

SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT

What's So Exciting About *Harry*?: Responses From the Fourth Grade
to *Harry Potter*

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human
Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science in Education

Degree Awarded:
Spring , 2002

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study was undertaken to gather thoughts and opinions of fourth grade students in regard to the *Harry Potter* series of books. Ten fourth grade students of a suburban Western New York school district were interviewed. The prerequisite for the interview was that the student had to have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books. The interviews were conducted in a quiet setting with only the interviewer and student present. The interviewer and the student were visible to other adults at all times. The interviews were conducted before the release of the movie, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, to ensure that the respondents' views were based on the books or tapes, and not the movie. The interviews were tape recorded and were then transcribed for analysis.

Data suggested that the students were very excited about and knowledgeable of the books and their author, J. K. Rowling. They commented on favorite characters, descriptions of the setting, vocabulary, Quidditch, favorite classes, spells, potions and why they thought the books were so good. Observations were also made regarding visualization.

Results of this study show that the children interviewed seemed to look for the

same things adult readers do in choosing to read. They looked for believable characters, good plot development, interesting settings and good writing. This is important to educators who are trying to engage students in literacy and help them become life-long readers. Implications for further research included possibly replicating the study with other groups, for instance, urban or rural fourth grade students or re-interviewing the original study group after the series of books has been completed.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the variety of oral responses (in an interview setting) of fourth grade students who have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books.

J.K. Rowling has created a publishing phenomenon with her *Harry Potter* books. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (*Philosopher's Stone* everywhere but the United States), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* are the first four in the projected series of seven novels. They follow a young wizard through his school years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Along the way he meets Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, who become his best friends, and many other memorable characters.

The exact geographic setting of the stories has not been revealed in the first

four books, but most adult readers recognize that the setting is probably Great Britain. Word clues, British spellings and phrases and school terminology provide these clues. Where fourth grade readers think Hogwarts is located is a topic that came up in the interviews for this research study and will be addressed later in this report.

What fourth grade students' thoughts and ideas about the books are, and what would induce some of them to read a seven-hundred page book, seem to be questions worthy of study.

Need for the Study

At a time when teachers and parents are trying to determine how to motivate children to read anything at all, along comes *Harry Potter*. The *Harry Potter* series has been a phenomenal success with readers young and old. As noted by Tucker (1999), "the (success) of the first three *Harry Potter* stories is without precedent in 20th century British children's literature" (p.221). The huge publication numbers of a book series of any type - let alone one aimed primarily at children - is amazing. Statistics show that fewer and fewer adults are purchasing

books today in the instant information age, but J.K. Rowling has certainly bucked that trend. There are 110 million *Harry Potter* books in print, having been published in 200 countries and 47 languages. (Bennett, 2001). J.K. Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* books, has created characters and settings that young people cannot seem to read enough of. Children have put aside television, video games and movies to read. It seemed that a work of fiction so powerful deserved to be studied.

Adults seem to be enchanted by *Harry Potter*, too, but the focus of this study is the children's response to reading, or listening to, at least one of the books.

If finding out what motivates children is the key to getting children to read, *Harry Potter* has been one of the strongest motivators in publishing history. Why do so many young people want to read, and in some cases re-read, the books? Would finding the answer enable teachers and parents to present other possibly enticing reading material to children? The purpose of this study was not to determine what motivates children to read in general, but the oral responses showed why these particular fourth-grade students were motivated to read *Harry Potter*.

The sheer numbers of children reading the series would seem to indicate a

need for a study to determine why they are so engrossed and how they respond in an interview format to the books. In this research study only fourth grade students in one particular school will be studied.

Research Question

How do fourth grade students in a suburban, western New York state school district respond orally to the *Harry Potter* books?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the variety of oral responses (in an interview setting) of fourth grade students who have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books.

Choice and Motivation

The *Harry Potter* success story is a relatively new one. The first book was published in England in 1997 under the title *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. (Wood & Quakenbush, 2001) *Harry* quickly became "one of the most popular children's series of our time."(Lockman, 2000, p.53)

As stated before in this report, the success of the *Harry Potter* series of books has been phenomenal. According to a survey conducted for a group of toy manufacturers, 58% of children questioned for the survey - between the ages of 6 -

17 - said that they had read at least one *Harry Potter* book. (Eckstein, 2001)

Much of this success has been due to the fact that children have chosen to read the books themselves.

Why would a fourth grade student choose to read a book with unfamiliar names, places and concepts? Why would books up to 700 pages long appeal to them? A partial explanation may be self-choice. As Cunningham, P., Moore, S., Cunningham, J. & Moore, D. state in their book, "children who engage in regular self-selected reading do a lot more reading than children who don't" (p.57). Self-choice is a strong motivator. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) related that "participants in our study sent a strong message about the need to read personally interesting material and about having some control over what they read..." (p.367). A young reader involved in their study stated "sometimes I just want my imagination to run wild" (p.350).

In an article by film critic Jack Garner (2001) one person interviewed said, "Imagination is the key to the *Harry Potter* books, and this adds to the delight of the books" (p.1). Most children have wonderful imaginations and the world that J. K. Rowling helped them to enter in the *Harry Potter* books is a wondrous place for them to be. Staircases move, portraits talk, owls deliver the mail, children

practice magic spells and make magic potions. All of this takes place in a school ! What a fantastic setting to enable their imaginations to soar. These things all appeal to a great many readers as evidenced by the number of books sold. In the United States alone, sixteen million copies of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and forty-nine million copies of all the books have been sold (Garner,2001).

Garner states in his article "morals, myths and legends (are) incorporated in a positive way" (p.1). Children are familiar with those types of literature and perhaps that familiarity makes them eager to pick up a *Harry Potter* book and start reading. They know that the world Harry Potter inhabits cannot be real, but reading about it may provide an escape. As noted by Gunning , "there are many roles reading can fulfill: provide enjoyment, escape, or aesthetic pleasure" (p.474).

Stahl and Hayes (1997) state that "goal orientation is created through student engagement in tasks they view as meaningful, challenging and interesting, as well as tasks that involve a social component" (p.134). The argument may be made that some children read *Harry Potter* because it was so popular and "in". This might have been an initial motivator, but eventually children got hooked on

the characters and story. According to Johns' (1986) there are two types of motivation: natural (intrinsic) and artificial (extrinsic). As reading becomes a more satisfying experience for reluctant readers the motivation will change from extrinsic to intrinsic.

Another reason *Harry Potter* may be so popular was referred to in Baumann, Hooten and White (1999). A young reader said, "We like know something's going to happen and then we read for it to happen in the book ... predicting" (p.47). Many children like guessing games. Rowling is very good at dropping clues and building suspense. Readers know who the "good guys" are and the author mixes them with characters the reader has determined to be "bad guys" and new characters they are not quite sure about. The anticipation and predicting may be part of the appeal.

J. K. Rowling and *Harry Potter*

Harry Potter has been such a huge success that many articles have been published regarding the author, J. K. Rowling. A review of the literature would be incomplete without the inclusion of references to some of those articles. Rowling has attained almost pop-star status. Rarely has an author been so much in the

public eye and the subject of so much media attention. Astrid Lindgren, the creator of the immensely popular *Pippi Longstocking* character enjoyed some of the same type of fame in her day. Lindgren's books were translated into dozens of languages and 130 million copies were sold ("Pippi creator", 2002). It seemed that Lindgren and Rowling had both struck the same chord, even though they did it with entirely different characters and settings. As Norwegian Prime Minister Goran Person stated on the occasion of Miss Lindgren's death, "with laughter and seriousness, fantasy and a little audacity..." she created an unforgettable character. So did J. K. Rowling. In *Conversations with J. K. Rowling*; she says, "you have to remember that these things were taking me hugely by surprise (sic)... what matters most was that I had written a book I was proud of" (p.49).

"Get Ready for *Harry Potter*" (2001) provided some background information on Ms. Rowling. She was a struggling single mother "on the dole" with an idea she had worked on for years. Rowling had said that the "idea" dropped into her head while riding on a train" (p.3). She had been a teacher and her academic training showed in the research she conducted for the *Harry Potter* books. She also did sketches of the characters, animals, objects and places in the books (p.7).

Claudia Puig's article, "Harry Potter's lore" (2001) praised Rowling's meticulous research of mythology and European folklore:

plot and specific magical environment are Rowling's own invention, but nearly all of the creatures and their exploits - as well as spells, potions and supernatural explanation of events - have their roots in European folklore, with some references dating back thousands of years (p. C1).

The article also gave a glimpse of Rowling's previous life as a teacher re-surfacing. She has been known to tell a curious fan to "look it up" (p.6) when asked for an answer to something in her books. She also stated her hope that having *Harry Potter* translated into Greek and Latin, interest might be revived in those languages ("*Harrius Figulas*", 2001).

Many teachers and parents are thankful for the books that Rowling has written. They have inspired so many children to read. One teacher stated in "Words of Wonder" (Johnson & Johnson, 2001), "As a fourth grade teacher in a Title I school I find that getting my students to read can be a difficult task. Fortunately, author J. K. Rowling has made this task easier with her popular *Harry Potter* series" (p.58).

Time will tell if *Harry Potter* becomes a true classic in children's literature, but the place Rowling and her creation hold in publishing history cannot be denied.

Bill Adler (2001) contends in his book *Kids Letters to Harry Potter*:

What *Harry Potter* has done is to help create a new generation of readers who will treasure reading for the rest of their lives. (p.ix)

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the variety of oral responses (in an interview setting) of fourth grade students who have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books.

Methodology

Subjects

Ten fourth-grade students from a suburban western New York school district were interviewed regarding their thoughts, ideas, opinions and general statements concerning *Harry Potter*.

Materials

A permission slip (Appendix A) was sent home with approximately eighty fourth-grade students asking if the child had read at least one *Harry Potter* book,

had at least one read to him/her, or listened to at least one on audiotape and would be interested in talking about the experience for purposes of this research.

Nineteen permission slips were returned. The researcher attempted to reach all respondents on at least three occasions, if needed, to set up interview times. Of the nineteen, ten responded to determine a time and date for the interview. Those ten students are the subjects of this report.

Procedures

The tape-recorded interviews were one-on-one and most of them took place at the local public library in a setting where the interviewee and interviewer could be observed, but not heard. This was done for the comfort of all involved. Two of the interviews took place at the school the subjects attended. In each case the same conditions were met. The interview could be observed, but not heard. The researcher spoke with the parents of the subjects and in all cases the most mutually agreeable location was chosen. The interviews took place in the afternoon during the school week.

The interviews all began with the researcher telling the subjects why they were

being interviewed. They were shown the microphone and tape recorder and asked to just talk freely about *Harry Potter*. There were no pre-determined questions and the subjects were encouraged to talk freely about their own experiences in reading, or listening to, *Harry Potter*. If they were hesitant in beginning the interview the researcher encouraged them to just talk about the books. This prompt was sufficient in most cases. A few questions used to keep the conversation going included: how did you find out about the books, who were your favorite characters, favorite parts, anything you would like to tell future readers?

The length of the interviews varied. The interviews averaged about fifteen to twenty minutes in length, but one was very short, about ten minutes, while another was forty-five minutes long. Some of the subjects seemed shy, but determined to talk about the books. Others talked non-stop and, in the researcher's opinion, could probably have talked for hours. Many seemed reluctant to end the interview.

Analysis of Data

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The report is a qualitative research study and includes some direct quotes from the subjects.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze data. The researcher had no pre-determined categories before the interviews were conducted. Due to the spontaneous nature of the research technique used, categories became apparent after the data were collected. They emerged from the actual interviews and were then compared, sorted and analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the variety of oral responses (in an interview setting) of fourth grade students who have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books.

Why Fourth Grade Students?

Fourth grade students were chosen for this research for a number of reasons. It was observed that many of them were reading the books in school. They were young enough to get really excited about the books and old enough to have, and express, definite thoughts and opinions on the subject.

The interviews were conducted before the movie was released. The researcher wanted to ensure that the ideas and opinions expressed were based on the books and not the movie. The names of the students have been changed.

In analyzing the interviews, patterns and categories began to emerge. The interviewees had ideas about the setting, Quidditch, favorite or memorable characters, what made J. K. Rowling such a good author and - significantly - visualization. Some of the comments were surprisingly sophisticated and demonstrated how much thought the readers had invested in the books. As one student remarked, “I felt like I was part of the book.”

Setting

J. K. Rowling has hit upon a super environment for her setting - Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. As Kyle said, “All the students are helping each other and the teachers are all getting along with each other. Everything is really nice.” While Kyle’s perception touched on the ambiance of Hogwarts, other students called it a magical place with its ghosts, moving stairways, owl delivery service, potions and spells classes and the Quidditch grounds. There is a dark side to Hogwarts, but not much was mentioned about it in any of the interviews.

Hogwarts is a boarding school and while many students were not familiar with that particular kind of school, they could relate to school. Its exact location is not

disclosed in the books and guesses ranged from "I think it's France or something" to "somewhere in Europe - I know it's not real" and "I know it's in England." Mary stated that she "didn't know where it was" and "didn't think it was important to know." Liz knew that Hogwarts was an old castle and commented that J. K. Rowling lived near an old castle "so you probably know what comes from that - Hogwarts!" She also commented "there's a charm so Muggles don't see it."

Most of the children mentioned that Harry lived with his aunt, uncle and cousin during the summer, but they did not seem as interested in that part of the story as in what went on at Hogwarts.

Characters

Strong characterization is definitely a J. K. Rowling attribute according to the children. They talked about Harry Potter, Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, Dumbledore, Voldemort and others as if they had physically met them. Tom described Dumbledore as getting "older and wearier" during the progression from book one to book four.

One instance of strong personal involvement is shown in a quote from Liz:

I stopped reading because I got really afraid for Harry and Ron when the barrier wouldn't move to get onto Platform 9 3/4's to the Hogwarts Express, so scared that I stopped reading for awhile.

Kates' description of Harry Potter: "He's kind of a good luck/bad luck person because something bad will happen to him, then something good will happen." She said her favorite characters were the Weasleys because, "They're all red-headed and freckled so you can kind of imagine them." Kate also offered the comment:

The author described them so well that you could picture them so fully in your head that it was unbelievable. I think people can imagine red hair right off the top of their head.

Pam had this to offer on the character development:

I like the characters and the way it was written. It explains a lot - it doesn't just say the person's name, it tells the attitude and stuff.

She also felt that Harry, Ron and Hermione "all relate to me." She said that she liked adventure and was brave, like the main characters.

All of the children had favorite characters that ranged from Harry to Hedwig. Mary liked Hagrid because "he was always nice to Harry." It was obvious that they had put much thought into the characters and became involved with them. As

Pam said "I hope that she writes an eighth book to show what Harry does after he's done with Hogwarts."

Choice and Motivation

It was noted earlier in this research study that the *Harry Potter* series is a challenging one and the fourth book is over 700 pages long. Why did these students choose to read the book or books? The answer to that question varies among the students. This is what they had to say.

Jim: "Everyone started reading it, so I started reading it."

Kyle: "Mom thought it would be good to read. I didn't like it at first, but (I) tried again later in second grade, still didn't like it, but in September (2001) I tried again and really like it." (He read the first three books from September to November and was starting the fourth book at the time of our interview.)

Liz: "I found out about them by everyone reading them. I was like the last person in the whole class to start reading them. All of a sudden I shot up from everybody else 'cause I got so interested in the books. I started reading them at night when I was supposed to be asleep and I started reading in the day at my free

time. We started reading them in books-on-tape. Then I started a little while by myself 'till I got to real hard words, then my mom read it to me. Then books-on-tape came back again and that's basically how we read our book."

Pam: "I didn't like it at first when I got the first book. My mom and me read it together ... sometimes I read ahead of her because I really wanted to know what happened. When I read at night I read over the limit I'm supposed to." She also said: "My mom mentioned the books to me, but I didn't think I'd like them so I didn't get them. Then one other kid in my first grade class had the book and he told me they were really good and he let me read a few pages and I thought it was really good and I got the first book."

Phil: "It was my idea to get the book. My mom was just really happy that I was reading a lot. I can't put it down."

Tina: (Tina read the books with her mom and older sister.) "Her (J. K. Rowling) books are one of the best books I ever read. Sometimes they can get pretty gross."

Mary: "I didn't want to put them down once I started reading them. They have lots of new words and they are really creative." (Mary read the

books with her dad and they read all four in order.) Mary also had this to say: “some kids read the book and it got them to read other books. They got me more into reading because they were exciting and interesting.”

Visualization

The children interviewed seemed to be very involved with the books. They became animated and some became quite passionate about how great the books were and why. In analyzing the interviews their ideas about visualization became very apparent. Kyle made this observation about his younger brother and visualization: “I don’t think he understands how you’re supposed to get a picture in your mind.” The students talked about the characters as if they were real and could describe the settings in great detail. Ben said: “she (J.K. Rowling) writes a lot of words that explain how people feel and she puts a lot of details into it.” Phil offered this advice: “you should read this book. It’ll build up your imagination! You definitely want to read one of J.K. Rowlings books to get a good idea of what a good book should be like.” Tina said that “it feels like you’re actually doing it when they describe it. You should read this

book 'cause it sort of makes you feel different ways than you ever felt before. You feel like you're one of the characters." Mary felt that "you could just picture some spells or Quidditch. She has a good imagination. You could just picture everything it was so explained."

Liz commented that "Hagrid caught two baby unicorns which were so cute - well in my head they were! No pictures!"

Vanity Fair (October, 2001) had an article on the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* with many pictures of locations and actors in character. When it was shown to Andrea she could identify every character and where the action was taking place. She was asked how she could do this and she said "because I remembered what the book said they looked like." This is a credit to the movie staying true to the book, but more than that it demonstrates the remarkable ability of the author to make the characters come alive to the reader. The books have very few illustrations. There is an illustration on the book jacket and the first page of each chapter has a drawing of something to do with that chapter. That is the extent of the illustrations.

Quidditch

The main sport played at Hogwarts is Quidditch. It seemed to be a combination of rugby, soccer and flying. All of the students interviewed mentioned it. Harry arrived at Hogwarts already famous because of his involvement with Voldemort and his resulting lightning bolt scar, but what really earned him a place of honor with the students was his Quidditch playing ability. Quidditch is a part of each book and the World Cup of Quidditch takes place in the fourth book. Kyle had this to say "...would be fun to play, but you'd need a broomstick to fly." (He described the game in great detail including the colors and function of the various balls, player positions and types of broomstick). Tina described the snitch, bludgers and the best type of flying broomstick - the Firebolt.

Vocabulary

One of the aspects of the books the researcher wondered about was the use of "British English" and if those words would make a difference to the students regarding comprehension and enjoyment of the story. There are a lot of Latin words used for spells and potions, too. The interviewees offered these comments

on unfamiliar words and phrases.

Tom: "I would recommend it for age eight to over because there are some pretty hard words that littler kids probably won't be able to pronounce."

"In the third book she (Hermione) gets a cat which is Cruikshanks. I'm not really sure how to pronounce it, but that's what I say it is."

"I could figure out words out pretty easily. I had trouble pronouncing them sometimes."

Kyle: "I would not recommend it for second grade. My brother is in second grade and it didn't keep him occupied. I think it was the words and some other things."

"When Fred says Mum it must be an accent from a different country."

Ben: "I had trouble pronouncing the spells, but I just went on because it didn't really matter how it was pronounced."

"Cupboard is probably a really little room."

"I didn't spend a lot of time figuring them out."

Kate: "A cupboard is like a closet because the person who wrote it is British."

Kate has the British edition of the third book

and had this to say about it: “Words are spelled differently - color is colour - it was hard for me to read.”

Mary: “Dad helped me when some of the words didn’t make sense, but after you read them they made sense.”

The consensus was that the British and Latin words did not make any difference in their enjoyment of the books. They seemed to think that it was natural for the spells and potions to be in a different language.

Thoughts on J. K. Rowling

All of the children interviewed knew the author’s name and many knew quite a few details about her. Many of them seemed to have thought a lot about her and why *Harry Potter* was such a good series.

Tom: “I think *Harry Potter* is a great book, very adventurous and they always have a lot of fun and excitement and there’s a lot of things involved.”

Kyle: (Speaking about Fluffy.) “Although the name sounds like some cute little puppy or something, he’s a huge dog with three heads!” (He liked the names Rowling chose for characters and animals.)

Liz: “I know a lot because I got *A Conversation with J. K. Rowling*.”

Ben: "I love the books! I don't know how she could have thought of it on a train and then wrote all these books!"

"She writes a lot of words that explain how people feel and she puts a lot of details into it."

Kate: "I like how she uses too many adjectives almost."
(She also mentioned that she likes the way the author writes.)

Patn: "It's (*Harry Potter*) really funny sometimes."

Paul: "The author surprises you with bad guys turning into good guys."

"It's really cool how she can create all these witches and wizards and make up those great names."

Tina: "...fun and J.K. Rowling describes how it happened and she foreshadows a lot. It feels like you're actually in it sometimes."

"Her books are one of the best books I ever read."

Mary: "Lots of creativity, different names and things you wouldn't find in a regular book."

"J. K. Rowling has a good imagination."

The children had many different ideas and picked different favorite parts or characters, but they all were so involved with the books! They seemed to know that the author was exceptional and that she was the reason the books were so good.

Liz

The researcher enjoyed talking to all of the children and listening to their various insights and opinions, but Liz was the longest and most involved interview and it is felt that some of her remarks deserve their own section. She talked to the interviewer for forty-five minutes non-stop and was just as engaging and animated at the end as she was in the beginning. At the end of the interview she said, "That's all I can remember!" That was after giving more detail, describing more characters than anyone else and reciting some spells - in Latin - word for word.

Following are some of her quotes:

"Hermione is a little snotty at first."

"It made the car ride seem like five minutes." (They were on a long car trip and listened to the books on tape.)

"Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers never last!"

"Harry Potters mom died saving him. It's very sad."

(Describing the Polyjuice Potion) "You need a hair to make it and it will turn you into what the hair came from."

"I love them! They're very good! I'm going to read them all over again!"

"I hope that she comes out with, follows him through all wizarding things."

“Harry Potters’ wand has a feather from the same Phoenix as Voldemorts’.

(On House Elves) “House elves do all your chores - I’d like one for my bedroom!”

(Talking about Dobby, a house elf.) “Harry Potter frees him in the second book. He becomes a cook because he wants to be paid. Dumbledore pays him two galleons a day. He did offer him ten, but Dobby wanted two.” (Liz thought this was very funny and giggled often telling this story.)

(On the Dementors) “They are like dead things.” (She remembered the spell to use against them and recited it in Latin!)

“I would definitely recommend *Harry Potter*. Sometimes my sister and me pretend we’re at Hogwarts.”

“Divinations - that’s where they tell the future. The teacher is really creeping me out! She read his (Harry Potter) future from the tea leaves - which I don’t think works - it’s just tea!”

(On Hagrid’s choice of pets.) “He wanted a dragon once which was not good ‘cause he lived in a wooden house.”

The interviews were very interesting and fun to do. Most of the children talked without any prompting and started right in after the interviewer said “Tell me about *Harry Potter*.” A few needed just a question like “What did you think about the book” or “Who is your favorite character?” They were all eager to share their ideas and opinions.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the variety of oral responses (in an interview setting) of fourth grade students who have read, or listened to, at least one of the *Harry Potter* books.

Conclusions

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to these bright, energetic young readers talk about what was obviously a favorite topic of theirs. It appeared that the appeal of the books was due to many factors. The children all mentioned the adventure, funny things that happened, great characters, wonderful animals, pets and the whole wizarding world. Above all it seemed that they recognized one crucial factor - the extraordinary talent of J. K. Rowling to tell a riveting story and keep the attention of so many agile young minds.

This research study was purposefully skewed from the beginning because of

its nature. The children who responded to the questionnaire regarding their interest in being interviewed had already read at least one book. That was a requirement for being interviewed. If the children had read one book they demonstrated their interest in it. At their age it would seem probable that if they were not interested in the story they would not have finished even the first book. The setting is unfamiliar, the vocabulary sometimes difficult, there are few pictures and some Latin words are used. These might all be stumbling blocks to a reader who was not dedicated to reading the story and finding out what happened in the end. The reading of the fourth book is not something to be undertaken lightly. It is over 700 pages long and the plot is very involved. Many fourth graders still chose to read it.

I expected that the children would like the book or books, but I was surprised at the amount of detail they remembered, how much thought and energy they put into telling me about the books and their astute comments on the author and what appealed to them. I read all four books as a prerequisite to conducting the research and many children remembered details I had forgotten about. It shows how involved they were with the whole *Harry Potter* world.

There has seldom been as much hype generated by a series of books for

children. Admittedly, the media may have been responsible for some of the children choosing to read the books, but that would not have kept them reading if the books were not interesting to them. As was mentioned before, the research was purposefully conducted before the release of the first *Harry Potter* movie. I wanted to see how successful the author had been in creating characters and settings that the children could visualize. I think that the interviews demonstrate how successful Rowling was.

Teachers and parents are always looking for reading material that will grab the attention of children. It appears that children look for the same things adults do in selecting reading material. They want a great plot, believable (or unbelievable in this case) characters, a chance to use their imaginations and well written work. Many imitators of Rowling have sprung up, but the children I interviewed seemed to recognize the quality of writing and the uniqueness of *Harry Potter*. If they choose to read other books along the lines of *Harry Potter* then Rowling has accomplished even more than being a best-selling author and fantastic story teller - she has helped to put children on the path to becoming life long readers.

Suggestions for Further Research

I think that it would be interesting to interview these same children again after the fifth *Harry Potter* book has been released and see if they think that it measured up to the previous books. The author plans seven books in all, and it might be interesting to interview the original subjects after all the books have been released. They would probably be in middle school by then. I would like to know if they still enjoyed the books or if their tastes had changed as they matured.

It would have been interesting to get the students together as a group after they had seen *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and listen to their comments. Their comments on what the characters looked like, whether they thought the movie stayed true to the book and especially what they thought of the Quidditch match would be intriguing to hear.

Another tack may be to interview fourth graders who were never interested in reading *Harry Potter*, or who started to read one of the books and stopped. Their comments could be compared to the original group to see what was different for each group.

This study reported the results of interviews with a small group of fourth

graders in a suburban school. The study could be replicated with groups of fourth grade students from rural or urban schools and the results of all three studies could be compared.

Harry Potter has been such a phenomenal success that it deserves to be studied further. If our goal as educators is truly to encourage students to become life long readers, we need to study the books that children appear to love. *Harry Potter* has surely become one of those.

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APPENDICES



Harry Potter Glossary

People

Harry Potter

A young British orphan who discovers on his eleventh birthday that he is a wizard. Lives in Gryffindor House of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Has a lightning slash shaped scar on his forehead, courtesy of Voldemort.

Ron Weasley

The youngest male of the red-headed Weasley clan (all current or former students at Hogwarts) who becomes a great friend to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Lives in Gryffindor House.

Hermione Granger

A brilliant half-wizard born to Muggle parents. Becomes third member of Harry's gang. Lives in Gryffindor House.

Professor Albus Dumbledore

The wise and wonderful Headmaster of Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Professor McGonagle

The Head of Gryffindor House.

Professor Severus Snape	The Head of Slytherin House and Professor of Potions.
Rubeus Hagrid	Groundskeeper of Hogwarts and protector of Harry Potter. (Very large in size)
Neville Longbottom	Orphaned resident of Gryffindor. Usually clumsy and inept. Target for Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle.
Draco Malfoy	Form-mate of Harry's. Son of a (secret) Dark Wizard. Not a very nice person. Lives in Slytherin House.
Crabbe and Goyle	Friends of Malfoy, not too bright.
Vernon Dursley	Harry's awful uncle.
Petunia Dursley	Harry's terrible aunt, wife of Vernon.
Dudley Dursley	Stupendously fat and stupid son of Vernon and Petunia, thus Harry's cousin.
Lord Voldemort	Powerful wizard gone bad. Killed Harry's parents and gave Harry the lightning slash shaped scar on his forehead. Usually referred to as "he who must not be named" by everyone except Harry. Needs a body badly so he can return to kill his enemies.
Muggles	All those who are not lucky enough to be wizards.

Places

Hogwarts	School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Portraits talk, stairways move and many other delightful quirks. Exact location unknown.
Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw	The Houses of Hogwarts. (Residence halls.)
Hogsmeade	Town closest to Hogwarts and end of the line for the Hogwarts Express.
Groundskeepers Cottage	Home of Hagrid, located on Hogwarts grounds at edge of Great Forest.
Platform 9 3/4's	Departure point for Hogwarts Express.
Diagon Alley	Shopping area for wizards and witches. Muggles cannot see the shops.
Gringott's Bank	Wizard bank, run by goblins. Located in Diagon Alley.
Great Hall	Central meeting place of Hogwarts. Site of term dinners and award ceremonies.
Privet Drive	Location of the Dursley home.

Things

Hogwarts Express	The train that takes all students to Hogwarts. Only visible to non-Muggles.
Sorting Hat	Large, ancient hat put on heads of new students to determine which house they will live in.
Quidditch	Favorite wizard sport. Something like soccer, rugby and handball played on flying brooms at great heights and lightening speeds.
Nimbus 2000	Rolls Royce of broomsticks in its time.
Firebolt	Replaced the Nimbus 2000.
Invisibility Cloak	Renders invisibility when worn. Left to Harry by his father, a former Gryffindor.
Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans	Wizard candy - truly every flavor, from treacle to vomit.
Galleons, sickles and knuts	Wizard money
<i>The Daily Prophet</i>	The official wizard daily newspaper.

Creatures

Hedwig	Harry's owl, used for sending messages. Each student has his or her own owl.
Fluffy	Hagrid's three-headed dog.
Norbert	Norwegian Ridgeback Dragon raised by Hagrid.
Crookshanks	Hermione's cat.
Scabbers	Ron's rat.
Fawkes	Headmaster Dumbledore's phoenix.

There are too many creatures in the four books to name them all, but they include trolls, giants, dragons, grindylows, house elves and hinkypinks.



Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Cindy Hayes-Low and I am working on my Master's degree at SUNY Brockport. My area of concentration is Teaching Reading and my thesis is going to be based on interviews with children who have read the *Harry Potter* books. I would like to talk to them about the books and their ideas and opinions regarding the book(s). If you think that your child might be interested in helping me I would appreciate it very much. Please fill out the permission slip at the bottom of this page. I may be reached at 395-9398 if you have any questions. Once I know how many children may be helping me, I'll contact you regarding the place and time of the interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

My child, _____, has my permission to participate in an interview with Cindy Hayes-Low regarding *Harry Potter*. I understand that real names of the interviewees will not be used in the thesis.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

I may be reached at _____ during the hours _____ to
(phone number)
set up a time for the interview. (Parent/Guardian please fill in above info.)