearly distinguishing between the two. One of the most famous *Harry Potter* quotes highlights this idea in which Dumbledore, the wise mentor, explains to Harry that he will face the choice between "what is right and what is easy." This remains a strong theme throughout the series, and is a valuable theme to discuss and teach.

In addition, Rowling also explores the idea of "love conquering all." This sacrificial love becomes a predominant theme starting with Harry's mother sacrificing herself to protect her son, creating a protective spell for the infant Harry, making him the only survivor of Voldemort's evil. This theme is explored over and over throughout the text.

Other positive themes explored include: family, friendship, the home, loyalty, and courage. As a class, we will be exploring these themes throughout our novel study.

If you would like to discuss our choice in our first novel study, please feel free to email me or set up an appointment. I would be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have.

