

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

by  
J.K. Rowling

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## Book Information

J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban  
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When Harry and his best friends go back for their third year at Hogwarts, an escaped mass murderer is on the loose, and the sinister prison guards of Azkaban have been called in to guard the school.  
Book #3

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; Bilby Award; Booklist Editors' Choice; Bram Stoker Award/Nominee; Carnegie Medal/Honors; Costa/Whitbread Children's Award; Guardian Children's Fiction Prize; Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Nestlé Children's Book Prize/Smarties Book Prize; Publishers Weekly Best Book; Smithsonian's Notable Book; VOYA Award/Honor

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## Main Characters

Albus Dumbledore a wise and fair headmaster of Hogwarts school; he offers help and advice to Harry

Aunt Marge an annoying relative of the Dursleys who raises dogs

Buckbeak a hippogriff belonging to Hagrid; he helps rescue Sirius Black

Cornelius Fudge the Minister of Magic

Crookshanks a cat Hermione takes as a pet; it instantly recognizes Scabbers as an Animagi

Draco Malfoy, Vincent & Gregory a nasty group of boys who enjoy making trouble for Harry and others at Hogwarts

Hagrid a kindly giant-sized man who befriends magical creatures; he has great affection for Harry and his friends

Harry Potter a thirteen-year-old wizarding student at Hogwarts; he is famous for surviving an attack by the wizard Voldemort as a baby

Hermione Granger a very dedicated and talented student, though she tends to be a bit high-strung; one of Harry's closest friends

James and Lily Potter Harry's deceased wizard parents; they were killed by Voldemort when Harry was a baby

Professor Remus J. Lupin a devoted new teacher of Defense Against the Dark Arts; he is a werewolf who befriends Harry

Professor Sibyll Trelawney a dubious Divinations teacher

Ron Weasley a good friend of Harry; he has many siblings and lives in the shadows of his successful older wizarding brothers

Scabbers/Peter Pettigrew Ron's pet rat who is actually the Animagi form of Peter Pettigrew; Peter was James and Lily's Secret-Keeper and he betrayed them to Voldemort, causing their death

Sirius Black a wizard framed for the murder of Peter Pettigrew and several Muggles; he is actually Harry's godfather and his deceased parents' closest friend

Snape a bitter and vindictive Potions teacher

The Dursleys Harry's aunt and uncle; Harry lives with this cruel family during his summer breaks

## Vocabulary

**clairvoyant** the ability to perceive things beyond the normal senses

**divination** the attempt at predicting or foretelling the future

**incantation** a spoken charm or spell invoked for magical purposes

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**medieval** relating to the Middle Ages

**omen** a sign of something, usually bad, that will happen in the future

## Synopsis

Harry Potter is an orphaned wizard who lives with his non-wizard relatives, the Dursleys, in the summer and attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry the remainder of the year. The Dursleys neglect and abuse Harry, and he spends his summer longing for his friends at Hogwarts.

This story (the third of a series) begins on Harry's thirteenth birthday. As usual, the Dursleys fail to acknowledge Harry's birthday, but a team of owls secretly delivers Harry some presents from his wizard friends. When Harry enters the kitchen for breakfast that morning, he sees a report on the television about a dangerous convict who is at large after escaping from prison. Later it is revealed that the man is a feared wizard named Sirius Black, who is thought to have helped an evil wizard named Voldemort kill Harry's parents. Mr. Dursley bribes Harry to behave in a polite manner to his annoying Aunt Marge, but Harry loses his temper after she insults his parents. Harry illegally uses magic to make Aunt Marge inflate like a balloon and then runs away from home.

Because he broke the wizard law that prohibits underage wizards from using magic outside of school, Harry is worried about his future. He takes a ride on the Knight Bus, a bus for lost wizards, and goes to the wizard section of London. There he meets with Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic, who surprisingly does not discipline Harry. He instead allows Harry to stay at the Leaky Cauldron inn until it is time for school to begin. At the Leaky Cauldron Harry overhears a conversation between his friend Ron Weasley's parents and learns that Sirius Black has presumably escaped from Azkaban, the wizard prison, to kill Harry.

The next day, Harry, Ron, and their friend Hermione board the wizard train bound for Hogwarts. Once aboard the train, they meet R.J. Lupin, the new

Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Chaos ensues as one of the Azkaban guards, called dementors, boards the train and begins to suck all of the joy out of the passengers. Harry faints, but Professor Lupin tells the dementor that Sirius Black is not on the train and sends it away.

The school year at Hogwarts begins with extra security, due to the escape of Sirius Black, and two new teachers. Professor Lupin is a favorite among the students, and Harry's giant friend Hagrid is beginning his first term as a Care of Magical Creatures teacher. In Hagrid's first class, he introduces the students to the hippogriff, a half horse and half giant-eagle creature. The hippogriff will allow a human to fly on its back if the human approaches it the correct way and does not insult it. Harry's arch-enemy, a boy named Draco Malfoy, insults a hippogriff named Buckbeak and is attacked by the creature. Although Draco's wound is easily mended, he begins a campaign to have Hagrid fired and Buckbeak executed.

After this incident, Harry sets his sights on winning the Quidditch Cup, which is the school championship for the popular wizard sport of Quidditch. Harry is the best player in the school, but loses the first game when a crowd of dementors approach the playing field and again make Harry faint. This humiliation causes Harry to seek out the help of Professor Lupin and to ask Lupin to teach him a spell to repel a dementor. In the meantime, Harry's best friends, Ron and Hermione, are fighting because Hermione's pet cat is continuously hunting and attacking Ron's pet rat, Scabbers. Eventually Scabbers disappears, and it is assumed that Hermione's cat has killed it.

The school falls into a panic after Ron awakens to find Sirius Black standing over him with a knife. Ron screams, and the convict retreats. Sirius Black has somehow managed to break into and escape from the magically guarded castle, and everyone is confused as to why the vicious murderer did not kill every boy in the room, Harry included. Another mystery plaguing Harry concerns Hermione. Somehow, Hermione has been taking an impossible

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number of classes at school, sometimes appearing in two different classes at the same time. Despite Harry's questioning, Hermione refuses to reveal her secret.

Harry also receives two very mysterious gifts at Hogwarts. George and Fred Weasley, Ron's older brothers, give Harry a magical map that shows a variety of secret passages below the school. Harry uses this to sneak away to a wizard town and candy store. Harry also anonymously receives the best Quidditch broom available. Although there is some concern about whether the broom is cursed, Harry uses it to win his first-ever Quidditch Cup.

The day of Buckbeak's execution arrives, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione sneak out of the school to comfort the distraught Hagrid. At Hagrid's cottage, they discover Scabbers hiding in a milk jug. Scabbers tries to run away when he sees the cat and, as Ron catches his pet rat, he is attacked by a giant dog and dragged into a secret passage beneath a tree. Harry and Hermione follow the passage to try to save their friend, and end up in an abandoned shack Harry had previously discovered while using his magical map. Harry learns that the giant dog is really Sirius Black, who is a shape changer, and Scabbers is not really a rat, but a shape-changing wizard named Peter Pettigrew. Sirius Black claims he was wrongly accused of betraying Harry's parents, and Peter Pettigrew is the real villain. Professor Lupin then arrives on the scene and verifies Black's story, which also reveals that Sirius Black is Harry's legal godfather and is the person who sent Harry the Quidditch broom. Professor Lupin confesses that the secret tunnel was built by Hogwarts because Lupin is a werewolf and needed to run away when there was a full moon so he did not attack students. Professor Snape, Harry's Potions professor, then appears in the shack and attempts to apprehend Black and Lupin. Snape believes Lupin is an accomplice to the fugitive murderer. A struggle ensues, and Harry knocks Snape unconscious.

The unusual group decides to return to Hogwarts, but before they reach the castle, Lupin turns into a

dangerous werewolf. Black turns into a dog to fight off Lupin and succeeds in luring him away from the children. The group is then approached by a crowd of dementors, who attempt to give Harry a death kiss that would suck his soul out of his body. Harry is saved by a mysterious figure who casts the Patronus spell that Lupin had taught to Harry, and the dementors retreat. Harry believes the mysterious wizard may have been his father.

Sirius Black is apprehended by the Minister of Magic and is sentenced to be executed by the dementors. Harry and Hermione decide they must do something to stop this, and Hermione uses an hourglass charm to travel back in time to before Buckbeak was to be executed. This charm is the reason Hermione has been able attend multiple classes at the same time. Harry and Hermione release Buckbeak before the executioner can get to him. Harry then sees himself about to be kissed by the dementor, and casts the Patronus spell to save his own life. Harry and Hermione climb onto Buckbeak's back and fly him to the castle tower where Sirius Black is being held. Sirius Black flees with the flying hippogriff, and Harry returns to being a Hogwarts student who spends his summers with the Dursleys.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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## Initial Understanding

Harry is generally a level-headed person. There are times, however, when he becomes incredibly angry. What are some examples of this and what do they have in common?

*One example is when Aunt Marge insults Harry's mother. Soon after, Aunt Marge insults Harry's father and claims that he was a "no-account, good-for-nothing, lazy scrounger..." Harry is so angry that he inflates Aunt Marge, like a balloon and she floats up to the ceiling. Another example takes place when Harry is wearing the Invisibility Cloak at Hogsmeade, and he overhears Malfoy admitting how he has faked his arm injury in order to get Hagrid in trouble. Malfoy laughs at Hagrid's pain, and Harry is enraged. It seems that whenever Harry becomes terribly angry, it is because someone is insulting or hurting someone he cares about.*

## Literary Analysis

Which character do you most identify with and why?

*This answer will depend on the reader's tastes and experiences. Some students may choose Harry Potter because he is a legend. He has survived encounters with the evil Lord Voldemort, and he has experienced many adventures for one so young. He is what some might consider a weak and naive child, and yet he has exceptional skills at Quidditch and has a great deal of courage. Some readers may identify with his qualities or want to be like him.*

*Others may identify with Hermione because she is such a talented student. She really cares about school, but does not care so much what other people think of her. Others may relate to Ron, who often seems to feel he is not good enough, or that he has to live up to someone else's reputation and accomplishments.*

## Inferential Comprehension

When Harry finally succeeds at summoning a powerful Patronus, why is it in the form of a stag?

*James Potter, Harry's father, was an Animagi and he transformed into Prongs, the stag. As Professor Dumbledore explains to Harry, the dead we love are always with us, and we "recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble." Dumbledore, like others, tells Harry his father is alive in him. When Harry faces the risk of the Dementor's Kiss, it is only natural that his father manifest himself in this way to protect his son.*

## Constructing Meaning

How does the reader know Hermione is an extremely dedicated student?

*Hermione reads textbooks even when school is not in session. When she is not with Harry and Ron, she can often be found reading in the library. She always knows the answers to questions asked in her classes, and students often tease her for being a know-it-all. She often writes more than the necessary amount of pages needed for essay assignments. In her extreme dedication to her studies, she seeks special permission to use the Time-Turner so that she can take multiple classes, many of which take place during the same time.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** The reader has been introduced to many characters in the series. To keep the characters organized, it might be helpful for students to arrange a sort of Character Tree, which would function like a family tree. Students could place all the characters and show how they are either related to or know each other. One example might start with Lily and James Potter, with branches extending to Harry and the Dursleys.

**Describing Actions or Events** The Harry Potter books have a well-developed plot and rich characterization suited for dramatization. Have the students work together to write a short screen play for a Harry Potter movie. Using a video

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camera, have the students act out a scene from their script. They may either act it out themselves, or they may create puppets to represent the characters.

**Recognizing Details** There are quite a variety of classes offered to the students at Hogwarts. Some classes include: Divination, Potions, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, Charms, and Ancient Runes. Have students choose a class mentioned in the book that they would most like to take. Have them write a short paper discussing what the class would be like, which textbooks would be used, and why they would like to take that particular class.

**Identifying Reading Strategies** After reading this book, students should have developed a good understanding of the characters and setting. Ask students to imagine their own version of a book in the series. Based on what they have learned from the books so far and also considering their own personal desires for the plot, have students compose an outline or summary for their book. They can even give it a name -- "Harry Potter and...." Emphasize the importance of the students using their imagination to create their own original work.