

## Harry Potter and Narrative Theory

Arts & Sciences 137.\*, Freshman Seminar  
Spring Quarter, 2 credits

Day: Wednesday Time 1:30-3:18 (first choice); 11:30-1:18 (second choice)  
Room in which I can show DVD

### Instructor

James Phelan

Office Hours TR 11:30-1:15

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### Office

Denney 452

### Course Description

This course will use concepts from narrative theory, particularly, worldmaking, character, perspective, plot, temporality, ethics, and aesthetics to give students a deeper understanding of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels—and why most people like them so much. Toward the end of the course, we will also examine the adaptation of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban to film. Students will do in-class reports and write two short papers, the first using the tools of narrative theory to offer a close reading of a favorite passage, and the second dealing with a larger issue of the student's own choice—or a creative imitation of Rowling.

### **Texts**

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)

H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (2008)

N.B. Although the amount of reading exceeds what is recommended for a freshman seminar, I believe that most of the students will have read the books at least once before. In addition, the books are engrossing reading, and I am confident the students will have no trouble with the pace. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* is written for a student audience, and I will assign no more than one chapter per week.

### **Course Policies**

Detail your expectations for:

- Attendance and participation are essential for success in this course and together they will constitute 15% of the final grade. Excused absences are permitted only for exceptional reasons and only if requested in advance.
- As noted above, students will write two short papers (approximately 3 pages and approximately 5 pages). The first will be an exercise in close reading. The second will be either on a more general issue arising from the course reading (e.g. how might narrative theory help you defend Rowling's work against those who find it dangerous?) or an imitation of Rowling (e.g., write a scene representing a brief meeting between Harry and his parents).
- Some students will be asked to give summaries of the novels we're not reading. Others will volunteer for dramatic readings of key scenes in the novels we are reading.
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## **Grading**

Students will receive a letter grade, and we will follow the University guidelines for translating numbers into letters.

Assignments:

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Oral Report/Dramatic Reading: 10%

First Paper: 35%

Final Paper: 40%

## **Academic Integrity**

For all the assignments for this course, the Code of Student Conduct of The Ohio State University is in effect. Academic misconduct is defined as: Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the university, or subvert the educational process.

Examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to:

1. Violation of course rules as contained in the course syllabus or other information provided to the student; violation of program regulations as established by departmental committees and made available to students;
2. Submitting plagiarized work for an academic requirement. Plagiarism is the representation of another's work or ideas as one's own; it includes the unacknowledged word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas;
3. Submitting substantially the same work to satisfy requirements for one course that has been submitted in satisfaction of requirements for another course, without permission of the instructor of the course for which the work is being submitted;
4. For an extended version of these examples please refer to [http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource\\_csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp)

To avoid plagiarism, students must make sure that they:

1. Always cite their sources (following the MLA format)
2. Read the guidelines for written assignments more than once
3. If in doubt consult with your professor.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Or visit the internet address of this office at <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu> for more information.

## **Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1 –Introduction: The Harry Potter Phenomenon and What Narrative Theory Can Tell Us about It**

**SIGN UP FOR ORAL REPORTS and DRAMATIC READINGS**

## **Week 2 – Possible Worlds**

READ: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*  
Abbott, Chapter 12, Narrative Worlds

DUE: Reports on *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

## **Week 3 – Character**

READ: Abbott, Chapter 10, Character and Self in Narrative

Continue discussion of *Prisoner of Azkaban*

DUE: Dramatic Readings from the novel;

ASSIGNED: first short paper

## **Week 4 – Narrative Perspective**

READ: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (first half)  
Abbott, Chapter 5, Narration

DUE: Reports on *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

## **Week 5 – Plot, Progression, and Seriality**

READ: *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (second half)

Phelan, Introduction to *Reading People, Reading Plots* (approx. 20 pages, available via Carmen)

DUE: Dramatic Readings from the novel; first short paper

## **Week 6 – Time**

No new reading: discussion of Past, Present, and Future in the series with special attention to *Half-Blood Prince*

DUE: Dramatic Readings from the novel

## **Week 7 – Ethics and Aesthetics**

READ: Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, first half

Phelan, *Introduction to Experiencing Fiction* (approx. 25 pages, available via Carmen)

Dramatic Readings from the Novel

ASSIGNED: Final short paper

## **Week 8 – The Sense of an Ending**

READ: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, second half

## **Week 9 – Harry Potter on Film,**

READ: Abbott, Chapter 9, Adaptation across Media

VIEW: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón

**Week 10 – Conclusion: Harry Potter and Narrative Theory**

DUE: Final short paper

Biographical Information:

James Phelan, Humanities Distinguished Professor of English, teaches courses in narrative and narrative theory as well as in twentieth-century literature and in critical theory. He is the recipient of both the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award (2007) and the Distinguished Scholar Award (2004). He has written or edited ten books of narrative theory and over one hundred essays. He has previously taught freshman seminars on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the Culture Wars (2005) and on Jane Austen and Contemporary Popular Culture (2007). He read the first Harry Potter book after he received it as a gift from his children and has been a fan of the series ever since.