

Magic Up Your Lesson!!

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Nowadays, if you ask people to give the name of a fictional character that comes first to their mind, “Harry Potter” will be the name you hear most.

This is not surprising. Harry Potter is the name of a boy wizard created by J.K. Rowling. He is an orphan who lives with his horrible aunt and uncle in Surrey, England. Then, one day he learns that he is actually the son of a great witch and wizard and goes to receive his magical education in the most famous school of wizardry, where he meets new friends and encounters numerous exciting adventures.

There are four books to date. The first of the series, “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” came out in 1997 and was followed by the second, “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,” and the third, “Harry Potter and the Prisoners of Azkaban.” The latest one, “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire,” came out in 2000 and holds the record as the fastest-selling book in history. In addition to these four books, there are also two small books published: “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them” and “Quidditch through the Ages” that are “read and used by Harry himself.” In total, over 110 million books have been sold. This proves the popularity of the Harry Potter series, not to mention several awards it has won. There is something magical about these books, something that makes people enjoy reading them. If everyone can read them, then the language cannot be too

difficult, and the story must be enchanting. Doesn’t this sound like an ideal piece of reading for an ESL/EFL classroom?

In fact, great books like these can be more than just something to develop your students’ reading skills. As I have said, the books contain magic. So here are some suggestions that are sure to magically improve several language skills as well as get your students hooked!

Suggested Pre-Reading Activities

The pre-reading stage is important. It prepares your students for the reading. A good activity will draw the students’ attention to the main task. Also, it helps the students with lower proficiency; it acts as a scaffold for the students, enabling them to read with more ease and confidence. There are many possibilities for the pre-reading stage.

Discussion

The first fact your students will learn about Harry Potter, our hero, is that he is a wizard. And for many people, words like witch, wizard and magic seem to have a negative connotation. Have your students take part in a little group discussion. Ask them to discuss whether magic is good or bad. And what about the people (in other words, witches and wizards) who use magic? Why are they good or why not? Then, let them vote. You might also tell them that Harry Potter books were once

banned in several States in the U.S.A. because of the witchcraft and wizardry content.

To make matters more complex and involve them more, you may ask the students to get more information on magic for homework. For example, they can watch movies where witchcraft and wizardry play an important role. Students who think magic is good can watch movies in which witchcraft is condemned, for example, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," "The Craft," "The Blair Witch Project," "Hansel and Gretel," etc. Students who think magic is bad can watch movies in which witchcraft is acceptable, for example, "Mary Poppins," "Practical Magic," "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," etc. At the end, let the students vote again.

Pre-Teaching

Now, let the students brainstorm all the words and phrases they know about magic. (You may also want to make sure that the class is talking about witchcraft and wizardry, not the literal "magic" of someone like David Copperfield.) Write the words on the board. If there is a student who does not know what a certain word means, ask the student who produces that word to explain it. You then know how much the students know and can estimate how difficult the students will find the Harry Potter Series.

Then, you may pre-teach certain words commonly found in Harry Potter that may be difficult for the students to understand, for example, "troll," "goblin," "cauldron," etc. Teach only words necessary for your activities, or else your students might get bored. If there are students who have read

the books, ask them to help you explain. Pictures would be of great help here.

You may also explain the origin of names found in Harry Potter, for example, "Hermione" (the daughter of Melenaus and Helen of Troy), "Minerva" (the goddess of wisdom), "Sirius" (the dog star), etc. so that the story will be more meaningful for the students. To know the origin of names will be fun even for students who have read the books.

Suggested During-Reading Activities

Of course, your students can just read the books. But here I have something for you to keep them busy even while reading. This will make the reading more meaningful. And you can make sure your students are not just reading the translated version!

◆ **British edition vs. American edition**

Many people know that Harry Potter books printed in U.S.A. have different covers from the original ones printed in the U.K. However, not many people know that the text is also a little different. Take advantage of this. You may have your students read both the British edition and American edition and take note of the differences they find, for instance, "football" and "soccer," "philosopher" and "sorcerer," etc. You can have the students discuss the differences later as well as discuss whether such changes are necessary. They could be asked who they think initiated the idea for the different edition: J.K Rowling herself or the American publishers; what might be the reasons; or whether the changes are justified?

◆ **Journals and letters**

In addition, your students can write journals after they finish each chapter, or whenever they feel like doing so. You can suggest some ideas if your students are new to journal writing and say they don't know what and when to write. For example, after Harry meets his new friends, some students may write how they would feel towards a "know-it-all" student like Hermione, how to deal with a bully like Draco Malfoy, etc. Also, they could write letters to someone in the story. For example, some students might want to tell Hagrid to be more careful when choosing a pet. The students can exchange the journals, or you can put the journals on a board for everyone to read.

Suggested Post-Reading Activities

As I usually teach English to undergraduate students in several fields, the activities suggested here are specially designed for these different fields. However, you can always pick the ones that your students will enjoy most. Moreover, plan your activity well and tell the students what you expect from them at each stage: a 200-word essay or a big project to be due at the end of the semester. By the way, since there are six books, it might be impossible for your students to read all of them at once. So here I give the name of the book needed for each activity as well.

◆ **Sports Science Specialists**

Quidditch, a most popular sport played on broomsticks, has both strengths and weaknesses. Students may discuss the rules and decide how they might change the rules to improve the game. For example, some students might not want men and women to

play on the same team; some students might want the athletes to use broomsticks of the same quality, etc. Then, the students can write up new rules for Quidditch and present their work to the class. Moreover, if the students want to, they can design a new sport to be played on broomsticks.

Book needed: "Quidditch through the Ages"

◆ **Architecture Specialists**

You may ask your students to draw Hogwarts Castle, the school Harry Potter goes to. They could do the floor plan of the whole school or just design the student common room or any interesting classroom such as for "Potion" or "Divination" classes. Students can also design the landscape of Hogsmead, the wizarding village; the Burrow, Ron's home, etc. The books do not describe these places in detail. So they will need to add details of their own. Have your students present their work to the class.

Books needed:

Book I for Hogwarts and Potion Class;

Book II for the Burrow; and

Book III for Hogsmead and Divination Class

◆ **Fine Arts Specialists**

Ask your students to draw characters as well as their costumes and wands and write a description of everything in detail, from hairstyles to the colors of the shoes, as well as explain why each character dresses so. Magical creatures would also be interesting to draw and describe in detail.

Books needed:

Any book can be used, but I strongly suggest

Book I and Book IV for characters.

*"Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them"
for magical creatures*

◆ **Medicine, Nursing, Pharmaceutical Science Specialists**

Ask your student to choose a potion they like and compare it to medicine they know. Describe the differences in ingredients, usage and effectiveness. Again, not everything is in the books, so your students will need to use their imagination.

Books needed: Any of the four books

◆ **Communication Arts Specialists**

Ask your students to demonstrate how Rita Skeeter's "Quick-Quotes Quill" works. The students could interview someone and transcribe the interview, then write how the quill might exaggerate the truth.

Books needed: Book IV

◆ **Engineering Specialists**

Tell your students to design the best ever broomstick or wand and present it to the class. Make sure they have interesting details; for example, wood that does not need polishing, etc.

Books needed: "Quidditch through the Ages" for broomsticks and Book IV for wands

◆ **Marketing, Advertising Specialists**

There are many ideas for students to create a marketing or advertising plan, from candies to broomsticks or even events like the "Quidditch World Cup". Your students may also design posters, radio commercials, etc. for advertisements. You can even have a little competition among the students!

Books needed: Any of the four books and Book IV for the Quidditch World Cup

◆ **Education Specialist**

Harry Potter learns his magic from several professors, each with his or her own

characteristics and teaching styles. Ask your students to criticize the teachers. Which seems to be the most interesting class? Who should think about doing another job? Why so? Is there anything each professor can do to improve the class? You yourself will surely learn a lot from this activity!

Books needed: Any of the four books

◆ **Law Specialists**

There are several interesting legal cases in the Harry Potter books. Your law students could write up a defense for Buckbeak, a pet that attacked a student. Or the students might want to defend Sirius Black, seemingly a mass murderer. In fact, a little court could be formed and students could enjoy role-playing.

Books needed: Book III for both Buckbeak and Sirius Black and Book IV for courtroom scenes

◆ **Veterinarian Specialists**

Your students could explain the relationship between a magical creature and a real creature. For example, they can say what aspects of an eagle a hippogriff has, and what aspects of a horse it has. Advanced students might even be able to explain the anatomy of a hippogriff.

Books needed: Book III for hippogriffs and "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" for other magical creatures

◆ **Psychology Specialists**

Several characters in Harry Potter books are well-rounded. Students can analyze the personalities of everyone from Hermione and Ron to Snape and Winky, etc. Ask the students to describe what kind of parents the characters might have, how they

were brought up, and what could they do to improve themselves, etc.

Books needed: Any of the four books

Some Further General Questions for Students

These are useful questions for you to use in discussion, debate, essay, etc.

- Where would you go in Diagon Alley, Hogsmead? What would you buy? (Any of the four books for Diagon Alley, Book III for Hogsmead)
- What Quidditch position would you like to play: a seeker, a beater, a chaser, or a goalkeeper? Who would be your teammates? (Any of the four books or "Quidditch through the Ages")
- Where would you go if you had an invisibility cloak? (Any of the four books)
- Harry is the most famous boy in his world. Who is the most famous boy in your world? Why? (No book is needed!)
- How would you protect the Sorcerer's Stone? (Book I)
- Create a new house at Hogwarts, a new mascot and color for the house as well as determine the type of students who should be in the house. (Any of the four books)
- If half of you could be an animal, which animal would you choose? Which half? (Book I for background on a "centaur")
- What do you think is the biggest challenge to get past to the Stone? Why? (Book I)
- What kind of magical pet would you like to have? Why? Name it. (Book I or "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them")
- What would be your most favorite "Every Flavor Bean"? What about the least favorite? (Book I)
- What would you see in "the Mirror of the Erised"? (Book I)
- What animal would you like to be able to talk to? Why? (Book II)
- Which house would you be in? Why? (Book I or Book IV)
- What moment of your life might a "dementor" remind you of? (Book III)
- What would a "boggart" change into when it saw you? How would you attack it? (Book III)
- If you could, what animal would you transfigure yourself into? Why? (Book III)
- How would you use a "Marauder's Map"? (Book III or Book IV)
- What would your "patronus" look like? (Book III)
- Which school would you like to attend most? Why? (Book IV)
- Which is the most difficult task in the "Triwizard Tournament"? Why? (Book IV)
- How would you get past the dragon? (Book IV)
- How would you do the second task? (Book IV)
- What kind of task should the "Triwizard Tournament" have? Design it. (Book IV)
- Design a new Quidditch team, including the uniform, mascot, motto, etc. ("Quidditch through the Ages")
- What will happen in Book V? (Book IV)

Harry on Audio Cassette

If you have Harry Potter audiocassettes available, they can be very useful. You can do something as simple as a simultaneous listening/reading task. Or you can play the cassette before and have your students read

the books later. Moreover, you may play the cassettes for listening comprehension and ask the students questions. Remember, don't play the cassettes too long; your students may easily lose attention.

Harry on Screen

By the time you are reading this, you might already have seen the film based on Book I "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." The film will be valuable in class if you can find a copy. Just like the audiocassettes, the film can be played before you have your students read the book, or you can play it after they have read the book and ask the students to see if there is anything different from the book, any character or scene missing? Why do they think the film is different from the book? Also, you can allow the students to see the film with the sound off and let them guess which scene it

is and/or try to reconstruct the dialogue for a short stretch.

Harry in Thai?

Everybody knows there are translated versions. In fact, this could help, when it comes to weak students. There are certain vocabulary and terms used in English, so I believe that students will have to look at and read the English version in order to do the activities. After they have started reading for a while, they will find out that it is not difficult and may want to know what the book is like in English. Before they realize, they might have finished the book!

Last but not least, the activities suggested here are simply to give you more ideas to "magic up" your lesson. There are still thousands of other things to do with the Harry Potter books. Be creative, like J.K. Rowling, and, like her, you'll be successful.

The Author

Navamol Sthapitanonda is an English instructor at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute. She was accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and sorted into the House of Gryffindor, yet she decided to pursue her studies in the Muggle world. Navamol received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Chulalongkorn University and a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from New York University, USA. Her main interests are magic-based lessons, needs analysis and curriculum design.

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