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# The Complexity of Common Core: Teaching Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince as a 7th Grade Complex Text

Allyson R. Jones

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The University of Southern Mississippi

The Complexity of Common Core:  
Teaching *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* as a 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Complex Text

by

Allyson Jones

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
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Approved by

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Katherine Cochran, Ph. D., Thesis Advisor  
Associate Professor of English

---

Eric Tribunella, Ph.D., Chair  
Department of English

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Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean  
Honors College

## Abstract

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards occurring across the country, schools and students are seeing changes in the organization of education. These standards, grounded in English Language Arts and Mathematics, are designed to push students' critical thinking skills, writing ability, and methods of communication to prepare them for their life beyond secondary education. For English Language Arts, there is an emphasis on teaching complex texts. In this study, I examined the qualities of complex texts to determine if *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* could be considered a teaching tool for seventh grade students. To do this, I performed many literary analyses following different schools of literary theory. Also, I created a controlling theme and rationale for a thematic unit featuring the Harry Potter novel titled, "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing." In this rationale, I explained the main ideas I wanted students to learn about the different kinds of love found in our society, along with the other texts and assignments featured in the unit. I decided to feature *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* because it is a very entertaining novel that also includes Common Core's measures for text complexity (qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations). This study aimed to provide information about the Common Core State Standards, determine the text complexity of the novel *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and create a thematic unit appropriately challenging for a seventh grade classroom.

Key words: Common Core, Harry Potter, English Language Arts education, text complexity, literary analysis, thematic unit

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1. Statement of the Problem</b>	1
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review</b>	3
A. Common Core State Standards Initiative	3
B. Text Complexity	8
C. The Phenomenon of Harry Potter	12
D. Research Questions	18
<b>Chapter 3. Methodology</b>	20
<b>Chapter 4. Literary Analysis of <i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i></b>	25
A. Reader-Response Analysis/Reflection	25
B. Psychological Analysis/Reflection	31
C. Marxist Analysis/Reflection	36
D. Mythological Analysis/Reflection	41
E. Media Studies Analysis/Reflection	46
F. Putting the Analyses to Work	52
<b>Chapter 5. Thematic Unit: Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</b>	54
<b>Chapter 6. Conclusion</b>	62
<b>Works Cited</b>	64

## Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

In an ideal English classroom, students enjoy reading, thinking critically about a wide variety of literature, and participating in lively class discussion; however, in many of today's English classrooms, students complain that reading is a chore with no purpose. This issue needs to be rectified because, as Trevor Cairney mentions in his book *Pathways to Literacy*, "Literature is not just about story; it is about life and one's world. It can act as...a source of knowledge; a means to peer into the past, and the future; a vehicle to other places; an introduction to the realities of life and death; and a vehicle for the raising and discussion of social issues" (77-78). With so much to be gained from reading literature, students should be excited about its prospects rather than dreading its outcomes.

Students are often afraid of literature when forced to read books they cannot relate to or understand. Faced with texts that they do not find entertaining or too challenging to comprehend, many students swear off reading altogether, leading to major issues with student reading levels. These subpar literacy levels must be addressed because, as Jillian Wendt explains, for students to be successful they need to "develop not only the ability to read, but also the ability to comprehend difficult texts and to communicate in effective and meaningful ways" (40). One potential strategy to get students reading more and to understand complex texts is to teach students books that they are familiar with and enjoy; unfortunately, many books that students enjoy are not commonly taught in the classroom. This can change with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which encourages teachers to teach "complex" texts. Since these texts do not necessarily come from a set list, teachers are now given more freedom with their text choices; they

have the ability to find and teach texts that are both relatable and entertaining to students, while showing complexity at the same time.

One such text that could be used in a seventh grade classroom is *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, by J.K. Rowling. While this is not a typical text choice, it has many qualities that make it a “complex” text as determined by the standards of Common Core. Using a text from the extremely popular Harry Potter series—which some students have read or at least know about—to teach literary technique could be a way to get students more interested in reading. In examining the Common Core State Standards that establish text complexity and critically analyzing *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, I aim to determine whether or not this text could be taught as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade complex text.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Common Core State Standards Initiative**

*What is Common Core?*

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is currently adopted by forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity. In this initiative are “standards” that students are expected to master throughout their education, which increase in complexity and difficulty as they move through each grade level. The standards in this new program are “designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). This push for college and career readiness began as a response to high school graduates being unprepared to meet the challenges of college and/or the workforce; Common Core’s objective is to make students prepared for these challenges.

It is emphasized that the standards “establish what students need to learn, but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). Rather than dictating how to teach material, the Common Core standards serve as a guide for what students should be learning to prepare themselves for the challenges of postsecondary education. For example, in English classrooms teachers are not required to teach certain texts from a master list, such as classics from the literary canon, but rather are encouraged to select complex material that helps students master the standards. This flexibility gives teachers

the opportunity to teach material that might not have received much attention in the English classroom. While it is important to expose students to the classic literary canon, these need not be the only types of works that students read and analyze in their literature classroom.

*Why was Common Core created?*

The workforce has seen a dramatic increase in jobs that require postsecondary education, as is mentioned in Robert Rothman's "A Common Core of Readiness." In 1973, 28 percent of jobs in America required higher education, but it is projected that by 2018 62 percent of jobs will require education beyond the high school level (qtd in Rothman 11). There is now a clear demand for workers with a college degree. The problem with this steep increase in demand is that students are going to college, but are not graduating with a degree. There are simply not enough students finishing college to meet the demands and qualifications of the current workforce.

One reason that students are not succeeding in college is that they have not been given the necessary preparation in high school. It has been shown that in 2011, only one in four students met the benchmark scores in English, Reading, Mathematics, and Science on the ACT test, administered throughout the country to determine a student's likelihood of passing an entry-level college course (qtd in Rothman 12). The ACT test results also found that about 40 percent of students entering college are required to take at least one remedial course and these students are more likely to drop out of college without earning a degree (qtd in Rothman 12). The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the leaders in the Common Core Initiative, decided that the solution to students coming to college

unprepared is to take a critical look at the education system and fix its weaknesses. Their goal is to make sure that students have the ability to enter and stay in college to graduate with a degree.

*What did schools look like previously?*

Before the implementation of Common Core, each state had its own set of standards for students to achieve. These standards were then assessed by a state test given towards the end of the school year. Each state had the freedom to create its own standards, but it quickly became clear that some states set their standards too low for students to be successful at the college level. One of the biggest differences found in the Common Core Initiative is that the standards are exactly the same for each state that chooses to adopt them, eliminating the issue of some states not being on par with the rest of the country. The standards of the Common Core Initiative “promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad...the [standards] enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). Previously, it was difficult to compare students throughout the country because each state’s standards varied so widely, but with Common Core it will be possible to compare these students since everyone is expected to master the same standards (“Frequently Asked Questions,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). Once we are better able to assess our students’ abilities on a national level, we will have a clearer picture of how our students rank on a global scale.

*What does Common Core mean for students?*

With the implementation of Common Core, the United States education system is going to see many changes; these changes will be especially important for students. In many cases, the way students are expected to perform will change drastically from what they have grown accustomed to. One of the biggest changes students will find is that they will be consistently expected to think critically. Critical thinking has always been a part of the learning process, but students have not always used it on a daily basis. For example, some previous assessments focused on rote memorization of facts and dates, wherein the student does not necessarily have to understand the material to get the right answer. Also, students often quickly learned what they need to know for the test and then forgot the information soon after. Common Core seeks to ensure that students are always thinking critically and defending their answers with evidence from the text. Instead of just accepting information as it is given to them, students are now encouraged to ask “Why, what should I make of this, and how can I apply this to my own life?”

Another major change students will see with the incorporation of Common Core is the emphasis on informational texts. Rather than just focusing on reading literature in the English classroom, Common Core strives to expose students to informational texts in all subject areas. This will be a major shift for students who had minimal experience with reading texts in such classes as mathematics and science. As Jim Burke mentions in *The English Teacher's Companion*, using this model allows students to “read informational texts from print publications in addition to examining other informational texts about the same topics that combine, for example, graphic and quantitative information...that offer yet other perspectives on a given subject” (143). These informational texts can give

students a deeper understanding of the subject they are studying and how it applies in the real world. It is also important to consider that using informational texts is a common practice at the collegiate level. Common Core seeks to introduce students to these types of scholarly work in every subject during their secondary education to better prepare them for success in college.

*What do the Common Core standards for English Language Arts look like?*

In English Language Arts, the Common Core standards are separated into four categories: writing, speaking and listening, language, and reading (“Key Points in English Language Arts,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). The reading category is further subdivided into literature, informational texts, and foundational skills. With regards to writing, Common Core strives to make sure that students have the ability to write clear arguments: assert logical claims based on sound reasoning, defend their opinion with relevant evidence, and research focused and long-term projects. The speaking and listening standards focus on making sure that students have the ability to present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening, speaking, and media, along with the skill to participate in academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. The language standards make sure that students have the ability to grow their vocabularies, determine word meanings, use formal English in writing, and make informed choices to express themselves (“Key Points in English Language Arts,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). The English Language Arts standards discuss a wide variety of topics and abilities, but the reading standards have by far received the most attention in English classrooms. This stems from

the fact that the reading standards are now focused on students being exposed to “complex texts.”

### **Text Complexity**

#### *What makes a text complex?*

Common Core emphasizes that students should be exposed to complex texts in the classroom. This is particularly important because it is noted in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects Appendix A that “if students cannot read challenging texts with understanding—if they have not developed the skill, concentration, and stamina to read such texts—they will read less in general” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). If we cannot help students understand the types of complex texts they will encounter after high school, then there is a chance that they will avoid reading as soon as they are given the opportunity. Turning away from these complex texts could lead to a “general impoverishment of knowledge, which...will accelerate the decline in the ability to comprehend complex texts and decline in the richness of the text itself” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). In order to avoid this consequence, students need to be exposed to complex and challenging texts throughout their high school career, but how exactly is a text determined to be complex?

#### *Qualities of Complex Texts*

The Common Core Initiative has created a model to serve as criteria for text complexity. This model is separated into three categories: qualitative dimensions/factors, quantitative dimensions/factors, and reader and task considerations (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). According to this model, qualitative

dimensions/factors refer to those “aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose,” quantitative dimensions/factors refer to those “aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently,” and reader and task considerations refer to “variables specific to particular readers...assessments best made by teachers employing their professional judgment and experience” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). This model can be used to examine all of the various aspects of a text and determine its complexity. Once its complexity is determined, teachers can better deem its appropriateness for a particular grade level.

#### *Qualitative Dimensions*

The four factors of the qualitative strand of text complexity are levels of meaning or purpose, knowledge demands, structure, and language conventionality and clarity. In examining a text for levels of meaning or purpose it is important to note that “literary texts with a single level of meaning tend to be easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). These multiple meanings can be very useful in the classroom, particularly in discussion where students are encouraged to provide many interpretations of a text. Knowledge demands of texts that are not complex make “few assumptions about the extent of readers’ life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary knowledge” while complex texts “make many assumptions in one or more of those areas” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). The various knowledge demands brought

up in texts force readers to think critically about the world around them, a very useful tool that can be employed in the college classroom.

In terms of structure, a complex text has “complex, implicit, and (particularly in literary texts) unconventional structures...make[ing] more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and other manipulations of time and sequence” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). The unconventional structures found in complex texts can be confusing to students, but with proper guidance and assistance these structures can be navigated and give students more appreciation for why the text was written using a particular format. When considering language conventionality and clarity, Common Core mentions that “texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language tend to be easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic, or otherwise unfamiliar language” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). One of the biggest issues students have with texts is its language. If they are not familiar with an author’s vernacular, they often struggle with analyzing the text. Just as guidance with structure can be beneficial, help with understanding language can be useful.

### *Quantitative Dimensions*

There are a wide variety of formulas and formats to follow to measure the quantitative dimensions of a text. These various tools are used to “help educators assess aspects of text complexity that are better measured by algorithm than by a human reader...using word length and sentence length as proxies for semantic and syntactic complexity, respectively” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). Common Core mentions that these formulas are often easy to use, but one of their major



drawbacks is that longer words and sentences are not necessarily difficult to read. It is noted that a “series of short, choppy sentences can pose problems for readers precisely because these sentences lack the cohesive devices, such as transition words and phrases, that help establish logical links among ideas and thereby reduce the inference load on readers” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). In many cases, it is the shortest sentences that cause the most problems for readers.

One formula that tries to avoid the issue of determining the true complexity of a text is Lexile Framework for Reading, developed by MetaMetrics, Inc. The major difference between the Lexile Framework and other formulas is that “traditional formulas only assign a score to texts, whereas the Lexile Framework can place both readers and texts on the same scale” (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). The Lexile Framework has the same problem of many readability formulas because it may underestimate the difficulty of texts that use simple language to communicate complex ideas. Therefore, MetaMetrics is actively working to determine if more factors should be added to their quantitative research (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). While there are some flaws with many of the quantitative tools to determine a text’s complexity, they still serve as an informative way to look at the language of a text.

#### *Reader and Task Considerations*

It is important to look at the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of a text, but the reader must also be considered when selecting a text. Teachers can determine what texts are most suited for their students by using their professional judgment. One example of using this judgment is noting that “harder texts may be appropriate for highly knowledgeable or skilled readers, and easier texts may be suitable as an expedient for

building struggling readers' knowledge or reading skill up to the level required by the Standards" (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). A teacher may be better able to determine how difficult or simple the text will be for the students, depending on individual students' reading proficiency.

Another aspect to consider when assigning a text is a student's motivation. If a student does not want to read a book then they will not get much enjoyment from it. They will simply look at the words on the page without considering their meaning and will not glean any retainable knowledge. The motivation levels of students in a classroom are important because "Highly motivated readers are often willing to put in the extra effort required to read harder texts that tell a story or contain information in which they are deeply interested" (Appendix A, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). When students are interested in their reading, they will ultimately learn more from it. They will be more invested in the plot and will think deeply about the text with proper motivation. If a teacher can consider what students like when assigning a text, the students will be more likely to enjoy their reading assignments, and will participate more in classroom discussion. One such series of texts could be found in the *Harry Potter* franchise.

### **The Phenomenon of Harry Potter**

*Why is Harry Potter so popular?*

Beginning in 1997, with six more books published by 2007, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series created a cultural phenomenon around the world. It seems that since the publication of the series, almost every child has wanted to be a witch or wizard and fly away to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Leilani Clark mentions one theory why the books are so popular in her article, "What is it about Harry Potter?" She explains

that the books' appeal lie in their "ability to traverse genres, combining all of them into one cauldron to produce all the elements of an addictive read—adventure, fantasy, and school in one narrative, with the archetypal orphan child hero" (752). The books have something for everyone to enjoy, regardless of age, race, or gender. By showcasing a mix of different literary elements such as adventure, romance, and fantasy, the books have a widespread appeal. For example, despite being a children's series, many adults love the books and are not ashamed to say so. In many cases both a child and his parents have read the series, giving the family a common form of entertainment.

Clark also explains that it is not easy to predict everything that will happen in the books, despite the typical formula beginning at the Dursleys' house and then moving to Hogwarts "where Harry learns the ways of the wizarding world and interacts with teachers, friends, and enemies; they all cover a school year; and climax in Harry confronting Voldemort or his followers" (752). Even with this basic formula, Rowling still keeps readers on their toes by inserting "those twists in the tale, those extra subplots and subtexts that keep the reader, at whatever age, guessing and reading on to find out what happens" (752). The reader may know that at some point Harry will encounter Voldemort but he is left in the dark as to how those events will happen. Also, oftentimes the true identity of a particular character is revealed during a shocking climax. Rowling manages to make a formulaic series unpredictable, a feat not easily accomplished.

Yet another enduring aspect of the *Harry Potter* series is its explanations of magical elements. The magic and spells in the books are not presented as old-fashioned ideas that do not belong in the modern world; rather, Rowling's portrayal of magic is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the world of Harry Potter, "broomsticks are the latest in sporting

equipment... owls serve as the most efficient post delivery system ever invented... [there are] paintings and pictures whose subjects move, secret passageways, and an hourglass that allows time travel” (753). The magic in the books has been given a modern twist accessible to today’s reader, especially because they learn its secrets through Harry, who did not grow up knowing he is a wizard. Harry’s experiences serve as a guide for the reader to learn the different elements of magic found in the books (753). The many types of magical elements that Harry experiences are made even more exciting because as Sharon Black mentions in her article, “The Magic of Harry Potter: Symbols and Heroes of Fantasy,” Harry is able to “leave the ‘muggle’ world that rejects and abuses him, run through Platform 9 ¾ (or step into a flying car or take a little magic flue powder) and enter the wizarding world where he can learn the lessons and develop the strengths that allow him to mature” (244). The muggle world that Harry leaves behind can be equated to the world the reader belongs to, so the reader can fully experience and appreciate Harry’s escape into a world unlike anything he has ever imagined.

While the *Harry Potter* series has many fantastical elements of magic and adventure, it also contains very “real” elements of school and friendship. During his time at Hogwarts, Harry gets to do things he never dreamed of, but what he truly takes away from his time there are the friendships he makes. The friendship between Harry and his two strongest allies, Ron and Hermione, is truly special. Clark notes their friendship is “perceptively portrayed, developing and changing as they grow older and external events affect them” (753). Harry and his friends are not simply happy and cheerful with each other all the time. They are shown in a realistic light, showing that sometimes friends have fights and get on each other’s nerves. What makes their friendship poignant is that

they push past their obstacles to always be there for one another, showcasing the important values of true friendship.

There is no question that the *Harry Potter* series has become a global phenomenon. Harry Potter has become a prevalent portion of our culture, receiving much praise and acclamation since its initial publication. There are a variety of elements, such as its exciting plot and well-developed characters, found in the series that contribute to its popularity and success; these elements also showcase a multitude of literary techniques. Since the series is so popular, especially among students, and display common tools of literature, why not include these texts in the classroom?

#### *Harry Potter as a Teaching Tool*

Teaching literature is a complicated job and there are many things to consider when presenting literature to a class, such as the addressing the needs of students, formulating thorough lesson plans, and selecting appropriate texts to teach. To shed light on how a text should be selected, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* explains, “We never just teach the book; we teach the idea that the book happens to be about” (Beach et al. 70). Selecting a text just because it is canonical literature is not enough. Instead of learning from a book simply because it is a classic, students gain more insight and knowledge by examining and analyzing the ideas presented in the text. While it is important that students be exposed to well-known literature, they should learn something meaningful from it as well. Integrating texts that are not often seen in English classrooms is on the rise, especially with the implementation of Common Core allowing more freedom with text selection. The *Harry Potter* series could help students learn important

lessons through a series they know and enjoy, instead of just reading “classic” books that might not necessarily be entertaining to read.

The *Harry Potter* books have already been shown to be effective in the classroom as evidenced by Stephen Deets’ article, “Wizarding in the Classroom: Teaching Harry Potter and Politics.” In his political science course, Deets discusses many topics such as identity, political culture, and globalization with his students using the *Harry Potter* books and other supplemental readings to enhance the conversation. He notes that the books are beneficial because they portray a society that the students “[know] intimately and yet [have] enough distance [from] that they [can] examine it dispassionately” (Deets 741). Many students are very familiar with the world of Harry Potter and in Deets’ classroom this works well because they can critically examine a society in which they do not actually live, but at the same time are familiar enough with it to consider its nuances. He explains that the *Harry Potter* series lends itself well to the study of politics because “Through the seven books, it creates a well-developed parallel world. Furthermore, the entire plot is driven by ethnic tensions, questions about social responsibility, and fights over political power” (741). Through Deets’ course, the students were able to gain important knowledge about politics, applying its techniques and ideas to the *Harry Potter* series.

The *Harry Potter* series is unique in that it can be applied across a variety of subjects, but it is arguably most effective in the English classroom. For example, Don L. F. Nilsen and Alleen Pace Nilsen explain in their “Naming Tropes and Schemes in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Books” that every year they incorporate some aspect of Harry Potter into their lessons; this article focusing on how they discussed tropes and schemes

in the series. They define trope as “a ‘turn’ in the way that words are being used to communicate something more than—or different from—a literal or straightforward message. Tropes are part of ‘deep structure’ meanings” (Nilsen and Nilsen 60). Some examples of tropes are allusion, irony, metaphor, and symbolism. They go on to explain that schemes are “part of the ‘surface structure’ and include such phonological devices as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and rhythm” (60).

In their discussions with their students, Nilsen and Nilsen focus on the names Rowling gives to characters, animals, places, and spells. They justify their investigation by explaining that Rowling’s “rhetorical density” is shown by “how much meaning she can pack into the few short sounds needed to create a name,” and by bringing attention to the fact that names can show literary techniques because “they are the only words that authors are free to create either from already-established morphemes or from totally original sound combinations” (60-61). The names Rowling uses in the series are unique and they showcase literary practices such as allegory and alliteration.

Nilsen and Nilsen discuss allegory, which they define as “extended metaphors that illustrate an important attribute of the subject” (61), to further analyze naming. They point out that Rowling calling witches or wizards with non-magical parents “mudbloods” is an allegory for “the way English speakers express hostility by saying that someone’s *name is mud* or the way some people express racial prejudice by referring to someone as a *half-breed* or *mixed-blood*” (61). They then give an example of an alliteration, which they define as “the repetition of consonant sounds, usually at the beginning of words” (64). Nilsen and Nilsen give numerous examples of alliteration, but one notable example is the names Rowling gives to the founders of the four houses of Hogwarts: Godric

Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin (65). Every name in the books has a meaning and can be used to showcase a variety of literary techniques such as allegory and alliteration. Nilsen and Nilsen go on to explain many more techniques used by Rowling, acknowledging just how much information can be gleaned from the *Harry Potter* series.

### **Research Questions**

It is clear that the *Harry Potter* series has a breadth of information to provide to students regarding literature, and even other subjects such as political science. There is much for a reader to learn from the series, all while being entertained by the fascinating story and well-developed characters. With so much knowledge to be gained, *Harry Potter* could be an excellent teaching tool in the classroom, but it does lead one to wonder what benefits there are to teaching *Harry Potter*. This is one question that I hope to answer in my study.

Also, in many cases the *Harry Potter* series has been used in undergraduate classrooms; however, there are not as many instances of the series being taught in secondary schools. With the new standards of Common Core decreasing the emphasis of certain texts in the classrooms, this could be the opportunity to incorporate texts such as the *Harry Potter* series into the secondary classroom. In my study I would like to establish if *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth book in the series, could be used in a seventh grade classroom. I selected this book in the series because its language presents more difficulty than the previous novels. It also has a complicated plot that features flashbacks and complex character development. To determine if I could use this book, I hope to delve further into the Common Core standards, particularly focusing on



the elements that deem if a text is complex: qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations. By looking at all of these factors and performing a literary analysis of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, I seek to discover if the book could be a viable option for teaching seventh grade students and what the benefits of using this book in the classroom could be.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

My study and analysis of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* was guided by many schools of literary theory, specifically reader-response criticism, psychological criticism, Marxist criticism, mythological criticism, and media studies. Guided by these theories, I selected five chapters from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* to read from each critical lens. For each school of criticism, I conducted my own analysis of the chapter following the guidelines of the literary theory. After this analysis, I reflected on the process and discussed the pros and cons of having students write from that particular point of view. By doing this, I was able to show the novel's complexity and the multiple readings it can offer. There is no one "correct" way to read the novel; many forms of literary criticism can be applied to offer a variety of perspectives in which to consider the novel.

Along with the different schools of literary theory, my analyses were conducted by heavily focusing on close reading. Close reading is a multi-faceted concept explained by Richard Paul and Linda Elder in their series of articles, "Critical Thinking...and the Art of Close Reading." They explain that close reading requires many skills. These include considering a reader's "purpose [for] reading and an author's purpose in writing, see[ing] ideas in a text as being interconnected, looking for and understanding systems of meaning, engaging a text, getting beyond impressionist reading, and formulating questions and seeking answers to those questions" (Elder and Paul 36). These skills are crucial to thoroughly and informatively conduct close reading, all of which students need to master. In writing my own analyses guided by the different criticisms, I have modeled the close reading skills needed for a thoughtful and critical response to the novel. My

analyses and reflections have also shown that *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* is not only a complex text, but also a text that communicates many ideas worthy of being taught in the secondary classroom.

After conducting a variety of analyses from portions of the novel, I reexamined the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. Focusing my attention to the seventh grade, I selected the standards for each section (reading, writing, language, and speaking and listening) that I would want my students to master during their study of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (see table 1). While all of the standards in these sections are important for students to master, some are not as relevant to the thematic unit I want to teach. One such standard would be the writing standard in which students publish their writing on the Internet or another medium (English Language Arts Standards, *Common Core State Standards Initiative*). It is important that students be given the opportunity to publish writing, but it is not required for this thematic unit.

In regards to standards for reading literature, I focused on making sure that students learn how to determine the main elements of a text and to analyze a text through close reading and comparisons and contrasts. For the writing standards, the unit focuses on writing arguments, the revision process, and gathering research for writing assignments. As far as the speaking and listening standards go, the unit is designed to assist students in mastering many types of discussions (such as whole class or one-on-one conversations), along with preparing them to make formal presentations in front of an audience. For the language standards, the unit is grounded in vocabulary, making sure that students are able to use context clues, look up and define new words, and identify the nuances among words.

Table 1

7<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts Standards addressed in thematic unit

Reading Literature	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies
Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.	Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.	Demonstrate understanding of figurate language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings
Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.	Gather information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of sources; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation		

Table 1 Continued

Reading Literature	Writing	Speaking and Listening	Language
Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).			

Source: "English Language Arts Standards." *Common Core State Standards Initiative*.

N.p., 2012. Web. 02 July 2014.

Selecting which standards would be addressed in my instruction of the novel served as a useful first step in the next portion of my research: creating a thematic unit, with *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* serving as the anchor text of the unit. A thematic unit is an extended lesson (oftentimes lasting many weeks) created to showcase a particular theme, such as determining the power of secrets or defining the American dream. Teaching through a thematic unit can be useful in presenting multiple ways to consider a topic and its implications in the world. As Diana Mitchell and Linda Payne Young mention in their "Creating Thematic Units," a thematic unit is "an umbrella under which concepts and materials are gathered" (80). Many types of things can be discussed while reading a text, but a thematic unit can serve as a smart way to organize ideas. While reading a text, students can refer back to the theme of the unit and use it to guide their responses. However, in order to create my own thematic unit, I first needed to decide which standards students would master (or come closer to mastery) through the unit. By knowing which standards I wanted to address, I had a thorough understanding of what things my thematic unit needed to address in instruction.

To display the things I wanted to feature in instruction, I decided to make a controlling theme and rationale for a thematic unit. A controlling theme and rationale explains the theme, goals, ideas, and texts used in a thematic unit. It describes why I selected certain texts to accompany the main novel and how they are related to the theme of the unit. Along with this, the controlling theme and rationale addresses the essential questions and enduring understandings that I hope the students learn during their study. As is mentioned by Jean Donham van Deusen and Paula Brandt in their “Designing Thematic Literature Units,” because a theme is “a complete thought, not just a topic or concept, there is more meaning to reflect on and to discuss than a single word or concept might provide” (21). For example, the theme of my unit is titled, “Love is a Many-Splendored Thing.” Instead of just talking about love in general, the thematic unit is focused on the different kinds of love, such as romantic or familial, and how it influences characters’ motivations.

By explaining that *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* could be considered a complex text by performing a literary analysis of the text through close reading, and creating a controlling theme and rationale for a thematic unit featuring other texts and activities, I display how and why a text that resonates with many students could be used in a secondary classroom. With many of today’s students’ interest in reading decreasing, it is important to teach them in ways that will engage their thinking. By teaching a popular book that is also textually complex, students have the potential to read, think critically, and enjoy themselves at the same time.

## Chapter 4: Literary Analysis of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

### Reader-Response Analysis

Chapter Thirteen of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, titled, “The Secret Riddle,” gives us an inside look at the childhood of Lord Voldemort, formerly known as Tom Riddle. The number thirteen has often been associated with bad luck and I am a firm believer in that idea; I am typically extra careful on Friday the thirteenth, a day that can easily end in disaster. From my prior knowledge of Lord Voldemort I was able to guess that the “riddle” referred to in the title referenced the infamous villain. It was no surprise to me then that the chapter revealing his childhood is marked with the unluckiest number. I thought this was a clever choice on Rowling’s part. I highly doubt that it was an accidental coincidence.

The chapter begins with Harry asking about a recent incident with Draco Malfoy, but Dumbledore brushes that off and tells Harry that they need to focus on his lesson. This upsets Harry, leading him to think “If their lessons were so very important, why had there been such a long gap between the first and second?” (Rowling 260). To me, Harry’s thoughts are typical of a teenager, always wanting to know why he is being told to do something. Oftentimes I forget that Harry is so young when I think about the things that he has been through in his life with the loss of his parents and the constant fear for his own life. However, it is moments like this that remind me that Harry is still a teenager capable of sarcastic remarks and curt retorts. I also find it fitting that we are reminded of Harry’s youth just before we explore Lord Voldemort’s youth. I feel that it serves as a reminder that no matter who we grow up to be, we all start out as children trying to find our way in the world.

One particular idea that I noticed frequently in this chapter is that Harry and Tom Riddle are placed in similar situations, but their experiences are entirely different. A section I found interesting was the description of Tom's mother, Merope. She has a tragic life filled with despair and unrequited love (Tom was conceived while his father was influenced by the effects of a love potion; Tom's father never really loved Merope). Towards the end of her life, she stops using magic and Dumbledore says, "I do not think that she wanted to be a witch any longer" (Rowling 262). Harry has a hard time understanding this and I definitely agree with him. What we cannot understand is why she would not want to stay alive for her son, who is essentially the only thing she has left in the world. She has magical powers, but she abandons them when they have the ability to save her life. I think she abandons them because her powers remind her that Tom's father does not really love her. The only reason he stayed with her was because of her love potion. Her powers could not give her the thing she wanted most so she sees no further purpose for them.

When Harry exclaims that she had a choice and did not have to end her life, Dumbledore explains, "Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage" (Rowling 262). Both Harry and Tom lose their mothers, Lily and Merope respectively, but what defines these characters is why their mothers die. Merope dies because she has lost the will to live and even her son is not enough to continue living, while Lily dies to protect her son. They are both abandoned: Harry out of love and Tom out of fear. I think this is essential because Harry internalizes Lily's love and he always tries to be a kind and caring person; on the other hand, Tom



internalizes Merope's fear and, rather than being scared himself, he makes others fearful of him. Mrs. Cole, the matron of the orphanage in which Tom lives, describes him as "odd...He scares the other children...I don't think many people will be sorry to see the back of him" (Rowling 267-268). Rather than being fearful like his mother, Tom uses the fear of others to his advantage. Unfortunately though, this gives Tom a reputation of being strange and odd and ensures that he does not have any real friends.

This chapter also reveals that while Harry and Tom were both informed about their magical powers at the same age, they have completely different reactions to the information. When Dumbledore tells Tom that his special abilities of making things move without touching them, making animals do what he wants, and making people hurt is magic, Tom is quick to believe him stating, "I knew I was different...I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something" (Rowling 271). He does not like his life and is quick to accept that he has another option by embracing the fact that he is a wizard. Tom wants nothing more than to be special. He hates his name because it is so common and ordinary. When he learns that he has the ability to be different from everyone else, he jumps at the opportunity to embrace his uniqueness. On the other hand, as a young child Harry could not even fathom the idea of being special. He mentions to Dumbledore, "[Tom] believed it much quicker than I did...I didn't believe Hagrid at first, when he told me" (Rowling 276). In his mind Harry is completely ordinary, while Tom refuses to be anything but powerful and special. The idea that he is a wizard is strange and ridiculous to Harry, while to Tom, it is the only reasonable explanation.

As I started reading this chapter I felt sorry for Tom Riddle. He has no family and had a terrible childhood with no friends or happy memories to be seen. However, during

his interview with Dumbledore, I began to realize just how cruel a person he really is. For example, when Dumbledore first starts talking to Tom, the boy thinks that he is a doctor sent to examine him. Even when Dumbledore denies it, Tom does not believe him and demands that he tell the truth. We are then told, “He spoke [those words] with a ringing force that was almost shocking. It was a command, and it sounded as though he had given it many times before” (Rowling 269-270). At a young age, Tom experiences the thrill of power, but more importantly, sees the control it brings. Dumbledore mentions to Harry that Tom already had already “discovered that he had some measure of control over [his powers]. And as you saw, they were not the random experiments typical of young wizards. He was already using magic against other people, to frighten, to punish, to control” (Rowling 276). Tom has embraced his powers but, unfortunately, he does not use his powers for good. Instead of trying to make himself happier, he tries to make others miserable. While I understand that he had a rough childhood, I lost my sympathy for him by the end of the chapter. Even if he did not know that he had magical powers, Tom still would have been a villain, not a hero. As Dumbledore mentions, Tom has “obvious instincts for cruelty, secrecy, and domination” (Rowling 276). Tom Riddle does not want to be good and kind; he wants to be notorious.

I was also leaning towards sympathy when the chapter explains how he has no friends, but my thoughts changed when I discovered that he did not really want friends at all. As Dumbledore explains, “he [Tom] showed his contempt for anything that tied him to other people, anything that made him ordinary. Even then, he wished to be different, separate... Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor do I believe that he has ever wanted one” (Rowling 277). This chapter helped me discover that Tom has never wanted

to be accepted by others. He simply wants to be better than them. This is obviously not the basis of creating strong friendships. Instead of trying to fit in with others, he does everything in his power to stand out. I completely understand wanting to be a unique person, but Tom took the idea to extreme lengths.

After reading this chapter I have come to a better understanding of Tom Riddle, but any sympathy I might have had for him was also lost in the process. He had the opportunity to turn his life around when Dumbledore invited him to Hogwarts; instead, he uses his education at the school to become “the most dangerous Dark wizard of all time” (Rowling 276). He achieves his goal of becoming notorious, but creates a name for himself that the wizarding community dares not to utter.

### **Reader-Response Analysis Reflection**

Reader-response criticism is one of many schools of literary theory employed to perform critical analyses of complex texts. In conducting an analysis using reader-response criticism, the reader relies heavily on their own thoughts and emotions to guide their understanding of the text. As is mentioned in Steven Lynn’s *Texts and Contexts*, reader-response criticism should be “an unselfconscious, spontaneous, and honest reaction” (qtd in Lynn 66). I feel that my analysis using reader-response criticism reflects this process. As I was conducting my analysis, the things that I wanted to talk about came to me randomly as I read the text; my thoughts bounced around throughout the chapter and I did not find myself worrying that I was not truly understanding the chapter. I enjoyed this because I discovered that I was not focused on finding the “hidden meaning” in the chapter, but rather, I was just noting some of my observations. Once I delved deeper into my initial observations, I was able to come to what I thought the overall

message of the chapter was supposed to be. Instead of hunting for what I, as the reader, was supposed to learn from the chapter, the overall message came to me in a much more organic way. This process could be very useful for students in conducting their own analyses.

Instead of worrying about getting the “right” answer, students could focus more on their actual thoughts about the texts to come to a deeper understanding of what they are reading. By taking the pressure off of making sure that their analysis is correct, students will have a more organic response to the text. As they analyze their own thoughts and emotions, they will be able to come up with a unique response to the text that reflects their personal ideas and insights.

While there are many benefits to students focusing on their own thoughts about the text, there could also be some drawbacks with this method. For example, students might think that because there is no one right answer, they can get away with writing a ridiculous analysis that does not support the text. To avoid this issue, Lynn suggests that the students should not “simply respond [to the text] and move on. Rather, [the student] shares a response, and considers the responses of others, and reconsiders the text, and evolves his or her responses” (Lynn 68). Instead of having students conduct their own analysis and leaving it at that, reader-response criticism should involve a community of readers (such as a teacher and class members). In this community, everyone shares their individual responses, whether it is through small group or whole class discussion. During this process, students can develop a stronger analysis than what their initial thoughts produced; in listening to their peers, students might get more ideas related to their analysis or come to think of the text from a new perspective. By doing this, it allows

students to bring their own ideas to the table, while also learning more about the text by listening to their peers' responses. While it is a strong concern that a student's analysis might be completely off base during their initial response, reader-response criticism stresses that a reader's initial response should not be their *only* response to the text.

Reader-response criticism can be a very effective way for students to reflect on their ideas about a text. There are no rules about what to write about, nor is there pressure to find the "correct answer." This school of theory allows students to speak their minds freely, something many might find exciting and liberating. However, a student's response should not end with only their initial reactions. In a community of readers, who are all performing the same type of analysis, everyone should share their ideas and use the discussions to strengthen their own arguments. By performing reader-response criticism, students will be able to articulate their own thoughts and learn how to use the opinions of their peers to evolve their analyses. Reader-response criticism gives students the freedom to speak their mind and the ability to consult the guidance and advice of their peers.

### **Psychological Analysis**

Chapter twenty-four of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, titled "Sectumsempra," is centered on the upcoming Quidditch match between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw that will decide the championship. As the entire school prepares for the match, Harry finds himself distracted by other things going on around him, most notably the suddenly single Ginny Weasley. Throughout the chapter, many obstacles stand in the way of attempts to tell Ginny how he feels, such as his search for the Room of Requirement, a dangerous encounter with Malfoy and detention with Professor Snape. As all of these events are taking place, Harry repeatedly ignores the truth and denies the facts

that are right in front of him. In regards to Ginny, it is only when he stops overanalyzing and thinking that he can express himself. However, in his meeting with Malfoy, while in his confused and worried state, Harry is blind to the events that are happening right under his nose. Throughout this chapter, Harry suffers from over-thinking or not thinking at all.

Having liked Ginny for some time, Harry wants to tell her how much he likes her, but his problem stems from the fact that she is the sister of Ron (his best friend). Throughout the chapter, Harry agonizes about what to do, likening it to “a fierce battle raging inside [his] brain” (Rowling 515). As this “battle” is continuing in Harry’s head, he thinks about asking Hermione for help and maybe even using some of his Felix Felicis (a potion that makes the drinker extremely lucky) to give him an advantage. Eventually, after all of his attempts to rationalize with himself about his feelings for Ginny, he makes the Quidditch game “inextricably linked in [his] mind with success or failure in his plans for Ginny. He could not help feeling that if they won by more than three hundred points, the scenes of euphoria and a nice loud after-match party might be just as good as a hearty swig of Felix Felicis” (Rowling 520). In doing this, Harry projects a successful encounter with Ginny onto the Quidditch match, even though the match has absolutely nothing to do with how he feels about her. He does not need to hide behind the excitement of the match because it is already clear that he likes her. Hermione picks up on his feelings and Harry describes her looks at him while he is talking to Ginny as “smug,” knowing that she has caught on to his secret. While it might help Harry to talk to Ginny if they win the Quidditch match, it should not be the reason that he succeeds or fails.

Throughout the entire chapter, Harry agonizes over what to do and if he should talk to someone about it, but at the end of the chapter he finally comes to a decision. As

he discovers that Gryffindor has won the match, he notices “Ginny running toward him; she had a hard, blazing look in her face as she threw her arms around him. And without thinking, without planning it, without worrying about the fact that fifty people were watching, Harry kissed her” (Rowling 533). Once he stops worrying about what might happen and what others might think, Harry is able to communicate his feelings to Ginny. He did not have to hide behind the match or wait until there was no one around to tell her. All he needed to do was to get out of his own head so that he could express himself.

Harry has another problem in this chapter, not with over-thinking, but with not thinking at all during his encounter with Malfoy. Harry is convinced that Malfoy has been using the Room of Requirement to hide something, so he makes it a quest to figure out what Malfoy is doing. One day before the big Quidditch match, he discovers that Malfoy is in the bathroom talking to Moaning Myrtle. Harry goes into the bathroom and realizes that Malfoy is crying. Malfoy suddenly sees Harry standing there and the two start hurtling curses at each other. In his special Potions book, Harry had previously noticed a spell called “sectumsempra” scribbled in the corner by the Half-Blood Prince. The prince wrote that it was “for enemies” but Harry had not figured out what it did. During the encounter in the bathroom, Harry found out the hard way what the spell did, because as he cast it, “Blood spurted from Malfoy’s face and chest as though he had been slashed with an invisible sword” (Rowling 522). Harry finds the scene to be horrifying and cannot believe that the Half-Blood Prince would write a spell like that in the book.

When Harry recounts the event to Ron, Hermione, and Ginny later, Hermione thinks that there is something wrong with the Prince. When Harry disagrees with her, she wonders why he can still defend the book after what just happened. Harry yells back at

her, “Will you stop harping on about the book! The Prince only copied it out! It’s not like he was advising anyone to use it! For all we know, he was making a note of something that had been used against him” (Rowling 529). Despite what just happened to Malfoy, Harry starts to over-think about why the Prince would write down that spell. He seems to have forgotten that the Prince intended the spell to be used “for enemies.” In attempting to rationalize why the Prince would have that spell, Harry does not realize that the book made him perform dark magic. Harry only sees the book as something that had “taught [him] so much...the book that had become a kind of guide and friend” (Rowling 525). While he has learned much from the book, Harry does not understand that the book is also teaching him spells that he should never use, especially when he does not know how they work. Harry has come to trust the Prince so much that he cannot fathom the idea that this person might be a dangerous wizard who has had a terrible influence on him.

Harry needed to think a little bit more about his relationship with the Half-Blood Prince. Had he not trusted his blind faith in the Prince, Harry might have realized how dangerous he had become. However, in regards to his romantic life, Harry benefits from not over-thinking. Harry’s relationships with Ginny and the Prince are very different and each relationship calls for a different type of action. However, it takes Harry a long time to figure out these different actions. In order for Harry to move forward, he needs to find a balance between over-thinking and not thinking at all.

### **Psychological Analysis Reflection**

Psychological criticism is heavily influenced by the famous psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Their work in the field of psychology, along with other psychologists, has made its way into literary theory. One of the most important aspects of



psychological criticism is that its goal is to “bring to consciousness the hidden fears and desires that disturb and control our lives...and to direct Freud’s question—‘Why did you do that?’—to authors or characters or readers” (Lynn 196). This form of criticism can be very useful, especially in attempting to determine a character’s motivations and desires. By looking deep inside the mind of a character, the reader can learn more about the actions of the story, why they like or dislike the character, and what influenced the author to make the character behave in a certain way. This could be beneficial for students because as they delve into the mind of a character in the text, especially a character they dislike, they can come to understand why that character behaves that way. This new perception might lead them to think differently about the character, having come to terms with their desires and motivations.

While it could be beneficial for students to practice psychological criticism, it could also be harmful in that if they do not have a strong grasp on psychology, they might feel overwhelmed and that it is too difficult. When I was writing my analysis, I found it to be difficult to approach the text from the field of psychology, mainly because it is not my area of expertise. If I had trouble understanding how to conduct psychological criticism, then students will have the same, if not more, trouble with their analyses. In order for students to get the most benefits out of conducting psychological criticism, they first must have at least a basic knowledge of psychology. Knowledge of how the mind works and what informs the conscious and subconscious is essential to truly understanding how psychological criticism works.

## Marxist Analysis

Chapter 7 of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, “The Slug Club,” showcases Harry and his friends’ journey to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts Express. Fresh after a trip to Diagon Alley where Harry witnessed Malfoy acting very strange, he contemplates Malfoy’s behavior with Ron and Hermione. While on their journey, Harry suddenly receives an invitation to join Professor Slughorn, the new potions teacher, for lunch along with a group of other students, including his friends Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom. The people invited to this luncheon become the titular “Slug Club” because they are students who Professor Slughorn finds intriguing. Harry does not like the club or its founder because of the way Slughorn judges the merit of students before he really knows them; however, what Harry does not realize is that he too uses superficial judgment, especially in reference to Slytherin students.

The Slug Club is a group of students who Slughorn wants to be associated with because of either their powerful family connections or incredible magical talent. For example, he wants to be friends with Harry because of his famous name and the rumors that he is the “Chosen One,” while he invites Marcus Belby to the group because his uncle invented the Wolfsbane Potion. Harry eventually figures out that “Everyone here seemed to have been invited because they were connected to somebody well-known or influential” (Rowling 145). Despite the fact that Slughorn invites these students based on previous information he has gathered, he still interrogates them about their lives and family. When he thinks he has heard enough from one student, he moves on to another. For example, in regards to Belby, when first talking with him, Slughorn makes sure to give him a considerable amount of food; however, when he learns that Belby is not very

close with his famous uncle, Slughorn starts talking to Cormac McLaggen, whose family is friends with the new Minister of Magic. At this point he began “offering around a small tray of pies; somehow, Belby was missed out” (Rowling 145). Now that Belby is of no use to Slughorn, it is not important that he get the best food available.

Without waiting to see if Belby has any potential on his own, Slughorn moves on to a student who he thinks will offer him better prospects. In this way Slughorn follows the Marxist principle of commodification, which, defined by Ann B. Dobie in her *Theory Into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*, is “the attitude of valuing things not for their utility but for their power to impress others or for their resale possibilities” (Dobie 92). Slughorn is not really concerned about the personalities of the students in the club; instead, he is focused on the benefits he would get by becoming their friends. Students with powerful connections can use their access to give Slughorn expensive things so that he can have a lavish lifestyle. Slughorn can also brag about these students to his colleagues and potentially make others jealous. Once he determines which students can help him the most, Slughorn tries to get close to them so he can reap the benefits of their connections.

By creating the Slug Club, Professor Slughorn creates a kind of class society, where certain students are elite and everyone else is not important. Just like societies with aristocracies, students can only be admitted to Slughorn’s elite group through familial connections. The only way one can hope to be included in the Slug Club if they don’t have these connections is if they display a talent that Slughorn finds impressive. He is the sole judge of who is important and who is not. Harry finds this upsetting because he thinks it is ridiculous that Slughorn should classify students based on these arbitrary

measures. Harry thinks that he does not like Slughorn's methods of judging people, but in reality, he does the same exact thing.

Just as Slughorn creates a class society between those who are elite and those who are not, Harry forms his own form of a class society: people who are good and people who are evil. While it might not be a bad thing to classify between good and evil, Harry's problem is that he considers every Slytherin student he encounters to be evil. For example, one of the students invited to the Slug Club is a Slytherin student named Blaise Zabini. He is in the same school year as Harry and when Slughorn asks them if they know each other, "Zabini did not make any sign of recognition or greeting, nor did Harry or Neville: Gryffindor and Slytherin students loathed each other on principle" (Rowling 143). Zabini and Harry do not really know each other and have no reason to despise each other, other than the fact that Harry is part of Gryffindor and Zabini is part of Slytherin. Harry does not like the Slytherin house, so he assumes that he does not like Zabini. In Harry's mind, anyone who comes from the Slytherin house is not to be associated with. It is no surprise then that two of the professors that Harry does not particularly like, Slughorn and Snape, come from the Slytherin house. This idea even extends to every person that Harry despises in the entire series such as, Lord Voldemort, Malfoy, and Bellatrix Lestrange. While he is not always friendly with people from the other houses, the people Harry exclusively loathes belong to Slytherin.

Harry claims to not approve of Slughorn's methods of selecting favorite students but by associating all members of Slytherin with evil, he creates the same kind of class society as Slughorn. While the professor's is determined by a person's family or talent, Harry's is determined by their school house. Even though Harry does not like Slughorn,

they have more in common than he would care to admit. They both classify people based off of arbitrary measures, even if they are not consciously aware of it. Slughorn's Slug Club and Harry's hatred of Slytherin represent a way of thinking that Marxism hopes to eliminate. Marxism wants to destroy the class system, but as Harry and Slughorn have shown, it is not easy to do because class societies are not always obvious. Sometimes they are created by a subconscious level that even its creator is unaware exists.

### **Marxist Analysis Reflection**

Marxist criticism is a unique form of literary criticism that is rooted in the ideas of Marxism. As Peter Barry explains in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, the aim of Marxism is to “bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange” (Barry 150). In understanding the basic ideas of Marxism, Marxist literary criticism's goal is to show that “a writer's social class, and its prevailing ‘ideology’ (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realized allegiances, etc.) has a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class” (Barry 152). In other words, an author's ideas presented in a text are not works of sudden genius and inspiration, but rather they are ideas formed by the society in which they live. This is an important concept for students to understand because an author's ideas do not simply come out of thin air. Instead, they are created by the circumstances of the author's life and in examining their lifestyle, the reader can come to a deeper understanding of the ideas presented in the text.

Clearly, this would be a hard idea for students to fathom so, instead of focusing on the author (who the students do not really know), I would ask students to focus on the characters. I modeled this by grounding my Marxist analysis in the characters of Harry

and Professor Slughorn. In a similar way to my psychological analysis, I stayed inside of their minds and reflected on the thought processes behind their actions. I took my understanding of Marxism and how it works and applied to the actions of Harry and Slughorn. When my students conduct a Marxist reading of the text, I would want them to follow this model. In conducting an analysis this way, students can showcase their knowledge of the concept by applying it in their writing. By encouraging students to do this, they will have to use higher levels of thinking than they might have needed if I were only to give a multiple-choice quiz on Marxism. They would show deeper understanding of both the text and Marxism by combining the two concepts into one analysis.

While it would be beneficial for students to apply their knowledge of Marxism to their writing, the challenge becomes helping students understand Marxism in the first place. Marxism is very complex and one has to have knowledge of why it was created and its goals in order to fully grasp it. Most seventh graders would find it difficult to understand, especially because many of them might not have ever heard of it at all. Just as with psychological criticism, students need to be taught the basic concepts associated with Marxism before they can apply it to the text. They do not necessarily need to know everything involved with Marxism, just enough so that they have a working knowledge of its goals and methods to achieve these goals. For example, I would not have students conduct an analysis based on the economics or politics of Marxism, but rather, I would ground the students' study in its definition of class societies (such as the haves and have-nots and the bourgeoisie and the proletariat). This is much easier for students to understand, especially when they are given real-world examples they can relate to, for example, the popular kids versus the nerds and high school seniors versus high school

freshmen. Particularly when analyzing Chapter 7 of the novel, the students only need to know that some people judge others based off of arbitrary measures; they do not need to be aware of the many complicated claims of Marxism. A more in-depth analysis of Marxism and its history should be reserved for a high school or college classroom.

Marxist literary criticism is a unique school of literary theory because it heavily relies on history to form its understandings. It is especially useful when trying to analyze the economy and society found in a text. Students could benefit from thinking about the world of a text, not just its characters. Also, even if the reader wanted to focus on the characters, Marxist literary criticism allows them to think not only about the characters' feelings, but their thought processes and what influences their view of society. However, in order for students to really appreciate Marxist criticism and apply it effectively to their writing, they must first have a basic knowledge of Marxism. This might take some time for many students to grasp, so time to practice it and patience are essential for students to be successful.

### **Mythological Analysis**

Chapter 30 of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, "The White Tomb," describes the scene of Dumbledore's funeral and reveals Harry's plans to finally put an end to Lord Voldemort. Within this one scene alone, the reader is exposed to a variety of mythological creatures: "a chorus of merpeople singing in a strange language," centaurs, and even a giant (Rowling 642). While these extraordinary creatures are considered staples of mythological stories, another characteristic of myths, described by Deborah De Rosa in her "Wizardly Challenges to and Affirmations of the Initiation Paradigm in *Harry Potter*," is initiation where "the hero typically goes on a quest during which he

encounters a mentor who assists him with a series of trials. The hero usually survives the arduous trials and returns home with an awareness of a new world order and a bond that he shares with his community” (163). This is a very familiar pattern for those who are familiar with the rest of the novels in the Harry Potter series. However, the sixth novel offers a challenge to this pattern: What happens when the mentor figure is no longer around to assist the hero? In the case of Harry, it results in another initiation, namely facing his fears and becoming an independent adult.

Harry was obviously very close with Dumbledore and throughout much of this chapter he refuses to acknowledge that Dumbledore is no longer with him. For example, in the days leading up to the funeral, “there were blank stretches of numbness where, despite the fact that nobody was talking about anything else in the whole castle, he still found it difficult to believe that Dumbledore had really gone” (Rowling 639). Harry is, unfortunately, familiar with close friends and family dying right before his eyes, but he still does not accept Dumbledore’s death until he gets to the actual funeral. It suddenly hits him “without warning...the dreadful truth, more completely and undeniably than it had until now. Dumbledore was dead, gone” (Rowling 644). Harry finally allows himself to grieve, and in doing so, opens himself up to planning the next step of his journey.

De Rosa explains that Rowling makes a “deliberate attempt to immerse her protagonist, at least temporarily, in the physical and psychological carefree state of childhood” (De Rosa 172). Throughout the other novels, Hogwarts has provided Harry this safety, especially with Dumbledore by his side along the way; however, with his protector and mentor gone, Harry’s safety of childhood is no longer available. Harry himself realizes this and declares that he “could not let anybody else stand between him



and Voldemort; he must abandon forever the illusion he ought to have lost at the age of one, that the shelter of a parent's arms meant that nothing could hurt him" (Rowling 645). He finally understands that he is not safe and that he must set out to face Voldemort to avoid losing anyone else in their battle.

By finally accepting his fate, Harry takes his place as the archetypal warrior described by Allen Evans in his "Discovering the Archetypes of Harry Potter," as one whose "goal is to win...more than winning merely to achieve personal status or power. It is winning in the service of others, winning to make the world a better place...winning for a just and virtuous cause" (20). Unlike previous novels where Harry's goal was to make friends and enjoy his time at school, his new mission is to save the world from Lord Voldemort, even if that means sacrificing things along the way. He tells Ginny that they can no longer be together because "Voldemort uses people his enemies are close to...Think how much danger you'll be in if we keep this up. He'll know, he'll find out" (Rowling 646). Harry intends to go on this journey alone in the hopes that no one else will get hurt fighting his battles. He knows that Voldemort will show no mercy and that he can no longer hide behind childhood for protection. Harry has come to understand that "There was no waking from his nightmare, no comforting whisper in the dark that he was safe really, that it was all in his imagination; the last and greatest of his protectors had died, and he was more alone than he had ever been before" (Rowling 645). Harry is now on the brink of adulthood, with no one left to protect him, he has to look out for himself and rely on his own abilities to get by.

While J.K. Rowling offers a variety of initiations for Harry to experience while at Hogwarts, the most important one comes after Dumbledore's death. However cruel and

unfair it may be, Harry now has to enter adulthood and face the man who has been the singular cause of his misery. Hogwarts can no longer be his place of protection. Now Harry must venture off to face Voldemort and ultimately save the world. Harry cannot be described as the archetypal “orphan” longing for family any longer. He has become the archetypal warrior whose quest is bigger than himself. While Harry is visibly upset over Dumbledore’s death, it allows for Harry to take the next step in his life and come to terms with his destiny.

### **Mythological Analysis Reflection**

Mythological criticism, while guided by myths of ancient history, is not necessarily required to only discuss literature in terms of famous myths. As Charles Eric Reeves in his “Myth Theory and Criticism” explains, “Myth criticism designates not so much a critical approach in literary studies as the convergence of several methods and forms of inquiry about the complex relations between literature and myth” (Reeves 1). For example, one way of conducting myth criticism is to look at symbols presented in a text and consider what they are meant to represent. Mythological criticism then offers students a variety of methods to employ in their analyses. A student might choose to follow the symbols path or they might look at mythological allusions found in a text. One of the benefits of this variety is that it allows for students to apply their knowledge of literary devices to their writing as needed to support their argument.

In my classroom, one literary device that I would make sure students are familiar with in regards to myth criticism is the archetype. Archetypes are incredibly common in literature and armed with knowledge of how they work, students will be better prepared to spot them in other things they read beyond Harry Potter. Especially in their writing and

understanding of the text, knowledge of archetypes can be quite useful. For example, Jeffrey Davis in “Archetypal Puppets Spark Good Writing,” explains that through the use of archetypes, students can “see for themselves that, although other people may appear strange and unpredictable, all of us share certain perceptions of the world, which subsequently show up in our stories. This realization makes the stories more pertinent to the students’ lives” (Davis 49). By understanding how archetypes work in stories, students can learn how people are represented in writing and how that affects their own perceptions of human nature. I chose to focus my mythological analysis on archetypes because of the many examples students could refer back to from their own readings.

While there are many benefits to mythological criticism, namely its close connection to the use of literary devices, one drawback of the method is that, especially if one wanted to refer to myths in their analysis, there are so many myths to choose from. Every culture has its own myths, with some dating back thousands of years. It is next to impossible for anyone to have read or know about all of these myths. In order for one to effectively compare a myth to another text, they have to have prior knowledge of the myth being compared. Not all students have knowledge of many myths and there is no common list of myths that all students learn about in school. Just as we have experienced with the other schools of criticism, students need to have prior knowledge of myths to create an analysis based in mythological criticism. Because of this, I would rather that my students rely more on how literary devices have been defined over the years, such as archetypes and symbols, instead of referring to myths of which they are not truly familiar.

Mythological criticism can be applied in a variety of methods, which allow for creativity in students’ writing. No two students would have the same response, but at the

same time, this variety makes it difficult to create guidelines for student responses. In order for mythological criticism to be effective in the classroom, the types of devices and myths used in describing the text must be limited to a select few. Overall though, there are many merits to mythological criticism and it definitely has a place in the English classroom. One of the most important things a student can take away from this form of criticism is that literary devices have been used throughout history and that, while there is no set “standard” of what these devices mean, they all have their origins in myths. Students can learn, not only about literary devices, but also history through their use of mythological criticism.

### **Media Studies Analysis**

Chapter 3 of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, “Will and Won’t,” serves as an introduction to the precautionary measures the Ministry of Magic is taking after the recent return of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. These measures are shown in the book through a series of newspaper articles that Harry reads before an important meeting with Dumbledore. Rather than just using narrative to explain what is happening at the Ministry, which is one of the most important organizations in the wizarding world, Rowling employs the use of media to offer information. This stylistic choice can be very effective, particularly showcasing different perspectives on a given situation. Media is a very important tool that William Egginton and Bernadette Wegenstein discuss in their media studies article, “The Impact of Media on Literature.” They define media studies as a field “devoted to the study and analysis of the variety of media humans use to transmit and archive data” (Egginton and Wegenstein). While media is extremely prevalent in our

society, its use in literature can have profound effects, particularly when it offers commentary on the world in which we live.

Rowling's use of media in this chapter demonstrates two things. Firstly, that the Ministry of Magic, working with limited information, is not aware of how to deal with the enormous threat with which they have been presented. Secondly, the flaws in the Ministry's new security measures that are not necessarily effective in ensuring wizards' safety with the return of Voldemort. Rowling's depiction of media is eerily similar to the misinformation that can be found in today's world of media.

The first newspaper article Harry reads focuses on the events that happened at the end of the fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Harry and his friends went to the Ministry of Magic and encountered Lord Voldemort and a mysterious prophecy. After these events, Harry has been dubbed "The Chosen One," as the only one who can stop Lord Voldemort. The article, while accurately describing the basics of the situation (such as Harry and Voldemort both being at the Ministry), neglects to give details about the most important aspect of the event: the prophecy. For example, near the end of the article, the author states, "The nature of that prophecy is unknown...the current whereabouts of the prophecy, if it exists, are unknown" (Rowling 39). Because everyone wants to know what happened, the media of the wizarding world produced a story based off of the little information they knew; however, without the vital details of what actually happened, their story is rendered useless. They are simply repeating what everyone already knows.

The simple repeating of information without trying to add to the story can be found in today's media as well. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005,

journalists were scurrying to report the story. As information was still coming to the surface, many reporters kept repeating that New Orleans is shaped like a bowl, meaning that the city is below sea level, therefore susceptible to flooding; when a large amount of water gets into the city it does not drain easily and sits stagnant until it is physically pumped out. It was like reporters were simply biding time until they got more information to report on so they simply repeated the information people, especially people from New Orleans, already knew. Rowling astutely showed this media tactic of biding time in her version of wizarding media.

Another article found in the chapter “Will and Won’t,” is a pamphlet issued by the Ministry of Magic titled, “Protecting Your Home and Family Against Dark Forces.” This pamphlet offers security guidelines for keeping wizards safe from Death Eater attacks claiming that they “will help protect you, your family, and your home from attack” (Rowling 42). Some of these guidelines include such things as, “You are advised not to leave the house alone... Wherever possible, arrange to complete journeys before night has fallen” (Rowling 42). The Ministry, while not forcing wizards to follow these measures, offers them as an extra stride towards safety for the community.

These measures seem reasonable given the circumstances, but as Harry reads the rest of the pamphlet, the suggestions offered do not seem effective. For example, one guideline mentions to “Agree on security questions with close friends and family so as to detect Death Eaters masquerading as others by use of Polyjuice Potion” (Rowling 42). Both Harry and Dumbledore find this suggestion to be not very useful. Dumbledore explains it by telling Harry that if he were to ask what his favorite jam was, he would respond with raspberry. Dumbledore then goes on to say, “although of course, if I were a

Death Eater, I would have been sure to research my own jam preferences before impersonating myself” (Rowling 62). While the intent behind the Ministry’s security measures is good, its execution is not necessarily effective. Even if a wizard were to follow all of these precautions all of the time, they could still potentially find themselves in real danger.

The Ministry of Magic, in creating this well-meaning, but not guaranteed, attempt at safety, mirrors the self-defense tactics offered to people in today’s society. While it is important for everyone to be aware of and know how to use self-defense tactics, a person’s safety is not guaranteed by using them during an attack. There numerous other things to consider in regards to self-defense, such as the physicality of the attacker, a means of escape, and what tools for defense the victim has on hand in the moment. For example, if a person knows to use pepper spray to stun their attacker, and they do not have pepper spray with them when attacked, they become more susceptible to injury. Just like the Ministry’s guidelines, the tactics of self-defense can be useful but cannot guarantee a person’s safety when faced with danger.

In this chapter of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling expertly uses media, not only to report on what is happening in the wizarding world, but also to offer a commentary on the types of media found in our own world. She uses articles ripe with repeating information and false guarantees to show how media is not always an effective way to present information to the public. Just as Harry and Dumbledore are skeptical of the tactics being used by the Ministry of Magic, we too should be cautious when encountering media in our own world. While there might be useful things to take from the media in our world, not everything one reads should be taken as fact. Regardless of its

benefits and consequences, media is found in many forms both in literature and the real world, offering an intricate system of communication methods to inform people of the world in which they live.

### **Media Studies Analysis Reflection**

Media studies is a large branch of criticism that is not limited to literature; it is used to analyze such things as marketing techniques, societal and gender norms, and how we communicate. As media is found across society, it makes sense then that it also finds itself featured in literature such as the Harry Potter series. There are many benefits for students to conduct a literary analysis with a focus on the portrayal of media. They can learn not only about the novel featured in their analysis, but also about how media is used to showcase certain ideas and emotions. Students can also benefit from making real world media connections based on their observations in literature.

When thinking about media in terms of literature it is useful to think about why an author chose a particular media structure. For example, in regards to Harry Potter, why did Rowling choose to create newspaper articles instead of offering an exclusive interview or photographs? Just as with every literary genre (poem, play, novel, etc.) there are different types of media that represent different things. It could be useful for students to learn about the purposes of the variety of media just as they learn about literary genre. Despite the differences among the various forms of media, they are all designed to have an impact on its reader. Stuart Hall in his article, "Encoding, Decoding" claims that media outlets strive to "have an effect, influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade" (Hall 479). In order to analyze a form of media, one has to know its purpose. Was the article's intent to be humorous? Serious? Was it meant to inform? To entertain? Once students



understand the media's purpose, their analysis will become both clearer and more informative. As Common Core is being introduced, it is important that students learn why pieces of literature and media are being written. It is not enough to simply analyze the text; the reader must also think about why the text was written in the first place.

Another benefit of having students conduct a media studies analysis is that they can connect the text to the real world. As was noted in my analysis, by featuring those particular types of media, J. K. Rowling was able to offer a commentary about how media is used in our world. A media studies analysis would lend itself well to a project for students to complete in conjunction with the novel. Students could research forms of media on a local, state, and national level and compare them to the media found in the novel. By connecting what they are reading to their own lives, students might develop a deeper connection to both the text and media in general. Most students might not think about how influential media can be on our lives so students could use this opportunity to learn about something that they might have previously taken for granted.

While there are clearly benefits in having students perform a media studies analysis, there are also consequences that could arise. For example, the term media studies encompasses a vast amount of information. It could be incredibly difficult for students to narrow their analysis to a manageable format. With so many routes to take, students could potentially feel overwhelmed by the choices with which they have been presented. Another pitfall of media studies is that there is not a set organizational format for an analysis. For example, in psychological criticism, students track a problem found in a character and "diagnose" it. This is a format that is simple to follow and the only thing that needs to be inserted is the information the reader wants to focus on. In media

studies, this clear-cut method is not so easily created. Because media studies can be applied across many fields of study, there is no set way to conduct an analysis. Some students might find this liberating, but others need a structure to guide their analysis.

Overall, media studies is an interesting form of criticism. It is versatile, intriguing, and offers insight into how the human races communicates. By conducting a media studies analysis, students can delve deep into the text, along with real-world examples of media. They can learn, not only about the novel, but also about society and what we deem newsworthy.

### **Putting the Analyses to Work**

Through the process of conducting my own analyses of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* using reader-response criticism, psychological criticism, Marxist criticism, mythological criticism, and media studies, I was able to gain a deeper appreciation for the novel's complexity and to think about the text in ways I had not previously considered. In my classroom, I hope that students will also gain insights such as these through their own readings and analyses. I plan to share the process by which I developed my understandings of the novel with my students.

As I read the novel and wrote my analyses, I noticed a strong interpretation of love. Throughout the novel there are many different aspects of love displayed, such as the romantic love between Harry and Ginny, the familial love between Harry and Dumbledore, and the friendship between Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Rowling clearly shows the importance of and the varying types of love found in the world; these are topics I want students to explore in their study of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. To help students understand and come to appreciate the varieties of love, I have

created a thematic unit titled, “Love is a Many-Splendored Thing,” in which students will read numerous texts about love and its different forms; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* serves as the text anchoring the unit together.

I understand that there may be some parental concerns arising from the use of this anchor text, particularly with the novel’s depiction of and attitude about magic. As a result, any student whose parents do not wish them to read this text will utilize an alternative text such as *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott, to learn about the varieties and importance of love. Assignments for this text will be as closely related to the *Harry Potter* assignments in complexity and function as possible.

## Chapter 5: Thematic Unit: Love is a Many-Splendored Thing

The title of this unit, taken from the famous 1955 movie of the same name, explains that love is multi-faceted. Love can be found in many types of relationships such as romance, family, and friendship. In this unit, students will explore these relationships as they are portrayed in a variety of literary and informative texts. Anchoring the unit is *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, which features all of these relationships. The other texts to be taught in the unit are: selections from *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, by Maria Augusta Trapp, *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder, “A Time to Talk,” by Robert Frost, “The Gift of the Magi,” by O. Henry, the myth of Cupid and Psyche, and “Sonnet 116,” by William Shakespeare.

Throughout their study of the unit, students will be reading many different kinds of texts, ranging from full-length novels and plays to shorter poems and stories; however, in each text, students will analyze the relationships among the characters and how they show different aspects of love. Some essential questions I will ask students to think about throughout the unit are:

- Is love the most powerful force of all? Can it overcome the greatest obstacles?
- What characteristics of friendship are everlasting?
- If given the opportunity, how would you show love for your family? Your friend? Your romantic partner?
- How is family defined? Does one have to be related by blood to be family?
- Is one type of love greater than another? Why or why not?

By examining the many different types of love and how they are represented, along with thinking about the unit’s essential questions, students will learn about love, how it is

displayed in literature, and the many forms that it takes. Some of enduring understandings I hope students take away from the unit are:

- Love can be found in many different ways. It does not only come romance, but rather, it can also be found in family and friendship.
- Even though opening oneself up to love can be difficult, it is ultimately worth it in the end.
- Family is not only defined by blood relations; family is made up of people you care about and with whom you enjoy spending time.
- A true friend will always be there to lend a helping hand, provide a shoulder to cry on, and join you in a whirlwind adventure.
- Love is one of the most powerful forces on Earth. It has no simple definition but it embodies the goal of the human experience: to care for others so strongly that they change you for the better.

For each text in the unit, students will utilize their close reading skills to analyze the passage and determine its overall message. Along with this, students will complete a variety of assignments associated with each text to help them in their understanding of the text and the thematic unit as a whole. The unit will begin with students reading excerpts from *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* followed by *Our Town*. After this, students will begin to read *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. To break up the larger novel, the poems and short stories in the unit will be interspersed among their reading of the novel. While not read back to back, these shorter works will be read in the following order: “A Time to Talk,” “The Gift of the Magi,” the myth of Cupid and Psyche, “Sonnet 116.” Prior to reading these texts, students will learn about the basics of

the genre. For example, before reading the poems students will learn about things such as rhyme, structure, figurative language, etc. During class discussions of the texts, students will use this knowledge of the genre to guide their analyses.

*The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* explains the true story of the family that inspired the hit movie, *The Sound of Music*. It gives an in-depth account of their family's experiences, including the Nazi occupation of Austria during World War II, their journey from Austria to Italy and America, and the family's musical backgrounds. At its heart, the book explains the love that grew between Maria and the children, along with the importance of a positive family lifestyle. Instead of reading the entire book, students will read selections from a few chapters that hit on the major themes of the book. To enhance their understanding of the family, students will be provided a "quick fact sheet" about the Trapps and their life. Students will also watch a few clips from *The Sound of Music*, such as Maria's first introduction to the children, the children's reaction to her sudden departure, and the Baron's final speech to Rolfe. All of these clips show how the family has changed over time and how their bond has strengthened. As a culminating activity for the text, students will create a coat of arms for the Trapp family, based off of evidence from the text and movie. They will be given a worksheet that describes many colors and symbols found on many coats of arms and what they represent. Students will then create one for the Trapp family and display their creation in the classroom.

*Our Town* is a play that is set in the small town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. Employing the use of an omniscient narrator, the play showcases the story of two young people, George and Emily, and their parents. George and Emily's love is put to the test and, through a series of conflicts and circumstances, they realize the value of

life and family. Emily and George's relationships with their parents also show many different ideas about love and marriage. Students will explore this idea by writing a short essay about George and Emily's relationship comparing and contrasting it to either George or Emily's parents' relationship. Other activities that students will complete include reading the play aloud as part of reader's theatre, drawing a map of Grover's Corners, and creating their own character who would be a citizen in the town.

"A Time to Talk" is a short poem featured in Robert Frost's collection of poems, *Mountain Interval*, which focuses on friendship. The speaker is working in his yard when his friend approaches. Instead of continuing with his work, the speaker puts his work aside and visits with his friend. This poem shows how important it is to take time to visit with friends. While there is work to be done, it does not mean that there is not time to talk to a friend. As students read, they will also listen to an audio recording of the poem to enhance their experience. Once they finish the poem they will get into small groups to discuss the poem and work together to continue the poem. Students will think about what kind of conversation the speaker has with his friend. How long do they visit with each other? Do they reminisce about something that happened years before or do they discuss plans for the future? Each group will then read their addition to the poem aloud to the class.

"The Gift of the Magi" tells the story of a poor man and woman who are trying to buy Christmas presents for each other. Ultimately, they both sacrifice their most prized possessions to fund a gift for the other. While the story might seem sad, it shows how deep their love runs. Each was willing to sacrifice something to make the other happy. Instead of thinking only of themselves, they thought of the other person instead. As they

read the story, students will mark vocabulary words that they do not recognize. They will then use their knowledge of context clues, along with the class discussion of the text, to determine the words' definitions. Students will then add these vocabulary words to a master list that they can refer to throughout the school year. The story has many difficult words so there is a rich pool of vocabulary from which students can select. Along with this, students will also complete a short writing assignment where they select a character from any book they have previously read and write about what kind of gift they would give to that character and why it would be meaningful.

The myth of Cupid and Psyche, as portrayed in Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, tells the story of the titular characters' whirlwind romance. Both Cupid and Psyche were beautiful and were married; however, there was one condition to their marriage. Psyche could never look at her husband. One night, following bad advice from her sisters, Psyche decides to look at him. Once she does this, Cupid flees saying as he leaves: "Love cannot live where there is no trust" (Hamilton 100). While the events after this moment allow the two to return to each other happily, the myth displays an important lesson that it is difficult to love someone if the relationship does not have trust. Students will discuss the myth and its lesson as a class. Along with this, students will work in groups to research and create a presentation about another myth. Each group will be assigned one of the following myths: Pygmalion and Galatea, Pyramus and Thisbe, Orpheus and Eurydice, and Narcissus and Echo. Each of these myths is focused on love and offer profound insights about the subject. Students will work together to research the myth's origins, its moral, and its influences on today's society. Then, they will create a presentation to give to the rest of the class based on this information. After their study of



the myths, students will write a short reflective piece in which they talk about which myth they enjoyed the most and why it was appealing.

Shakespeare's "Sonnet 116" talks about love and explains how love is "an ever-fixed mark / and is never shaken" (l. 5-6). The sonnet advocates for love and claims that it can withstand anything. Students will first read the text by themselves and then "turn and talk" to a partner about what they thought. After a few minutes of discussion, students will then come back together as a whole class to analyze the sonnet. Using the technology of a Promethean Board, the poem will be displayed on the board and students will come to the board to make annotations on the poem. The sonnet will serve as the introduction to a large essay about the thematic unit as a whole. Students will be instructed to think about the sonnet's claim that love is everlasting and powerful. Then, they will select one of the longer texts (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* or *Our Town*) or two of the shorter texts (selections from *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, "A Time to Talk," "The Gift of the Magi," or the myth of Cupid and Psyche) and argue whether the sonnet's claim is accurate or not. Students will also have the option to write about love's power from the view of family, friendship, or romance. Their essay must have textual evidence and offer a clear argument.

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* offers a rich amount of material to discuss in the classroom. Each type of relationship discussed in the unit can be found in the novel. To emphasize the importance of family, students will read an article, "*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince: Her Dark Materials*," by Liesl Schillinger. She claims that Dumbledore's death near the end of the novel is a "finish so scorchingly distressing that the reader closes the book quaking, knowing that out of these ashes, somehow, the

phoenix of Rowling's fiction will rise again—but worrying about how on earth Harry will cope until it does" (Schillinger 1). Students will work with a partner to figure out why Dumbledore's death is so distressing. They will examine he and Harry's relationship to determine just how close the two had become.

Just as family is important to Harry, so too is friendship. He consistently relies on Ron and Hermione to join him in adventures, offer advice, or help get him out of trouble. As much of the book revolves around Potions class, students will design a potion to create "an ideal friend" based off Harry and his friends. Their potion will include magical ingredients that showcase characteristics of friendship. To help understand the concept, students will receive an example to model their potion after. This example will include such ingredients as "sprig of loyalty," "infusion of humor," and "caring juice." Afterwards, students will draw a picture of what a bottled version of their friendship potion would look like.

Along with looking at the many types of relationships found in the novel, students will also examine the effects of media and how they are portrayed in the book. After looking at real world examples of media in which the topic has been misconstrued, students will assume the identity of Rita Skeeter, a gossip reporter within the Potter series who is famous for twisting the words of her interviewees. They will rewrite the scene in which Harry kisses Ginny for the first time: the after-party for the Quidditch championship game. Students will twist the events of party in a way that Rita Skeeter might to sell more newspapers. Students will also watch scenes from the film and compare them to the book, specifically the scenes in which Dumbledore meets Voldemort for the first time, Slughorn informs Harry about horcruxes, Hermione reveals

her feelings for Ron, Harry and Dumbledore's journey in the cave, and Dumbledore's death. These scenes are all important to the story and students will see how true they stayed to the novel. To finish their study of the novel, students will perform a Socratic seminar where they sit in a circle and go back and forth asking each other questions about the novel. These questions are not meant to test the students' knowledge of minute details, but rather to think about the overall themes of the novel and what we as readers are meant to take away from the story.

All of the texts discussed in the thematic unit offer an opinion on love, whether it is through friendship, family, and/or romance. While varying in styles and length, the texts offer students the opportunity to learn about love and the many forms in which it comes. After completing this thematic unit, students will truly understand that love is a many-splendored thing.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is focused on preparing students to take the next step for careers beyond their education, whether that is through college level courses or workforce training programs. The standards created by this initiative are meant to “[develop] the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students will need to be successful” (“What Parents Should Know,” *Common Core State Standards*). In order to achieve this goal in English Language Arts, students will need to read and analyze complex texts; however, with so many students dispassionate with reading, it is also important to ensure that the texts they read be entertaining and enjoyable. When thinking about what texts are complex and enjoyable for 7<sup>th</sup> grade readers, I immediately turned to the Harry Potter series.

The Harry Potter series is a collection of books that have withstood the test of time. Ever since the publication of the first novel in 1997, Harry Potter and his friends have influenced the lives of millions of children and adults alike. By reading the novels, these people, myself included, have been transported to the magical wizarding world filled with castles, adventure, mythical creatures, and true friendship. The series is universally appealing and offers its readers the opportunity to explore their imaginations and escape into a world unlike any other.

With students so uninterested in reading for school as of late, one alternative to get students intrigued with reading is to have them read *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. The book offers many themes for students to explore such as love, friendship, family, trust, power, and fear. There are many ways to read the novel and it has the ability to offer a variety of analyses. Students can examine the novel by looking at their

own responses as a reader, thinking like a psychologist diagnosing a character's problems and concerns, employing the technique of Marxism to showcase a character's view of society, referring to mythological archetypes to describe a character's growth, and connecting the text to their own experience with media in the real world. It is clear by the sheer amount of information one can analyze in the text, the quality of writing and character development, and questions it raises about life and society, that *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* is a complex text by the guidelines of the Common Core State Standards.

To teach *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in the classroom, it should be combined with other texts that explore a common theme. I decided to focus my thematic unit on the different relationships of love because there are many elements, such as romance, family, and friendship to consider. The other texts, including a play, nonfiction, poems, and short stories, all offer commentary on what love is and what it means to love. After completing the unit and the accompanying assignments, students will have a much deeper understanding of the power of love and how it is represented in our society.

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, schools around the country will start to see a change in how students learn. The standards will push students to think critically about the things they read, themselves as people, and the world in which they live. To assist with this, teachers will choose texts and examples for students to analyze. Eventually, students will be able to take these critical skills beyond the classroom and into the workforce. While the 7<sup>th</sup> graders my thematic unit is focused on won't be going to high school right away, the work they will do with *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* will prepare them to face these challenges.

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