

Lessons About Character, Ethics and Values Embodied in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

There's a lot to learn about character, ethics and values from stories like *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* but, like real life experiences, the lessons are best learned when we take some time to reflect and discuss the events and choices that shape and reveal values and character.

We learn more when we ask questions like: 1) What factors influenced the most important choices of the main characters? 2) Were the consequences of their choices what they wanted? 3) Could they have made different choices that would have created better results?

This guide can be used for self-study or as the basis of a discussion with others who have read the book. You'll get the most out of it if you write out your answers before discussing them.

I. Everyone can and should learn from life experiences. What important life lessons that should help the character in the future were learned or should have been learned by:

A. Harry

B. Dumbledore

C. Doris Umbridge

D. Cornelius Fudge

II. Throughout the book, Harry became angry and sullen and often failed to control his anger. Make a list of all the times you remember where Harry's anger got him into trouble or was unfair to someone who was on his side.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

A. Is there anything Harry could or should have done to better control his temper or is it impossible to do so?

B. What could have changed if Harry had more consistently exercised self-control and overcome his anger?

III. Despite the urging of Dumbledore and Sirius and the reminders of Hermione, Harry refused to practice or learn Occlumency.

A. Why do you think this was so?

B. What would or could have been different if he had exercised the self-discipline to learn Occlumency?

C. Do you know anyone who seems unwilling to exercise self-control or self-discipline? How has this affected his or her life?

D. Are there any areas where your life could be better if you exercised more self-control or self-discipline?

IV. After Harry learned certain unpleasant facts about his father and Snape, he resisted Hermione's pleas and decided to break into Umbridge's office so he could talk to Sirius about his father -- even though he knew it could result in expulsion, embarrass McGonagall who had just stood up for him, endanger Sirius, and undermine the mission of the order of the Phoenix.

A. Why did he do this?

B. Was it responsible?

C. Was it essential that he have his answers the moment he wanted them?

D. Is it reasonable to expect anyone to resist these sorts of powerful urges?

V. Was Harry fair in his anger at Dumbledore for ignoring him, not knowing that Dumbledore had good reasons for doing so? What could Dumbledore have done to reduce Harry's feeling of abandonment and betrayal?

VI. Should Harry have resisted the temptation to invade Snape's privacy by reading his thoughts in the pensieve?

A. Was this a very big violation of respect or a little one?

B. Did Snape have a right to feel so angry at what Harry did?

C. If Snape had done the same thing to Harry, would your opinion be any different?

D. Was it proper for Snape to stop teaching Occlumency to Harry after Harry read his thoughts in the pensieve? Why or why not?

VII. What might have changed if Ron and Fred had responded differently to the Slytherins' taunting?

VII. There were many examples in the book where individuals were treated unfairly, unkindly or disrespectfully by others including the one's listed below.

A. What overall lessons could be learned from the treatment of:

1. Harry by the Dursleys?
2. Kreacher by Sirius?
3. Snape by Harry's dad?
4. Luna by her classmates?
5. Ron by Malfoy and the Slytherin House?
6. Grawp by Hagrid?
7. Harry by Snape?
8. Harry by Umbridge?
9. Harry by Dumbledore?
10. Firenze by the other centaurs?
11. Mudbloods, half-breeds, nonhuman creatures (like centaurs) and house elves by Sirius's mother, Umbridge, the Malfoys and others?

B. Have you ever been treated unfairly, unkindly or disrespectfully by others? How did it feel?

C. Have you ever joined in with others to treat someone in an unkind or disrespectful way?

D. Since Voldemort is not a pure blood wizard himself, why does he promote or allow hatred for everyone who is not a pure blood?

E. The Malfoys, Umbridge and others could be said to have prejudiced or bigoted attitudes about mudbloods, half-breeds and nonhumans they thought they were superior to. Are there people in the real world today who have those kinds of attitudes about other groups? What's wrong with these sorts of attitudes?

VIII. Phineus Nigellus, the portrait of the old Slytherin headmaster, said to Dumbledore: "Never try to understand the students. They hate it. They would much rather be tragically misunderstood." (p.823) What do you think he meant by that? Is there any truth to this statement?

IX. Harry's relationship with Cho was constantly damaged by misunderstandings.

A. What did Hermione try to teach Harry and Ron about Cho and about the way some girls think about and deal with emotions? Do you think she is right?

B. Cho never asked Harry directly what his relationship with Hermione was. Why not? Should she have before she jumped to conclusions?

C. Why was Harry always so nervous around Cho? Are there any lessons about feelings and relationships you can learn from the way Harry dealt with his feelings for Cho?

X. Hogwarts has a system of granting and taking away points from each house for good performance or misconduct.

A. Did you see anything unfair in the way the point system was used, especially by the heads of one house against students in another?

B. Was there any system you could predict when and how many points could be deducted and added?

C. It often seemed unfair the way Umbridge and Snape deducted points from Gryffindor, but when McGonagall added a huge number of points back at the end of the book, was that any different? Why or why not?

D. What would be a fairer way of dealing with the point system?

XI. Trustworthiness involves not lying or deceiving, but it also involves forthrightness or candor (sincerity and openness, telling others what they have a right to know or should know).

A. There is a lot of lying, secrecy and trickery in the book. Some cases may have been more justified than others. Were the following examples consistent with the moral duty to be trustworthy? Why or why not?

1. Ron and Hermione not telling Harry everything they knew while Harry was at the Dursleys.
2. Hermione lying to Umbridge to lure her into the forest.
3. Harry lying to Umbridge about knowing where Sirius was.
4. Kreacher lying to Harry about whether Sirius was at the headquarters.
5. Dumbledore not telling Harry about the prophecy.
6. Dumbledore not telling (or having someone else tell) Harry about why he was ignoring him.
7. Dumbledore not telling (or having someone else tell) Harry about why it was important he learn Occlumency.
8. Sirius and others not telling Harry about the kind of person his dad was, at least at Hogwarts.
9. Voldemort not telling his followers that he was a not a pure blood wizard.
10. Were there times Harry should have revealed more to Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall? If so, why didn't he?

B. How important is trust? Why

- C. Who could Harry really trust?
- D. Could Harry's friends always trust him to:
 - 1. Try to help or save them?
 - 2. Tell them the whole truth?
 - 3. Be honest about his feelings?
 - 4. Treat them fairly and with respect?
- E. Who is the most trustworthy character in the book?