

The Spectrum of the Human Condition: A Character Analysis of Albus Dumbledore and  
Severus Snape in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the morally gray nature of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape in the Harry Potter series. Using secondary scholarship, the literary theories of Edward Forster and Vladimir Propp, and my own definitions and thoughts, this paper examines the choices and motivations of Dumbledore and Snape. Based on those, I analyze how the two of them fit or do not fit the idea of literary heroes and villains. The research within this thesis is important because this representation of humans as non-perfect beings ensures that we accept ourselves and others as who we are rather than the sum of our parts.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Introducing the Characters and Story**

For many children, the name “Harry Potter” is synonymous with magic, goodness, and heroism. The Harry Potter series, written by British author Joanne “J.K.” Rowling follows the life of young boy turned wizard, Harry Potter, and his best friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, throughout their adolescence as they attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Each installment tells the story of approximately one year, primarily set at Hogwarts, as Harry and friends pursue risky adventures, typically fighting against Lord Voldemort, the main antagonist throughout the series (Rowling). In the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1997)<sup>1</sup>, readers follow Harry, an eleven-year-old orphan living with his abrasive, and sometimes abusive, Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon, and cousin Dudley, as he discovers that all the strange things happening to him are signs of magic. Harry enters a whole new world of wizardry, magical creatures, dangerous places, and daring spell work while discovering that his parents were not killed in a car crash like his relatives told him: they were killed by Voldemort and Harry survived the Killing Curse, seemingly vanishing the dark wizard (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 50). When Harry arrives at Hogwarts, he is sorted into Gryffindor house, the group known for heroic acts and bravery<sup>2</sup> (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 118).

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<sup>1</sup> The British and original title of this book is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, but I will refer to the American title: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

<sup>2</sup> When students begin their first year at Hogwarts, they are sorted into four houses based on their personalities and values: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff. They spend much of their time with their house and have all their classes with their house. Ravenclaw values wit, Hufflepuff values kindness, and Slytherin values ambition and is often associated with evilness.

As the school year unfolds, Harry and his two best friends meet many witches and wizards, but two of them are prominent throughout Harry's story: Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape. Dumbledore is whimsical and good-natured, despite leaving Harry with his hostile relatives (Rowling 13), while Snape is brooding and snide. When the three young students begin to suspect someone is attempting to steal the Sorcerer's Stone, a magical stone with properties that allow the user to become immortal, they immediately suspect Snape (Rowling 183). Eventually, the three of them uncover the culprit behind the attempted thievery happening all year and discover that Snape was not trying to steal the Stone but protect it (Rowling 300). Ultimately, the first book in the series ends with what readers know as a classic tale of good versus evil, hero versus villain: Harry and the infamous Lord Voldemort (Rowling 294). After the action, the three young heroes begin to suspect that Dumbledore knew they would try to thwart the thief but let them try anyway (Rowling 302).

Harry's sequential years at Hogwarts are much the same, all ending in a battle of hero versus villain. In the second installment, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999), Harry returns to Hogwarts where strange things once again take place. Students are petrified, essentially frozen like stone, and no one has any answers as to why (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 181). The three protagonists do not suspect Snape this time around, but they do suspect Draco Malfoy, Harry's school enemy who is highly favored by Snape, as being the Heir of Slytherin, allegedly the only person who can open the Chamber of Secrets<sup>3</sup> (Rowling 158). When Dumbledore is banished from Hogwarts by Draco's father, Lucius Malfoy, he leaves what are basically hints for Harry and Ron to

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<sup>3</sup> The Chamber is a supposed secret chamber made by Salazar Slytherin, a Hogwarts founder, to house the giant serpentine monster, the basilisk (Rowling *Chamber of Secrets* 151)

solve the mystery and save the school (Rowling 263). Eventually, the young hero discovers the Chamber of Secrets and battles a villainous memory of a young Lord Voldemort preserved in his school diary; Harry ends up saving Ron's younger sister, Ginny, along with stopping the attacks, destroying the diary and memory of Voldemort preserved within it, and keeping the school from closing (Rowling 323). After Harry's near brush with death in the Chamber, Dumbledore praises the young wizard, awarding both him and Ron with awards for special services to the school (Rowling 331).

In Rowling's third novel, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), there is a break from the typical format of Harry versus Voldemort, who does not appear at all in this installment. When Harry returns to Hogwarts, he discovers a new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor: Professor Lupin, whom Snape seems to house a deep hatred for, beyond his normal loathing of anyone who holds the post (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 93). This year, Harry discovers a mass murderer, Sirius Black, has escaped from the wizard prison, Azkaban, and is on the hunt for Harry (Rowling 73). Despite Dementors<sup>4</sup> stationed at Hogwarts, Black, who Harry later finds out was his father's best friend and sold them out to Voldemort, manages to evade capture.

The tension comes to a head when Sirius, who is revealed to be an Animagus,<sup>5</sup> tricks Harry, Ron, and Hermione into listening to his story. Lupin shows up and is revealed to also be best friends with James and Sirius, as well as a werewolf (Rowling 332-348). The trio finds out that Sirius was innocent and was best friends with James,

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<sup>4</sup> Dementors are the guards of the wizard prison, Azkaban. They are terrifying, phantom-like creatures who suck the happiness and souls out of people.

<sup>5</sup> An Animagus is someone who can magically transform into an animal.



Lupin, and a boy named Peter Pettigrew; the four of them are known as The Marauders<sup>6</sup> and became Animagus to keep Lupin company in his wolf form. Pettigrew, who was assumed murdered by Sirius, is revealed as the one who betrayed Harry's parents and has been biding his time in his Animagus form: a rat, posing as Ron's pet. Hiding in the shadows, Snape reveals himself and the reason for his hatred of James and thus, Harry: The Marauders were his school bullies (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 349-377). Despite knowing of Sirius' innocence, Snape still attempts to deliver him to the Dementors, and Dumbledore leaves it up to Harry and Hermione to save Sirius (Rowling 391-393). Using a Time Turner<sup>7</sup>, the two of them succeed in freeing Sirius, who escapes and goes into hiding, but Peter Pettigrew still gets away (Rowling 415). After these events, Dumbledore congratulates the two of them on this achievement and Snape reveals to the students that Lupin is a werewolf, causing him to resign (Rowling 422) These first three installments are whimsical and adventurous, with the characters facing danger but rarely death. The final four books in the series, however, take a much darker turn.

Although Lord Voldemort physically disappeared on the night he murdered Harry's parents, the last four books feature him in peak strength. In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), the classic trope of Harry, the story's hero, fighting Voldemort, the story's villain, returns. A mysterious someone enters Harry's name into the titular Goblet of Fire, which magically selects participants for the Triwizard Tournament, a competition between Hogwarts and two other wizarding

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<sup>6</sup> The Marauders is the name given to James Potters' group of friends which includes himself, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew. They also go by code names of Moony (Remus), Wormtail (Peter), Padfoot (Sirius), and Prongs (James), which all pertain to their Animagus form, or in Remus' case, his status as a werewolf. The group attended Hogwarts in the same year as Snape and as a result, there is a lot of history between all the boys.

<sup>7</sup> A Time Turner allows the user to go back in time. Its use is regulated by the Ministry of Magic, which is the wizarding government, and it is a terrible crime to mess with time.

schools, which features three tasks full of danger but also glory (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 186-187). It is obvious to everyone that Harry could not have entered his own name, but Snape, blinded by his hatred of Harry, blames him for entering the competition.

According to Professor Dumbledore, who does not agree with Snape, Harry is magically bound to compete despite protests from the other teachers (Rowling 276-280).

The story comes to a dramatic head in the third and final task where Harry and Cedric, the other Hogwarts champion, touch what they think is the winning trophy, but is a Portkey,<sup>8</sup> and takes them to a graveyard where Peter Pettigrew and Voldemort's half-formed body wait for them. Pettigrew murders Cedric right before Harry's eyes and then brings Voldemort back to his true form through a ritual using Harry's blood, creating a darker and drearier tone for the rest of the series (Rowling 636-639). Harry barely makes it out alive after dueling the strengthened Lord Voldemort, another example of the battle between a hero and a villain. When he returns to Hogwarts, Dumbledore believes him immediately and begins his work to move against Voldemort (Rowling 703). Snape, as one of Dumbledore's most trusted allies, resumes his work as an undercover spy, pretending to be a Death Eater (Rowling 686). Following these events, Harry begins his fifth year haunted by the memories of Cedric's death.

In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), readers watch as Harry is the center of political propaganda and corruption. Refusing to accept that Lord Voldemort has returned, The Ministry of Magic paints Harry and Dumbledore as raving lunatics who lie about Voldemort's return (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 73).

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<sup>8</sup> A Portkey is an ordinary object enchanted to transport anyone who touches it to a predetermined destination.

Meanwhile, Dumbledore has reinstated the Order of the Phoenix<sup>9</sup> with himself as the leader (Rowling 67). Harry begins having dreams and visions from inside Voldemort's mind, almost like he is possessed (Rowling 463). However, Harry gets no answers as to why this is happening, because Dumbledore ignores him entirely throughout the whole book, and sets Harry up with Occlumency<sup>10</sup> lessons with Snape (Rowling 518). Feeling like everyone is against him, Harry and friends establish Dumbledore's Army (D.A.), taking back a bit of power the Ministry has taken from them by not allowing them to learn defensive magic, where they learn spells to combat Voldemort (Rowling 392). Eventually, they are caught, and Dumbledore is exiled from Hogwarts because he is blamed for their activity (Rowling 618).

After having constant visions and dreams of the same door, Harry finally gets a vision of Sirius being tortured at the Ministry, so he and his friends sneak off to rescue him (Rowling 727). Thanks to Snape, who was able to communicate with members of the Order, many notable heroes show up to save the children, resulting in a massive battle between several heroes and villains (Rowling 801). In the battle, Sirius is murdered, again, right in front of Harry, which results in Harry attempting to battle Lord Voldemort. However, Dumbledore, the only wizard Voldemort ever feared, arrives at the Ministry and has an epic duel with the villainous wizard, ending the story in another classic case of hero fighting villain (Rowling 810-816). After these events, Harry is very angry with Dumbledore for ignoring him, but Dumbledore claims he was trying to protect Harry, and

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<sup>9</sup> This is the name of the group of Dumbledore's closest confidants and supporters. They are somewhat like the opposite of the Death Eaters but there is no blind devotion to Dumbledore. Instead, it is a group of witches and wizards who all share a common goal of defeating Voldemort.

<sup>10</sup> Occlumency is the act of closing one's mind off from outside intrusion. The opposite of this is Legilimency, which is the act of peering into one's mind.

did not realize he was hurting him (Rowling 825). At the end of the book, Harry, along with readers, learn of a prophecy delivered to Dumbledore, which says that Harry must be the one to kill Voldemort, and that “neither can live while the other survives” (Rowling 844). This revelation sends Harry into a year of preparing for the final battle with his nemesis.

In the next book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* (2005), Harry dives deep into the history of Lord Voldemort with Dumbledore. He teaches Harry about Voldemort’s notorious past, while also giving him tools to prepare for the final battle of good versus evil (Rowling *Half Blood Prince*). After recovering the most important memory related to Voldemort, Dumbledore’s suspicions are confirmed: Voldemort has created several Horcruxes<sup>11</sup> (Rowling 500-505). Harry has already destroyed one Horcrux, Tom Riddle’s Diary in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, while Dumbledore has destroyed one, Tom Riddle’s ring; this leaves what Dumbledore believes to be four Horcruxes, and he believes he knows where one is (Rowling 507). The two of them travel to a cave notable from Voldemort’s childhood where they find the locket of Hogwarts founder, Salazar Slytherin (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 576). They quickly steal away with the locket, and when they get back to Hogwarts, discover that Death Eaters<sup>12</sup> have infiltrated Hogwarts thanks to Draco Malfoy, whom Harry suspected of being a Death Eater all year. When they arrive, Dumbledore comes face-to-face with Draco, who disarms him and explains that Voldemort has demanded he kill Dumbledore

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<sup>11</sup> Horcruxes are dark magical objects that contain fragments of one’s soul. To create a Horcrux, one must commit the darkest deed of killing someone. This allows the creator of the Horcrux to have their physical body die but their soul still be preserved in the Horcrux. Voldemort creates Horcruxes in order to achieve immortality because as long as his Horcruxes remain intact, he cannot truly die.

<sup>12</sup> Death Eaters are Voldemort’s closest followers and he expects blind faith and loyalty until death from them. In return, they would have a place in his new world order.

(Rowling 584-592). After several tense moments, Snape arrives, surveying the scene before he shockingly kills Dumbledore and runs off with the Death Eaters (Rowling 596). This story darkly ends with the most powerful wizard in the series killed off, once again in front of Harry, by someone he thought was a fellow hero.

In the final installment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), readers see the final epic battle between good and evil. Following the tasks set for him by Dumbledore, Harry, along with Ron and Hermione, are on the run from Voldemort and the Death Eaters while hunting Horcruxes (Rowling *Deathly Hallows*). Everything in the Wizarding World is now controlled by Voldemort, with Snape assuming the role of headmaster at Hogwarts (Rowling 225). The trio, while on the hunt for Horcruxes, become frustrated with Dumbledore's lack of directions and find out some facts about his murky past, disrupting their, and the readers', views of him as the perfect embodiment of goodness (Rowling 352-362). Eventually, the three of them find themselves at Hogwarts and take part in the epic battle between the forces of good and evil; at Hogwarts, they watch Snape get murdered by Voldemort, whom they believe to be his master (Rowling 654-658). When he dies, he leaves Harry a collection of memories that Harry then watches in the Pensieve.<sup>13</sup> Harry finds out that Snape had always been in love with his mother and assumed his position as spy when finding out Voldemort planned to kill her; ever since then, he remained loyal to Dumbledore and only killed him on Dumbledore's orders. Also, Harry shockingly discovers that he himself is the final Horcrux, accidentally created by Voldemort, and that for Voldemort to be defeated, he must sacrifice himself (Rowling 659-690). Dumbledore knew this all along but kept it from Harry. Harry goes

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<sup>13</sup> The Pensieve is a magical device used for viewing memories.

on to sacrifice himself but returns from the liminal space between life and death to destroy Voldemort once and for all (Rowling 707-722). After the ultimate villain of the series is defeated, the remaining heroes go on to live long and happy lives. Despite Harry's evolving feelings throughout the series, he names two of his children after the morally ambiguous Dumbledore and Snape (Rowling 758).

These two morally gray characters, while originally introduced in the first book as seemingly entirely good or bad, are revealed to be incredibly complex as the story evolves. Dumbledore is always presented as morally righteous and a figure who the "good guys" of the story constantly look to for wisdom and guidance. Readers believe that Dumbledore is a good man who was forced to make tough decisions at the cost of "the greater good," such as leaving Harry in the care of his abusive aunt and uncle (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 55). However, readers do not know the true scope of Dumbledore's murky character until *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* when they discover Dumbledore aided Grindelwald, a notorious dark wizard second only to Voldemort, as well as had a hand in his own sister, Ariana's,<sup>14</sup> death (Rowling 566-567). On the other hand, Snape is viewed as a mysterious, villainous type character from his very first introduction in the series, with Harry's scar from Voldemort's failed Killing Curse searing with pain when Snape first meets his eyes (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 126). Unlike the seemingly perfect Dumbledore, other characters constantly question Snape's true allegiance, leaving readers guessing until the very last installment (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 659-690).

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<sup>14</sup> Ariana was the youngest Dumbledore sibling and when she was six years old, she was attacked by muggle boys which altered her magic forever, making her too fragile to send to Hogwarts. Because of her unstable magic, she was prone to fits of rage where she would fire spells and curses without meaning to.

## Thesis Statement

In J.K. Rowling's seven installments of the Harry Potter series, a variety of both round and flat characters fill the pages, but none is as complex as Albus Dumbledore or Severus Snape. Both characters' choices and motivations are murky, with many arguing whether the characters present themselves as heroic or villainous. Albus Dumbledore, a seemingly morally perfect man and headmaster of Hogwarts School, commits questionable acts throughout the seven novels, and his dark past is explored in the last installment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Severus Snape, a teacher at Hogwarts and double agent, relentlessly bullies young children while spying on the evil wizard, Voldemort, but even sacrifices himself for the greater good. These two problematic and complex characters beg the question: how do they fit into the definition of "hero" and how do they fit into the definition of "villain"? By employing literary analysis and applying literary theories such as Vladimir Propp's theory of character types and Edward Forster's theory surrounding complex characters, I examine the choices and motivations of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape as heroic and villainous qualifiers in the Harry Potter series. By gaining a deeper understanding of these two characters, young adults and adults alike can gain a deeper understanding of the human condition and morality that goes beyond the binary.

## CHAPTER II: CONTEXT

### **Harry Potter's Success**

To understand the impact of these two characters, it is first relevant to contextualize the Harry Potter series and its popularity. From a young age, the series' author Rowling always knew that she wanted to be a writer. The inspiration for Harry Potter came to her in 1990 on a delayed train from Manchester to King's Cross Station in London, England, an important location in the soon-to-be series. Over the next four years, she spent her time mapping out an extensive and detailed plan for the seven books. After completing a full manuscript for the first installment, she sent the book out to several publishing companies and despite now being a pop culture phenomenon, the text was rejected by twelve different companies before being picked up by Bloomsbury Children's Books in June 1997 ("About"). After this, the series achieved unprecedented success, with six novels quickly following the first.

As the books were published, the series soared more and more in popularity, eventually becoming a pop culture sensation. The seven books took the world by storm, selling over 500 million copies, making it the top selling book series of all time. Moreover, the last four books in the series set the record for the fastest books to sell out (Buzacott-Speer). Because of the popularity of the series, the books have been translated into more than eighty languages, demonstrating the boundary-defying impact of the series (Pierce). In addition, each book was developed into a feature film, with the last, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, being divided into two parts. The series transcended the page and screen, spawning massive numbers of merchandise, spin-off plays, books, films, and even theme park lands and rides across the world (Buzacott-Speer). Thus, it is safe to



say that the magical adventures of Harry and his friends have captivated the minds and hearts of adolescents and adults alike. Because of the heavy circulation of the series, there has been extensive research about it as well as the morally ambiguous characters that fill its pages.

### **Harry Potter as Young Adult Literature**

For the sake of this research, it is important to understand that while the series, especially the first few books, are marketed as children's literature,<sup>1</sup> the series actually falls into the young adult category of literature. Young adult literature is a dynamic collection of subgenres which changes over time because of the advancements of culture and society upon which it is based (Cart 53). Despite its definition constantly ebbing and flowing, it can be defined as literature for and about teens which provides a stepping-stone between children's and adult literature; it covers many genres like romance, fantasy, and more (Doll). As society has changed and evolved, so has the nature of the problems addressed within young adult literature. So, as time has gone on, the content of young adult literature has evolved along with it (Akers 9). One of the primary distinctions between children's and young adult literature is the difference in themes, with children's literature exploring more surface level topics, like friendship, and young adult books exploring more mature and complex themes, such as a struggle against power (Sullivan). These more intense themes are a way for authors and parents to inform adolescents of the problems present in the wider world without being overt (Akers 45).

Along those same lines, young adult literature typically features morally gray characters who are neither entirely good nor bad. This trope is something commonly

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<sup>1</sup> literature targeted at younger readers typically under the age of ten. It often spans many genres (Akers ii).

lacking in children's literature. In children's literature, characters are often very black and white; there is good and there is evil, and little gray area in between (Hill). In the first two Harry Potter books specifically, the writing covers lighter topics like learning spells that transform a button into a beetle and "playground scruples" between Harry and Draco Malfoy. While it can be said that these two books alone fit into the children's literature genre, the series as a whole features much darker themes. This transition into the more mature ideas of classism, grief, and death (Rowling), which are all commonly found in young adult literature, leads me to classify the series as such. Thus, although the series is sometimes marketed towards younger children, Rowling's characters grow over time and the books age alongside them.

Another common motif of young adult literature evident in the series is the coming-of-age aspect of the story. Harry ages from a whimsical eleven-year-old child into a brave seventeen-year-old man when the series concludes, ultimately ending in his decision to sacrifice himself for the greater good of the Wizarding World (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*). Thus, the series evolves over the course of the seven books into the ultimate embodiment of young adult literature, adhering to many of the same themes commonly found in the category, such as the introduction of morally gray characters, like Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape.

These two characters found in the series highlight the fact that the human condition is not so black and white, which is an important lesson for adolescents to learn. The world is not divided into the simple binary of good and bad, so it is extremely beneficial for young adults to read about bad characters who do good things and good characters who do bad things. By understanding that people are much more complex than

simple labels of “hero” or “villain,” readers are better equipped to effectively navigate our non-binary world. This fact is demonstrated by a 2013 study on characters’ behavior and real-life reactions to it. Researchers Maja Krakowiak and Mina Tsay-Vogel determined that when a character has altruistic motivations, even if the action itself is considered bad, people tend to empathize with and understand the character. After reading stories with morally ambiguous characters, people feel better about their own imperfect actions (181).

Therefore, by learning to empathize with a wider range of characters commonly found in young adult literature such as the Harry Potter series, we can ensure adolescents begin to understand and navigate their world full of people who are not entirely good or bad. By reading and discussing this research, we as people can see the importance of the Harry Potter series and the characters found within it and thus, better equip young adults, which is the primary audience for the series, to understand the world around them. The study of morally gray characters found within this series gives readers, particularly young readers, a glimpse into the fragmented reality that the world holds, where they are then more prepared to accept people and themselves as the sum of their parts, rather than just the good parts. Because adolescence is such a tumultuous time in life, it is critical to learn this self-acceptance and empathy towards others and this research makes it clear that the Harry Potter series aids on this journey. Therefore, with research like mine which evaluates morally gray characters within young adult literature, like the Harry Potter series, young readers gain self-acceptance as well as the ability to accept and meet others where they are.

## **Previous Harry Potter Scholarship**

One position held by many scholars is that the series has a wide array of relatable characters which provide adolescents with valuable lessons and proves to them that they are not alone. Because the characters grow alongside their real-world readers, scholars assert that the series is very impactful for young adults. For instance, Haeun Lee and colleagues argue that Harry's world is captivating for young readers because it combines aspects of the magical world with everyday tasks which many young readers can relate to. One example of this aspect of the books is when Harry simultaneously juggles preparing for the Triwizard Tournament and making good grades in his classes (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*). This relatability is pertinent to Harry Potter's young audience because although their coursework is not learning spells and flying on brooms, they see themselves in these characters (Beach and Willner 103). Because there are so many different characters and types of people represented in the series, like Ron, who feels overshadowed by his large number of successful siblings, young readers see that they are not alone because one of their favorite characters may feel the same way as them.

To that end, the unique aspects, situations, and characters in the story provide relatability for many specific groups of people. For example, Harry himself can be very relatable to adolescents with trauma, especially those in care like group or foster homes. One writer, Sarah Mokrzycki, describes the way in which young readers in care relate to Harry Potter in a way that many adolescents cannot. Beyond the typical experiences of young adulthood, Harry shows children that they are not alone in their unique circumstances and provides a valuable way for them to confront their trauma. She includes an example of two foster parents who have seen Potter's impact on the children in their care. They say that "foster-care related topics in the book provided a safe way for

their children to discuss their experiences” (Mokrzycki 157). Thus, the Harry Potter series offers many specific characters and situations for young readers to relate to, emphasizing the importance of the series along with research such as mine.

Along with this idea, many scholars have evaluated the characters of Dumbledore and Snape, drawing on their morally ambiguous traits and qualities. While little research exists about these characters being heroic or villainous, there is extensive scholarship on the complexity of them. For instance, author Alicia Willson-Metzger describes Dumbledore as “the most morally ambiguous character in the series” (293). Along with that, Jenny McDougal writes in the book *A Wizard of Their Age: Critical Essays from the Harry Potter Generation* that “Dumbledore, in the service of his endgame, uses lies, manipulation, and blind loyalty to coerce Harry Potter into a role he doesn’t choose: saving the future and destroying Lord Voldemort” (159). Thus, these examples provide evidence that many scholars have focused on the morally ambiguous nature of Dumbledore as a whole. Similarly, many have written about the moral ambiguity of Snape as well, such as Shelly Shaffer who explains that despite appearing evil throughout the series, when readers see Snape as a bullied teen, “it humanizes him. This version of Snape is much different from the villain he often appears to be” (57). Moreover, researcher Emma Gustafsson writes that “adult Snape is much more complex than his young version, he is constantly moving between making life difficult for Harry and lending a helping hand in various ways” (6). Many researchers have focused on the moral ambiguity of both characters, but I will take this research further in my thesis.

## **How the Characters will be Evaluated**

This thesis evaluates the complexity of both Dumbledore and Snape, emphasizing not only their morally gray characteristics but also their heroic and villainous qualities. I take previous research surrounding these two characters further by discussing Dumbledore and Snape in conversation with one another rather than separately while evaluating them as morally gray characters who fit qualities of both hero and villain. While I look at others' assessments of these characters and previous definitions of heroes and villains, I define a hero as someone who is motivated by moral virtue to make a choice and villain as someone who is motivated by corruption and their own selfishness when making a decision. Thus, I focus specifically on their choices and the motivations behind those choices, which differs from the research of previous scholars like Willson-Metzger and Shaffer because I focus on these specific aspects of their decision making rather than the characters. It is vital to look at them together because they are two sides of the same coin. Snape often makes the right decisions for the wrong reasons, while Dumbledore makes the wrong decisions for the right reasons, further adding to their complexity and moral ambiguity.

I also look at two literary theories, the first of which is Vladimir Propp's theory of character types. Propp's character theory divides literary characters into seven different spheres and archetypes, such as hero and villain, which are the two I focus on in this thesis. In his book, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp studied over one hundred fairy tales in detail and argues that all characters can be defined by their "spheres of action" and whatever role they play in the progression of the story ("Vladimir Propp"). This text does focus on Russian folktales, but Propp's work is not solely limited to this type of story and can be applied to the Harry Potter series because like the Russian folktales,

there are clear heroes in the story, like Harry, and true villains, like Voldemort. Propp argues that the primary sphere of action for the villain is a “fight or other form of struggle with the hero” (122) and the primary sphere of action for the hero is going on a journey, responding to the demands of the donor<sup>2</sup>, and getting married (122-123). Propp’s theory is useful to me because I use his archetypes to assess the heroic and villainous qualities of these two characters and demonstrate that Dumbledore and Snape cannot simply fit into a binary definition of “hero” or “villain” such as Propp’s and instead, show the nonbinary nature of the human condition.

The second theory I utilize is Edward Forster’s theory of complex characters. Forster’s theory of complex characters divides characters into “flat” (having no change in the story) and “round” (developing over the course of the story). According to Forster, what makes a character “round” is the ability to surprise the reader, and round characters stand in stark contrast to flat characters, as flat ones are typically constructed around a singular “idea or quality” (40). When examining Dumbledore and Snape, it is important to consider Forster’s theory of characters because the two of them are so complex in nature. I use these two theories as a springboard and form my own opinions, effectively adding to the conversation around these two characters. To that end, I analyze these characters using these literary theories, the research of others, and my own definitions to explore the gray area that lies between hero and villain and what we, as humans, can learn from it.

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<sup>2</sup> Donor is one of the other character types, along with helper, princess, false hero, and dispatcher.

## CHAPTER III: DUMBLEDORE

### **The Man Behind the Actions**

Throughout the Harry Potter series, Dumbledore is presented as a heroic figure who all, especially young Harry, look to as a figure of hope and purity, but later, his flawed nature shines through the cracks and his catastrophic decisions lead to suffering, injury, and even death. From the beginning, Rowling presents Dumbledore as an all-knowing mentor-like figure who passes wisdom and knowledge to Harry. Even in the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Dumbledore is described as the Wizarding World's beacon of hope. When readers first encounter him, Professor McGonagall<sup>1</sup> says, "But you're different. Everyone knows you're the only one... Voldemort was frightened of" (11). This quote instantly shows readers that Dumbledore is extremely powerful and serves as the protector of the Wizarding World from Lord Voldemort and his cronies. Moreover, he is immediately established as wise and all-knowing, with Professor McGonagall not believing that Voldemort has been vanquished until it is confirmed by Dumbledore (12). This interaction demonstrates Dumbledore's wisdom and omniscience, with his second-in-command looking to him for confirmation of Voldemort's demise rather than celebrating like the rest of the witches and wizards (16). Even above her own relief and excitement, Professor McGonagall values Dumbledore's word.

In addition to his first introduction to readers, Harry's first encounters with information about Dumbledore portray him as powerful, morally virtuous, and an overall

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<sup>1</sup> Professor McGonagall is Dumbledore's number two at Hogwarts. She trusts him and he trusts her.



heroic figure. For example, when Hagrid goes to give Harry his Hogwarts letter, he habitually refers to Dumbledore as “the greatest Headmaster Hogwarts ever had” (Rowling, *Sorcerer’s Stone*, 58). When Hagrid gives Dumbledore this moniker of “greatness,” he means that he is the best possible person to teach Harry, and other young witches and wizards, magic. This is evident because Hagrid just finished explaining that Harry will be a great wizard and that Hogwarts is the best school for witchcraft and wizardry and he then goes on to talk about Dumbledore as the greatest headmaster. The context of Hagrid’s description of Dumbledore shows that Hagrid was not just talking about Dumbledore being a great person, but about him being a great wizard which is the best option to shape the minds of young witches and wizards. This description automatically associates Dumbledore as being an intelligent wizard and great teacher in the minds of readers and Harry alike.

To that end, the first time Harry learns more about Dumbledore is when he gets his collector card<sup>2</sup> in his Chocolate Frog candy. When Harry gets his card, it reads: “Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945” (102-103). This introduction immediately, again, associates Dumbledore with greatness and heroism in the minds of the readers and young Harry. In that same vein, when Harry first physically sees Dumbledore following the Sorting Ceremony<sup>3</sup> Percy, Ron’s older brother says, “He’s a genius! Best wizard in the world!” (123). This interaction further cements Dumbledore as great and powerful, especially because this assertion comes from Percy,

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<sup>2</sup> Chocolate Frog candies come with trading cards of famous witches and wizards. To have a card in the candy would mean that you are one of the most powerful and/or influential people in Wizarding history.

<sup>3</sup> The Sorting Ceremony divides first year students into one of the four houses based on their personality and values.

someone who Harry and readers know as being a prefect<sup>4</sup> and someone who strives for order and subordination. Like Hagrid, Percy describes Dumbledore as being very intelligent and not only describes him as the best headmaster, but as the best wizard in the entire world. This claim shows that not only is Dumbledore “great” within the walls of Hogwarts, but his greatness and influence extends beyond the boundaries of what he accomplishes at the school. These first impressions of Dumbledore stay in the minds of Harry and readers throughout the books, up until his murky past begins to be revealed.

This positive portrayal of Dumbledore continues many times throughout the other books in the series. For example, over the course of the books, Dumbledore is defined as the greatest wizard of the age, and, as Professor McGonagall said in the first installment, the only wizard Voldemort ever feared. In the second installment, Harry is introduced to a House-elf<sup>5</sup> named Dobby, who tells him that Dumbledore is widely respected among House-elves, that he has heard Dumbledore is the greatest headmaster Hogwarts has ever had and has power that rivals Voldemort’s (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 17). Dobby’s opinion of Dumbledore shows that the impression of him as a great headmaster and powerful wizard exists not just in witches and wizards, but in magical creatures as well. Furthermore, because House Elves are slaves, their respect for Dumbledore shows him as a fair and kind man who cares for the disenfranchised. Typically, House-elves do respect their masters, but it is more of a respect out of fear or brainwashing. For example, Dobby punishes himself when he speaks poorly of his masters, the Malfoys, in ways like

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<sup>4</sup> Each house has a boy and girl prefect in fifth through seventh year. A prefect must be an exemplary student.

<sup>5</sup> House-elves are magical creatures enslaved by wizards to carry out chores and tasks within the home. Typically, only very wealthy witches and wizards own House-elves. Many wizards argue that the elves enjoy their enslavement, and they can only be freed if their master presents them with clothes.

slamming his head into the wall or ironing his fingers (14, 178). Unlike the Malfoys, Dobby respects Dumbledore more out of awe and admiration because of his incredible powers and fairness and brilliance as a headmaster.<sup>6</sup> Rather than regarding Dumbledore with a respect stooped in fear of his power, Dobby respects his powers, skills, and fairness as a man and headmaster, showing that even among disenfranchised populations, such as House-elves, he is regarded as a powerful wizard.

Additionally, in the third book, Harry overhears Ron's parents talking about Sirius Black and their worry because everyone believes he is looking to hurt Harry. Ron's mother, Molly, says, "You're forgetting Albus Dumbledore. I don't think anything could hurt Harry at Hogwarts while Dumbledore's headmaster" (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 66). Despite Sirius allegedly being an extremely powerful escaped mass murderer, Dumbledore alone is enough to quell anxieties about Sirius harming Harry. In the minds of those close to Dumbledore, nothing bad could ever happen with him around because his strong powers and knowledge of magic would allow him to best any opponent. This trust of Dumbledore shows readers a small glimpse of his power and skill as a wizard because all throughout the third book, everyone is terrified of Sirius Black and the only

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<sup>6</sup> When discussing House-elves, it is important to note Kreacher, who has been the Black family elf since Sirius was a child. Even though he never cared for Sirius and preferred the rest of the Black family, he was passed into Sirius' ownership when the rest of the family died. When Sirius died, he passed into the ownership of Harry. He is first introduced to readers when Harry visits Sirius' home and unlike Dobby, he does not hold many wizards besides his masters, particularly Sirius' mother and brother Regulus, in high regard. Sirius is very hostile towards Kreacher, but his family is much warmer towards the elf. Because they are much nicer to him than the Malfoys are to Dobby, Kreacher buys into their blood purist views and respects them as pure and great wizards as they are Pure-bloods. Even though the Blacks abuse him and offer him as a sacrifice to Voldemort (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 192-195), Kreacher respects and loves them long after their deaths, which is very different from Dobby's respect of Dumbledore. Thus, even though most elves do respect their masters, Kreacher further illustrates the point that it is more out of brainwashing or fear than it is out of awe.

time when that fear is lessened is when people remember that with Dumbledore around, no one could commit the atrocities they fear Sirius will attempt.

As the books grow darker in tone, the relationship between Harry and Dumbledore becomes much closer, with readers and Harry gaining a deeper understanding of the headmaster. Throughout Harry's earliest years of knowing Dumbledore, he never held any kind of negative emotions or impressions of him, but in his later teenage years, he, along with readers, began to harbor a more nuanced view of Dumbledore. In the fourth installment, Harry begins to see Dumbledore as not just a powerful and wise man full of whimsy, but a dangerously powerful and menacing wizard. At the end of the book, Harry thinks to himself: "At that moment, Harry fully understood for the first time why... Dumbledore was the only wizard Voldemort had ever feared.... There was no benign smile upon Dumbledore's face, no twinkle in the eyes behind the spectacles... A sense of power radiated from Dumbledore" (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 679). Before this instance, Harry and readers know that Dumbledore is incredibly powerful, but they have not witnessed his full power yet. Here, we begin to understand Dumbledore as more than just a wise old headmaster who happens to be powerful; instead, his power is the focal point of his character at this point in the story.

To that end, readers follow along as Harry begins his fifth year at Hogwarts with a sense of resentment and anger towards his headmaster. Harry is angry with Dumbledore for keeping him in the dark all summer, and his anger grows when he travels to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place<sup>7</sup> and discovers Dumbledore specifically instructed Ron and

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<sup>7</sup> Number Twelve Grimmauld Place is a manor owned by Sirius Black. The house is unplottable, cannot be seen by Muggles, and is protected by a charm where only those told about the house can find it. It is used as the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix.

Hermione to withhold information from him. When the two of them tell Harry that Dumbledore made them swear not to tell him anything, Harry begins to harbor an anger towards Dumbledore, and Rowling writes “the very thought of him [Dumbledore] made Harry’s insides burn with anger again” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 76). This instance is the beginning of Harry, along with readers, feeling negatively about Dumbledore, showing the subtle dynamic of his character.

This anger continues throughout Harry’s fifth year because Dumbledore avoids him the whole year and comes to a peak after Sirius’ death. Following his godfather’s death, Harry’s anger, grief, and guilt unleashes onto Dumbledore, which Rowling explains by writing: “White-hot anger leapt inside him. Dumbledore knew *nothing* about his feelings” (823). Harry then begins to smash many belongings in Dumbledore’s office because of his anger towards the old man, but Dumbledore does not balk; instead of matching Harry’s emotions, Dumbledore calmly tells him, “By all means continue destroying my possessions... I daresay I have too many” (825). He then goes on to agree that his instructions for Sirius to stay out of the action is what got Sirius killed, and that he only withheld information from Harry to try to protect him. This interaction is also the first time readers, along with Harry, discover the true meaning of Harry’s connection with Voldemort: one of them must be the one who kills the other. Dumbledore reveals that he has known of this connection for 15 years but has kept it hidden from Harry because he felt he was too young (826-827). Even though Harry forgives Dumbledore here, this point in the story marks the shift in their relationship and shatters the perception of Dumbledore as a wise and seemingly perfect wizard.

In Harry's sixth year, his relationship grows extremely close with Dumbledore. This sixth year is a crucial step to Harry's later defeat of Voldemort because Dumbledore begins to give him private lessons where he learns the secrets of Voldemort's bloody past. Dumbledore explains that "I have decided that it is time, now that you know what prompted Lord Voldemort to try and kill you fifteen years ago, for you to be given certain information" (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 197). When Harry asks if the lessons will have anything to do with the prophecy Dumbledore told him about, Dumbledore replies, "It has a great deal to do with the prophecy... and I certainly hope that it will help you to survive" (198). Here, readers and Harry see that despite what Dumbledore told Harry at the end of last year, he did not tell him everything he knew about Harry's connection with Voldemort. Moreover, this quote indicates that Harry will soon be in grave danger and even though Dumbledore withheld crucial information from Harry about him being a Horcrux, he was doing what he felt would give Harry the best chances of survival.

Over the course of the year, the two of them grow close, and when Harry sees Snape kill Dumbledore, Harry knows that he, along with Ron and Hermione, must carry out the mission left by Dumbledore to defeat Voldemort left. Harry thinks to himself that he would need to figure out where the real locket Horcrux<sup>8</sup> is before he "could move a little farther along the dark and winding path stretching ahead of him, the path that he and Dumbledore had set out upon together, and which he now knew he would have to journey alone" (645). Here, readers see how devastated Harry is by Dumbledore's death because

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<sup>8</sup> One of Voldemort's Horcruxes is Salazar Slytherin's locket, which Dumbledore and Harry hunt down at the end of *Half Blood Prince*, but they actually discover a fake replica because someone named R.A.B has taken the real Horcrux with intents to destroy it.

of how close they had grown, and that without Dumbledore, he is alone as he began his work to defeat Voldemort. No one understands Voldemort in the way that Dumbledore did, so Harry knows that without the old man, he is now the most knowledgeable person about Voldemort. In this sixth novel, we lose Dumbledore himself from the main story line, but he remains in the thoughts and conversations of the other characters.

Despite his death, Dumbledore remains constantly in Harry's mind and his true murky character begins to be revealed in the final installment of the series. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione begin to carry out their mission hunting and destroying Horcruxes, the trio begins to get frustrated with Dumbledore because of his lack of help and cryptic messages. Harry begins to understand that, despite what he thought, he did not know the true Dumbledore at all. Near the beginning of the book, Rowling writes that Harry "had never thought to ask Dumbledore about his past... No, they had always discussed Harry, Harry's past, Harry's future, Harry's plans... he had missed irreplaceable opportunities when he had failed to ask Dumbledore more about himself" (*Deathly Hallows* 22-23). Here, it is clear that Harry, along with us as readers, begins to understand that there is much more to Dumbledore than meets the eye; even though he thought he was close with Dumbledore, there is so much about him that he did not know. He is not simply a whimsical and wise old wizard, but a complex and confusing character. As the book continues, the trio begin to uncover some shocking information about Dumbledore's past. They discover that despite being seen as the figurehead of good, Dumbledore was best friends with the evil wizard Grindelwald in his youth and plotted with him to overthrow the government and control both wizards and Muggles (714). Here, the morally ambiguous nature of Dumbledore begins to be revealed.

As Harry, Ron, and Hermione continue their quest, they find themselves at Hogwarts where, after witnessing Snape's death, Harry retrieves a collection of memories to view. Shockingly, it is revealed that Dumbledore has raised Harry up to fight Voldemort, knowing that in the end, Harry must die for Voldemort to be defeated because on the night when Voldemort tried to kill baby Harry, he accidentally created a seventh Horcrux: Harry. Harry watches Snape's memory where Snape questions, "You have kept him alive so that he can die at the proper moment?" to which Dumbledore replies, "Don't be shocked, Severus. How many men and women have you watched die?" (686-687). In this moment, all the buildup related to Dumbledore's morally gray attributes finally comes to a peak.

The man who supposedly loves Harry and raised him and mentored him closely, almost like a parent or grandparent, has always been raising him as a sacrificial lamb. Despite being shocked by this revelation, Harry meets his death at Voldemort's hand and sees the ghost of Dumbledore in the liminal space between life and death where Dumbledore says that he had a suspicion that Harry could come back from death, but he was never certain (710-711). After Dumbledore says this, "Harry looked up at the old man and smiled; he could not help himself. How could he remain angry with Dumbledore now?" (720). Many would be mad at this revelation, but Harry smiles and lets go of his anger because he had always trusted Dumbledore, and that trust paid off. Harry understands that Dumbledore's guidance will allow him to truly defeat Voldemort. Dumbledore's suspicion did turn out to be true and Harry was able to kill Voldemort once and for all, seemingly living on in peace with his friends. In the epilogue, Harry prepares to send his two oldest children to Hogwarts, and it is revealed that he named his



second child Albus Severus Potter, after both Dumbledore and Snape (758), proving that, in the end, despite everything, Harry forgave Dumbledore and still regards him as a brave and good man.

### **Dumbledore as a Hero**

Now that Dumbledore's actions throughout the books have been discussed, it is important to examine his choices and motivations that are heroic. Something notable about Dumbledore is that he is one of, if not the most, progressive headmasters Hogwarts has seen. Despite his past views on Muggles being less capable of self-governance than wizards, he is very open to Muggle-born students attending Hogwarts and employs Hagrid, who is half giant, as well as Professor Lupin even though he is a werewolf. Many characters in the story who are depicted as evil or villainous take issue with Dumbledore's progressive views on magic and who should be allowed to practice it, which makes his actions and motivations stand out as heroic. For example, Lucius Malfoy, Draco's father, is very vocal about his distaste for Dumbledore. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Draco says, "Father's always said old Dumbledore's the worst thing that's ever happened to this place. He loves Muggle-borns. A decent headmaster would never've let slime like that Creevey in" (Rowling 222). With this quote, it is clear that Lucius Malfoy, a prejudiced Death Eater, detests Dumbledore because he is progressive and accepting of all who possess magic rather than believing in blood purity. Because of this, his views on equality stand out as heroic because of the stark contrast of the oppressive opposite view, which is held by the story's main villains.

Another example of Dumbledore's progressive views as a headmaster is his employment of previously freed House-elves. Throughout the story, many characters

discuss House-elves and their enslavement, and even some of the most pure-hearted characters, like Hagrid, believe the elves are happy as slaves and that they love their work (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 265). When a House-elf is freed, it is very hard for them to find work because no one wants to pay them, so when Harry frees Dobby<sup>9</sup>, he searches for employment for years before finally coming to Hogwarts where Dumbledore says he would pay him. When talking about Dumbledore, Dobby says, “Dobby gets a Galleon a week and one day off a month! ... Professor Dumbledore offered Dobby ten Galleons a week, and weekends off, but Dobby beat him down” (379). Besides Hermione, Dumbledore is one of the only characters in the whole story to believe in the freedom of House-elves and even pays those who want it, demonstrating his progressive views as a headmaster.

In addition to House-elves, Dumbledore treats several other magical creatures as equals and with respect. For example, it is revealed that Hagrid is half-giant in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and he is met with a lot of judgment due to wizards’ preconceived notions about giants. Even Ron, who has had a close relationship with Hagrid for five years, seems shocked and tells Harry that giants are vicious. However, Dumbledore continues to stand by him and refuses to accept his resignation, insisting that he is a great teacher and that his blood relation to giants does not define him (453-454). This example once again demonstrates Dumbledore as a progressive man who is motivated by equality rather than prejudice. Also, Dumbledore not only allows Professor Lupin admittance to Hogwarts as a child-werewolf but makes special accommodations for him so that he can enjoy school like other students. When explaining his past to

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<sup>9</sup> In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry tricks Lucius Malfoy, who is Dobby’s master, into freeing him.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione, Lupin says, “It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to Hogwarts ... But then Dumbledore became headmaster and he was sympathetic. He said that as long as we took certain precautions, there was no reason I shouldn’t come to school” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 353). In the past, no werewolf had attended Hogwarts, yet Dumbledore made the choice to allow Lupin to study magic just like the other children in the Wizarding World, which highlights the good and heroic parts of his character.

Therefore, Dumbledore’s progressive nature as a headmaster aligns closely with my definition of a hero as someone motivated by moral virtue. While moral virtue may mean something different to everyone, I argue that these progressive beliefs and values as a headmaster are morally virtuous because Dumbledore gets nothing from these actions yet does them out of kindness and firmness in his beliefs. With all these decisions mentioned, Dumbledore makes them because he feels it is only right and fair to treat all people and creatures with respect. Throughout the series, there are several times when Dumbledore’s views on equality are expressed. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when talking about the idea of blood purity, he says, “You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!” (Rowling 723). With this example, it is clear that Dumbledore sees all living beings as equals, which is likely his motivation behind the decisions like paying Dobby, allowing Professor Lupin into Hogwarts, and more. Thus, this motivation is virtuous and not one motivated by selfish reasons, so by my definition, Dumbledore’s decisions as a headmaster would be heroic.

Another heroic aspect of Dumbledore's character is his care for Harry. Even though it could be argued that Dumbledore does not care about Harry because he raises him to sacrifice himself for the greater good, it could also be argued that this decision is because he fights for the greater good of all of humanity, rather than what he may desire. It has already been established that throughout the books, Dumbledore and Harry have a very close relationship and there are many times when it is clear that, despite everything, Dumbledore does truly care for Harry. One example of this is when Dumbledore meets the Dursleys in the sixth book and reprimands them for the way they treated Harry when he left him in their care. Because of the blood protection magic<sup>10</sup>, Dumbledore had no choice but to leave Harry with the Dursleys, as they are his only living relatives. All throughout the books, Harry faces neglect and abuse at the hands of the Dursleys but this is never acknowledged by Dumbledore until *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. When Dumbledore goes to pick Harry up during the summer, he grows irritated at the Dursleys' inhospitable nature and explains that he asked the Dursleys to care for Harry as if he was their own son. He says, "You did not do as I asked. You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you" (Rowling 55). This instance shows that Dumbledore truly does care for Harry because it is reiterated throughout the series that he is extremely levelheaded and rarely shows anger. This moment is one of the

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<sup>10</sup> Blood protection magic is a very powerful and ancient magical bond that is formed when a blood-related family member sacrifices themselves in the name of love for another family member. When Voldemort killed Lily, she died protecting Harry and therefore created a magical blood bond between them. Knowing of this magic, Dumbledore cast a charm on Harry to activate the protection that will work until Harry comes of age if his home is shared with someone of blood relation to Lily. As long as Harry called the Dursleys' home, Voldemort could not harm him while he was there.

few times in the books where we see Dumbledore portray a true sense of anger at someone that is not an outright villain. In other words, this anger at the Dursleys has nothing to do with dark magic, which is a usual cause of his rare anger, but has everything to do with their treatment of Harry.

### **Dumbledore as a Villain**

On top of the heroic aspects of Dumbledore's character, there are many villainous aspects as well. One major theme evident in the books is that Dumbledore constantly allows young children to embark on dangerous adventures that are not very age inappropriate. For example, in Harry's first year, it is heavily hinted that Dumbledore knew Harry, Ron, and Hermione would attempt to stop the theft of the Sorcerer's Stone and, instead of thwarting their attempts, he left the school and allowed them to carry out their plans. While this is not confirmed as one hundred percent fact, the trio all suspect Dumbledore did intentionally let them go after the Stone, especially after giving them help and guidance like giving Harry the Invisibility Cloak and explaining the Mirror of Erised<sup>11</sup> to him. When discussing this possibility with Ron and Hermione, Harry says, "He's a funny man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give me a chance. I think he knows more or less everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he taught us enough to help ... He thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could" (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 302). This quotation demonstrates something unusual about Dumbledore, which is that he

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<sup>11</sup> The Mirror of Erised is a magical mirror that when someone looks into it, they see their deepest desire. Harry became obsessed with the Mirror because it would show him his parents and when Dumbledore found him in front of the mirror, he explained how it worked. Later, Harry sees the Mirror of Erised when he faces off against Quirrell and Voldemort, and he can defeat them because of what Dumbledore told him about the Mirror.

gives children a lot more credit than many other adults in the series. Even if he did not intentionally desire for them to embark on the quest to stop the Stone's theft, he gave them several tools to accomplish the goal, because he saw it as their, especially Harry's, right to confront Voldemort. This is likely true because we know he has been raising Harry to fight Voldemort, so he wanted to give Harry opportunities to prepare. Still, no matter his motives, this decision puts Harry, Ron, and Hermione into a lot of danger.

Another example of Dumbledore encouraging children to engage in dangerous situations is Harry and Hermione's use of the Time Turner to save Sirius and Buckbeak. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione wants to take every class offered at her grade level, so the Ministry allows her to use a Time Turner only to get back and forth from classes. Hermione stresses the seriousness of using a Time Turner, telling Harry "awful things have happened when wizards have meddled with time" (Rowling 398-399). Despite this danger, Dumbledore instructs Harry and Hermione to illegally use the Time Turner to go back in time to save Sirius and Buckbeak and allow them to escape the Ministry's clutches. Even though he is the most famous wizard of modern times, he does not try to use his influence to make things right and prove Sirius' innocence. Instead, he sends two children on a dangerous and illegal venture, which they do ultimately succeed in (418). Again, Dumbledore allows two adolescents to put themselves into harm's way in the name of "doing the right thing" rather than handling the issue himself. This highlights an ethical dilemma that Dumbledore faces many times throughout the series where he uses others, like Harry and Hermione in this instance, in service of whatever his motives are at the time, showing that he has no issue letting others do his dirty work.

Perhaps the most glaring example of Dumbledore putting children in harm's way, however, is the Triwizard Tournament. In Harry's fourth year, he is contractually bound to compete in the Triwizard Tournament, at least according to Dumbledore. Since the Tournament had not been held in years, the officials in charge of the competition changed some of the rules, including raising the minimum age to seventeen. Dumbledore explains this to the Hogwarts students, saying that "this is a measure we feel is necessary, given that the tournament tasks will still be difficult and dangerous, whatever precautions we take, and it is highly unlikely that students below sixth and seventh year will be able to cope with them" (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 188). Despite these words being spoken by Dumbledore himself, he later insists that Harry, who only turned fourteen two months prior, must compete, no matter the dangers. When Harry's name comes out of the Goblet of Fire, Dumbledore says, "It seems to me, however, that we have no choice but to accept it" (280). While Dumbledore insists on Harry competing, the other characters in the scene see that he is too young, with Fleur Delacour, another champion, referring to him as "little boy" (275). In the end, Dumbledore's insistence has major negative consequences, with Cedric's death and Voldemort returning to his full physical form (638-643). Dumbledore's proposition that Harry again put himself in mortal peril causes a domino effect, and without it, Cedric's death would likely be avoided completely, and it would have been much harder for Voldemort to return to his physical form at the time that he did.

Thus, Dumbledore repeatedly makes decisions to put underage witches and wizards into dangerous situations, but these decisions cannot be analyzed as purely black and white, or purely good or bad. Many of these situations do have good outcomes, like

Harry stopping Professor Quirrell from taking the Sorcerer's Stone (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 296), Harry and Hermione freeing an innocent man and magical creature (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 418), and even Harry winning the Triwizard Tournament (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 710). However, there were many negatives associated with these decisions as well, like Cedric's death, Voldemort returning to power, and the numerous times Harry is traumatized by the events he witnesses. Much like Dumbledore's general character, these decisions are hard to pinpoint as being entirely heroic or entirely villainous. His motivations are also not clear, but regardless of his motivation, he still puts multiple children into danger. These situations show that Dumbledore prioritizes what he feels is the right thing to do even if the means to that end are not perfect. Above everything else, he values the right thing, like preparing Harry to fight Voldemort, saving Sirius, and adhering to the rules of the Triwizard Tournament, which is often the thing that lands him and others around him in trouble. Therefore, all these instances demonstrate Dumbledore's extreme focus on the greater good with little regard to how he will achieve the greater good.

Another negative aspect of Dumbledore's character is that, regardless of his motives, he still bought into the system of slavery. As previously discussed, Dumbledore is one of the few powerful wizards in the story that treats various magical creatures with respect and pays free House-elves, like Dobby;<sup>12</sup> however, he allows the system of slavery to continue at Hogwarts despite being considered the most progressive

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<sup>12</sup> Since House-elves must be freed by their master willingly giving them clothes, they are not freed very often. Like Kreacher, most House-elves are brainwashed and believe that they want their servitude and even judge free House-elves, like Dobby, for taking payment (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 378). Because of this, freeing House-elves is very complicated because many of them would be very upset at being free, which is likely a large reason why Dumbledore does not free and pay all elves at Hogwarts.



headmaster Hogwarts has ever had. At Hogwarts, most daily tasks and chores, like cleaning the common rooms or preparing dinners, are performed by the enslaved House-elves (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 238). If there were no other way to conduct household activities, one could argue Dumbledore has no other choice but to allow the enslavement of House-elves to continue at Hogwarts. However, we know that there are many ways Dumbledore could perform these duties, one of which is using household spells and charms. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Tonks<sup>13</sup> uses magic to clean Hedwig's cage and says, "I've never quite got the hang of these sort of householdy spells" (Rowling 53). With this example, we as readers know that there are spells that one could use to do things that at Hogwarts, are carried out by the enslaved elves. While Tonks may not have mastered these spells, we are told time and time again that Dumbledore is the greatest wizard of the age, so surely he could conduct simple cleaning and cooking spells to take the place of the hundreds of slaves at Hogwarts. The continuation of slavery by Dumbledore is certainly a villainous quality, because regardless of the situation or reasoning, owning slaves is never okay nor is it even something that could be viewed as neutral.

Another questionable thing Dumbledore does at Hogwarts is his blatant favoritism. Throughout the books, Dumbledore's close relationship with Harry is demonstrated in many ways, one of which is his bias and favoritism of Harry, his friends, and Gryffindor House. Since the story is told from Harry's perspective, much of Dumbledore's favoritism is brushed over, but when analyzed from a neutral perspective, there are many glaring examples. For instance, in the first two books, Dumbledore

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<sup>13</sup> Nymphadora Tonks, or simply Tonks, is an Auror and member of the Order of the Phoenix. She is a very powerful witch and is a large part of the story from books five through seven.

awards just enough points to Gryffindor house to ensure they win the coveted House Cup (Rowling *Sorcerer's Stone*) (Rowling *Chamber of Secrets*). While there is nothing inherently wrong with awarding the points when they are deserved, like to Neville for standing up to his friends, it is interesting that he conveniently awards Gryffindor just enough points to take home the House Cup.

In addition to this, he awards these points for the Gryffindors breaking rules and putting themselves and others into danger, such as Harry and Ron taking Professor Lockhart into the Chamber of Secrets where a deadly basilisk awaits them. Previously, Dumbledore had warned Harry and Ron about any further rule breaking, but he does not follow through on these threats. Instead, he tells the pair of them, "I seem to remember telling you both that I would have to expel you if you broke any more school rules ... Which goes to show that the best of us must sometimes eat our words ... You will both receive Special Awards for Services to the School and — let me see — yes, I think two hundred points apiece for Gryffindor" (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 330). Multiple years in a row, Dumbledore ensures that Gryffindor has just enough points to defeat the other Houses and secure the House Cup, which shows his favoritism towards Gryffindor and neglect towards the other Houses. Many of the children in other Houses likely desire the attention of the school's headmaster, but this favoritism would be very disheartening. On top of that, it is stated many times throughout the series that Slytherins tend to join Voldemort's cause (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 107), but when analyzing Dumbledore's favoritism, it is easy to see that for those students who follow Voldemort, they may have seen that as the best choice because Dumbledore constantly reinforces the idea that Gryffindor is the only house that matters. If Voldemort wanted to, he could easily use this

favoritism to entice students not in Gryffindor to become his followers because if Dumbledore did not show them they were important, perhaps Lord Voldemort could.

According to my definition of a villain as someone motivated for selfish reasons, this favoritism is a darker aspect of Dumbledore's character. Dumbledore himself was in Gryffindor ("Albus Dumbledore"), which is likely part of why he favors the house so much. Identifying with this house only because he was a part of it indicates Dumbledore lacks empathy and understanding of the other houses. Even though each house has desirable characteristics and traits attached to it, Dumbledore seems only to see these in the Gryffindors because he himself was in the house and cannot see the value of the others. On top of that, his close relationship with Harry likely contributes to him favoring the Gryffindors because he cares for Harry and wants the best for him. Both motivations behind his favoritism are selfish and not morally virtuous. Therefore, according to my definition, this part of his character is villainous and a negative attribute of a man who is treated as entirely good.

Another murky part of Dumbledore's character is his dark and disturbing past with the evil Grindelwald. Throughout the story, we see Dumbledore as the perfect, all-knowing hero but the most glaring part of his morally gray nature is his relationship with Grindelwald and what he did in his youth. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, readers learn that if a few things had been different in Dumbledore's life, he would likely have ventured down the dark path to evil, much like Voldemort. Grindelwald, along with Dumbledore, wants to force Muggles into servitude and rule the Wizarding World in the name of the greater good. When Harry reads a letter written by Dumbledore to Grindelwald, Dumbledore writes: "We seize control for the greater good. And from that

it follows that where we meet resistance, we must use only the force that is necessary and no more” (Rowling 357). This quote, which comes straight from Dumbledore’s own pen, is shocking for readers and Harry who saw Dumbledore as the champion of Muggle-born and Muggle rights. His belief on blood purity and his idea that wizard dominance is for “the greater good” makes many of his heroic actions and stances seem hollow. Although Dumbledore did not prescribe to these beliefs in later years, it is not because he had a total change of heart and saw that his beliefs were wrong. It was because of his falling out with Grindelwald.

After some time spent as close friends, Grindelwald and Dumbledore began to experience some tension which culminated into a massive fight between the two of them and Dumbledore’s brother, Aberforth. Dumbledore and Grindelwald wanted to take their plans on the road, which would require taking Ariana, Dumbledore’s sister. Aberforth did not like this because of Ariana’s fragile state, so he told them that, which angered Grindelwald. This resulted in a three-way duel, which Aberforth describes as: “And there was an argument . . . and I pulled out my wand, and he pulled out his, and I had the Cruciatu s Curse used on me by my brother’s best friend — and Albus was trying to stop him, and then all three of us were dueling.” This fight resulted in Ariana being upset and getting into the crossfire; no one knows for sure who killed her, but Ariana was killed during the duel (557). Later on, when Harry sees Dumbledore in the liminal space between life and death, Dumbledore tells Harry that Grindelwald “vanished with his plans for seizing power and his plans for Muggle torture, and his dreams for the Deathly Hallows, dreams in which I had encouraged and helped him. He ran, while I was left to bury my sister, and learn to live with my guilt and my terrible grief, the price of my

shame” (716-717). While it could be said that Dumbledore had some second thoughts because of the murky ethics and morality of what he was doing “for the greater good,” his grief over Ariana and falling out with Grindelwald show that, at least in part, he was motivated by selfish reasons to no longer pursue Muggle servitude with Grindelwald. He says himself that Grindelwald left him, and not the other way around.

The situation with Grindelwald is perhaps the most glaring example of Dumbledore’s fatal flaw: overlooking his pawns in the service of his “for the greater good” endgame. Dumbledore said himself that his obsession with power and the Deathly Hallows<sup>14</sup> specifically consumed him during his friendship with Grindelwald and even afterwards. When Harry asks Dumbledore if the Hallows were real, Dumbledore responds, “Real, and dangerous, and a lure for fools. And I was such a fool” and then goes on to tell him that the Hallows are what connected him and Grindelwald (713). Because of the Hallows and his friendship with Grindelwald, he overlooks those in his path until it is too late, much like Ariana and her death, which consumed him for the rest of his life. Even after Grindelwald leaves, though, Dumbledore’s shared obsession with the Hallows causes other pawns to fall. For example, Lily and James Potter died after loaning his Invisibility Cloak, one of the Deathly Hallows, to Dumbledore. While Dumbledore had the Cloak, which according to him he had because “I had long since given up my dream of uniting the Hallows, but I could not resist, could not help taking a

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<sup>14</sup> The Deathly Hallows, or simply Hallows, are a trio of items (the invisibility cloak, the elder wand, and the resurrection stone) which when combined, make the owner the Master of Death. These items are thought to be of legend, brought about in a children’s tale called “The Three Brothers” where three brothers “cheat” death by possessing these magical items. Many ambitious wizards, like Dumbledore, spend their whole lives searching for the Hallows, attempting to be the true Master of Death. However, Harry himself is the true Master of Death, possessing all three items at once, and he does not desire the Hallows, making him the rightful owner of all three. Despite this, he does not ever unite all three Hallows as he throws the resurrection stone in the Forbidden Forest and snaps the elder wand.

closer look” (714-715), Voldemort found the Potters. Even though the Cloak may not have saved the Potters, it might have given them a way to escape Voldemort’s clutches and survive, but once again, they had to die because of Dumbledore’s obsession with “the greater good” and continued interested in Deathly Hallows. Even though he says he had given up hope of uniting them, his examination of the Cloak shows that, at least in part, he is still interested in the Hallows. In the service of his own desires and end game, he overlooks those who lay in his path and unintentionally causes them to perish.

This use of other characters as pawns is the most major aspect of his character that is morally ambiguous. Another huge casualty of Dumbledore’s chess game against Voldemort is Snape. Snape’s love for Lily is why he traded his Death Eater status to become a spy for Dumbledore, and in the last installment, it is revealed how Dumbledore consistently manipulated Snape and his love for Lily. One glaring example of this is when Snape comes to Dumbledore, telling him that Voldemort is after the Potters, and asking him to protect Lily, Dumbledore replies, “And what will you give me in return, Severus?” (Rowling 678). Dumbledore, who is supposed to be the leader of the fight against Voldemort, does not automatically think of protecting the Potters, who are a part of the Order of the Phoenix, and instead thinks of what he can get in return for protecting them. This is a decision motivated by selfish reasons because Dumbledore phrases the question as seeing what he can get out of it rather than imploring Snape to do the right thing in helping the fight against Voldemort, which would make him a villain under my definition. Moreover, after the Potters are murdered, Snape visits Dumbledore once again and Dumbledore tells him: “If you loved Lily Evans, if you truly loved her, then your way forward is clear” (678). It is clear that Dumbledore is manipulating Snape’s love and

grief over Lily's death to convince him to aid him in his plans and fight against Voldemort. Even though this is ultimately for a good cause and is "the right thing to do," Dumbledore uses a morally wrong tactic of manipulation to get what he desires. Thus, this is another example of him making questionable decisions, even if they are the right decisions. He has the mentality of any ends can justify the right means, which is clear here as he manipulates Snape, which later leads to Snape's death. This mindset causes many of Dumbledore's pawns in his schemes against Voldemort to fall.

Along with Snape, the most obvious pawn used by Dumbledore is Harry himself. All throughout the series, every decision made by Dumbledore was done to prepare Harry to face Voldemort and lay down his life for the greater good of the Wizarding World. Harry is ignorant of this fact up until the final installment, and Dumbledore never reveals the full truth until Harry is about to sacrifice himself. When Harry begins unraveling Dumbledore's past, he discovers how he has been used by the older wizard. In a moment of his anger, Harry yells, "Look what he asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again! And again! And don't expect me to explain everything, just trust me blindly, trust that I know what I'm doing, trust me even though I don't trust you! Never the whole truth! Never!" (362). At this moment, Harry realizes that all along, Dumbledore has been using him in his war against Voldemort but never trusted Harry enough to let him in on the plans. He just expects Harry to follow his will, which he does, up until he lays down his life for all of humanity. In a way, Harry almost had no choice but to sacrifice himself because Dumbledore shocks him with this last-minute revelation and gives him no time to plan an alternative. Despite caring somewhat for Harry, this does not stop Dumbledore from using him as collateral damage in his fight against evil.

All these flaws, while considered villainous by my definition, do not prove that Dumbledore himself is a villain. As a deeply flawed man and character, Dumbledore makes mistakes many times throughout the books, often never thinking of those that will end up as collateral damage in his master plan against Voldemort. However, Dumbledore also has many good qualities and many aspects that would make him a hero. Because of this combination of heroic and villainous traits, decisions, and motives, Dumbledore cannot simply be classified by a marker of “hero” or “villain.” Because of that, I push back on Propp’s theory here because doing so would be a disservice to his character and would compromise half of what makes Dumbledore such an interesting literary figure. He constantly keeps readers guessing and speculating his true motives and whether he is what we call a “good guy” up until the very end. According to Forster’s classification of character types, Dumbledore is absolutely a round character because he surprises the reader several times and is also not constructed around a single idea or quality, such as being a hero and only ever making virtuous decisions. Because Dumbledore is not a “round” character by Forster’s definition, as in only ever acting as perfect savior, I do not classify him as entirely heroic or villainous. He is a mixture of both, which speaks to our own nature as humans.

This moral ambiguity makes Dumbledore that much more relatable to us. These flaws mixed with his heroic qualities make him come to life rather than being words on a stationary page. Author Jenny McDougal writes, “The end of *Deathly Hallows* shows Harry and the reader — most importantly the reader — that Dumbledore is no different from the rest of us: misguided, angry, joyful, selfish, loved, powerful, smart, and wishing for a life better than the one we have” (178). This quotation summarizes Dumbledore as a



character excellently; he is neither entirely good nor bad, but simply trying to act in the name of the greater good. However, along the way, what is actually for the best easily gets misconstrued. Like Dumbledore, the world is full of people who must make tough decisions and by reading the Harry Potter series and seeing characters like the headmaster, young readers can accept both themselves and others as who they are.

## CHAPTER IV: SEVERUS SNAPE

### **The Man Behind the Actions**

Throughout the Harry Potter series, Severus Snape is presented as a rude bully and even a menacing Death Eater high up in Voldemort's chain of command but is later revealed to have been a double agent working for Dumbledore the entire time. Much like Dumbledore, everything is not what it seems with Snape. From the beginning, Rowling presents Snape as an evil character in the story. The first time that Harry, along with readers, sees Snape, it is negative and orients him as someone we should not like nor trust, which is the opposite of Dumbledore's positive introduction. When Harry first sees Snape talking to Professor Quirrell at the Sorting Ceremony, his scar sears with pain, and Percy tells him, "No wonder he's [Quirrell] looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to — everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape" (Rowling *Sorcerer's Stone* 134). While Dumbledore's first introduction has McGonagall showing readers how extraordinary he is, Snape's first introduction associates him with the Dark Arts and as someone that other characters fear. Not only that, but because Harry's scar is a remnant of Voldemort's attempted murder, it subconsciously associates Snape with the evil Voldemort.

After these initial impressions of Snape, his portrayal in the rest of the books does not get much better. In Harry's first Potions class, we see Snape as a brash and abusive bully who targets children not in Slytherin house. Snape goes on to quiz Harry in front of the class, embarrassing him and targeting him for seemingly no reason (145-147). After this, Harry immediately begins loathing Snape, and he, along with Ron and Hermione, even suspect he is the one attempting to steal the Sorcerer's Stone, although it is later

proven that he was trying to protect it (310). As the books continue, Harry still distrusts and loathes Snape, which certainly makes an impression on the perceptions of readers since most of the books are from Harry's perspective. While much of the discussion surrounding Snape in the first book was about the possibility of him being a supporter of Lord Voldemort, most of the information following this book is about Snape's status as a bully. In the second book, Snape shows his cruel nature by suggesting that Harry is behind the mysterious petrification of students, telling Dumbledore: "I suggest, Headmaster, that Potter is not being entirely truthful. It might be a good idea if he were deprived of certain privileges until he is ready to tell us the whole story. I personally feel he should be taken off the Gryffindor Quidditch team until he is ready to be honest" (Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets*, 143-144). This interaction shows that Snape certainly has a distaste for Harry, as despite having no evidence, he wants Harry to be punished for petrifying the students.

In the third book, readers continue to see Snape as a cruel and vindictive man who hates Harry, and the reason behind this hate is finally uncovered. The Marauders, particularly Sirius and James, bullied Snape during their time at school, causing Snape to hold a deep-seated grudge against Harry and the Marauders. When Snape gets the opportunity to punish for Harry for sneaking into Hogsmeade,<sup>1</sup> he compares Harry to James and explains what happened with James supposedly saved his life, saying: "I would hate for you to run away with a false idea of your father, Potter ... your saintly father and his friends played a highly amusing joke on me that would have resulted in my

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<sup>1</sup> Harry is not allowed into Hogsmeade because to visit the village, you must have a signed permission slip, which he does not have. To get around this, Harry has been using the invisibility cloak to sneak into Hogsmeade, but he gets caught because the hood of the cloak falls off and Draco sees his head.

death if your father hadn't gotten cold feet ... He was saving his own skin as much as mine. Had their joke succeeded, he would have been expelled" (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 284-285). This interaction finally gives readers justification behind Snape's hatred of the Marauders and consequently, Harry. By describing Harry as being just like James and then explaining how James almost killed him, readers can see the reasoning behind Snape's hatred for James and his son, regardless of if they feel it is justified or not. Furthermore, this interaction is the first in which we get a detailed glimpse into the past of the mysterious Severus Snape.

This cruel and vindictive nature of Snape is still apparent throughout the fourth book, but as the tone darkens, readers learn more about Death Eaters and as a result, Snape's status as a spy for Dumbledore. Both Snape and Igor Karkaroff<sup>2</sup> are pardoned past Death Eaters, and Karkaroff attempts to talk to Snape about the Dark Mark growing more prominent throughout the year<sup>3</sup>. Harry and Ron overhear a conversation between the two men where Karkaroff is frightened of the Mark and what it means, but Snape tells him, "Then flee. Flee — I will make your excuses. I, however, am remaining at Hogwarts" (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 426). Here, readers see that Snape, despite the Dark Mark becoming clearer on his skin, will not entertain the idea of running away. Instead, he wants to remain at Hogwarts with Dumbledore, demonstrating both his bravery and loyalty. These traits highlight the fact that while Snape may be cruel, he does have some

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<sup>2</sup> Karkaroff is the headmaster of Durmstrang, one of the other wizarding schools visiting Hogwarts for the Tournament. Like Snape, he used to be a Death Eater but when he was arrested, he offered up many names of other Death Eaters in exchange for a pardon.

<sup>3</sup> Since the summer before Harry's fourth year, the Dark Mark, which is the symbol of Lord Voldemort and his followers, has begun becoming more visible on the skin of past Death Eaters. The Dark Mark is branded onto Death Eaters' left arm and was a sign of trust and respect between Voldemort and his followers. The Mark is used as a way for Voldemort to summon the Death Eaters and vice versa. Since Voldemort's disappearance on the night he killed Harry's parents, the mark had faded but began to reappear in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* because of Voldemort's eventual return.

good qualities. In addition to this idea, Snape officially assumes his role as spy for Dumbledore again, putting himself in grave danger in the name of doing what is right (713). Up until this book, Snape seems like just a vindictive, cruel man with a grudge against the Marauders, but this installment shines light onto Snape's ambiguous motivations and choices. Despite his personality and mean-spirited actions throughout the series, here readers see that there may be more to Snape than meets the eye.

In the fifth book, Snape commits his usual moral infractions by abusing students, but readers also witness a pivotal moment from his past. After Harry has the vision of Nagini attacking Mr. Weasley,<sup>4</sup> Snape begins giving Harry Occlumency lessons. At first, the lessons go about as good as one would expect, with Snape insulting Harry and Harry not practicing between lessons. However, one day Snape leaves his office with Harry still in there with the Pensieve, so Harry peers into it and sees an interaction between Snape and the Marauders where the Marauders bully and humiliate Snape (646). Snape also calls Lily, who was defending him, a Mudblood<sup>5</sup> before the present-day Snape pulls Harry out of the memory (648). Rowling makes it a point to call out Snape's immense anger (649) and after Harry leaves the office, writes that Harry "knew how it felt to be humiliated in the middle of onlookers, knew exactly how Snape had felt as his father had taunted him, and that judging from what he had just seen, his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him" (650). These moments provide readers with several revelations. First, that there were many instances of the Marauders taunting Snape

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<sup>4</sup> Because of his connection with Voldemort, Harry often has dreams and visions of Voldemort's mind or what Voldemort is seeing. When Nagini, Voldemort's pet snake and Horcrux, attacks Mr. Weasley, Harry sees it in a dream. This dream worries Dumbledore because if Harry can see into Voldemort's mind, this must mean Voldemort can see into Harry's. To protect Harry, Dumbledore orders Snape teach him Occlumency.

<sup>5</sup> A heblood is the worst name you can call a Muggle-born. It is like a slur that means their blood is dirty, and thus not as pure as those with wizarding parents.

at school, and thus, he may be slightly justified in his hatred of them. Also, it shows that Snape bought into the blood purity ideals that Voldemort fought for, even if he does not believe them now. Finally, these moments indicate that perhaps Harry and readers should not just trust the Marauders' accounts of things, but also consider Snape's perspective. It is entirely possible to bend the truth when recounting something verbally, but the memory does not lie. Here, we see once again that Snape's past is complicated and nuanced, and not as simple as him being a villain in the series.

While Snape has been solidified as someone fighting for the Order in the previous few books, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* takes this idea and turns it on its head. The second chapter of the book, "Spinner's End," is one of the few instances where the narration deviates from Harry's perspective and readers see Bellatrix Lestrange<sup>6</sup> and Narcissa Malfoy<sup>7</sup> seek out Snape so that Narcissa can ask him a favor. By meeting secretly with these two who are so heavily associated with Voldemort, Snape looks almost guilty by association. One quote that makes Snape appear suspicious to readers is when he says, "Dumbledore has been a great wizard ... But through all these years, he has never stopped trusting Severus Snape, and therein lies my great value to the Dark Lord" (31). This makes Snape's true allegiance very confusing because in trying to convince Bellatrix of his loyalty to Voldemort, he also crafts a compelling case for readers. This chapter is very interesting for readers because it begs the question: to whom is Snape truly lying? This question continues to linger in the minds of readers because as the book continues, Harry begins to suspect Snape once again of being a Death Eater

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<sup>6</sup> Bellatrix is one of Voldemort's most trusted Death Eaters. She kills Sirius Black.

<sup>7</sup> Narcissa is Draco's mother and Lucius' wife. She herself is not a Death Eater but her husband and sister, Bellatrix, both are.

(328) for the first time since *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. This suspicion transcends the pages of the book and plants further doubt in the mind of the reader that perhaps Snape is not to be trusted after all.

The most shocking moment of this sixth book comes when Draco fails to kill Dumbledore,<sup>8</sup> and Snape does the deed instead. Not only is this one of the most astonishing moments of this book, but in the whole series. Up until this point, readers have gone on this journey of at times, trusting Snape and his intentions and at other times, being suspicious of him; there has been no solid proof of Snape's true allegiance, and no true moment of betrayal of either side until this murder. Snape draws a line in the sand, both to readers and to Harry. In the moments after Snape murders Dumbledore, Rowling writes that Harry "hated [Snape] as much as he hated Voldemort himself" (603). This moment is very important because before, Harry always loathed Snape and did not trust him, but now he has committed the ultimate betrayal; he has killed the head of the Order and a man who had full and complete trust in him. In Harry's mind, there is no coming back from this and Snape has reached full villain status. Like Harry, many first-time readers were shocked and angered at Snape's actions. A news article from 2005, shortly after the book's release, highlights several young readers' opinions. One girl, Hannah, said, "I always knew Snape was mean, but I never would have guessed he was just spying on them the whole time" and another child, Jack, said, "I didn't think Snape would do it ... It finally gave closure on Snape and Malfoy being evil" (McMullen). These reactions are important because it shows that when the story first came out and the revelation was

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<sup>8</sup> In the previous year, Lucius failed Voldemort so to punish him, Voldemort gives Draco a mission to kill Dumbledore. Obviously, Draco cannot succeed in killing the most powerful wizard, so this task is meant as a way to get Draco killed.

not yet widely known, readers were just as shocked as the characters in the story and fully believe Snape has achieved villain status. Going into the last installment, both characters in the story and readers alike no longer trust Snape.

In the last book, readers continue to find out new information about Snape's past and information about his status as a Death Eater. Again, like "Spinner's End," in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, the seventh book begins with the chapter, "The Dark Lord Ascending," which lets readers witness a meeting between Voldemort and the Death Eaters rather than the typical chapters following Harry. Here, we get to see Snape for the first time since he murdered Dumbledore. It seems that he has fully embraced his villain status, with the chapter revealing him as a cold Death Eater who watches his fellow Hogwarts teacher, Charity Burbage, die at the hands of his master (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 12). In addition to this, a small detail shows readers that Voldemort trusts Snape entirely, perhaps even above all his other Death Eaters. The text says, "Severus, here," said Voldemort, indicating the seat on his immediate right" (3). This detail may seem insignificant at first glance, but Voldemort ordering Snape to sit on his direct right shows how much Voldemort truly trusts Snape, as he is his "right-hand man."<sup>9</sup> Voldemort trusting Snape here shows that he has fully proven himself loyal to the Death Eater cause. Because of this, the book begins by furthering our distrust in Snape.

This moment is the last readers see of Snape for a while, until Harry, Ron, and Hermione break into Hogwarts, where Snape has become headmaster. During the Battle of Hogwarts<sup>10</sup>, the trio overhears Voldemort and Snape conversing with one another. It is

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<sup>9</sup> "Right-hand man" is a common saying that means someone's most trusted advisor and confidant ("Right-Hand Man").

<sup>10</sup> The Battle of Hogwarts is the name given to the final epic battle between the Death Eaters and the Order members.



revealed that Voldemort believes the Elder Wand is not truly loyal to him because Snape is its rightful owner,<sup>11</sup> so he decides to let Nagini attack and kill Snape so that the wand would obey him (654-655). As Snape lays dying and Voldemort leaves, Harry, Ron, and Hermione emerge and see Snape. Snape pulls Harry in close and in his final moments, gives Harry a collection of memories that he can watch in the Pensieve. His last words are telling Harry: “Look ... at ... me” (657-658). This moment is very important because despite being seen as villainous, both by readers and other characters, in this book, Snape gives Harry something in his final moments, which would be very odd behavior if he were truly evil. What is more is that his dying wish is for Harry to look at him, again something that indicates perhaps he is not truly evil, because he would have no reason to want a boy he has tried to hunt down and kill to look at him.

The next chapter, “The Prince’s Tale,” reveals the most information about Snape in the entire series. “The Prince’s Tale” finally gives readers and Harry answers about all the unknown surrounding Snape. The first major reveal is that Snape knew Lily before even going to Hogwarts and the two of them were very close friends. When they first meet, Snape reveals to her that she is a witch and explains all there is to know about the Wizarding World to her (664-668). As the memories continue to pass, Harry watches as Sirius and James bully Snape throughout the years, and Lily explaining to him that she does not like the friends he has been hanging out with<sup>12</sup> (673). This moment indicates the two of them growing apart as friends, but Snape continues to care for Lily, as the

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<sup>11</sup> It is believed that the Elder Wand passes ownership by someone killing its previous owner. As Snape killed Dumbledore, Voldemort sees him standing in the way of him truly owning the wand. However, it is later revealed that one only needs to disarm the previous owner, making Draco and then later Harry, once Harry disarms Draco, the true master of the Elder Wand. Thus, Snape dies in vain.

<sup>12</sup> The friends are all people who in the present day, are Death Eaters.

memories eventually lead to the moment when Snape begs Dumbledore to protect her from Voldemort (677). After this, Snape turns against Voldemort and becomes a spy for Dumbledore and several memories pass, showing the two of them discussing Snape's true intentions and allegiance. It is revealed that Lily's murder truly did cause Snape to be loyal to Dumbledore, so loyal that he agrees to kill him so that Draco does not have to be a murderer. Dumbledore insists that Snape be the one to kill him to protect Draco's innocence, and Snape agrees despite not wanting to, but does so in loyalty to him (685).

In this chapter, readers learn that above everything, Snape was motivated by his love for the late Lily. These memories show that ever since he was a child, Snape has loved Lily, or at the very least loved the idea of her. This is evident because it is obvious that he deeply hates and despises Harry and James yet protects Harry because of his supposed love for Lily. When Dumbledore tells Snape that Harry must die to defeat Voldemort, Snape questions, "I thought ... all these years ... that we were protecting him for her. For Lily" (686). This quote shows that Snape was horrified at the thought of Harry dying because his love for Lily is so strong. He feels that Harry is her legacy and wants him to survive purely because of that reason. This chapter is extremely revealing of Snape's true nature because it finally shows readers the truth. All throughout the series, he was fighting for the right side because of his love for Lily. Everything he does, he does for Dumbledore and his allegiance to the Order. Still, Snape commits many morally ambiguous and questionable acts throughout the series, begging the question of does he truly deserve the title of hero or was the suspected nature of him as a villain in the series correct?

## **Snape as a Villain**

Much like Dumbledore, Snape shows clear favoritism to a specific house: the Slytherins. Many times, Snape punishes the Gryffindors much more severely than the Slytherins. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Draco and Ron get into a physical fight because Draco insults Ron's family and Snape walks up. Instead of punishing both boys, Snape only takes House Points from Ron, with a threat to take more (Rowling 196). In addition to this, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Snape is filling in for Lupin, he asks the students questions about werewolves, and Hermione is the only one who knows the answer. Rather than calling on her, he ignores her, causing her to say the answer out loud. In front of everyone, Snape says, "Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all" (Rowling 172). These moments show Snape's favoritism because he harshly takes points from the Gryffindors when the Slytherins do not face the same fate. He chooses to only punish Ron and lets Draco get off unscathed and punishes Hermione for knowing the right answer to a question he asked. These examples show that to Snape, being a Gryffindor is something that must be punished.

In addition to harshly punishing the Gryffindors, there are several instances where Snape unfairly rewards the Slytherins. For example, in the third book, Draco comes in late to class and Snape just ignores the disruption, telling everyone to settle down. The text explicitly says that this is because "Malfoy had always been able to get away with anything in Snape's classes; Snape was head of Slytherin House, and generality favored his own students above all others" (123). This quote shows that his favoritism is not something that is up for interpretation but rather something he explicitly does. In addition to this example, Snape's favoritism of the Slytherins can be seen in *Harry Potter and the*

*Order of the Phoenix* when Snape gives Harry a zero for the day because his potion was not good enough but lets Goyle<sup>13</sup> turn his in despite it being much worse than Harry's (Rowling 235). These examples show Snape's extreme favoritism of the Slytherins because he gives them special privileges he does not give anyone else. Snape is known as being one of the most severe and strict Hogwarts professors, so it is very unlike him to allow someone to turn in unsatisfactory work or come into class late. He only gives these special affordances to those in Slytherin and no one else.

Like Dumbledore, this favoritism is a villainous, or at the very least unsavory, characteristic because it is motivated by selfish reasons. As Dumbledore favors the Gryffindors because he was in that house, Snape favors the Slytherins because it is his house. He also fails to empathize with students that are not in his own house, which is evident in how he punishes Harry for having a less than perfect potion but accepts Goyle's potion that caught his robes on fire (235). Moreover, I argue that Snape's favoritism is worse than Dumbledore's because he takes it a step further and punishes those, particularly the Gryffindors, for not being in Slytherin. This would be very disheartening to these students because they know that no matter how hard they try, they will be treated differently for not being in Slytherin. What is more is that the students certainly interact with Snape more than Dumbledore because they have Potions class several times a week, thus putting them in jeopardy of being punished for not being sorted into Slytherin anytime they enter his classroom. Finally, when the students receive career advice in their fifth year, we learn that certain professions require a N.E.W.T.<sup>14</sup> in

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory Goyle is one of Draco's best friends and a fellow member of Slytherin house.

<sup>14</sup> In the fifth year, students take O.W.L exams, or Ordinary Wizarding Level exams. These exams determine what classes they can continue in the sixth and seventh year and eventually take the N.E.W.T.

particular classes, such as needing Potions to become an Auror. Snape only accepts students who get an Outstanding grade<sup>15</sup> on their O.W.L. exam into N.E.W.T. level Potions classes (663), so students would need to do very well in the Potions classes throughout school to then perform highly on the exam. Because Snape favors the Slytherins over the other houses and gives them special affordances, they would automatically be more prepared for the exams and thus, have higher chances at securing good jobs for themselves after Hogwarts. All these reasons combine to show that this favoritism is a villainous attribute because it causes potential harm to students and their futures. Teachers, like Snape, should be preparing students for their futures, not sabotaging them based on their own selfish motivations.

Along with Snape's favoritism of the Slytherins, he harbors grudges and hatred for certain students, such as Neville Longbottom, which causes him to bully them. Throughout the books, Neville struggles with a lack of self-confidence, making him an easy target for Snape's seemingly baseless bullying early in the series. From the very first books in the series, Snape targets and harasses Neville many times. For example, Neville makes a mistake in Potions class in first year, and Snape yells, "Idiot boy!" in front of the entire class (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 139). It is not uncommon to make mistakes when you learn a new skill, especially when you are so new at something like Neville would have been in the first year. Yet, Snape still calls him an idiot in front of everyone rather than providing constructive feedback, showing how he bullies the students he dislikes. Additionally, in the third book, Snape tries to poison Neville's toad, Trevor. In Potions

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exams in. Passing the N.E.W.T. exam for a particular subject is like graduating with proficiency in that subject and would thus enable them to get certain jobs that require a N.E.W.T. in particular classes.

<sup>15</sup> Hogwarts operates on a made-up grading scale. Outstanding (O) is the highest, followed by Exceeds Expectations (E), Acceptable (A), Poor (P), Dreadful (D), and Troll (T).

class, Neville has once again messed up because as Rowling writes, “Neville regularly went to pieces in Potions lessons; it was his worst subject, and his great fear of Professor Snape made things ten times worse.” To teach Neville to read directions carefully, Snape says they will feed Neville’s Shrinking Solution<sup>16</sup> to Trevor and if he has failed to save the potion, he will be poisoned (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 125). With the help of Hermione, Neville salvages the potion so that when Snape feeds Trevor the Shrinking Solution, he turns into a tadpole. Rather than rewarding Neville for succeeding in a subject that is difficult for him, Snape takes points from Gryffindor because he told Hermione not to help him (128). A little later in this same chapter, we learn that Snape is Neville’s biggest fear, with his Boggart<sup>17</sup> turning into Snape (135). This shows the true impact of Snape’s seemingly baseless bullying and harassment of Neville because more than monsters and Lord Voldemort, like the other students fear, the Boggart turns into a teacher who is supposed to be there to teach and nurture him.

This bullying, while seemingly for no reason, is discovered to have an underlying motivation in the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. When Dumbledore explains the prophecy about Harry and Voldemort, he says that the prophecy spoke of a boy born at the end of the summer with parents that had defied Voldemort three times, but never explicitly says Harry himself. Thus, the prophecy could indicate anyone who met those criteria, and there were two people who did: Harry and Neville. Dumbledore explains that Voldemort had to mark the boy as his equal, and he chose Harry because he saw him as the biggest threat (Rowling 842). I argue that Snape’s

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<sup>16</sup> This is a potion that when one drinks it, makes them shrink. If it is brewed incorrectly, it can be poisonous.

<sup>17</sup> A Boggart is a shape shifter that lives in dark spaces, like closets or drawers. No one knows what a Boggart’s true form is, because it turns into the person standing in front of its biggest fear.

hatred for Neville is motivated by his love for Lily and he blames Neville for Lily's death, which causes him to have a deep loathing for the boy. Every time he looks at Neville, he is reminded that Lily could be alive if Neville was the boy of the prophecy. When readers witness Dumbledore and Snape's conversation where Snape begs Dumbledore to save Lily, Dumbledore tells him that the prophecy only refers to a boy born at the end of July (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 677), meaning that Snape would know that there was another option: Neville. Thus, it makes sense that when Neville arrives at Hogwarts, especially because his arrival coincides with Harry's, all the wounds and grief surrounding Lily would reopen for Snape.

Although readers can understand Snape's reasoning for torturing Neville, that certainly does not make it right. It would be impossible to include every moment of Harry's life in the books, so it is safe to say there are likely instances of Snape bullying Neville that readers are not even aware of. Because Neville is around Snape so often, and he bullies him pretty much every time he sees him, it can be inferred that Neville's low self-esteem is at least, in part, attributed to Snape constantly putting him down. Young children are very impressionable, so it would be difficult for Neville to endure Snape's bullying and not have low self-esteem. In addition to that, Neville's fear of Snape is why he performs so poorly in potions (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, 125), showing the emotional impact of his bullying. As the Slytherins have a higher chance of succeeding in Potions, Neville has a much lower likelihood of succeeding in the class, and we know that he performs poorly on his O.W.L. exam, which does not allow him to continue into the next year of Potions (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 173-174). Because of this, many careers are ruled out for Neville, regardless of if he wanted to pursue them or not. Thus,

Snape's bullying of Neville, regardless of his motions, is villainous because due to his selfish love of Lily, he torments a child to the point that he negatively impacts his prospects and self-worth.

In addition to Neville, Harry himself is the student who receives the most of Snape's bullying and hatred. For example, when Snape teaches Harry Occlumency in the fifth year, he repeatedly insults his intelligence. When explaining Occlumency, Snape says, "You have no subtlety, Potter. You do not understand fine distinctions. It is one of the shortcomings that make you such a lamentable potion-maker" and "The mind is a complex and many layered thing, Potter ... or at least most minds are" (530). In this interaction, Snape both mocks Harry's skills as a potions-maker and his intelligence, insinuating that his mind is not complex and calling him simple-minded. This shows Snape's hatred of Harry because in this teachable moment, he cannot simply explain Occlumency to Harry without insulting him. As his professor, Snape should be nurturing Harry's mind and ensuring that he continues to grow academically, but because of his grudge against James and the Marauders, he fails in his duty as Harry's teacher.

In addition to when Snape directly bullies Harry to his face, there are also many instances of Snape insulting him behind his back. One example of this is when talking to Bellatrix and Narcissa, Snape says about Harry:

Of course, it became apparent to me very quickly that he had no extraordinary talent at all. He has fought his way out of a number of tight corners by a simple combination of sheer luck and more talented friends. He is mediocre to the last degree, though as obnoxious and self-satisfied as was his father before him. I have



done my utmost to have him thrown out of Hogwarts, where I believe he scarcely belongs. (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 31)

This passage shows Snape's hatred of Harry very well because even when he is not around, Snape continues to put him down and insult him. Also, this moment again shows that Snape's hatred of Harry is tied to James, because he says they share the same bad qualities, like being obnoxious. Because Harry is not around, he cannot defend himself, showing that Snape does not only say bad things about Harry to get a rise out of him, but because he truly hates him and does not care who knows. In addition to this moment, when Harry watches Snape's memories in the Pensieve, he sees moments where Snape discusses his distaste for Harry with Dumbledore during Harry's first year. Snape describes Harry as "mediocre, arrogant as his father, a determined rule breaker, delighted to find himself famous, attention-seeking and impertinent" and Dumbledore replies, "You see what you expect to see, Severus" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 679). This interaction indicates that while Harry is similar to James, Snape cannot look past his hatred of James to see that Harry may not be entirely like the man who bullied him, as Dumbledore shows in his reply. These moments where Snape insults Harry to others shows that his hatred is so intense and so unwavering that he seems to discuss Harry's faults with anyone who will listen.

Even though Snape, in his mind, has many reasons for hating and bullying Harry, these moments still showcase his villainous side because these justifications are based on his selfish hatred of James and the Marauders and his love for Lily. Despite the passage of time, Snape cannot let go of the grudge against James and the Marauders for bullying him and tormenting him at school. Dumbledore confirms this by saying: "I forgot that

some wounds run too deep for the healing. I thought Professor Snape could overcome his feelings about your father — I was wrong” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 833). This quote demonstrates that Snape has not gotten over the Marauders bullying him and takes out this frustration on Harry as retribution for how James mistreated him. Moreover, much like Neville, Harry likely serves as a reminder of Lily and her untimely death. While Harry looks strikingly like James, he also has Lily’s green eyes, which is why Snape tells him to look at him when he dies (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 658). Because of this resemblance, it can be inferred that when Snape looks into Harry’s eyes, he is reminded of Lily, which causes his grief to resurface. Regardless of this reasoning, these are still selfish reasons to hate Harry because Snape lets his own personal grudges and grief cloud his judgment when it comes to Harry, and he never truly gave him a chance to prove himself to him. While Snape’s bullying does not affect Harry in the same way it does Neville, it is still detrimental to Harry. Like Neville, Harry does not perform as well in Potions as he could and barely scrapes by on his Potions O.W.L. (Rowling, *Half Blood Prince*, 175), which is likely because of Snape’s constant harassment and criticism. Instead of teaching the students and doing what he can to ensure they succeed, he seems to make it his mission that they fail because of his selfish grudges and love for Lily, further proving that these actions make him villainous by my definition.

In addition to Snape’s treatment of students, another villainous thing Snape does is contribute to Sirius’ death by stopping Harry’s Occlumency lessons in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Following Harry seeing the Marauders bullying Snape in the Pensieve, Snape tells him that he will never teach him the subject again (672). Since he refuses to teach Harry, Harry gets no further practice shutting off his mind, leading to

Voldemort manipulating the connection between them and sending him the false vision of Sirius being tortured at the Ministry (782). This causes Harry to believe the vision and rush to the Ministry, which then causes Sirius to go to the Ministry and meet his death there. This situation is an example of a butterfly effect<sup>18</sup> in the series, where Snape's stopping of the lessons led to Sirius' death because had he continued the lessons, Harry would have a greater chance of shutting off his mind and therefore preventing anyone from going to the Ministry in the first place. Stopping the Occlumency lessons is motivated by selfish reasons, so this example would be considered villainous by my definition. Snape again lets his grudge against the Marauders cloud his judgment, which inadvertently contributes to Sirius' death. Aside from the fact that Sirius is torn from his loved ones, this is very bad for the Order because his home served as the headquarters, he is one of the few people who knows the truth about Peter Pettigrew, and he is one of Dumbledore's most trusted soldiers. Therefore, Snape stopping the lessons is villainous and has a major negative impact on the rest of the series.

Finally, the clearest examples of Snape's villainous actions come from his time spent as a Death Eater. To be a Death Eater, one must be trusted by Lord Voldemort and be one of the closest members of his circle. Because of this, it can be inferred that Snape had to do some nefarious deeds to be a member of the Death Eaters. For example, although he may no longer prescribe to these beliefs, Snape bought into the blood purity manifesto of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. When Snape first interacts with Lily and Petunia, he tells Petunia he would not want to spy on her because she is a Muggle (665). This is the first indication of Snape being a blood purist because he uses Petunia's status

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<sup>18</sup> The butterfly effect is a theory that a small decision can have much larger outcomes.

as a Muggle in a negative way, and then hesitates when Lily asks him if it makes any difference that she is a Muggle-born (666). This hesitation is likely due to the fact that Snape does think it makes a difference but makes an exception because it is Lily.

As the years progress, Snape's blood purity becomes more evident. In their fifth year, he calls Lily a filthy Mudblood in his embarrassment and anger over being bullied by the Marauders (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix*, 648). Up until this point, Snape has likely considered Lily to be an exception to his derogatory views about Muggles and Muggle-borns because of his feelings for her. However, in this moment Snape's true feelings come out, showing that he does prescribe to these blood purist views. Following this insult, Lily ends her friendship with Snape, saying, "You call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 676). This interaction furthers the assertion that Snape considered Lily an exception to the blood purity he believed in, since he called other Muggle-borns Mudbloods. Thus, it is evident that in the period before Snape was a Death Eater and during his time as one, he was closed-minded and bought into bigotry.

One of the worst things Snape did in his time as a Death Eater and even after was claiming to love Lily, but not caring about her husband and son. When Snape goes to Dumbledore begging him to save Lily, Dumbledore asks why Snape would not ask his master, Voldemort, to save Lily in exchange for killing Harry and James. Snape says he tried, to which Dumbledore questions, "You do not care, then, about the deaths of her husband and child? They can die, as long as you have what you want?" (677). Because Dumbledore would not be willing to protect only Lily, Snape relents, begging Dumbledore to "hide them all" (678). Here, Snape's selfishness shows because he says

he loves Lily, yet clearly does not value her happiness as he is willing to sacrifice her son and husband for her to live. In addition to this, it has been established that Snape relentlessly bullies Harry all throughout the series, again showing that he says he loves Lily, but does nothing to ensure Harry is happy and cared for. Moreover, when Snape finds out Harry must die, Dumbledore notes that he seems upset and asks if he has grown to care for Harry. Snape, disgusted at the thought of caring for Harry, casts his doe Patronus,<sup>19</sup> and when Dumbledore asks if he still loves Lily after all this time, Snape says, “Always” (687). This moment shows that even after all the years of protecting Harry, he did not do it because he cared for the boy that was half Lily. He only did it because of his love and obsession over Lily, which is problematic because if he did truly love her, he should have cared for her son’s wellbeing rather than doing the bare minimum simply to keep him alive and breathing.

Thus, Snape did eventually turn to the right side, but he still did many questionable things during his time as a Death Eater, like believing in blood purity and trying to trade Harry and James’ lives for Lily, that somewhat carried over into his time as a spy. These things are extremely selfish of him because if he truly did love Lily, he would see her brilliance and know that Muggle-borns are just as good as Pure-bloods, thus never turning to the Death Eater cause. There are many possible explanations of why Snape became a Death Eater, but none of them are motivated by selflessness or moral virtue. Additionally, Snape constantly put down Harry while he was at Hogwarts and even tried to sacrifice him and James to keep Lily all to himself. This is arguably the most glaring example of his selfish, villainous habits because he was willing to kill

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<sup>19</sup> Snape’s Patronus being a doe is significant because Lily’s was a doe, signifying his love for her.

innocents that Lily loved to try to keep her for himself. This shows that while Snape may have truly believed he loved Lily, he did not entirely see her as a person and was more so obsessed with the thought of her and failed to consider her own happiness. Lily never would have been happy with Snape, especially knowing that he is a part of the cause that cost her the lives of her son and husband. Snape does not consider this, thus demonstrating his selfish and villainous attributes because he thought only of himself in these moments.

### **Snape as a Hero**

Snape as a character is incredibly complex, and although his villainous deeds in the story are more numerous and apparent, he also does many things that meet my definition of hero as someone motivated by moral virtue. First of all, Dumbledore asks Snape to kill him, and Snape is troubled by this for many reasons. Dumbledore tells him that he wants Snape to complete the task because he wants to preserve Draco's innocence and soul, and Snape asks, "And my soul, Dumbledore? Mine?" (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 683). This quotation shows that there is still good inside Snape because he worries about his soul, and as evidenced by Voldemort, villains do not care about their souls or how pure they are. This worry juxtaposes Snape and Voldemort, because Voldemort has the smallest regard for his soul, seeing as he split it seven times. On the other hand, Snape, someone who many readers still consider a villain after everything he did, worries about his soul and what killing someone, especially someone he cares about, will do. This comparison shows that Snape is not a villain, as he cares about his soul, unlike the true villain of the series. While he may have committed several villainous actions, he still cares about the implications of doing bad things in the world.

On top of this idea, Snape protects many other characters throughout the books. For example, he protects Draco in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. He follows Draco closely in this sixth installment, offering help to him, which Draco refuses, numerous times. He also asks Draco several times what he is doing (Rowling 323), and had Draco told him, Dumbledore and Snape could have protected him and his mother from Voldemort, preventing Draco from journeying further down the Death Eater path he had already begun. In addition to Draco, Snape protected Lupin and saved his life in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. When the Death Eaters pursue the decoy Harrys<sup>20</sup>, the Order members, and Harry himself, Snape stops a Death Eater from killing Lupin. The text reads: “A Death Eater moved ahead of Snape and raised his wand, pointing it directly at Lupin’s back — ‘*Sectumsempra!*’<sup>21</sup> shouted Snape. But the spell, intended for the Death Eater’s wand hand, missed and hit George<sup>22</sup> instead” (Rowling 688). This moment reveals Snape’s heroic nature because he could have exposed himself by pointing the spell at the Death Eater’s hand, showing that he is still ultimately loyal to the Order’s cause. It is almost as if protecting Lupin and the Order members was Snape’s first reaction, as he chose to protect Lupin and save his life rather than keeping up the facade of himself being a Death Eater. Moreover, this scene shows that while Snape’s grudge against the Marauders certainly eats away at him, he still puts it aside during certain acts of heroism.

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<sup>20</sup> When the Order of the Phoenix transports Harry from the Dursleys’ to Ron’s house on the eve of his seventeenth birthday, they use “decoy” Harry’s, or six others disguised as Harry to confuse the Death Eaters and make Harry himself less of a target. The six people take Polyjuice Potion, thus transforming their physical selves into Harry.

<sup>21</sup> This is a spell created by Snape. It causes the target to have one or multiple cuts that bleed severely.

<sup>22</sup> Because the spell hit George, his right ear was cut off. Otherwise, he was fine.

In addition to Draco and Lupin, the most important character Snape protects is Harry. There are several times that, despite Snape's grudge against the Marauders, he still chooses to protect Lily's son. For example, when Professor Umbridge is on her reign of terror following Dumbledore's expulsion from Hogwarts in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, she uses Veritaserum<sup>23</sup>, made by Snape, to question students she deems as suspicious. At one point in the book, she questions Harry about Sirius' whereabouts using the potion (Rowling 631), and Dumbledore later informs Harry that Snape gave Umbridge fake Veritaserum so that she could not find out the truth about Sirius and as a result, Harry's association with an alleged escaped convict and mass murderer (832-833). Dumbledore was gone from Hogwarts, so Snape should have obeyed the new headmaster, Umbridge, but instead, chose to protect Harry, showing that at least on some level, he cared what happened to Harry.

Also, Snape protects Harry in several ways at the end of *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* when Harry confronts him about killing Dumbledore. Harry is very upset about Snape killing Dumbledore, so he fires spell after spell at Snape as he, along with other Death Eaters, flee Hogwarts. Instead of fighting back against Harry, Snape just deflects the numerous spells, causing Harry no real harm (Rowling 602-603). Even though he hates Harry, Snape still chooses to ultimately protect him from harm, which again shows that he can put his grudges aside for the right reasons. On top of deflecting the spells, Snape subtly reminds Harry of the importance of Occlumency against Voldemort, telling him: "Blocked again and again until you learn to keep your mouth shut and your mind closed, Potter!" (603). To everyone else, Snape's words appear as

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<sup>23</sup> Veritaserum is a very powerful truth-telling potion which causes the drinker to uncontrollably spill their secrets.



simple insults towards Harry, but his words serve as a reminder and warning to Harry about the dangers of Voldemort being able to enter Harry's mind, especially now that Snape and Dumbledore will not be around to teach him further Occlumency. Finally, Snape stops Bellatrix from torturing Harry with the Cruciatus curse under the guise that he should be left for Voldemort (603). This reasoning allows Snape to skillfully keep up his disguise as Death Eater while also protecting Harry from further harm. Thus, these two examples, which are only a small piece of the numerous times Snape protects Harry, show him as a hero because he puts his selfish grudges aside and does the morally right thing: protecting Harry. Instead of doing what is easy in letting his hatred guide him, Snape is the bigger person and prioritizes doing the right thing over the easy thing, cementing these actions as heroic in nature.

Continuing, the most obviously heroic thing about Snape is that he is a loyal character, and he stays loyal to Dumbledore until his last breath, constantly doing what is right. Snape tells us as much in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* when Harry watches his collection of memories. Snape tells Dumbledore: "I have spied for you and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you" (Rowling 687). This quote indicates that all along, everything Snape did was for Dumbledore and thus, the fight against Voldemort. This information shows that, although many of Snape's actions may appear as evil upon first glance, when looking deeper, one can see that like Dumbledore, everything he did was for the greater good.

Along these same lines, Snape is loyal to Dumbledore even after the old man has died. For example, when reading the books for the first time, it seems that Snape being the headmaster at Hogwarts after Dumbledore's death is so that Snape, a Death Eater, can

continue Voldemort's reign of terror at the school. However, Dumbledore tells Snape before he dies that when he becomes headmaster and Voldemort truly believes the school is in his grasp, he must do everything he can to protect the students (682). After Dumbledore dies, Snape could have chosen to do what would best benefit him, which he may have believed was reassuming his Death Eater role to save his own skin now that Dumbledore has died and Harry is missing. Instead, Snape plays his double agent role well, making Voldemort believe he is doing his bidding but in actuality, he is protecting the students per Dumbledore's orders. Even though it may have been easy to become the villain once more, Snape continues down the path of bravery and heroism. It is evident that he follows Dumbledore's wishes and protects the students to the best of his ability because when Neville, Luna, and Ginny attempt to steal the Sword of Gryffindor from Snape's office, Snape punishes them by giving them detention with Hagrid (302). Knowing how kindhearted and passive Hagrid is, this is hardly a punishment for the students, and Snape could have punished them severely, as breaking into the headmaster's office is no small feat. Instead, he shows his loyalty by staying true to Dumbledore and protecting the students.

Moreover, in "The Prince's Tale" chapter, it is revealed that after Snape kills Dumbledore, the two of them communicate through Dumbledore's portrait in the Headmaster's office. This communication allows Dumbledore to continue giving Snape instructions after his death and for Snape to continue showing his unwavering loyalty. For example, Dumbledore, via the portrait, carefully instructs Snape to Confund<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Confundus charm, or "Confunding" someone, confuses and misdirects the target's thoughts.

Mundungus Fletcher<sup>25</sup> to plant the idea of using decoys to deliver Harry to safety, which would both protect Harry and conceal Snape's true allegiance (688). Additionally, by talking to Dumbledore, Snape provides Harry, Ron, and Hermione a way to destroy the Horcruxes. When Harry and Hermione are camping one night, Harry sees a doe Patronus and follows it to a small lake where at the bottom, the Sword of Gryffindor rests (367). Having the Sword allows them to have a way to finally destroy the Horcruxes, which is something they have been searching for for months. The three of them are confused about who sent the doe until later, it is revealed that Snape sent the Patronus and Sword because of Dumbledore's instructions (689-690). Thus, these examples show that Snape easily could have turned coat and assumed his full role as a Death Eater because Dumbledore was no longer around. While he could talk to his portrait, Dumbledore was not physically there so Snape had no one to truly answer to. Because of this, Snape fits my definition of hero in these instances because he does not take the easy way out to save his own skin, but rather stays true to his word and to Dumbledore until the very end.

Despite these many heroic actions and motivations, Snape cannot be entirely classified as a hero. Much like Dumbledore, Snape is a deeply flawed and ambiguous character, constantly making mistakes in the books because of his personal feelings and grudges. Often, Snape is blinded by his past and cannot see the good in people like Harry or Sirius. Because of this, he is cruel, vindictive, and sadistic, seemingly getting pleasure from humiliating and bringing down others like Neville or Harry. Still, Snape is often able to put those feelings aside and still do what is right in the end, making classifying

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<sup>25</sup> Mundungus Fletcher is a member of the Order of the Phoenix who Dumbledore recruited because he wanted someone who was a murkier character to have eyes and ears on the happenings of the seedy side of the Wizarding World.

him as a hero or villain complicated. Due to this amalgamation of both heroic and villainous traits, it is impossible to simply classify Snape as a hero or villain, much like Dumbledore. This thinking is supported by Forster's theory because as he says, Snape is not "flat" as in he is not simply the evil supervillain, but much more complicated than that. He is "round" or motivated by many different things and changes many times throughout the story, constantly keeping the audience guessing. Along those same lines, I again push back against Propp's theory in relation to the Harry Potter series because many of the characters in the story cannot fit perfectly into his different character molds and would have to be classified as several different roles.

Because of these reasons, I cannot simply classify him as hero or villain. Doing so would be a disservice to the complexity and intricate nature of his character. Snape is difficult to dissect, which makes him all the more interesting. Like real people in everyday life, he makes mistakes, but ultimately tries to do the right thing. Snape serves as a foil to Dumbledore because while Dumbledore often does the wrong things for the right reasons, Snape often does the right things for the wrong reasons. It is easy to dismiss Snape as a villain who may have tried, but ultimately failed in redeeming himself. However, using my arguments and analysis laid out in this chapter, it is evident that Snape cannot be dismissed as a villain, and is instead part hero and part villain, demonstrating the complexity of the human condition.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

While Dumbledore and Snape from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series are often regarded as strictly heroic or villainous, this thesis has made it clear that the two of them cannot simply fit into those binary definitions. On one hand, Harry and Voldemort fill the formulaic model of hero versus villain with little movement on the spectrum of morality. However, the characters within the Harry Potter series do not all simply fulfill these types of roles, and many of them are incredibly complex, such as Dumbledore and Snape. Throughout the series, the two of them strive for the greater good, but their methods are not always the best. Dumbledore is consistently presented as a morally golden man, especially in the first few books of the series. As the books continue, however, his more ambiguous nature is revealed through actions like using other characters as pawns, raising Harry for slaughter, and allowing children to carry out dangerous missions on his behalf. Snape, on the other hand, is presented as an antagonistic bully whose allegiance is constantly questioned throughout the books. As the series draws to a close, however, his more heroic deeds come to light, like protecting others, staying loyal to Dumbledore, and fighting for the right side. These two men are incredibly similar in the sense that they want to do the right thing, but often get tangled up in their murky reasonings and questionable methods. They are also different in the sense that Dumbledore seems to strive for the greater good, but is the one with questionable methods, like raising Harry to die for the betterment of everyone else, while Snape often does many of the right things for the wrong reasons, such as turning to the right side solely based on his love for Lily.

The primary question of this thesis is how the two men fit into the definitions of "hero" and how they fit into the definitions of "villain." From the literary analysis

presented, it is evident that the two of them cannot fit solely into either box. According to Forster's definitions of flat and round characters, the two of them are obviously round characters as they constantly change and evolve throughout the story. Because of this changing nature of the two of them, I push back on Propp's theory of the character types, and I do not believe Dumbledore or Snape fit into his ideas of heroes and villains. While his theory applies to folktales discussed in his book and certain characters like Harry as the hero or Voldemort as the villain do fit into his different character spheres, it does not work for complex and many layered characters like Dumbledore and Snape. Rather, I argue that the idea of hero and villain should be thought of as a spectrum, with someone like Harry representing moral purity at one end and someone like Voldemort representing the darkest sides of human nature on the other. According to this idea, Dumbledore and Snape, when analyzing their choices and motivations as I have done in this thesis, would fall somewhere in the middle area rather than be situated at either end. This idea is incredibly important because it is much closer to how we exist in our real world.

By examining these two characters, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel's study, they found that when a character does something immoral, people are more likely to be forgiving of those actions if the outcomes are positive or neutral (194). As for Dumbledore, these findings are important because many view him as the perfect man, with Rowling herself stating: "People wanted Dumbledore to be perfect. He's deeply flawed. But to me, he is an exemplar of goodness. He did wrong. He learnt. He grew wise. But he must make the difficult decisions that people in the real world have to make. Very difficult decisions" ("J.K. Rowling Talks about Dumbledore and Snape"). Most of Dumbledore's difficult

decisions, like keeping secrets from Harry, raising him to die against Voldemort, and manipulating Snape, do have positive outcomes. Harry figures everything out when he needs to, he lives and defeats Voldemort, and Snape, while he does die, redeems himself in the minds of Harry and readers alike at the end of the story. Thus, people are very forgiving of Dumbledore, because as supported by Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel, the outcomes are mostly positive even if his actions are immoral. Similarly, Rowling says about Snape: “He can be mean, he can be sadistic, he’s bitter. But he is courageous ... without him, disaster would have occurred ... people can be deeply flawed. People can make mistakes. People can do bad things ... And they can be capable of greatness” (“J.K. Rowling Talks about Dumbledore and Snape”). As Rowling says, Snape does many bad things in the books, yet that does not make him entirely bad, because he does do many things that have positive outcomes. As she says, without Snape, Harry likely would not have succeeded on his mission, as he gave him important guidance and help on his quest against Voldemort. Thus, Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel’s research demonstrates the importance of this research because by reading about these two characters whose questionable actions often have positive outcomes, people can be more accepting of themselves and others.

Because people are more forgiving of Dumbledore and Snape’s fictional actions, they are more likely to forgive themselves for not being perfect. According to Michael Slater and colleagues, stories and characters within them can “expand human sympathies.” They argue that if we really connect with a character or a story, we may try to be more like that character or see bits of ourselves in that character (450-451). This research demonstrates that if one connects with a character or story, like Dumbledore and

Snape in the Harry Potter series, they see bits of themselves in them and vice versa. Because of this close connection of the character with oneself, I argue that Dumbledore and Snape's characterization causes people to be more forgiving of themselves. If they can forgive Dumbledore for raising Harry to die or Snape for stopping Occlumency lessons because their actions mostly have positive outcomes, then they can forgive and understand themselves as not perfect beings. This is because of the relatability of Dumbledore and Snape in an immersive and engaging story.

On top of these ideas, Dumbledore and Snape's moral ambiguity helps people see and understand the positions of others as imperfect people. Loris Vezali and fellow researchers found that when people become very immersed in a story and try to work out the feelings and actions of fictional characters, that translates to real life and they become better at understanding others. The researchers conducted three studies, one of elementary school children, one of high school children, and one of university students, to see if reading the Harry Potter series improved empathy and understanding towards others (105). They found that when identifying with main characters in the story, such as Dumbledore and Snape, these young readers were more likely to empathize with and see the positions of stigmatized groups in real life (115). Even though this study focuses specifically on seeing the perspectives of minority groups, it still proves that identifying with characters like Dumbledore increases your acceptance and empathy of others' perspectives. Because of that, Dumbledore and Snape are beneficial for readers, especially the young adult audience of the book series, because they show that not all people are perfect and that the world is not simply divided into good and bad. Like Dumbledore and Snape, the world is full of people who must make tough decisions and



by reading the Harry Potter series and considering the actions and motivations of characters like Dumbledore and Snape discussed in this research, young readers can accept both themselves and others as who they are. As discussed previously, I classify this series as young adult literature, so this study is of particular importance since it proves the positive outcomes of characters like Dumbledore and Snape on the young adult audience.

While this thesis focuses specifically on the Harry Potter series, this research can be applied to other young adult series to further demonstrate the importance of morally ambiguous characters as well as gain a broader idea of their representation in the genre. For example, this work could be applied to Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series or the *Shadow and Bone* series by Leigh Bardugo to gain a broader understanding of the different types of morally gray characters represented in young adult fiction. I conclude that these types of characters are the most realistic and important to study because they most accurately represent the spectrum of the human condition. Readers are more easily able to relate to someone like Snape who lets his feelings and past grudges cloud his judgment or someone like Dumbledore who regrets choices made in his youth than someone seen as entirely perfect like Harry. While we all may like to think that we would lay down our lives for the betterment of humankind like Harry did with no questions, we are far more likely to be flawed and imperfect like Dumbledore and Snape. Because of that, these morally gray characters are much more complex and as a result, require deeper consideration and analysis than a perfect hero who makes all the right choices, but is not representative of the human condition.

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