

Ten Points to Gryffindor! An examination of the use of house points within the Harry Potter series and within my classroom

Pico Iyer (1999) and David Steege (2002) have examined the parallels between the structure of JK Rowling's Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the public boarding schools and stories of England. A dimension of this parallel is the structuring of students into houses and the awarding or subtracting of house points. The motivation of the Hogwarts professors in awarding or taking away house points is important: Whether they award points for "outstanding courage," "cool logic", or for accomplishing tasks not many in their year could manage such as taking "on a full-grown mountain troll" (Rowling, 1997, 178, 305-306); or taking them away for a student's "cheek" (138); the use of points reveals the professors' biases and values. Nowak discusses how a character's motivation within the Harry Potter series has "a profound impact on how authority figures react to the alleged infraction[s]" within the series (23). What acts and behaviors are praised or punished reveals ideological messages to the readers as well.

I have taught courses focusing on Harry Potter as a theme in a college freshmen orientation course and as a course in a Honors program. In an effort to capture a sense of the Hogwarts experience, I sorted my college students into the four Hogwarts houses and employed the point model within the series. The experience was challenging for me as an educator. As someone who attempts to create a welcoming environment for all and avoid showing bias towards individual students, soon my students horrified me with accusations that I was awarding more points to certain students and I was faced with unpacking my biases and motivations.

Examining both the uses of house points in the Harry Potter series and in my own course is a powerful way to explore issues of bias and privilege. This paper will reflect upon key moments of point distribution from the series and from my own classroom to draw out the implications of the use of the house point system.

Works Cited

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