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“The Boy Who Lived”: *Harry Potter* and the Practice of Moral Literacy

by

Laura Fitzpatrick

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

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“The Boy Who Lived”: *Harry Potter* and the Practice of Moral Literacy  
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## ABSTRACT

Using Isocrates' theory of education, I argue that *Harry Potter* and the fandom culture it inspires cultivates a moral and ethical literacy. Isocrates proclaims that texts are a pivotal tool in instructing students and are a means to instill values. This theory helps frame the way I see reading *Harry Potter* and participating within online fandom spaces as a form of ethical instruction unique to the phenomenon that is the *Harry Potter* Generation, those who grew up along with the release of the texts, films, and subsequent canonical expansions. I articulate how the book provides readers with examples they can draw on to understand the world around them. These examples are then put into practice within online communities where readers develop and hone literacy skills that cultivate their moral and ethical frameworks to be more accepting of marginalized groups and individuals. This approach establishes the literacy and rhetorical capacity of online communities and the moral and ethical potential of these spaces when combined with worthy texts.

## INTRODUCTION

*“[Harry Potter will] be famous - a legend - [...] there will be books written about Harry - every child in our world will know his name!” (Sorcerer’s Stone 10)*

In the opening pages of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, the first novel written by the now revered author and philanthropist J. K. Rowling, Professor McGonagall prophesized an impactful future for the lead character. Her prediction has proven true, but perhaps in more ways than McGonagall or even Rowling could have imagined. Today, Harry Potter’s name resonates across the world, enchanting young and old readers alike, and almost everyone has at least heard of the boy wizard who attends Hogwarts even if they can’t quote you the exact ingredients of a polyjuice potion. *Harry Potter* has long since found itself a permanent staple in the vocabulary of our culture. This relationship between what happens in the text and how it’s put to use in communities exemplifies the type of moral literacy education that *Harry Potter* initiates. I would argue that the act of reading *Harry Potter* and participating in online fandom communities instills a form of moral literacy that educates readers and fandom participants.

There are, of course, certain stigmas against the study of children’s literature and especially online communities such as Pinterest, Tumblr, or Reddit. However, as I will argue here, it is precisely in these places where readers, students, and fandom community members come to learn how to interpret and analyze the world as well as rhetorically engage with others. We can garner valuable insight from tracing these paths between the text and its function in our communities. If we understand how one practice, such as reading *Harry Potter*, informs, reinforces, and expands another, such as writing fanfiction online, we can begin to conceptualize the power behind such a cultural force as *Harry Potter*. With that

understanding, we can better confront and create a world worth living in. *Harry Potter* offers us a way to articulate the importance of children's literature but also of online communities and fandom in creating moral literacy strategies.

I came across *Harry Potter* myself when I was, quite fittingly, 11 years old, in a box of used books my teacher gave away as rewards for good behavior. Like so many others, I was not much of a reader. I struggled throughout my early education, went through the assisted reading program, and still could never find value between the pages of a book. But there I was on that fateful day, choosing a book out of bin at random and out came *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I struggled to read through those first few pages several times, stumbling over names like "Hagrid" and "Dumbledore" and the vast array of characters and places. But the day I finally persevered, I didn't stop. I plowed through *Sorcerer's Stone*, then *Chamber of Secrets*, then *Prisoner of Azkaban* in a frenzy that my mother could only describe as uncanny. My mother, being the wonderfully encouraging woman that she is, obligingly went out to get me *Goblet of Fire* especially once I had finished *Prisoner of Azkaban*, simply elated at my first signs of enthusiasm for reading. And so started my lifelong passion for the boy wizard.

My story is one of many very similar stories. As I will argue in this thesis, these stories didn't affect only me; they hold true for a great many readers of *Harry Potter*. The series inspired so many children to read more, to love reading. It inspired publishers to publish longer stories because there was proof children would read longer works (*Potter Works Wonders*). The stories, though, didn't end with the last page of *Deathly Hallows*. They continued through the screen, through online fandom culture, and through the continued production of canon from J. K. Rowling. These spaces act to employ a reader's knowledge of

the series, to put into practice, and to reinforce the moral education the series cultivates. We are the “Harry Potter Generation,” the adolescents who grew up reading the texts as they were published and seeing the films as they were released. In many important ways, we grew up right alongside Harry within this cultural phenomenon. Although not all readers of the series were children (as the publishing of the adult editions with special covers makes clear), young readers received the greatest benefit and impact of the series. This impact instilled a set of moral and ethical values within adolescents that transformed not only the reading landscape of children’s literature but also the way engaged fans interpret and interact with the world around them.

As I would like to argue, I see the text itself delivering certain moralistic lessons and imparting a type of ethical education. To make this case, I draw heavily on Isocrates to articulate how the process of moral education occurs. Isocrates’ methods from ancient Athens can help us understand how *Harry Potter* creates an ethical education, and they can help us conceptualize the beneficial effects of this type of education. Drawing on Isocrates’ insight that teachers must provide a model of action that reinforces textual examples, I show that J. K. Rowling acts as a role model who reinforces the moral literacy practices *Harry Potter* cultivates. In this vein, I envision Emma Watson as the ideal student that draws from the texts, learns from her teacher, and then applies that knowledge in an impactful way in the world. Moreover, I go one step further to examine the *Harry Potter* Generation as students whose classroom exists beyond the pages of the text. For the *Harry Potter* Generation, the fandom spaces online work to instill and cultivate moral literacy practices. I argue that these online spaces provide a pivotal role that has been little understood in how *Harry Potter* cultivates ethical individuals. Additionally, I draw on Mark Bracher’s Schema Criticism to

closely detail the types of moral and ethical precepts the series instills. In *Literature and Social Justice: Protest Novels, Cognitive Politics, and Schema Criticism*, Bracher argues for a series of learning processes we can use to articulate different ethical world views that the *Harry Potter* canon imparts.

But *Harry Potter* canon, works directly authored or information disseminated by J. K. Rowling, goes much further than the original series. There is a large swath of expanded canon from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages* texts, to *Pottermore* online, to the latest film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* written by J.K. Rowling. We should also consider world expansions such as *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, a play produced and enticingly subtitled “The 8th story.” Yet what interests me more than the expanded canon here is the fandom culture that fuels subreddits, Twitter battles, Pinterest pins, Tumblr posts and more. Delving into the depths of the *Harry Potter* fandom, the online community has its own set of norms and forms informed by the text and what has come before, such as the “What Harry Potter Taught Me” memes, Epiphany posts on Reddit, which reveals new layers through applying the text to the world we live in. An examination of the *Harry Potter* fandom shows that the online Potter universe has its own set of norms and exchanges that build upon and expand what readers learn from the text and applies it to current socio-cultural situations. This exchange of knowledge on the web that continues to this day indicates a certain reciprocity. *Harry Potter* literacy practices reveal and enrich the text itself, turning readers back to the original novels through participation in a community of fellow fans. Fans online engage in rhetorical analysis and interpretation, and they apply textual situations and lessons to the world they live in. These spaces give fans a way to ‘practice’ what they’ve learned, to be challenged by other fans in the accuracy of their

deductions, and to actively reinforce and engage their knowledge. All of this occurs while they sharpen their literacy skills.

*Harry Potter* has played a large role in my life and in the lives of so many children. Often cited with the revival and reimagining of reading, literature culture, and children's texts, *Harry Potter's* far reaching influence calls for a closer inspection to understand the implications of the texts and to be more firmly aware of the social and moral issues of our time. Imperative in our socio-cultural moment, we must understand the impact of digital communities on our socio-cultural and political constructions. Literature inspires us, captures our imaginations, and helps us picture the world we live in. *Harry Potter* took the world by storm in a way no other piece of literature has done before—in part because people are more interconnected through online communities than ever. If we are to envision a more just world, understanding how *Harry Potter* plays a part in doing so can help in guiding our pedagogical and literature practices and in cementing the necessity of considering online rhetorical practices within these frames.

While I cannot hope to perform an exhaustive analysis of the texts or fully represent what the *Harry Potter* fandom looks like online, I hope to present representative pieces and snapshots that establish the importance and the efficacy of such an exploration. In *Childhood and Cultural Despair*, Leah Marcus urges us to consider what is at stake in understanding children and childhood in literature: "By measuring the portrayal of child subjects in literature against a wider range of attitudes and actual behavior toward children, we can learn a great deal about what is going on in that literature, and in other areas of a given culture as well" (242). While her call to action deals with her specific field of seventeenth century literature, such a sentiment remains just as true with current literature. If we take the time to

look at the relationship of children and culture, we can better understand our cultural moment. We get a chance to understand how this new generation focuses on accepting difference and cultivating empathy for marginalized communities.

And the *Harry Potter* Generation's moment is now.

## PART 1: *HARRY POTTER* AND THE INSTRUCTIVE NATURE OF READING

I never enjoyed reading much growing up, which seems a bit peculiar given my current field of study. I struggled to learn how to read despite my mother's consistent and thorough attempts to encourage and teach me. Now I remember my mother's promise to buy me any book I wanted as a fond fantasy—a promise, alas, that quickly disappeared when I finally began to read voraciously. And what enticed me into the world of infinite stories? *Harry Potter*. I picked up the first two in the series at random one day in my classroom's bin of used books in need of a new home as a reward for good behavior. I think I just liked the cover. I recall struggling over the odd names—Dumbledore, Hagrid, Dursleys—and to understand what was happening. It took me three tries to finish that first book, but once I did, I immediately consumed the second. I remember asking my mother for the next two (all that were out at the time) and her putting on her shoes, grabbing her purse, and heading out to the bookstore. I am fortunate that both my parents encouraged my love for all things *Harry Potter* (My father would wait in the midnight release lines so I would have the next book when I woke up), but there was something about the texts themselves that did more than my parents or teachers knew how to do. It inspired me to read. And read I did. I picked up one book, and then another, and another...and the rest is history.

Something about *Harry Potter* captures the imagination of readers. Without it, I would not be pursuing a Master's in English, and so many others can say the same about how *Harry Potter* inspired their reading. However, it not only teaches a love a reading, but also it teaches readers moral and ethical codes that develop in their lives. In this section, I draw on Isocrates' theory of education to elaborate how this ethical instruction occurs. I argue that

Rowling, as the teacher, exists as the model, living out the moral livelihood her stories create, and Watson is the perfect student of the text, drawing on a moral code from the text that shapes her current actions and commitments. Bracher's theory of schemas also helps to show what it is about the text itself that can instruct readers to be more moral and ethical in their evaluation of real world situations. We see then that the extent to which *Harry Potter* instructs its readers and develops their moral and ethical compass.

When we think about education today, we turn to pedagogies of culture, media, etc. We turn to our schools and colleges, to latest technologies and fads. Despite how the series disparages Dolores Umbridge's views, her remark that "progress for progress's sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering" does suggest that the knowledge and experience of traditions before us can offer us valuable insight (*Order of the Phoenix* 92). For me, the type of ethical education *Harry Potter* imparts parallels much of the educational theory that Isocrates formulated throughout his rhetorical career in Athens around 400 B.C.E. Isocrates is helpful for framing what I see as an educational and moral literacy practice derived from reading the text and engaging in fandom communities. Returning to ancient Athens doesn't just give us a theoretical approach but also a practical approach to education that Isocrates claimed created the ideal citizen-student--and which stands as true today as it did two millennia ago.

Isocrates saw literate education as a way to improve the skills and enhance the ethical qualities of an individual in order to make her a better citizen of the state. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates states:

Education can make such people more skillful and better equipped at discovery. It teaches those who now hit upon things by chance to achieve

them from a readier source. But it cannot fashion either good debates or good speechwriters from those who lack natural ability, although it may improve them and make them more intelligent in many respects. (64-65)

Isocrates' focus here is on the potential of education. For him, it cannot create excellence or brilliance, but it can always improve, strengthen, and enlighten individuals. Isocrates qualifies this potential by stating this can only happen if the student has a natural inclination to grow. This outlook centers his education in terms of what is practically achievable:

“[...]the study of political speeches can assist in encouraging and training these faculties [of soundness of mind and a sense of justice]” (66). And yet, for Isocrates, education is firmly grounded in reading. It is in fact that act of reading that imparts these “faculties” and shapes an individual's notions of morality, ethics, and integrity. In *Genuine Teachers of this Art*, Jeffery Walker reconstructs Isocrates' paideia through careful examination of his works and that of his contemporaries. Walker reinforces the fact that, for Isocrates, “the student must read widely and critically in the “celebrated” authors” (73). By reading these good works, a student can cultivate skills and knowledge that make herself more ethical person and active citizen.

Education, of course, has immense potential in Isocrates' terms. He creates an allegory to animals. If animals can learn to be more civil and act on demand, than surely humans can do better:

The most terrible thing of all is that every year in spectacles they see lions being more gentle toward their trainers than some men are toward their benefactors; and bears rolling around, wrestling, and imitating our knowledge. Yet they cannot ascertain from these examples how much power education

and training have, or that these would improve our natures more rapidly than those of animal. (Antidosis 245)

Education has the power to train, improve, and alter individuals. For Isocrates, it all lies in the potential of a human individual to learn. And in the case of *Harry Potter*, it is a tool by which students can learn “more rapidly” that which they should learn—and learn it well.

There is evidence that supports Isocrates’ notion that good texts develop ethical citizens. Indeed, evidence even that *Harry Potter* does this work. In a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, a group of psychologists set out to understand the ways in which readers of *Harry Potter* have an increased level of empathy. In “The Greatest Magic of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice,” Vezzali and his team’s research concluded that:

Participants reading about Harry Potter’s interactions with characters belonging to stigmatized groups may have learnt to take the perspective of discriminated group members and, in turn, applied this enhanced ability to understand disadvantaged groups to real-world out-group categories. (Vezzali et al. 116)

Vezzali and his team show how reading can and does cultivate empathy, and that *Harry Potter* creates such empathy in readers. Other research has taken this a step further, seeking to show how *Harry Potter* fans could have more far reaching effects on social and political outcomes, such as, in the US, millennial Harry Potter loving voters may have been in part responsible for electing President Obama in 2008 (Gierzynski). Ultimately, work like Vezzali’s and Gierzynski’s indicate that readers of the series become more accepting of marginalized groups of people. This is a disposition that changes the society we live in and has a measurable impact on the world. Their study begins to explain why and how this

process of learning occurs—one that Isocrates laid out ages ago in ancient Athens—simply one where the texts we read give us a new way to see the world around us.

Mark Bracher’s articulation of schema criticism helps us explore this phenomenon in the *Harry Potter* literature specifically. Bracher claims that readers use examples from books to measure and evaluate experience in the real world. Depending upon the examples the book provides, negative or positive social constructions are reinforced. He goes about this by laying out certain schemas, or evaluative structures, that readers can overwrite into more positive schemas. These more positive schemas result in less prejudiced and more ethically minded individuals. However, whilst Bracher uses schema criticism to argue for the capacity of protest novels in particular, I will expand his argument to show how schema criticism can bring out the poignancy, relevancy, and critical accomplishments of other genres, particularly literature for youth, by explicitly detailing how the act of reading can teach and cultivate empathy. Specifically, I argue, that *Harry Potter* overwrites the negative schemas with the more positive ones, indicating how readers learn from the text and what they learn. *Harry Potter* provides an ethical education and schema criticism provides a lens to see how that happens so we can better understand the effects that have occurred on the *Harry Potter* Generation.

The system of cognitive schemas is derived from how the brain processes information. It conveys how people use their knowledge to process what happens around them, and it suggests that by thinking about anything, even a table, we activate different schemas to address and understand them (Bracher 14). These schemas are how people process, analyze, and decide how to interact with the world around them. Now, where things go wrong is when the “previously acquired knowledge” is false or inadequate in addressing

the real world. Bracher states that, “There are four key faulty assumptions about people in general, or human nature, [that] have been identified that lead people to support harmful and unjust social policies, institutions and systems” (Bracher 8). As Bracher elaborates, these are Autonomy, where one’s character creates behavior and life outcomes exclusive of circumstances; Essentialism, when one’s character is inherent and not shaped by environment; Atomism, where individuals are naturally competitive and not cooperative; and Homogeneity, where people can be categorically and definitively labeled. In other words, these faulty schemas convince us that people are not nuanced (Bracher 8). With that understanding of what goes wrong when interacting with the world, Bracher argues that these perceptions can be changed with “The recognition that individuals are situated rather than purely autonomous, malleable rather than immutable, in fundamental solidarity with each other rather than in unmitigated opposition, and internally heterogeneous rather than homogeneous” (Bracher 28). In other words, the counter and positive schemas overwrite the faulty schemas: Situationism, Malleability, Solidarity, and Heterogeneity. By shifting perspectives, the reader can better intuit the world and society and better address situations.

It is useful for the way I will be discussing *Harry Potter* to understand what methods a text uses to rewrite schemas. Bracher identifies three ways that people can dispense with their faulty cognitive schemas and replace with more adequate ones: developing metacognition of the schemas “faulty and harmful nature,” providing examples, and training readers in information processing routines (Bracher 27). If we can discern these processes within the text, we can begin to paint a picture about the ethical potential of a piece of literature. Bracher argues that protest novels offer this type of ethical instruction; However, I see *Harry Potter* as providing not only this same cognitive work but doing so more

successfully since its repetition through multiple books, movies, and online fandom spaces increases its potential to reinforce and alter negative schemas into positive ones.

To begin, I turn to how the Autonomy Schema is overwritten to a Situational Schema via the character of Remus Lupin, a new professor at Hogwarts and an old friend of Harry's father. Lupin comes to Hogwarts during Harry's third year in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, seeking to fill the empty teaching position of Professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts. In this scene, Harry, Hermione, and Ron first meet Lupin upon the train, the Hogwarts Express, on their way to school for the year—highly unusual considering faculty do not use the train to get to Hogwarts:

[The compartment] had only one occupant, a man sitting fast asleep next to the window. Harry, Ron, and Hermione checked on the threshold. The Hogwarts Express was usually reserved for students and they had never seen an adult there before, except for the witch who pushed the food cart. The stranger was wearing an extremely shabby set of wizard's robes that had been darned in several places. He looked ill and exhausted. Though quite young, his light brown hair was flecked with gray (74).

In his impoverished state, readers are at first left to wonder why their new teacher looks so run down and weary. Throughout the year, we see Lupin's performance as teacher as so above and beyond any previous teachers as to make him a favorite among most students. "That was the best Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson we've ever had, wasn't it?" said Ron excitedly as they made their way back to the classroom to get their bags. "He seems like a very good teacher," said Hermione approvingly" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 140). Obviously beloved and appreciated, Harry also develops a close relationship with Professor Lupin as he

teaches Harry after hours how to perform a Patronus Charm (*Prisoner of Azkaban* “The Patronus”), which wards against Dementors. The reader grows to love and appreciate Lupin for his kindness, bravery, and wisdom.

By the end of the novel, Lupin’s “condition” is revealed to all: Lupin is a werewolf. Rowling has explained in interviews that this condition was written as a metaphor for HIV, with all of the stigma and difficulties associated with it in terms of interacting with society (“Writing by J. K. Rowling: Remus Lupin”). “[Severus Snape] *accidentally* let slip that I am a werewolf this morning at breakfast. [...] This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents....They will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 423). When Lupin is forced to leave the school, readers see a gifted teacher forced to leave despite his talents and success. Bitten and changed at a young age as retaliation for his father’s decisions (“Writing by J. K. Rowling: Remus Lupin”), Remus’s condition is a product of circumstances outside of his control. He is constantly forced to move from place to place because of how others view him. (“Writing by J. K. Rowling: Remus Lupin”). As a reader, we identify with his hardships and come to understand it is not by choice Remus Lupin wears shabby robes and lives humbly, but because of the limits society places on him for a condition he had no choice in acquiring. This setup, especially since we learn about Remus as an individual before we see how society has shaped and continues to shape his life, teaches readers that society and circumstances play a pivotal role in determining one's life and no matter what you may want or do, sometimes you are simply a victim of your situation.

Lupin completely changes how readers make assumptions about other individuals in less than ideal circumstances. As Bracher points out, “By arming readers with such

alternative concepts embodying tacit recognition of the role of circumstance in both success and failure, the novel provides them with yet another tool for escaping the myopia of the Autonomy schema when assessing and categorizing real people outside the novel” (Bracher 177). By repeatedly reminding readers of how Lupin’s choices are limited by society despite his talents and intentions, *Harry Potter* rewrites the Autonomy Schema. The series gives readers a reference by which to understand and interpret not only the situations in the story but also of their *own* lives. Readers see quite clearly how people are often controlled by circumstances but are still deserving of empathy and compassion. Readers mourn Lupin’s (and Tonk’s) death, and they sympathize with his son’s new orphan status. The book humanizes and situates Lupin as deserving of empathy. Readers gain an example of how to weigh a person’s situation when evaluating their actions and worth. This example lets them see other Lupins in the world as restricted by their situation, not their inherent characteristics and therefore culpable. J. K. Rowling’s writing brings in readers; they grow to love and adore the characters. This too motivates readers to agree with the text’s view that society carries the fault, not Lupin. Through Lupin, readers gain a sense of the harmful nature that the Autonomy Schema creates—the first and basic way texts can alter schemas—and begin to switch to an understanding of the Situational Schema.

No one character exemplifies the shift from Homogeneity to Heterogeneity in *Harry Potter* more so than Professor Severus Snape. In no other character do we see such reason to shift from evaluating people as either good or bad to nuanced like Snape. From the outset, he singles Harry out as a problem child. Cruel, unfair, and a disagreeable person, Snape is seen as nothing but a villain time after time. Throughout the first book, they cast dirty looks at each other, and Harry and the gang long suspect Snape is the villain. In the third book, Snape

stands against Harry in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, actually stopping him and preventing him from going to live with his godfather, Sirius Black, by almost having Sirius killed by the Ministry of Magic. For this action, readers hate Snape. After all, why shouldn't Harry get to live with his Godfather who loves him instead of the Dursleys who mistreat him? The perspective seems almost absolute when at the end of the sixth novel, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Snape performs the penultimate act of evil by killing Dumbledore (*Half Blood Prince* 596). Harry's hatred runs deep at this moment and he cannot imagine one redeeming quality for Snape. He tries to attack Snape, only to have his spells brushed away as Snape flees the Hogwarts grounds (*Half Blood Prince* 602). Straight through the sixth and into most of the seventh, Snape is pure evil to Harry and so to the reader as well.

However, in the seventh novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the reader's perspective of Snape completely changes. Lord Voldemort brutally murders Severus Snape in the Battle of Hogwarts, and Harry walks up to Snape as he dies. With his dying breath, Snape imparts Harry with memories, through his tears, that Harry needs in order to understand how to defeat Voldemort. Through it, he also learns more about the life of Severus Snape and what his motives really are: "I have spied for you [Dumbledore] and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter's son safe" (*Deathly Hallows* 687). Snape, we learn, loved Harry's mother, and it was for this love that he fought to protect Harry from Voldemort. It did not overwrite the unfortunate qualities of greed for power and cruelty of Snape, of all the years of tormenting Harry he'd lived, but he could no longer be simply dismissed as an evil villain in the *Harry Potter* series. By reading through the series, readers shift from an understanding of evil as an absolute to one where people have both good and bad in them, which is exactly what it takes

to rewrite the Homogeneity schema, an understanding of others as a single, essentializing, character quality, to the Heterogeneity schema, one where people recognize the nuanced nature of character. Readers, through the revelations in the series, learn how they mislabeled Snape. In trying to determine if he was good or bad, they sought to essentialize and strip Snape of his identity. However, upon learning the ulterior motives, readers are forced to reassess their original conclusions and come to a more nuanced understanding of how Snape is neither good nor evil, but human. Snape teaches readers that to label is to mislabel and that they must look at a bigger picture to get to the truth.

Luna Lovegood also overwrites the Homogeneity Schema for the Heterogeneity Schema but with different results. J. K. Rowling obviously sought to translate what she saw in the real world into her wizarding world (the dementors in *Prisoner of Azkaban* being a manifestation of depression being another example), sometimes the expression was less explicit or overt. In Luna Lovegood, introduced in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, it is easy to see any child ostracized by society because she did not act out social norms. Luna walks to the beat of her own drum, wearing a butterbeer cork necklace and radish earrings; she doesn't let her peers get her down. At first Harry and the gang find her strange—her nickname is Loony Lovegood after all. As the year progresses however, they start to see past the strange statements and talk of wrackspurts. They find Luna to be loyal, resourceful, kind, and wise. She stands besides Harry at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* to fight the Death Eaters and Lord Voldemort and imparts the wisdom to Harry that no matter your differences, you have contributions and characteristics of value and merit.

Though Harry and the gang do not overtly taunt or harass Luna in the beginning, their actions in the text show that if you take the time to get to know someone like Luna, you find

no brighter friendship. Luna is now often among readers' favorite characters (myself counted among those readers) as they either identify with a social outcast such as Luna or as they appreciate her individuality. Children can often be cruel, but the effervescent and forgiving nature of Luna lays out a model for how to accept yourself, forgive those around you, and appreciate those who walk to a different tune. In many ways, Luna exemplifies for readers how to act in the world. Through the course of *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry, Hermione, and Ron learn to value Luna for who she is—not by her label. Once they do, they build a strong friendship that helps carry them through the climax of the novel at the Ministry of Magic. We learn through Luna more than the harmful nature of judging others, but also an example of how to treat others with respect, to value that 'other'—and that provides readers with an exemplar for executing the Heterogeneity schema within the world. By pairing it with Snape, we get the type of repetition needed to enforce and change negative cognitive schemas into a more positive cognitive schema.

Applying Bracher's theory fits with the movement and underlying assumption in *Harry Potter* research and criticism that the texts have the power to spawn social justice movements and improve the morality of its readers. In the essay "We are Book Eight: Secrets to the Success of the Harry Potter Alliance," Heather Elise Hamilton and John Michael Sefel argue for just such an effect. "The Harry Potter Alliance, or HPA, uses aspects of the Potterverse in a myriad of humanitarian campaigns. It has demonstrated a remarkable ability to galvanize people to take part in social action, enthused by the moral values underlying Rowling's books" (Hamilton and Sefel 207). Indeed, one of the ways they mark this series as so effective is that "Harry Potter's world is 'domestic.' He spends his time at school. He rides the train. He studies for tests. These are all activities that are familiar to his fans, and it is

easy for them to look around at their surroundings and superimpose Harry's experiences onto their own" (Hamilton and Sefel 209). Hamilton and Sefel support the ease and success of applying what happens in *Harry Potter* to the world. It allows for the text to do exactly what Bracher states rewriting schema's requires: namely to take what you read, the examples it provides, and apply it to the world you live in. *Harry Potter's* school setting feels familiar to so many readers, and so they are able to easily extract and apply the examples the text provides to their world. For readers, imaginative capacity and relatability of the text allows readers to distill these schema changes easily and readily and then utilize them. Invariably, a belief in the autonomy of marginalized individuals leads to participation in changing the socio-political environment.

One particular social justice aspect that critics have highlighted is *Harry Potter's* racial politics, an issue of particular interest to millennials. In the opening to the article "Harry and the Other: Answering the Race Question in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*," Jackie C. Horne notes that

As many readers have noted, the *Harry Potter* books are deeply invested in teaching their protagonists (and through them, their readers) how to confront, eradicate, and ameliorate racism through its depiction of the racism that underlies Voldemort's campaign against 'Mudbloods' [magic people with non-magical parentage] (76).

Horne clearly points out the instructive and ethical nature of *Harry Potter*. She draws on the example of 'Mudbloods' to talk through the moral features of the text to interpret real life situations, or as Bracher might term it, it allows for a situational schema to be overwritten.

*Harry Potter* pushes readers to reconsider their worldviews, and teaches them a code of ethics that accepts otherness.

Other scholars have taken up the issue of ethics within *Harry Potter*. In *Ethics and Form in Fantasy Literature: Tolkien, Rowling, and Meyer*, Lykke Guanio-Uluru states, “The elements of doubt and uncertainty developed in *Harry Potter* are potentially ethically productive, in that they may lead the reader towards questioning and reflection on ethical issues” (Guanio-Uluru 156). Guanio-Uluru uses this specifically to do with Christian and religious ethical contexts within both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, I would argue that this can be taken more broadly beyond the strictly religious sense of morals to a broader sense of social ethics that the *Harry Potter* Generation has come to identify with. Guanio-Uluru also states that “the implied author tricks the reader into perceiving both Dumbledore and Snape based on faulty assumptions in a first reading, and then reveals the deception in the surprise ending” (Guanio-Uluru 156). Certainly, there is a distinct payoff in reading the series to the very end. However, one only gets a sense of Snape’s identity being “comprised of both ill-will and good will” (Guanio-Uluru 156) if one goes back and *understands* Snape’s ulterior motives throughout the earlier texts. This act of returning to the text to get a sense of how one misperceived Snape ultimately lends itself to learning how easy it can be to misjudge someone—an important facet of being empathetic. The very fact that this evolution occurred over time as those in the *Harry Potter* Generation grew up with the series, lends itself to this development. Those that grew up right along the text, waiting with baited breath for the next book or film, experienced this in real time. In fact, I would often reread the entire series before the release of the next book or film to help refresh my memory and ground myself in where I left off, and I know I was not alone in this habit. The

cultural moment created a situation that encouraged the Harry Potter Generation to revisit the text and by doing so, helped further its function as an ethically instructive tool.

On the eve of the release of the seventh book, a great storm waged between fans for and against Severus Snape. At the midnight release they handed out stickers to represent which side of the debate you resided on, and at midnight we would understand which side reigned victorious. While I'm happy to say that I choose to back Severus Snape (perhaps partly to do with that side using my favorite color purple as the aesthetic), I think the ending makes the debate more complicated. The point is not that Snape fits either the good guy or the bad guy category but that he represented a nuanced and complicated human being reflective of the world we live in. That lesson is far more valuable than aligning on either one of the other side. It taught us all to go back and look more carefully at his motives and to see Snape for who he was and less about who he had been labeled.

As I have argued, *Harry Potter* provides examples that help to develop a reader's ethical and moral code to be less prejudiced against marginalized people. I have used Isocrates claim that good texts instruct readers to reveal how readers acquire these codes. Yet, Isocrates develops the importance of the relationship of the teacher and the student in this type of instruction. Isocrates states, "Both teachers and students have their own parts to play: in particular, the pupils' responsibility is to bring the requisite natural ability, and the teachers', to be able to educate these kinds of students, but common to both is practical experience" (Antidosis 241). The student can learn but the teacher must be a suitable role model, a fit example by which to instruct and guide. And of course, for both the teacher and student, the role of practice is instrumental in the success of the endeavor for education. Isocrates expands, "They must be educated and gain knowledge of that particular subject;

and [...] they must practice and become familiar with its use and its implementation. After this, whatever the profession, they will become accomplished and far outstrip others” (Antidosis 240-241). Knowledge and practice are two halves that lead to proficiency in the material. And this imperative to learn and become proficient is a necessary to society. As Isocrates states, “The condition of the city necessarily depends on how the young are educated” (*Antidosis* 238). For Isocrates, the health and justness of society depends on adolescents being well educated in this manner. Successfully done, this education teaches students and creates more ethical and moral citizens.

In Isocrates’ paradigm of education, Rowling serves in the role of the teacher and therefore, must act as a model to her students, in this case, her readers. For those that know the story of J. K. Rowling, her meteoric rise to fame is nothing short of impressive. From depression to single parenting to losing her mother, Rowling has fought through some tough issues. Part of what inspired her writing in the *Prisoner of Azkaban* was her depression, which resulted in the creation of the Dementors, creatures who suck out all the happiness from a person. For all of her struggles though, Rowling persevered and now is an acclaimed and much loved author. Her success is well known, but moving beyond that, Rowling herself is a social justice advocate. She was the first billionaire to drop to being a millionaire through donations to charity—not by spending her money for herself. She is noted for her involvement with charity and there are two specific involvements, among many, that I would like to highlight.

As I posited, the Isocratic model of education posits the important nature of the model in cementing the values of the texts that cultivate an ethical education and develop literacy skills. As the author of the series, Rowling acts as the teacher and model for her readers and

fans and, as I would argue, functions as an exemplary role model for instructing her readers. Firstly, Rowling contributes to research for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, the condition from which her mother passed. In 2006, she donated significant funds to the building of the Centre for Regenerative Medicine located at Edinburgh University in order to start building. To express their thanks, they renamed the institution after Rowling's mother, the Anne Rowling Regenerative Neurology Clinic ("J.K. Rowling Marks Start For Clinic" 1). In 2010, Rowling donated another 10 million to continue her support ("J.K. Rowling donates £10m to multiple sclerosis clinic" 1). After watching her mother suffer through the disease, Rowling felt the necessity to act for change—a sentiment expressed through her writing.

Secondly, is her work for Lumos, an organization she helped found that seeks to give a voice to institutionalized children in impoverished circumstances and usually from third world countries.

I looked at that photograph of the boy in his cage bed [from the Sunday Times article] and felt he has absolutely no voice. This touched me as nothing else has because I can think of nobody more powerless than a child, perhaps with a mental or a physical disability, locked away from their family. It was a very shocking realization to me and that's where the whole thing started. ("Lumos: Our Founder" 1)

The photograph depicted a boy in a caged bed and deeply moved J. K. Rowling. This 2004 occurrence was in the middle of her writing of the *Harry Potter* series. Rowling's belief that all children should have a voice is reflected through her writing and her work as a humanitarian. As Isocrates purported, it is not just the texts you give a student but the model you enact as the teacher. Rowling lives true to her words and sets up a model that all her readers, or students, can follow, and indeed, that's exactly what some do. Rowling's charity

work and advocacy work for underprivileged children brings awareness and a move for change—the same actions her characters carry out, such as Hermione’s creation of S.P.E.W. (The Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare). Her actions match up with the socially just actions of her characters, and so J. K. Rowling lives as a model to her text, inspiring her readers to follow not only in the character’s footsteps but hers as well, and so she inspired readers to make real change in our world too.

Rowling provides readers with an excellent model to follow both in herself and in her text, but what of the student? Emma Watson, who played the part of Hermione Granger in the films, provides an example of the student which we can examine. Of course, we must acknowledge that part of the *Harry Potter* Phenomenon rests on the resounding success of the 8 part movie adaptation of the novelization. It spread the name like wildfire, inviting more people to pick up the books. We can trace the successfulness of the instructive nature of *Harry Potter* by looking at Watson’s involvement with bringing the series from the page to the screen. All of the actors are, in a way, the test case that proves the profound effect that this story can have on those who read it. Acting requires the memorization of lines, character interpretation, and critical reading skills in order to deliver a successful and believable performance. These literacy skills were put to use and developed over the period of the series. A dedicated fan, Emma read all the books, and at the outset of her career, only the first four were published. As such, Watson was familiar with all of the novels from the beginning and was eager to gain the next installment throughout her time on the Potter set. She read them, knew them, and quite literally, she *lived* this story. All of the practice she engaged in with the texts as well as her reading of them, developed her education and clearly influenced

her. She stands as an example of the powerful potential reading and literacy practices have in instructing young readers, and today, we can see the effect of this through the life she leads.

Emma Watson lives her life according to upstanding principles to help protect the voices for those who may not have them. In 2014, Watson was appointed a United Nations Women Goodwill Ambassador (UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson 1). It was a notable day once she had finished her undergraduate degree at Brown University for English Literature to begin to work towards the things she believed in. Emma Watson is known as a humanitarian and activist but her work with the UN took her work to new heights of ambition and brought a greater awareness to the type of work she was doing. As a feminist and social justice warrior, Watson stands up for others and marginalized groups just as her character Hermione Granger fought through house-elf rights and created S.P.E.W. She took to heart and mind the example given to her within the text of *Harry Potter* and through the practice she had acting, and she used that knowledge to fight for a more ethical society. As the Isocretean model articulates, I would highlight the powerful potential when students are given an example and a model and space to employ and practice. Such an education creates more ethically minded individuals and citizens.

After all, as I have shown through Snape, Lupin, and Luna, these characters can represent many different maligned groups, can instruct readers to better understand them, sympathize with them, and give them a reference by which to accept them instead of judging them harshly. However, Watson is involved not in an #againstbullies movement or fighting against transgender prejudices but specifically women's rights. Playing Hermione Granger, this seems most fitting considering Hermione's constant battle against the prejudice and ridicule of not only her peers but some of her teachers and community members because of

her intelligent and bossy nature. Hermione, as one particular fan video frames it “literally gave no fucks” (“If Hermione Were the Main Character in Harry Potter); She is bossy, so, so incredibly smart, courageous, and will not stand to be shut down by her betters. Indeed, that above mentioned video is all about how much Hermione fights patriarchal norms on how a woman should be and act. Hermione is a symbol for women’s strength and equality, that they can excel just as well as a man could. As Isocrates purports, that one can learn by the example laid out in the text, that it can lead one to act out in beneficial matter in politics, it can be no surprise that Emma Watson followed the example of the character she had spent so many years bringing to life by fighting for equal rights for women.

Watson further exemplifies the living model through her feminist work with #HeForShe. Shortly after her appointment as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, Watson introduced the #HeForShe movement that calls not just for women to gain equal rights, but asks men to stand right along women and use their voices to vote for equality, to proclaim themselves a feminist as defined by Emma Watson in her #HeForShe announcement speech at the United Nations Headquarters in New York: “The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” (Watson 1). Emma Watson consciously stressed the importance of equality of both sexes and not women better than men. What these demonstrate is her ability to navigate a controversial topic, to take her appointment and speak on its behalf in a political atmosphere to change the world for the better. She uses speech, perfectly in line with that of which *Harry Potter* would have shown her, in order to engage in her political moment.

Now, this isn’t to say that *Harry Potter* is a magical solution to prejudice and character faults. Even Isocrates claimed that education could go only so far if an individual

did not also have the right disposition (Isocrates *Antidosis*). After all, we need only look at another actor from the series whose actions landed him in jail. Jaimie Waylett, who played Draco Malfoy's crony Vincent Crabbe, was convicted for taking part in the London riots back in 2011. He "received a two year sentence for violent disorder and 12 months for handling stolen goods" ("London Riots"). Previously, Waylett had also been sentenced for the possession of drugs. Clearly, participating in *Harry Potter* and being a fan does not directly correlate to becoming a moral citizen. Although we might consider how Waylett practiced an immoral character, nevertheless we must recognize that *Harry Potter* does not act to create morality out of nothing. It simply enhances those with the capacity to learn. For Isocrates, education can benefit those with a natural disposition to do so; it is not a fix for those without a natural inclination to the subject or material. What is important to recognize is the potential of the series to cultivate ethical world views.

This eloquence and integrity are exactly the types of characteristics Isocrates hoped his theory of education could instill in his students to make a change for the better. As Josiah Ober says in his chapter entitled "I, Socrates.... The Performative Audacity of Isocrates' *Antidosis*" within the collection *Isocrates and Civic Education* by Takis Poulakos and David Depew, states:

We may honor Isocrates' conception of the goal of civic education as the development, through speech, of a complex yet integrated identity. He calls upon his students to become persons capable of intervening, through speech, in an equally complex social and political realm. (40)

As Depew emphasizes, for Isocrates, it is more important that his students become moral citizens and that the capability of speech and writing comes second. In Isocretan education, communication flows from the just soul.

Indeed, that's exactly what J. K. Rowling's series appears to do for readers. A series of memes online deal with what "Harry Potter Taught Me." These memes highlight what readers learn from the different characters in the series. For example, one image (that I will deal with at greater length later) depicts a series of three character profile images that read "Sybill Trelawney taught us that you can always change your future. Lucius Malfoy taught us that money will only let you choose your form of misery. Dolores Umbridge taught us that education should never have a political agenda" (Rapp). Obviously, these takeaways have a decidedly ethical bent that connect the text to readers' actions in the world. As more users participate within these spaces, they learn to *practice* what the text instructs them in. More than this, they develop skills of analysis and interpretation, building their rhetorical literacy skills. As more fans come together to participate and build a community online, they acknowledge the truth the fandom holds for them, until the whole community rises up to show their prevalence and relevance in the *Harry Potter* Phenomenon, in *defining* that phenomenon. If we want to understand how *Harry Potter* ethically instructs readers, we must understand the role that practice plays through fandom participation.

## PART 2: THE 'PRACTICE' OF FANDOM

This past week I went to the grocery store for a bit of ice cream. Just a little treat to help me make a frantic week of grading, writing, and reading. As I was browsing the myriad displays from different brands, my eyes glanced upon Yuengling's newest flavor "Butterbeer." Now, any casual fan of *Harry Potter* knows that butterbeer is the drink of choice (since the idea of pumpkin juice just does not sound appealing) for the characters and fans. It's been immortalized in DIY recipes, *Harry Potter* release parties, and Universal Orlando's Wizarding World of Harry Potter. However, nowhere on the packaging of that delectable pint of ice cream did it say "Harry Potter" or Warner Bros. Yet, the ice cream was a definite ode to *Harry Potter* fans. *Harry Potter* is so great it need not even say its name. (I'm looking at you "You-know-who"). One single pint of ice cream and yet it gives us a clear indication of the pervasive nature of a cultural phenomenon and an example of how people engaging with it might use it or profit from it. And ice cream isn't the only place *Harry Potter* pops up. From QVC hosts describing handbags as Hermione's beaded handbag that had an undetectable extension charm placed on it to political comparisons of our current president to a certain villain, there is something about the way fan communities engage with the material of *Harry Potter*. The *Harry Potter* novels give readers a lens in which to interpret the world. While this bleeds into our culture at large, the best instance of communities using *Harry Potter* to process their life and world lies online in the *Harry Potter* fandom communities.

I return to Isocrates to help emphasize the importance of the fandom community's engagement with *Harry Potter* in acquiring a moral and ethical education through reading. As I stated earlier, Isocrates tells us that "[Students] must be educated and gain knowledge of

that particular subject [they choose to study]; and...they must practice and become familiar with its use and its implementation. After this, whatever the profession, they will become accomplished and far outstrip others” (Antidosis 240-241). An important component of Isocrates’ education is practice. He insists on an engagement with and an implementation of the learned textual material. For a solitary activity such as reading, how does one engage with and “practice” that material? One answer to this question that is central to the *Harry Potter* Phenomenon is fandom communities online. These communities allow members to take their solitary experience and put it into ‘practice;’ Fandom members utilize their acquired knowledge to engage in interpretive and analytical activities that cement and reinforce the ethical nature of the texts.

Pinterest, while it can often be dismissed as not rhetorical or faddish, is in fact rhetorical. As Katie DeLuca points out in her piece “‘Can we block these political thingys? I just want to get f\*cking recipes.’ Women, Rhetoric, and Politics on Pinterest,”

The users' rhetorical participation in this online space—discussing politics, women's rights, issues of site conventions, and more—illustrate how rhetoric and arguments can be constructed across online spaces, including those that have been cast as a space for sharing recipes, crafting patterns, researching diet fads, and looking at outfit ideas. The rhetorical and civic engagements that take place in these spaces can provide insights into the rhetorical activities that characterize the everyday experiences and composing practices of individuals in social media spaces. (DeLuca “Introduction”)

While DeLuca points us to political women’s spaces, what she states about user’s utilization of the space as rhetorical holds true in fandom spaces as well. The ways users use the site as

well as the subject material determine the rhetorical efficacy of the site, not the form of the site itself. Therefore, while Pinterest can offer inane observations about nail polish colors, Pinterest's potential as a site of communication allows for a multitude of functions and levels of rhetorical engagements.

The online world of *Harry Potter* fandom stretches far and wide and exists in a multitude of forms, each of which offers different areas of practice and engagement. I would like to cover the breadth of the fandom before focusing in on memes circulated on Pinterest, fanfiction, and reddit users articulating the ways that the fandom culture of *Harry Potter* plays a pivotal role in creating an ethical education. Isocrates' rhetorical education gives a model that can inform our understanding of the importance of "practice" in the ethical education *Harry Potter* imparts. As Isocrates explains, 'practice' is an equally important function as acquiring knowledge in the process of learning. Fandom spaces are an integral piece for allowing community members to engage in the type of thinking and civic participation that today's world requires. If we look at these spaces as rhetorical and instructive, we can see how readers work through and relate to the text and put it into "practice." We can see how members use the text as a lens to view the world and put it into practice engaging and communicating with other fandom members. *Harry Potter*, unlike any other series before, inspired readers to engage not only with the text but with other fans; a profitable inspiration imperative to the ethical and instructive effect of the series.

In "Ethical Frameworks and Ethical Modalities: Theorizing Communication and Citizenship in a Fluid World," Ashley Hinck states, "Scholars have long recognized that popular culture shapes our social and political lives. Popular culture's depictions of people, social relationships, and political issues affect how fans imagine themselves and the world

around them” (1). And while Hinck seeks to establish an interdisciplinary theory to deal with fan activism, she situates the field and the points towards the value of incorporating fan spaces when thinking about ethical instruction. Just as DeLuca does, Hinck cements the efficacy of turning to fandom and online communities to situate and analyze literacy practices and socio-political involvement. And there is certainly plenty to draw on when we look to *Harry Potter* communities online.

*Harry Potter* most definitely deals in myth and magic, in “witches and wizards and magical beasts” (Starkid), on the surface. But its real magic lies in its power to connect with masses of people. From *A Very Potter Musical*, to other fan videos and fan fiction, to masses of memes and a trillion tweets, *Harry Potter* connected with viewers in a way that no other series, or single piece of reading, has ever done before. Research drawn from a Facebook poll of top ten books from users in August 2014 indicated that *Harry Potter* was the most influential, putting it at the top of the list of aggregated data (Adamic 1). Obviously, there is something about *Harry Potter* that sticks with *readers*, a long lasting effect over time, and an emphasis on the plurality in terms of amount of people. It boils down to *Harry Potter*’s ability to get underneath a reader’s skin and affect change within them. It shows that education, by a person being presented with even one text, increases their level of education and helps them garner new skills and greater proficiency. It also gives readers a moral compass by which to evaluate the world they live in. Most impressively, it creates a foundation, a community online that creates a basis for exchange between community members. This community reinforces and broadens the application of the morals gained between the pages of the series.

The online *Harry Potter* universe includes fan creations, such as artwork and fanfiction, *Pottermore*, a gift from J. K. Rowling to fans that expands the content of the Potter universe, and fandom news reporting sites, such as Snitchseeker and Mugglenet. While I will get to more of the fictional and rhetorical interpretation uses of online spaces, I want to first turn to the more ‘canonical’ spaces of *Harry Potter*, those that cover what J. K. Rowling has added to the universe, which includes news dissemination services of that canon. Then, I can look more closely at what fans add and how they engage with and practice the forms that the text lays out. Each of these different online sub communities engages in different practices that inform, flesh out, and connect the community to the content of the text and to the fandom in ways that enrich the ‘practice’ of the fandom.

In 2011, the internet went on fire when J. K. Rowling announced that she would be launching Pottermore, a new site where fans could “share, participate in, and rediscover the stories” (“Pottermore”). I still remember putting my friends to work while we were on vacation to solve the Magical Quill challenge in order to receive beta invites to the site (My friends are awesome). The excitement that ripped through the community was palpable across the web. Pottermore, initially, released interactive images that retold the series chapter by chapter. You could collect items and potion ingredients, which you could use in a potion activity. The site also allowed for the first time ever for fans to be sorted into houses and given wands through quizzes approved and designed by J. K. Rowling. For Rowling, Pottermore was a gift to her fans, a way for her to give back to the community that loved her series and stuck with her.

As details pertaining to the Pottermore service came out, Snitchseeker and Mugglenet detailed and reported on the whole process. Both news sites were (and still are) completely

dedicated to reporting everything that occurs within the fandom. These sites report things like every interview with J. K. Rowling, what actors went on to do, actors and characters birthdays, relevant competitions, and so much more. These sites operated as a way to open a door to fans of the books to bring them online for all the latest, up to the minute updates as well as new extra material reveals, such as when J. K. Rowling revealed that Albus Dumbledore, the venerable Headmaster of Hogwarts, was written as a gay character. The news sites also acted as a hub for fans to comment and share how they related to the information and created forums for fans to test out their latest theory about the text or to discuss their favorite characters. These options for participation allowed fans to practice out their theories, to engage in character and plot analysis together. This process developed not just literary skills, but moral literacy skills as the text sets up readers to understand the complexity of the various parts and people of the text. These sites were there from the very beginning and operated in such a way that allowed for fans to begin to explore what online Fandom communities were like. It gave fans an opportunity to ‘practice’ their knowledge from the series and reinforced and expanded the issues that they learned to address in the text.

From J.K. Rowling, to Emma Watson, to the everyday fans of the *Harry Potter* Phenomenon, the *Harry Potter* series not only captures the imagination of its readers but also creates a lasting impact. What Isocrates gives us is a means to understand and analyze the ways this series educates its readers in an ethical and moral way that results in the types of political and social involvement that makes changes for the better. Isocrates gives us a model of education that helps us to articulate how not only the series but the fandom culture as well works in tandem to instill ethical education through practice. The work I am doing here can

and should be expanded on for the improvement of, not just our classrooms, but that of our, both real and virtual, societies at large.

In the same way that Snape's character requires readers to develop more complex means of evaluating character and understanding difference, fan culture requires participants to make more complex their interpretive skills and moral evaluation, which solidifies the ethical education of the novels. For example, on places like Pinterest, people exchange theories about how the text functions. A popular pin (Figure 1) posted by Tumblr user batmansymbol argues that happiness is weaponized throughout the series. As batmansymbol says, "happiness is something not just to be lived—it is to be wielded, on your own behalf and the behalves of the people around you, to battle against the world's heavier elements" (Riverside). This interpretation explicitly connects the ethical instruction from the text and applies it to the world in which the reader lives. It interprets, analyzes, and extrapolates meaning.

batmansymbol:

one of the most important things to me about harry potter is its portrayal of happiness. in the harry potter world, happiness isn't just a feeling—it's a weapon. look at how harry and his friends fight: with *riddikulus*, laughter stymies a creature made of fear; with *expecto patronum*, the very memory of happiness beats back the grim forces of depression.

the weaponization of positivity stretches beyond that. fred and george weasley's inventions, meant for laughter, turn into arms against umbridge's regime. and after their departure from hogwarts, their joke shop becomes not only the single bright spot in diagon alley (literally & figuratively) but a hub of defensive magic. the whole weasleys' wizard wheezes narrative serves as maybe the clearest example in the series that happiness can act as both shield and sword.

there is something deeply empowering in a depiction of happiness as something so tangible and usable. as a profoundly depressed person, i often feel myself scrounging for happy memories and clutching them close; i find myself grasping for laughter in the dark. the physicalization of *expecto patronum* is not a quantum leap from reality. the boggart's laughter as combat fuel, the weasleys' levity as not just a choice but a difficult and defiant one—it's all familiar.

the series has its share of darkness, but it revels most in the light. it lets us believe that the act of joy is not small, trivial, or inconsequential. happiness is something not just to be lived—it is to be wielded, on your own behalf and the behalves of the people around you, to battle against the world's heavier elements. harry potter teaches us this.

**Read this. It's so great.**

Figure 1 Riverside, Lily. *Batmansymbol: Happiness isn't a feeling, it's a weapon*. 2017.

As figure 1 shows, this analysis goes deeper beyond the surface comment.

Batmansymbol provides details, such as the way Fred and George's joke shop, Weasley's

Wizard Wheezes, "serves as the clearest example in the series that happiness can act as both

a shield and a sword.” He gives explicit details to support his interpretation. A deeply rhetorical argument construction, batmansymbol displays his skills and the way that readers interact with the text in fandom spaces. This level of support and detail is common among fan conversations across Reddit, Tumblr, Pinterest, and beyond. This piece crosses between fandom spaces, tying together the larger community of *Harry Potter* fandom. This increase in fan support and engagement with the interpretation bolsters its efficacy and demonstrates how fans appreciate and value this theory. We also see how fans engage with it. One comment (seen in Figure 1), states “Read this. It’s so great.” While this comment is short and sweet, the comment sums up one of many fans who comment to show how they interpret and value this theory. A post is one thing, but it’s the engagement of the fans who agree, share, repin, and more to further and support the theory that reveals how fans engage, value, and put into practice the rhetorical skills cultivated in the text.

We see in this post a clear train of movement from text to personal experience to the world through rhetorical analysis. Batmansymbol articulates how understanding happiness can be both a ‘shield and sword’ that helps him battle his own depression. In the last part, he turns this experience to how the community can use it. He tells us that we can use happiness to “battle against the world’s heavier elements.” This process of extrapolating meaning from the text and applying it to oneself and the world is exactly the analytical and rhetorical process that the text and the fandom communities cultivate. This same process happens to bring out moral and ethical lessons from the text.

The what “Harry Potter Taught Me” memes bring to the forefront the lessons and the effects that individual readers extract from the text itself, with a specific focus on individual character journeys. For example, a series of three character profile images reads “Sybill

Trelawney taught us that you can always change your future.” “Lucius Malfoy taught us that money will only let you choose your form of misery.” “Dolores Umbridge taught us that education should never have a political agenda” (Rapp). Obviously, these are some very powerful takeaways, and these side characters manage to convey, instruct, and enlighten readers to potential takeaways from the books that apply to the “real” world. There are a slew of these memes covering almost every character held within the pages of the series. Fans actively try and establish the powerful potential of *Harry Potter* to teach, not only them, but others. They seek to pass on their love of *Harry Potter* and the benefits they received to others online—to connect with their community and other communities. On a site like Pinterest, it is easy to perceive how these statements are repinned, Pinterest lingo for saving it to your own account and reposting there, over and over again by more and more users. Repinning is the prime way to disseminate information and to connect with other members. It allows users to collect information they see as valuable or true, and by increasing the number of times a pin has been repinned, they bolster the authority of the single pin. The more users find meaning in what the meme stands for, as they acknowledge the truth it holds for them, they create a communicative and rhetorical engagement with the content and each other. The situation calls on fans to rise up, to put their *Harry Potter* knowledge to the test, and to practice engaging with one another in meaningful ways. It cultivates their analytical and literacy skills and ties them to value based observations about the morals of society. In so doing, the *Harry Potter* Phenomenon takes flight from the textual and digital spaces into our own.



Figure 2. Rapp, Jennifer. *What Harry Potter Taught Me*. 2016. Web.

Pinterest is not the only place where rhetorical and analytical engagement exists. Fanfiction.net and the now defunct Quizilla from the early 2000's are sites where people can

write their own stories using the characters from any fandom (even I took a stab at writing some *Harry Potter* fanfictions back in the mid-2000). Fanfiction exists as a space to reimagine the characters, the story, and events that requires writers to be analytical and to interpret the original text itself. When using characters from *Harry Potter*, fanfiction writers must first understand the character before bending them to the purpose of their own story. For example, many fanfiction stories turn Harry Potter and Hermione into a couple as opposed to Ron and Hermione as in the text. Long before the final book was released, these Harry/Hermione fics deduced that Harry was a better fit romantically for Hermione than Ron. And indeed, in an interview conducted by Emma Watson years after the last book had been published, J. K. Rowling admits that Harry would have made a better fit with Hermione than Ron (Sims). These online communities build skills in analysis and interpretation that develop literacy. Fan's comments on the accuracy of the character portrayals or if the story "feels" like *Harry Potter* or J. K. Rowling's writing help to keep the community honest and keeps the content true to the original story's vision. Fanfiction communities engage in detailed and complicated analytical and rhetorical analysis that develops not just their rhetorical and literary analytical capacities but their moral ones too in order to stay true to the original series.

Each piece acts as a form of engagement that "practices" what the text teaches readers. One fascinating example is the Black Hermione movement. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is a play still currently running in London that outlines "The Eighth Story" for the series. It picks up where the final chapter of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* left off. As such, it necessitated the recasting of Harry, Ron, and Hermione as adults. When the new trio was announced, the debate did not center around the talents of each of the new

actors, but around the fact that Hermione Granger had been cast as a black woman. Many people commented that since Hermione had been white in the movies, it made no sense to change her race for the play. Others pointed to the fact that the series never once claims Hermione's race explicitly. Even with Rowling's blessing, the casting remained a hot button issue. Deeply invested in the morals of the text, readers are drawn in and instructed to take them as their own. For example, readers follow that of Hermione's and Luna's model to be more accepting and inclusive, and so *Harry Potter* helps to develop their moral compass through proper examples and textual perspectives.

Yet, so much of the fandom embraced this movement. Suddenly my Pinterest board was full of artistic renders of Hermione as a woman of color. Readers, especially black women, suddenly saw themselves within the pages of a book in a way they had not been able to envision before. In *Resistance and Survival: Children's Narrative from Central America and the Caribbean*, Ann Gonzalez points towards the vital importance of recognizing oneself between the pages of a book. She states "Walking in reverse becomes a metaphor, like reading in reverse, for a form of duplicity that offers a space for resistance inside the dominant codes" (8). Gonzalez points out a reading strategy that articulates a need for finding oneself in the literature one reads and using strategies to reclaim the narrative. For the first time, *Harry Potter* fans were able to take the message of the book to value others and difference and put it into practice in a way not explored or embraced before. For the most part, fans have loved the change and valued its expression of difference.

For Isocrates, just as much as reading ethical and well written speeches can provide an example that can teach students, their practice and engagement with the examples, the ways in which they use them as tools to create their own compositions and to analyze the

world around them, remains equally important in cultivating an ethical and moral citizen.

*Harry Potter* acts as an example text that gives students, readers, and fandom community members a way to interpret the world. The characters, whether they be Snape, Lupin, Luna, or any of the others, provide a schema, as Bracher would term it, that turns readers to their world and then the world at large.

## CONCLUSION

There is yet to be another book or series that has captured my attention and heart in the same way that J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* has. There is a *je ne sais quoi* about the series that cements itself within the imaginations and hearts of so many fans across the globe. And yet, if we take the time to look closely at the series and the ways that it engages with, impacts, and speaks to our cultural moment, we gain not only a sense of the literature itself, but also a sense of the value of children's literature on influencing our culture, society, and political climate. For readers, *Harry Potter* isn't just a book or a series or a series of films, it's a way to understand not only the world they live in, but the one they want to live in. As J. K. Rowling told the world at the premiere of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, "Whether you come back by page or by the big screen, Hogwarts will always be there to welcome you home" (qtd in Cetin). When we need it, Hogwarts is a school we can return to in order to process the world we live in. But when the books are not enough, fans can turn to the ever-growing world of online fandom creation. They can consume story upon story from fanfiction to musicals to Youtube series and movies. Fandom spaces give fans new ways to experience the magic that is *Harry Potter*.

Harry Potter is "the boy who lived" and he lives up to his namesake. Despite the end of the series, *Harry Potter* continues to live on through the fans that have come to love him. *Harry Potter* has undoubtedly changed the world we lived in. Isocrates gives us a framework to understand and articulate how this change occurs. To understand the impact fully, as Marcus compels us, we must turn not only to how the text functions but how readers interact with the text, which I trace through the rich, rhetorically and politically, fandom spaces. Fandom creates space for fans to practice what they've learned in the series. It brings

reading, a solitary activity, into an engaged community where members can practice literary practices such as interpretation and analysis that develops their rhetorical skills and reinforces the ethical principles of the series. It allows members of the community to use their knowledge from the series and apply it to real life contexts in real time.

I hope others take up the mantle of closely analyzing and tracing the ethical and literacy development practices of children's literature and fandom spaces online. Scholars should consider more carefully the vital role fandom and online communities play in learning, in acquiring literacy skills, and developing a code of ethics. As Bracher demands that others take up his lens of criticism to articulate how readers learn more ethical schemas to evaluate the world, I hope other scholars begin to articulate the ethical and moral teachings of children's literature, fandom, and rhetorical compositions at large. With so much division socially and politically, it becomes ever more important to build and work towards a socially just future—and *Harry Potter* should be recognized as a powerful tool to help us get there. With the large and engaged community that continually expands, *Harry Potter* is especially placed to offer the support and practice necessary to cultivate an ethically just future.

I never could have imagined that when I picked up that used copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* from a bin back in middle school that it would take me here. As the Harry Potter Generation grows up and has children of their own (building *Harry Potter* themed nursery's, designing *Harry Potter* baby's clothes, and more), a new generation of engaged *Harry Potter* fans forms. As they fall in love with the series, they too can join the fandom, one google search at a time. Because when we give children the tools to grow and learn, we give them a chance to build a brighter future. In the end, with the text's moral instructive nature, it's not so surprising that my social justice scholarship would take me back

to not just where I began my scholarship career, but to one of the places where I first learned ethical behavior, between the pages of a good book like *Harry Potter*.

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## VITA

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