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Censoring Banned Books: The *Harry Potter* Series Religious Controversy

“A 2006 challenge in the Gwinnett County Schools alleged that the Harry Potter books promote witchcraft” (Peters). When the very first book was published, it was a sensation, but as the Harry Potter series started to gain popularity, more people, specifically religious groups, started examining the books, speculating as to why they were so loved. Once people realized what the series was about, it immediately made its way to the Banned Books List. Christians oppose the Harry Potter series because they believe the series of books celebrates the occult.

Harry Potter is acknowledged as a half-blood, half wizard, and half-Muggle (human). He was destined to be Lord Voldemort’s rival from the day he was born. The books are filled with child neglect, dangerous situations, and vulgar language, so it is understandable why, from a parent's point of view, the books were banned. However, I am not a parent; I am a young adult who loves reading books and has never been told not to read. For some, these books have sparked discussions, dissections, and debates. It is ironic how the Christians believe Harry Potter is a satanic-driven series when Christians worship a god named God, whose book is filled with the same content or worse.

These books go against Christian beliefs by promoting wizards, witches, occultism, and paganism (Olukotun). In a way, this book series is banned for existing. Some Christians genuinely enjoy J. K. Rowling's books because they “...consider Harry’s journey an edifying allegory for Jesus Christ” (Olukotun). Ultimately, these are all just speculations and rumors, none of which are true unless confirmed by the author, J. K. Rowling.

People are deprived of the choice to read these books if they are taken away from them by force (Asheim 63). They will not be able to say for themselves if they believe the book is exceptional or immoral. The *Harry Potter* series is “one of the most challenged on record” (Gray). Every book in the seven-book series has made its way to the Banned Books List at one point. To most Christians, this series “challenges their 'Christian views',” and if any child were to be “exposed to these witches and wizards they may be tempted to engage in 'evil' activities” (Scales 535). People dampen children’s imagination by not letting them read Harry Potter books. Children should be allowed to imagine far off places where they can be witches and wizards.

There have been lawsuits where parents tried to get the *Harry Potter* series banned from their children’s schools for its violence and witchcraft. Many parents think, “Students should not read books containing words that they are not allowed to say in school” (Bertin 10). Parents have done anything they can to keep their children safe; while that is perfectly fine on their part, they are also affecting the lives of other students (Bertin 9). As stated by Susan L. Webb, “They [public officials] cannot, however, censor publications by generally accepted authors...” J. K. Rowling is one such author (2018). The First Amendment is used in cases against those who try to ban books because this right applies to everyone.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, published in 1999 in the United States, was the most challenged book in the United States that year (Peters 2017). This book showcases great values and themes as the story progresses. It values humility by showing what a modest hero Harry Potter turns out to be. When he catches the golden snitch in Quidditch, he does not stop for the audience’s applause. He continues with the game. This is a great learning lesson for children, teenagers, and even adults to learn.

In the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, J. K. Rowling emphasizes the community. Everything done throughout this book was not done by just one person. It took a group to get something done. Harry, Ron, and Hermione find the chamber together; they defeat the beast inside together. They all add something special that the others are lacking, which shows that whatever is done in life, people have a community for a reason.

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, a recurring theme is the duality of life as seen by Professor Lupin, who spends most of his time as the professor at Hogwarts and then, at another time, as a man-eating werewolf. Everyone has two sides to his or her story, much like the *Harry Potter* books, which are seen differently by the same group of people. To some Christians, these books are filled with satanic rituals, glorifying magic and the occult, while to others, they are an allegory for Jesus Christ.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire is very much a coming-of-age book. This series has followed Harry Potter from the very beginning and now follows them as they become self-aware about themselves. For children to follow these books over the years, they have grown up alongside Harry, Ron, and Hermione, so they are going through the same things as their favorite characters. Children and teenagers, even adults, idolize these characters not just for all the magic but for how J. K. Rowling has portrayed them as teenagers going through the normal stages of life, but with a pinch of magic.

Self-sacrifice plays an important role in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Harry and Dumbledore sacrifice much of their happiness and peace for the greater good. Every book has a message it tries to bring across to its broad audience. Those who want books banned only look at the negative parts of the book and do not look at each book as a whole. They are more

than just witches and wizards casting spells; they are people who go through marvelous adventures as friends, family, and a community.

Christians believe the Harry Potter series celebrates the occult. No matter what light people see it in, Harry Potter will always be controversial for its magical elements. This will not stop people from getting their hands on one of J. K. Rowling's seven spellbinding books and entering a world of wonder. For every sensor, there is a reader willing to take a stand.

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