

HARRY POTTER LITERARY ORIGINS (Syllabus of Dr. Elizabethada A. Wright*)

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“JK Rowling has done English professors a great favor. She wants the Harry Potter books to be read many, many times by serious readers—she’s written stories with many layers.” — Dr. Liz Wright

Summary: Students will examine the *Harry Potter* series as literature. The class will analyze the novels’ surface, moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings. “In order to do all that, students need to understand the intertextuality Rowling is using,” says Wright. Rowling references other texts throughout her books, ranging from Greek mythology and *Alice in Wonderland* to Faust and *Fahrenheit 451*.

Required text: J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, *A Winter’s Tale* by William Shakespeare, *The Once and Future King* by E.B. White, *Emma* by Jane Austen.

In class: “JK Rowling has done English professors a great favor,” says Wright. “She wants the Harry Potter books to be read many, many times by serious readers—she’s written stories with many layers.” Students will discuss how their knowledge of other texts enhances their understanding of Harry Potter. For example, knowing that Rowling had named Hermione after a character in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Wright had certain expectations of the character.

The class will watch some videos, including portions of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the post-modern film *The Story of the Atomic Bomb*.

Wright says she also wants to make sure students can write well and speak well. In addition to the readings required for the whole class, each student will read another book and deliver a presentation outlining the book’s connections to Harry Potter. Reports may cover *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge, *The Wizard of Oz*, T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, and works by C.S. Lewis.

Wright may have the class develop a master character list and a chart correlating plot points to other works. “I want to whet students’ appetites for slow mining of texts—that’s the basis all of English literature studies,” Wright says. ■

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