

# Harry Potter & the Philosopher's Stone

This has to be the most bizarre exam text to write a set of study notes about. Get it wrong and you will land on the mat. Ah, well, not to worry, eh? So where do you start with this in comparison to Tom Brown's Schooldays? Let's do the easy stuff first. You'll find a list of bullet points at the end of these notes (more to follow) which will give you some ideas about where to start putting the two texts together.

Both books are about little boys who grow up at home and at school. Both schools are public schools and each school has pupils who believe it to be the best school in the land. Both schools also have a strong sporting tradition, especially for team games and I suppose you could argue that Rugby was an 'invented' game, although it can't really be compared to Quidditch, except in terms of hard physical contact and knocking a ball around while the rest of the school watches and goes mad.

Each book features a central character with a great deal of grit, determination and charisma. Tom Brown is popular and gets into trouble because he likes adventure and taking risks. Harry Potter is notorious and sometimes very unpopular and gets into trouble because of more or less the same characteristics. Unlike Tom, Harry Potter doesn't undergo a conversion experience because of the influence of a younger Christian boy. In fact there is absolutely no mention of any kind of organised religion in the Potter books at all, unless you count Magic as a religion, as some people probably do. If Potter is converted to anything it is to the belief in his own powers as a super magician who can save the world, which is about as far away from Christianity as you can get. This is quite in keeping with the post-modern trend of discounting Christianity in favour of New Age/ alternative spirituality, of course which might well explain the appeal that the book has to a present day adult readership. Children just like magic, so that audience is well catered for, too.

In fact it would be fair to say that JK Rowling has created a children's classic series, because she has cleverly combined a number of cultural and traditional themes, traditions and beliefs with credible characters and a simple, but very effective plot. Boy can do magic. Boy gets chance to save the world from the powers of darkness, using magic. Boy saves the world from the powers of darkness using said magic. It isn't a new idea, but we will try to look at why it works so well as we go through the text.

The main plot is quite a straightforward detective story. Apart from introducing the readers to the characters who will play parts in all the seven novels in the series, the plot of 'Philosopher's Stone' is about the theft and recovery of a magical stone which guarantees the owner everlasting life. This strand is part of the bigger plot, which deals with the return of the evil Lord Voldemort, and the attempts of the 'good' characters to defeat him. Harry Potter and his two best school friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger follow the trail of clues to find the hidden stone and Voldemort's first attempt to return to power is thwarted. You will find that these notes do not go into detail about the various plot twists, because I am assuming that you will be familiar enough with the details of the story to know them already. Expect to find some reference to plot features, but more emphasis on what you'll need to do the comparison with the other set text, 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'.

Remember that this is the first of a series of (probably) seven novels which follow Harry Potter's progress from the first year at Hogwarts School to (presumably) his final showdown with Voldemort (Are you thinking Star Wars? Please don't let Voldemort be Harry's long-lost Dad). If you've read all the books and seen the movies, you'll know exactly what happens and who is who, but you have to try not to get carried away when you're answering the comparative question in the exam. You won't get marks for recounting the whole story, even if you can do it backwards on stilts while juggling flaming clubs. Just stick to the first volume and please don't weave in irrelevant bits from the movie. You can mention (as I have) relevant links with books from the rest of the series, but try not to concentrate too much on what comes later in the story.

As we go through chapter by chapter, we'll try to make some intelligent comparisons with Tom Brown, where relevant and point out the obvious differences between the two texts. Stylistically, of course, you will find that there is little comparison to be made at all. Rowling is totally contemporary, Hughes is Mid-Victorian. Tom Brown is a very inaccessible text for a modern audience. Adults find the Hughes hard going, teenagers may be able to make sense of some of it, but the average ten year old would probably never get past the first chapter – maybe even the first page. Pick up Harry Potter, though and the style is sharp and transparently accessible.

George Orwell's writing was described as having the clarity of a pane of glass and credit must go to Rowling for the same economy and style. Her descriptive powers are exceptional, her dialogue has the true authenticity of twenty first century talk and the syntax is a very elegant mixture of simple and compound sentences with the occasional complex one to keep the reader challenged. Adults tend not to buy simple books, but adults queue up in droves for Harry Potter stories. Poor Mr Hughes, I hear you cry, but you have to remember that contextually, the readership in the mid 1800's would probably have found Tom Brown quite accessible too. What is evident, though, is that Hughes' readers would have had to be very well

educated and rather upper class, whereas the Harry Potter readership is probably spread right across the social and intellectual board. You need to comment on that, if you can. One of the reviews of Harry Potter (in The Times) claimed that 'JK Rowling has woken up a whole generation to reading'. I don't dispute that at all and one of the reasons is the accessibility of the style. Everyone who reads Potter books never has to fight their way through interpretation either of plot, character, syntax or lexis. Even the neologisms are easily decoded. Diagon Alley is a very clever pun, but it isn't rocket science to work out that it's a pun on diagonally and reasonably easy to work out the 'slanted' nature of the alternative world Harry lives in as a magician. Muggles is an amusing alternative title for human beings and the obvious similarity to the word 'muddle' is an amusing swipe at the dimness of many of the human race. You should go through the text and make a list of the invented words (neologisms) and work out the oblique pun beneath each of them. Remember also that adults reading the stories aloud to younger children will naturally explain the puns as they go along, so another bonus with the books is that children can learn about quite sophisticated word play outside school as well as in the classroom. That's probably what prompted TheTimes reviewer to make the comment about being 'woken up to reading'.

So, let's have a look at the story, which is, as they say, a cracking good read.

## Chapter 1

Harry Potter, newly orphaned, arrives by flying motorcycle in the arms of a giant at the Dursley's house in Privet Drive. His parents are dead, killed in some mysterious accident and several mysterious people appear to be taking care of his safety. The Dursley's are very ordinary people and Mr Dursley seems to be rather an unpleasant sort of man. No prizes for spotting the influence of Roald Dahl straight away with the opening description of the Dursley family. Like Dahl, Rowling goes straight for the ingenuous approach, blurring out uncomplimentary facts about physical appearance – 'Mrs Dursley...had nearly twice the usual amount of neck'. Very appealing to a child centred audience. Typically too, we have a stereotypical central character – the orphan child fostered by unwilling relatives.

The pace is very fast and the syntax mostly quite uncomplicated. The lexis is mainly standard English, but from time to time Rowling throws in a challenge to the young reader with words like 'chortle' or 'exasperated'. Note too the regular use of comparison, especially in the form of simile. Hagrid's feet are 'like baby dolphins'. This is quite a common feature in children's stories, so it's not surprising to find it here. The speech register, too, is very informal. All the characters use clipping or elision, even the important people like Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall. Hagrid, of course, speaks in dialect and with ellipsis (his sentences are clipped) 'No sir, – house was almost destroyed'. You can say this is a class marker, if you like, although you have to remember that this is a post modern text and aimed into a readership that is now almost classless.

The surprise element is, of course, the introduction of the bizarre features of Harry Potter's magical world; at first, the cat reading the map (shades of Dr Seuss here?), then 'weirdos' in strange clothes, owls flying round in the daytime and the 'downpour of shooting stars' on the news report. Aimed at a child's imagination, the story has to have instant appeal and the more odd the better. What makes the older reader (and the adult, too) persevere, is the juxtaposition of the bizarre and the utterly normal worlds. Dumbledore has a silver cigarette lighter that puts the street lights out. He eats sherbert lemons. Hagrid rides big motor bike that flies. Add to this some really convincing pathos (the 'scratchy, whiskery kiss' Hagrid gives to the sleeping baby) and clever suggestions of dark deeds and tragedy – 'I got him out alright' 'Lily and James dead' and the short opening has all the hooks necessary to sweep the reader on to the next chapter.....and the next.....

The narrative time line is cleverly constructed, with Chapter one functioning as a kind of prologue. In film studies this is called a 'back-story', where events leading up to the main plot are shown. Most famously, the second Godfather film is almost all the 'back-story' of how the older Corleone became the Don. Here, the back story fills in how Harry came to be living with his Aunt and Uncle and also introduces the theme of Voldemort and some kind of dreadful catastrophe. We are given a tantalising glimpse of an alternative world existing alongside the normal one and meet several principal characters from each.

## Chapter 2

Ten years later, The main story begins after a gap of ten years in which time Harry has grown up. This chapter is short and deals with Harry's life in Privet Drive and his relationship with the Dursley family. Exaggeration is a staple of most children's fiction and this novel is no exception. All the Dursley family are monsters and Harry's life with them is ludicrous. He sleeps, for example, in the cupboard under the stairs, wears his cousin Dudley's cast off clothes and suffers constant abuse from all the family. Cousin Dudley is a spoiled brat and a bully, his mother (Aunt Petunia) talks to him in baby talk and Mr Dursley shouts at Harry all the time.

On Dudley's birthday trip to the zoo, Harry has his first serious magical experience, when he talks to the python and makes the glass in the cage disappear so the snake escapes and terrifies Dudley. What is established here, of course, is a reverse-gender Cinderella theme, which all children will recognise and respond to. Harry is the underdog but the power of magic will make it right in the end. No fairy godmother, though, because in this fairy story, the magic is in the main character, who is a

teenage boy, not a poor little kitchen maid with ugly sisters. If you want to make the point that Harry's life is underprivileged, then I suppose you could. The cruelty is severe, but tolerable because it's so ridiculous. The talking to animals is not a new idea, either, but it's a sure winner with children. The way JKR twists it is to have the snake speak in a South American accent.

## Chapters 3 & 4

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Carrying on the Dursley narrative, we have the letters from Hogwarts, inviting Harry to take up his place there. Intrigue comes into the story here, as it becomes obvious that the Dursleys know something Harry doesn't know (and the reader doesn't yet know) about who and what Harry Potter really is. The family tries to stop Harry from seeing the letters and eventually Mr Dursley runs away with to the lighthouse. In the middle of a storm, Hagrid arrives to deliver Harry's letter personally and the Dursley's are thwarted.

You are obviously going to comment on the exaggeration again, but remember that children are much more willing to suspend disbelief than adults are when they read stories, so concentrate instead on the attitudes and values implicit in the narrative. Dursley is an abusive man, who is mistreating a child and what he gets is his comeuppance. Dudley is a greedy bully who is given a pig's tail. All three of the Dursley's are abandoned in the middle of the sea and a strong protector rescues Harry. Hagrid is like a huge big brother who bashes the tormentors and children love this kind of rough justice.

It's very difficult to analyse humour and you will find a great deal of humour in all the series of Potter books. Much of it is slapstick, like Dudley being given the pig's tail and Hagrid's pink umbrella-wand, but you will also find some sharp humour in the incongruity of situations and in speech patterns.

You might also want to comment on the skill with which Rowling creates the mystery story. Harry Potter is not a 'whodunnit' crime story, but there are certainly elements of mystery in it. We always know the name of the villain (and remember too that the character's names are cleverly constructed to reflect their characteristics or origins). What the reader is asked to puzzle out is what Voldemort is going to do next and how it's going to be done. This is a very compelling ingredient of all mystery stories, especially in children's literature. The fact that the 'good guy' who solves the mystery and brings the villain to justice is a teenage boy is another element that makes this series of stories so successful. But it isn't a new formula – Enid Blyton did it with her 'Secret Seven' series in the 50's.

## Chapter 5

In this chapter, Rowling extends the canvas and introduces the reader to the magical universe, which exists in a parallel space and time, as Harry and Hagrid visit Diagon Alley (note the comment above about the clever play on ideas with this neologism.) to buy Harry's school supplies. Again, we see the blend of realism and fantasy. The shops are real shops but sell unrealistic items. Gringott's Bank (note the single name, which has connotations of exclusivity – like 'Coutt's') is a clever play on the idea of 'ingots' of gold or silver. See also how Rowling brings in allusions to pirate treasure with the money (galleons) piled on the floor of the vault in large quantities. Perhaps it is accidental, but you might also want to speculate as to whether or not Rowling has borrowed from Tolkien, in having used goblins, trolls, dragons and other LOTR creatures.

The first meeting with Malfoy (the name is perhaps a derivation from the French 'mal' – bad and 'foi' – faith?) introduces us to one of the 'evil' characters, who will be the 'bad guy' as the series progresses. Class markers abound here, with Malfoy's speech patterns deliberately structured to sound 'aristocratic' or typically 'upper class' and Rowling also makes Malfoy intolerant of racial difference, with references to not letting the 'other sort' into Hogwarts. Cleverly, though, it is not racist in terms of ethnicity or skin colour, but in terms of 'pure blood' and 'mud blood'. The theme is developed later in the series using the characters of Hermione and others whose parents are not both 'pure' wizards.

Note how Rowling gradually introduces clues as the narrative progresses. The wand Harry buys in Ollivander's shop is the twin of the wand that gave Harry the scar and the episode is cleverly written to suggest a very serious process of selection. It is clear that Harry is more famous than he (and the reader) yet realises.

## Chapter 6

The Dursleys take Harry to King's Cross to catch the Hogwarts train from platform nine and three quarters and Harry meets the boy who is to become his best friend, Ron Weasley. The Weasleys figure largely in the entire series and become Harry's surrogate family. Note the anachronism of the Hogwarts train as an old fashioned steam engine that takes many hours to travel across what looks like ordinary countryside to reach the school. Rowling obviously understands the eternal fascination people have with steam railways and with what is now called 'Heritage' in general. ('Heritage' means old fashioned things like castles, oil lamps, stately homes and everything to do with our historical past). Maybe you could argue that there are

definite elements of fairy tale iconography in the stories, which would be logical, given that the central theme is magical. You might like to make a list of all the odd ways that Rowling makes the ordinary extraordinary, with things like Chocolate Frogs and photographs that move. There are too many to list here, but the point you make is that they are all possible, given the *'what if?'* factor and so they *become* real through the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. You should also note that the dialogue is always perfectly recognisable as post modern. All the characters talk 'normally' even if *what* they talk about is odd.

On the journey, Harry finds out more details about his new world and meets some of the characters who will become friends and enemies as the stories progress. The arrival at Hogwarts is described in quite a Gothic way, with boats that magically glide across the lake to the 'vast castle with many turrets and towers'.

## Chapter 7

Hogwarts may be magical, but it is based quite definitely on the British Public School and we can certainly make many comparisons with the Hughes text. Like Rugby, Hogwarts has a House system and the students feel a very strong sense of loyalty to their respective Houses. There is also an indication that pupils feel that they 'belong' to their House and there is, too, a sense of rivalry between them. Later on we will find that sport is an important aspect of this rivalry, as is the competition for the House Cup.

I suspect that many people will speculate as to why Rowling picked a public school setting for Harry Potter, rather than a more conventional State school. If we think about the need to create an isolated world, then a boarding school is a more convenient setting than a day school and the House system, although still a feature of many state schools is much better established in the private sector. Another factor, although I'm not sure about this one, is that the general perception of the Public School is that it is a place where 'privilege' is still important. Rowling uses this to good effect with characters like Malfoy and the Slytherins, all 'pure-bloods' with well connected parents. This creates a very clear opportunity for Rowling to create characters who are 'good', as a balance and of course this is a necessary part of the overall plot concerning Voldemort and his followers. It might be worth thinking about the way in which Rowling suggests that this 'upper class' privilege is in fact quite corrupt. As the stories go on, it becomes apparent that many of the 'Death Eaters' (Voldemort's followers) are from the 'upper class' families, while the opponents are less affluent (like the Weasleys) and certainly less snobbish. Crude caricatures and maybe a simplistic idea, but worth considering nevertheless.

If I remember rightly, there was some criticism of JKR's choice of the public school setting when the first book came out as it was suggested that she was deliberately celebrating the ethos of the public school system at the expense of the ordinary state system. Perhaps it was thought that she was making an oblique statement about 'good' schools and 'bad' ones? I think really she may have been wise enough to know that there is a mystique about public schools that has always attracted readers and like many other children's authors, she chose a sure bet as a location. Have a look at the number of texts in the Education Anthology for A/S paper one and see how many extracts feature public schools and you'll see what I mean.

## Chapter 8

The staff of Hogwarts, many of whom become familiar characters in the successive books of the series, are introduced. Once more we have a clever cross-section of types and stereotypes, featuring 'good' and 'bad' characters. The subjects, too, are cleverly inventive and bear no relation at all to conventional school subjects. An obvious difference here with the Tom Brown text is the way that Rowling concentrates on lessons and academic matters much more than Hughes does in his Rugby novel. At Hogwarts, hard work and a full curriculum of lessons (even if they are bizarre subjects like Defence Against Dark Arts) is the norm. At Rugby the academic subjects are glossed over in the first part of the story and made to seem rather unimportant, compared to sport. This is later reversed, with Arthur's attitude to his studies. At Rugby, the pupils are certainly given more importance than the staff, but the opposite is true at Hogwarts. There are some common elements, though, with two revered and respected Head teachers (the Doctor and Dumbledore) and emphasis on escapades outside the classroom and the trouble pupils get into when they break the rules.

The character of the Potions Master, Snape, is the main portrait in this chapter. He will play a central role as Harry's Nemesis. I wonder if Rowling deliberately made him a pseudo-scientific character. 'Potions' is obviously a play on the idea of Chemistry and all the Potions lessons are described as torture to pupils. He is thoroughly disagreeable and the hostility towards Harry is maintained throughout the series. Again you are going to say he is a caricature and he is, but his unrelenting hostility and his physical description makes him the baddie you love to hate.

## Chapter 9

Linked to Snape is the character of Malfoy. Snape is an adult version of Malfoy and Housemaster for the evil Slytherin House, of which Malfoy is also a member. You will want to draw a parallel here with the Flashman character in Tom Brown, but don't

go too far with this. Remember that Malfoy is the same age as Harry and he doesn't have the same potential for physical menace because he isn't a senior boy, like Flashman. You can, though, say that he and Harry are natural enemies. There are some similarities in the two characters and their relationship to the main characters, in the way that both Malfoy and Flashman are underhand, using sneaky tactics to keep out of trouble themselves and getting others into it by devious means.

The main event in the chapter is the introduction of the sporting theme. Like Rugby, the game of Quidditch is a hugely important aspect of school life. Don't try to compare the two, though, because Rowling makes Quidditch an amalgamation of several team sports, complicated (or made more interesting) by the element of flying broomsticks. What you need to do is look at the function the games have. They both provide healthy competition and also a way of consolidating House loyalty.

## Chapter 10

Remind yourself of the remarks about organised religion earlier in these notes and look at the title of this chapter. Halloween is a major holiday at the school, with a special feast and decorations. Rowling is obviously using a contemporary reference point here for young readers, who will be perfectly familiar with bats and pumpkins. Later on we have Christmas trees and presents but never a reference to anything other than the conventional codes and connotations of Christmas.

The Nimbus 2000 broomstick is an interesting parallel to 'designer' status objects and we have to make a point here about the way that Rowling encourages male readers. Have you noticed how many of the central characters are male? Hogwarts is a mixed school, but the action centres very firmly round a core of boys and men. Hermione is a strong character and so is Professor McGonagall, but women are definitely not prominent in this narrative. Quite what you should make of this, I'm not sure. It's clever of JKR to choose boys for most of the central characters and clever of her to make her women strong. There seems to be a very even split of readership gender for these books, so can we presume that JKR's motive was to encourage boys to read because girls read anyway? There's probably someone doing a dissertation that one as we speak.

In this chapter, too, we learn more about the rules of Quidditch and there is a good deal of action when the troll appears in the upstairs bathroom. As with all children's stories the monster is easily overcome by the hero, but not before we have the very conventional rescue of the maiden (Hermione) in distress. What makes the episode credible is the conventional dialogue and the slapstick humour. "Oy, pea-brain!" yells Ron before Harry sticks his wand up the troll's nose. "Urgh – troll bogies" says Harry, as he takes his wand out.

## Chapter 10

The first Quidditch match is a brilliant piece of comic writing, especially Jordan's amplified commentary, with additional asides from Professor McGonagall. Conventionally we never expect anything less than that Harry will catch the Golden Snitch and win the match, so no surprises. The surprises are, as usual, in the way he does it (catching it in his mouth); the commentary dialogue and in the mysterious events off the pitch, with Hermione setting Snape's robe on fire.

You might want to say something about the pace of the narrative (and this will apply throughout the book). This was a first novel and so something of a 'test piece' for JKR's story. There is some evidence that she had the whole narrative of the series mapped out before this episode was written, but there would have been no guarantee that the public would accept the very odd characters and settings. As a test, it has to be short, concise and convincing. One way to ensure that is to make the narrative run at a very fast pace and JKR does this. If you look at later works, especially the fifth book 'Order of the Phoenix', there is a definite tendency to put in more detail about characters, emotions and motives and the pace is very much slower. 'Philosopher's Stone' is almost frenetic, with very short chapters and a great deal of action at the expense of character detail and certainly emotional detail.

Compare the pace of this book to the Hughes and you will see how much more leisurely the pace is in 'Tom Brown'. The author intrudes at length and interrupts the narrative constantly to sermonize and there is certainly no element of mystery in anything Tom Brown does. There is a great deal of emotional content, especially in the second part of the book, with the introduction of Arthur and his influence on Tom and East. You might like to suggest that JKR's structure and content reflect the frenetic pace of post modern society with its three second attention span and Hughes chooses a pace and style that is indicative of a more thoughtful slower-paced era.

## Chapters 12 & 13

Christmas at Hogwarts. Trees and food – no chapel. In fact no chapel at all in five books so far, but plenty of pagan influences. Compare this with Hughes and make the point that the Rowling novel reflects a secular society, whereas Hughes lived in a time when Christian teaching was a core element of life. Have you noticed, too, how much emphasis there is on excessive consumption of food in Harry Potter? Is JKR really suggesting that all children are greedy all the time? Note how many references there are to sweets and juice – is this a deliberate reflection of the times we live in?

Harry's presents are an amusing mixture of the mundane and the very bizarre – a maroon hand-knitted sweater, sweets, a fifty pence piece and an Invisibility Cloak that used to belong to his dead father.

The discovery of the Mirror of Erised (note the clever reversal of the title over the frame "Is how not your face but your hearts desire") is a poignant sequence. Harry sees his 'live' parents in a mirror, but of course can only wave at them. Rowling goes close to describing serious emotion here, but does not cross the line, preferring to proceed with the narrative and have Ron look in the glass to see himself as Head Boy and Quidditch cup winner. Dumbledore, the wise headmaster, stops Harry from looking into the mirror for the third time and delivers a homily 'It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live'.

The very short chapter 13 is concerned once again with moving the mystery narrative along, as the three young detectives discover the identity of Nicholas Flamel, the keeper of the stone that guarantees everlasting life to its owner and Snape's character is made to seem even more suspicious with his overheard conversation with Professor Quirrell.

## Chapters 14 & 15

Hagrid's pet dragon, Norbert, provides some original comic relief, as does the three headed dog (called 'Fluffy') which he has set on guard over the trapdoor. Once again, JKR juxtaposes the ridiculous with the normal ("Bless him, look, he knows his mummy", says Hagrid, as the baby dragon bares its fangs). The whole episode of getting rid of Norbert has slapstick elements, with the 'baby' banging its tail on the wall, making the windows rattle and Ron's bitten hand turning a 'nasty shade of green'. When Norbert is taken away by Charlie Weasley and his friends in the dead of night, Hagrid puts a teddy bear and some brandy in the travelling crate and Norbert rips its head off. Typically, JKR uses the cliff hanger ending, with Hermione and Harry being caught, together with Neville Longbottom, out of the dormitory and given detention.

The next chapter, in which Harry, Hermione, Neville and Malfoy do their detention in the Forbidden Forest, introduces some more fantastic creatures in the shape of centaurs and unicorns. What you will notice is how the author can change the mood quite swiftly. The events in the forest (dead unicorns and creeping figures) are very much more sinister than previous ones. The book, of course is coming to its climax, so this is not unexpected, but there is a convincing menace in the silvery unicorn blood and 'something slithering over dead leaves nearby'. The encounter with the centaurs is dramatic and the climax of the chapter, with Harry's face to face meeting with the 'hooded figure' and his scream of pain 'as though his scar was on fire' carries real dramatic intensity. Harry's rescue, by Firenze, the rogue centaur, is convincing and the dialogue is very adult here when Firenze explains the significance that the Stone has for Voldemort. Again, the chapter ends on a cliff-hanger, with the return of Harry's invisibility cloak 'Just in case'.

## Chapters 16 & 17

Rowling breaks the climax of the book into two chapters. Chapter 16 is the 'quest' to find the Stone and the identity of the mysterious hooded figure who has been trying to find the secrets of its enchanted hiding place. There is never any doubt that Voldemort is involved in some way with the whole scenario, but there is enough mystery to keep the reader guessing as to what form he will take. (Notice mundane details like the quest happening after the end of term exams are over) In a neat twist, which is not revealed until later in the series, Rowling keeps the reader convinced that it is Snape who is the villain. The 'red herring' is always a staple ingredient of mystery fiction.

Harry, Hermione and Ron go in search of the Stone and typically, they have to solve a series of clues and pass several barriers on the way. So far all is predictable. Rowling, however, mindful of the violence of computer games, puts Ron into a chess game with live pieces and a real element of physical danger. Winning the game involves him being taken by the Queen who 'struck Ron hard round the head with her stone arm'. He is knocked unconscious and then Hermione has work out a logic puzzle to get past two barriers of fire, before Harry can go on into the final hiding place. The clever thing about this section of the book is the way that Rowling shows the co-operation between the three friends, each one relying on the other to stay safe. Harry finally enters the last chamber, expecting to confront Snape trying to steal the Stone.

Good mysteries always have a twist and Rowling creates several in the last chapter. The villain is not the evil Snape, but the meek Professor Quirrell. Of course Rowling, like all good mystery writers, uses the cliché of the criminal explaining the motives behind the crime, which is just another way of filling in the audience on the details the author couldn't reveal beforehand, so we find out about the 'loose ends' from the character.

The finding of the Stone is very inventive and Rowling creates an unusual effect with the mirror-Harry putting the Stone into the 'real' Harry's pocket as he looks into the glass. The revelation that Voldemort is attached to the back of Quirrell's head is also novel and full credit to JKR for making it convincing. Look at the dialogue again. It's the adult register of Voldemort's speech that makes the impact. "Kill him, fool and be done!"

The formulaic ending – Harry fainting and hearing voices, knowing 'all was lost' (what a cliché!) and 'falling down...down...

down...is again something that is common in this type of fiction. He wakes up safe in the hospital wing and the reader is obviously meant to breathe a sigh of relief. Remember that the average reader for this one was about eight and you might see that more realism might have meant nightmares. What is evident in the later books is that Rowling gained a great deal of confidence after this first story was so successful. Later books in the series are much darker and she kills off some characters in quite gruesome ways. (In 'Goblet of Fire' Voldemort tells his assistant to 'Kill the spare' and one of Harry's school mates dies.) Here she is, I think, playing it quite safe. Maybe her intended audience was younger than it turned out to be when the book was released. Once older teenagers and adults had read and enjoyed this story it was only to be expected that she would want to cater for an older reading audience in future episodes. Perhaps she always intended the stories to reflect Harry's increasing maturity. There was a great deal of media coverage, for example, about 'Harry's first kiss' in the chattering tabloids when the latest book came out.

The story ends with further explanations from Dumbledore, (whose character I confess to finding rather twee, with his 'twinkling eyes' and excessively calm demeanour) and the moral (only one who wanted to find the stone – find it but not use it) is delivered. There is a predictable ending, with Gryffindor winning the House Cup because of the bravery of Harry and his friends and everyone passing their exams. Harry returns to Privet Drive and life with the Dursley's and that's the end.

So how do you make that fit with Tom Brown's Schooldays? Here are a few thoughts, but please do your own thinking as well.

Both books are a reflection of their time and place of writing

Both deal with loyalty, friendship and growing up

Both central characters have spirit and get into difficult situations because they are stubborn and courageous. Each one has some nobility of character that makes him likeable.

Each central character undergoes a change. Tom's change is confined to two books (the second one is about his years at University) Harry's is spread over seven. The change in Tom has to happen in one episode and is really about his spiritual conversion. Harry's change happens gradually over a span of seven novels. He doesn't change in the same way as Tom Brown, but rather becomes more aware of who he is and what he has to do.

Both books are set in a very prestigious public school and much of the detail and description deals with the traditions and the way the school is run

There is in both books an implicit idea that teacher and pupil are on opposite sides. In TBS it is a sort of war but in HP there are only a few staff members who are hostile and disliked.

Both books feature bullying although HP is bullied worse by his relations and Professor Snape than by another pupil, as Flashman bullies Tom Brown.

Sport plays a very important part in the life of both Hogwarts and Rugby School. It is seen as character building and provides healthy competition and encourages team work

Friendship is a central theme in both books. Unlike TBS Harry Potter has a boy and a girl as his two closest friends which reflects modern society. Tom's world is exclusively male and features women only as carers and servants. The females in HP are strong and independent.

Christian teaching and morality is central to Hughes's book while HP features a less specific spiritual dimension. There is strong emphasis on 'good' and 'evil' and the battle between the two in Harry Potter, but Rowling never gives an indication that she intends it to be linked to Christian teaching. This reflects the post modern trend towards the rejection of traditional Christian values and ideology.

HP contains implicit references to modern values and attitudes and TB to Victorian ones. This is perfectly natural, as most novels are a reflection of contemporary culture. We see references to excessive eating and material comforts in Harry Potter. Also to possessions (Harry's lack of possessions is an indication of how important they are to the readership) and in later novels to tabloid journalism and corrupt government. IN TB we have references to industrialisation and its evils, to the importance of the countryside and the maintenance of the 'rule' of the privileged. In HP this is reversed. The privileged are often shown to be corrupt and the 'upper class' are not, in general shown as sympathetic characters.