

# Harry Potter and the Hallowed Classroom

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....ummm...ah yes! "Aparecium!"

Harry Potter has without a doubt been named and mentioned, seen and read, breathed and dreamed by more people than I care to envisage over the last 8 years or so, and although I cannot admit to being an avid fan, I must say that the phenomenon is really quite something.

Now, I wont go into a rant or rave regarding Harry Potter – although when I abbreviate it I can't help but think JK Rowling got his name from a rather famous sauce J – but rather, I shall dive on in to today's task: Using HP in class.

Now, if I google HP there really are a million and more worksheets and discussion boards and lesson plans and interactive games that are all, to a lesser or greater degree, interesting to use in the classroom...

BUT....they just don't convince me. So bowing to the pressures of students and teacher's alike on doing something with HP I decided to actually sit down and think about HP and the classroom. And I came up with this:

To begin with you have to decide if you want to work via the books or the films. Across all levels it is impossible to consider them one and the same and they will each lead you in different independent directions. So I chose Film. Bearing in mind that although being fairly faithful to the books they are still visually subjective to the film makers vision.

So what's next? Well, HP really isn't realistic in any sense of the word and neither is a lot of the language used. So although there might be wonderful dialogues and phrases and a potion full of terms and jargon – for the student to apply in the real world of communicating in English I felt HP ran a little short of material. So I went for something else.

I divided the possibilities of working with HP into two: Literature or Drama.

Literature is a massively important part of learning, especially when considering the applications and use of english as well as aiding in developing range, style, delivery and expression. And HP offered a wonderful opportunity to explore literature in a very stimulating way.

The work on literature was then divided into two options – Discussion, comparison and interpretation and Drama.

The reasoning for this was based purely on a natural progression from the films themselves by focusing on Influences. And the list that came out was fairly long. However I decided to guide the students towards literature which maybe they had never heard of or better yet had come across but would shy away from were they ever to hear such names uttered again!

So that meant the following: EMMA, MACBETH, THE PARDONERS TALE, THE BIBLE, THE ILIAD, THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

With Tolkien, the issue was simple – using youtube clips we would compare and comment on the visual and literature similarities between Voldemort and Sauren, the horcrux and the One ring, Gollum and Kreacher, Gandalf and Dumbledore: for language I was focusing specifically on passive's, opinions and expression.

The Iliad had a direct reference between HP saving of Cedric's body and that of the actions of Hector, Achilles and Patroclus and "the idea of the desecration of the body" as JK Rowling pointed out in an interview in 2007 with EW. The scenes themselves are fairly powerful, but it provided the hook to bring students into looking at literature such as the Iliad in a new light – once they also understand that there is the possibility of dealing with the text through scenes with Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom and Diane Kruger there was an obvious extra motivation factor.

The point however was to open doors to literature and then comment and extract language – especially when looking at expression, tone, punctuation and range. It is not imperative that we use the original works for this – the whole point is to capture students attention in a way that they can relate to and then guide them towards something that requires greater language work on their behalf.

Biblical themes and references run throughout the HP series and as Rowling points out herself: they're very British books... So on a very practical note Harry was going to find biblical quotations on tombstones..." You can find links to the resurrection, God, and quotes directly from Matthew and also the Corinthians.

Emma by Jane Austin, was something a little more subtle to link to but important nonetheless as it brought the link to endings. Or more precisely endings with a twist. And for the students the realisation and importance in storytelling of how to bring a tale to an end and keep your listener/readers guessing. I spoke about curiosity and the importance of cliffhangers in a previous blog in relation to lesson presentation, but often the troubles in Language learning are a little different: I find students are more than capable of using english with a wonderful range but when it comes to telling or recounting events both fictional and non, they lose their way when it comes to concluding. Emma and the comparisons with HP and almost any other great work be it film or book cannot be beaten in my opinion in showing how to structure and conclude successfully.

Finally MacBeth and the Pardoners tale – both of these are heavily borrowed from in HP. The first in regards to Voldemort hearing the prophecy ( what if he never did?) and Macbeth meeting the witches ( what if he never had?) the Macbeth question lies behind it all – would any of this ever happened if they hadn't? From here discussions in class are almost limitless – you can focus on third conditionals above all looking back at the events of anything!

For the latter the story of 3 brothers who attempt to cheat death and the 3 rogues in Chaucer's tale who find gold are incredibly similar both in moral and actions but I believe these two elements can best be linked to our second main option in working with HP – Drama. Re-enacting this tale full of greed, blood, death and a little horror but with a wonderful moral could be a magnificent stage play for a class to do – the characters are easily divided between main parts and limited lines – and you can get the class working on the dialogues and interaction as they are not written in the film or book, which you can see here.

Drama and theatre in class are not only an excuse to have some fun. They offer the possibility to work on something fundamental in all students: embarrassment.

Overcoming the fear of speaking and making mistakes is probably the biggest hurdle any singular student will have to deal with. Theatre and Drama – roleplaying and acting, which provide an alternate persona almost and de-personalise the action for the student aids in overcoming that fear. Using lines and phrases they only have to learn and not create, tone of voice and



pronunciation, delivery and timing are all skills we need to speak and communicate in English – and Drama really is the most effective way of working on those skills without the hinderance of the fear of embarrassment.

Linking these to HP why not try re-enacting the above mentioned scenes by inverting the characters from each work – Macbeth in HP and HP in Macbeth!

You see? It's not always about vocabulary worksheets when we use film as a basis to our lessons. They can be the driving force behind doing so much more!

But for now all I can say is....

“Evanesco!”