

Quote from movie 1 - Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

"There is no good and evil - only those with power and those too weak to seek power."

1. Many people defending *Harry Potter* say that the series is a story about good overcoming evil. Who, then, is good in this film and who is evil?

One is led to believe that Ron, Harry, and Hermione are "good" and the Dursleys, Voldemort/Riddle, Fitch, and the Malfoys are "bad."

2. How do the rules of the magic world apply to the "good" characters? Do they obey the rules? Are they punished by the "good" adults (especially Dumbledore)? What kinds of people actually want them punished? Give examples.

The rules do not really seem to apply to Ron, Harry, and Hermione. They broke many school rules during the film. And they are rarely punished. Harry and Ron illegally flew a magic car. Instead of being expelled, Harry and Ron merely got a detention (and Harry only had to help Laxard answer fan mail!). The three main characters also made an illegal potion. They were never caught and the film made it seem that it was necessary for them to break this rule. If they don't make the potion, how will the bad guys be stopped. They also snuck out of the castle after hours, abducted a teacher against his will, and knocked the teacher unconscious. And they were never punished! The only characters that want to punish Harry are shown as bad guys - the Dursleys, Fitch, and Snape. The only people wanting consequences for misdeeds are people characterized as bad folk.

3. Do you ever feel bad for Tom Riddle? When?

Yes. He said he had no home to go to. He is an orphan. The viewer is made to feel sorry for him. However, he turns out to be Voldemort. This sends mixed signals. Why should we be made to feel sorry for an evil man?

4. What level of morality is J.K. Rowling advocating?

Level 6. See below for more.

5. What is the moral message of *Harry Potter* (especially in regards to the nature of rules)?

The rules of society do not matter much. One can reinterpret the rules to suit the circumstances. In fact, there are times when rules should be broken.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione were heroes - as a result of breaking rules. It seems as if no adult could ever solve the mystery behind the Chamber of Secrets by way of following rules. Rules are just arbitrary and sometimes pointless - and certainly restricting! - guidelines created by society. As you have seen, the "good" characters broke many rules - and were rewarded for it. Interesting note: Harry - the "good" character has evil powers of Voldemort. Do good characters have evil powers?

6. How is this different from *Les Miserables*?

In *Les Miserables*, the law was shown as very important. Certainly, the message of *Les Miserables* included the idea that there are times when laws should be broken (especially if the law enforcers are evil or if breaking the law will lead to a greater good). However, Jean Valjean believed that despite his best intentions, he still needed to pay for his crimes. In *Harry Potter*, there is no punishment for rule breaking. There are no punishments in *Harry Potter* because the author is claiming that rules can be redefined

7. How can the moral message of *Harry Potter* affect the young children reading the series (+ and -)?

positively - Heroism, courage, friendship, and resourcefulness are desirable characteristics in children that are Harry Potter's age

negatively - Children may see rules as arbitrary restrictions that confine a person rather than protect them. This may send the message to children that rules do not matter or may reinforce child rebellion. Rule breaking can be fun, funny, exciting, and even heroic.