

Preparation

Reading

Read the following articles then answer the questions below:

- For each of the two texts, what is the point of origin of the journalist's article (the element the journalist is commenting upon)?
- For each of the two texts, list the words and expressions used to describe the positive and the negative side of the *Harry Potter* series.
- Make a list of the terms related to magic.

Text 1.

Opinion Roundup: Positive About Potter

Despite what you've heard, Christian leaders like the children's books.

Ted Olsen (Ted Olsen is Online and Opinion Editor of *Christianity Today*).

December 6, 1999

Christians hate the Harry Potter books. It's undeniable. Just look at the media reports about how Christian parents around the country are trying to get the book banned from libraries and schools. "It's a good thing when children enjoy books, isn't it? Most of us think so," wrote children's book author Judy Blume in a *New York Times* opinion piece. "[But] in Minnesota, Michigan, New York, California, and South Carolina, parents who feel the books promote interest in the occult have called for their removal from classrooms and school libraries. I knew this was coming. The only surprise is that it took so long. ... If children are excited about a book, it must be suspect."

Likewise, *Los Angeles Times* writer Steve Chawkins wrote of the controversy, "I enjoy these periodic battles about book-banning. ... Hostility is often high. If you disagree with those who are so eager to protect your children, you are not merely wrong; you are twisted, negligent, evil, a dupe of dark forces, and, as in my case, a bad parent."

But here's the problem with painting with such a broad brush: It's just not true. In fact, as far as I can tell, while no major Christian leader has come out to condemn J.K. Rowling's series, many have given it the thumbs-up. If our readers know of any major Christian leader who has actually told Christians not to read the books, I'd be happy to know about it; but in my research, even those Christians known for criticizing all that is popular culture have been pretty positive about Potter.

One of the most quoted supporters of the Potter books is *Christianity Today* columnist Charles Colson, who, in his November 2 *Breakpoint* radio broadcast, noted that Harry and his friends "develop courage, loyalty, and a willingness to sacrifice for one another—even at the risk of their lives. Not bad lessons in a self-centered world." Colson dismisses the magic and sorcery in the books as "purely mechanical, as opposed to occultic. That is, Harry and his friends cast spells, read crystal balls, and turn themselves into animals—but they don't make contact with a supernatural world. ... [It's not] the kind of real-life witchcraft the Bible condemns." (If you don't have the RealAudio player, you can get the transcript of Colson's broadcast at www.breakpoint.org)

Focus on the Family's review is one of the most recent—and most critical—of the Christian reviews, but the strongest that Focus's critic, Lindy Beam, can muster is "Apart from the benefit of wise adult guidance in reading these books, it is best to leave *Harry Potter* on the shelf." Still the review is mixed, rather than negative: "Harry Potter contains valuable lessons about love, courage, and the ultimate victory of good over

evil," Beam writes. "The spiritual fault of Harry Potter is not so much that Rowling is playing to dark supernatural powers, but that she doesn't acknowledge any supernatural powers at all. These stories are not fueled by *witchcraft*, but by *secularism*." (One wonders if such an argument also faults *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Wizard of Oz*.)

The Focus on the Family Web site's "Parent to Parent" area offers mixed—not to say moderate—reviews. Two parents claim "I cannot say I sensed anything 'evil' about the book. It was pure fantasy," and "I [do not believe Potter's books] lead us to believe that the people who take themselves seriously as witches are 'ok' or safe." Two others are outraged. "The book becomes very satanic," writes one. "This series is simply Satan's way of infecting the minds of our children," writes another.

World Magazine has offered not one, but two reviews of Harry Potter—one very positive, one less so—and later made Potter-related news. In its May 29 issue, *World* critic Roy Maynard praised *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* as "a delight—with a surprising bit of depth." He dismissed the most controversial subjects in less than a paragraph: "Rowling ... keeps it safe, inoffensive, and non-occult. This is the realm of Gandalf and the Wizard of Id, not witchcraft. There is a fairy-tale order to it all in which, as Chesterton and Tolkien pointed out, magic must have rules, and good does not—cannot—mix with bad."

Five months later, *World* was less positive in a three-page cover story about the Harry Potter phenomenon. Still, the magazine notes that Rowling's witchcraft bears little resemblance to modern wicca. "A reader drawn in would find that the real world of witchcraft is not Harry Potter's world. Neither attractive nor harmless, it is powerful and evil." Still, writers Anne McCain and Susan Olasky warn that the books contain "dark elements," and that "unlike biblical stories, in Potter's world bad things seem to happen for no reason." Like Colson—and just about every other reviewer of the books—*World* encourages its readers to choose C.S. Lewis's Narnia series and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as "better worlds for a child's imagination," but says there's plenty of fodder for discussion and enjoyment in these fantasy books as well.

That was the October 30 issue of *World*. The following issue, November 6, included an announcement that God's World Book Club, a division of the organization that owns *World*, was withdrawing the Harry Potter books from its catalog. "We reviewed and recommended the Harry Potter books as wholesome, good-versus-evil fantasy in the spirit of J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis," the full-page announcement said. "However, the fact that the books are not Christ-centered and further evidence that they are not written from a perspective compatible with Christianity have led us to retract the books. ... We sincerely apologize for offense given and thank our customers for contributing to the discussion that led to this decision."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, in J.K. Rowling's native country, *Christianity* magazine has nothing but praise for the book. Mark Greene, Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, writes that he balked at buying Harry Potter for his god-daughter when he heard it was set in a school for witches and wizards. He bought Narnia instead. Now, interestingly, he regrets his decision: "I wish I'd been the one to introduce her to Harry—fine lad you know, courageous, resourceful, humble, fun, good mind. Comes from good stock, you know. She could do worse, far worse. And, as far as literary companions go, frankly, not much better." (Neither the article nor the magazine appears online, as far as I can tell.)

It shouldn't surprise our readers that *The Christian Century* has no quarrels with Harry Potter, either. Still, its December 1 lead editorial, "Wizards and Muggles," makes some excellent—and surprising—points about Christians and fantasy. "Rowling is not the first fantasy writer to be attacked by conservative Christians. Even the explicitly Christian writer Madeleine L'Engle has taken heat for the 'magic' elements in *A Wrinkle in Time*."

Such critics are right in thinking that fantasy writing is powerful and needs to be taken seriously. But we strongly doubt that it fosters an attachment to evil powers. Harry's world, in any case, is a moral one." The unsigned editorial also notes that "one of the salutary effects of fantasy writing is to remove us from the everyday world and prompt us to look at the ordinary in fresh ways. ... G.K. Chesterton claimed that his own journey to Christian faith began with his childhood absorption in fairy tales. From fairly [fairy?] tales he learned that the world is precious but puzzling, coherent but mysterious, full of unseen connections and decisive truths." Though the *Century* doesn't mention it, C.S. Lewis made a similar claim.

Perhaps the most insightful discussion of the Potter books comes from Wheaton College professor Alan Jacobs in the bimonthly *Mars Hill Audio Journal*. In the September/October volume, Jacobs defends the books as promoting "a kind of spiritual warfare. ... A struggle between good and evil. ... There is in books like this the possibility for serious moral reflection ... [and] the question of what to do with magic powers is explored in an appropriate and morally serious way." Furthermore, Jacobs notes that contemporary Christian unease with magic is somewhat recent:

In sixteenth-century Europe you would find Christians who were deeply involved in astrology largely because they were Calvinists. And it was understood at the time that there was a close connection between a predestinarian theology and astrology because astrology confirms or supports a predestinarian theology by suggesting that the outcome and direction of our lives is fixed before our births ... Other Christians at the same time who dismissed astrology as being a bunch of hogwash but who were very much engaged with magic. ... Magic was not thought to be any more at odds with Christianity than experimental science. The big question then is to what use do you put magic? Now we see magic as an intrinsically dangerous thing. Our focus now is on experimental science and technology, and we tend to have the same kinds of debates about technology now that Christians had about magic several centuries ago.

Jacobs and Mars Hill host Ken Meyers then discuss how Star Trek technology, as imagined as Potter's magic, is treated differently by Christians, even though the two have similar ends: "If we imagine somebody stepping on to a little circle and then suddenly dissolving, and then reappearing instantly somewhere else, and we call this a transporter, and we're told that it is a device that is created by technology, then we go 'oh, that's cool.' But if we imagine someone waving a wand and then disappearing and reappearing somewhere else, we're much less comfortable.

"I'll give the final word to Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling, in a quote from a CNN interview: "I have met thousands of children now, and not even one time has a child come up to me and said, 'Ms. Rowling, I'm so glad I've read these books because now I want to be a witch.' They see it for what it is. It is a fantasy world and they understand that completely. I don't believe in magic, either."

<http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/december6/12.0a.html>

Text 2.

Harry Potter Books Spark Rise in Satanism Among Children.

The Onion, 26 July 2000.

LOCK HAVEN, PA--Ashley Daniels is as close as you can get to your typical 9-year-old American girl. A third-grader at Lock Haven Elementary School, she loves rollerblading, her pet hamsters Benny and Oreo, Britney Spears, and, of course, Harry Potter. Having breezed through the most recent *Potter* opus in just four days, Ashley is among the millions of children who have made *Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire* the fastest-selling book in publishing history.

And, like many of her school friends, Ashley was captivated enough by the strange occult doings at the Hogwarts School Of Witchcraft And Wizardry to pursue the Left-Hand Path, determined to become as adept at the black arts as Harry and his pals.

"I used to believe in what they taught us at Sunday School," said Ashley, conjuring up an ancient spell to summon Cerebus, the three-headed hound of hell. "But the *Harry Potter* books showed me that magic is real, something I can learn and use right now, and that the Bible is nothing but boring lies."

Ashley is hardly the only child rejecting God these days. Weeks after the release of *Goblet*, the fourth book in J.K. Rowling's blockbuster kid-lit series, interest in witchcraft continues to skyrocket among children. Across America, Satanic temples are filling to the rafters with youngsters clamoring for instruction in summoning and conjuring.

Over protests from Christian Right leaders, who oppose the books for containing magic--and, by extension, Satanic religious beliefs--millions of children are willing their bodies and souls to Lucifer in unholy blood covenants. In 1995, it was estimated that some 100,000 Americans, mostly adults, were involved in devil-worship groups. Today, more than 14 million children alone belong to the Church of Satan, thanks largely to the unassuming boy wizard from 4 Privet Drive.

"The *Harry Potter* books are cool, 'cause they teach you all about magic and how you can use it to control people and get revenge on your enemies," said Hartland, WI, 10-year-old Craig Nowell, a recent convert to the New Satanic Order Of The Black Circle. "I want to learn the Cruciatus Curse, to make my muggle science teacher suffer for giving me a D."

"Hermione is my favorite, because she's smart and has a kitty," said 6-year-old Jessica Lehman of Easley, SC. "Jesus died because He was weak and stupid."

But as wild as children are about Harry, no one is happier about the phenomenon than old-school Satanists, who were struggling to recruit new members prior to the publication of the first *Potter* book in 1997.

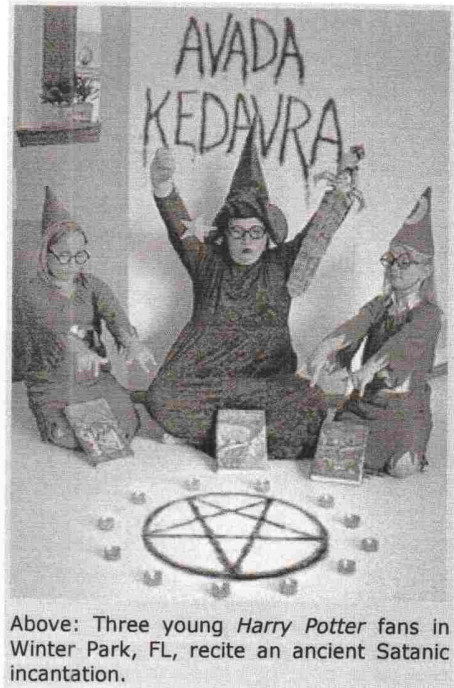
"Harry is an absolute godsend to our cause," said High Priest Egan of the First Church Of Satan in Salem, MA. "An organization like ours thrives on new blood--no pun intended--and we've had more applicants than we can handle lately. And, of course, practically all of them are virgins, which is gravy."

With membership in Satanic temples reaching critical mass in some areas, many children have been forced to start their own organizations to worship the Lord Of Lies. Houston 11-year-old Bradley Winters, who purchased *Goblet Of Fire* with his own allowance money at the stroke of midnight on July 8, organized his own club, Potterites To Destroy Jesus, with his neighborhood pals. An admission fee of \$6.66 grants membership to any applicant willing to curse the name of God and have a lightning bolt carved into his or her forehead with an iron dagger.

"The *Harry Potter* books are awesome!" Winters said. "When I grow up, I'm going to learn Necromancy and summon greater demons to Earth."

It's more than just the kiddie set and Satanists, however, who are rejoicing over Harry's success. Educators nationwide are praising the books for getting children excited about reading.

"It's almost impossible to find a book that can compete with those PlayStation games, but *Harry Potter* has done it," said Gulfport (MS) Middle School principal Frank Grieg. "I have this one student in the fifth grade who'd never read a book before in his life. Now he's read *Sorcerer's Stone*, *Prisoner Of Azkaban*, *Chamber Of Secrets*, *Goblet Of Fire*, *The*



Above: Three young *Harry Potter* fans in Winter Park, FL, recite an ancient Satanic incantation.

Seven Scrolls Of The Black Rose, The Necronomicon, The Satanic Bible, The Origin Of Species--you name it."

Less pleased are Christian leaders, who see Pottermania as a serious threat to their way of life.

"Children are very impressionable," said Dr. Andrea Collins of Focus On Faith, a Denver-based Christian think-tank and advocacy group. "These books do not merely depict one or two uses of magic spells or crystal balls. We're talking about hundreds of occult invocations. The natural, intuitive leap from reading a *Harry Potter* book to turning against God and worshipping Satan is very easy for a child to make, as the numbers have shown."

"These books are truly magical," Collins added, "and therefore dangerous."

But such protests are falling on largely deaf ears, especially in the case of Harry's creator.

"I think it's absolute rubbish to protest children's books on the grounds that they are luring children to Satan," Rowling told a *London Times* reporter in a July 17 interview. "People should be praising them for that! These books guide children to an understanding that the weak, idiotic Son Of God is a living hoax who will be humiliated when the rain of fire comes, and will suck the greasy cock of the Dark Lord while we, his faithful servants, laugh and cavort in victory."

http://www.theonion.com/onion3625/harry_potter.html

In class:

Entraînement à la synthèse:

1. Consultez la petite méthodologie de la synthèse et complétez le tableau suivant :

	Article 1	Article 2
Type		
Date de publication		
Titre		
Auteur		
Contexte géographique		
Contenu - thème(s) commun(s)		
Objectivité (informatif ou polémique)		

2. Résumez en deux ou trois mots chaque paragraphe du premier texte.

3. Rédigez l'introduction d'une synthèse de ces deux articles.

Follow-up work:

1. Listening/watching:

- a. Listen to Chuck Colson's broadcast. Do not read the transcript!

<http://www.breakpoint.org/commentaries/2632-potter-mania>

- What is Colson's opinion about Harry Potter?
- What is Connie Neal's opinion: should Christian parents let their children read *Harry Potter*?
- What is the link between Daniel and the *Harry Potter* series?
- What are Colson's reading recommendations?

Now, you can cross-check your answers with the transcript.

- b. Watch the following video: "Catholic School Bans *Harry Potter* Books"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUwbaNO6Z18>

- Try to explain the pun "Potter Expelled".
- Why was the *Harry Potter* series banned?
- This ban is compared to another one. What is it? Explain.
- What are the parents' reactions to this decision?
- Why is vegetable soup mentioned at the end?

Homework:

Read the following text and compare it with the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Then, write a letter to the Catholic Education Office's spokesman (Mark Rix) to defend or condemn the *Twilight* series.

Schools ban racy *Twilight* books by Stephanie Meyer

By Lauren Dickson

From: *The Daily Telegraph*

September 12, 2009 12:00AM

PRIMARY school students have been banned from reading the teen cult classic *Twilight* books because they are too racy and contradict religious beliefs.

Librarians have stripped the books from shelves in some junior schools because they believe the content is too sexual and goes against religious beliefs.

They even have asked parents not to let kids bring their own copies of Stephenie Meyer's smash hit novels _ which explore the stormy love affair between a teenage girl and a vampire _ to school.

Santa Sabina College at Strathfield was so concerned about the *Twilight* craze that teachers ran a seminar for Year 6 students to discuss sexual and supernatural themes in the books. The school's head librarian Helen Schutz said:

"We don't have a policy of censorship but the issues in the *Twilight* series are quite different from the *Harry Potter* classics.

"It is not available in our junior library for these reasons." She said that younger kids read the book _ which have been turned in a smash hit movie _ so they could "talk the talk and are part of the cool crowd".

But teachers addressed the primary students because they were concerned they might be too young to deal with the adult themes.

"There was a great level of concern from the teachers and we anticipated there would be concern from the parents," Ms Schutz said.

"We wanted to make sure they realise it's fictitious and ensure they don't have a wrong grasp on reality."

The four Twilight books trace the love affair between Bella Swan, who moves to a new school, and Edward Cullen, a mysterious heartthrob who belongs to a family of vampires. The line between real life and fiction has been further blurred by constant speculation that on-screen stars Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart are off-screen lovers.

Catholic Education Office spokesman Mark Rix said individual schools had to decide whether the books were suitable.

"It comes down to the discretion of the school to keep an eye on what the kids read," Mr Rix said. "Some primary students are not ready to read Twilight. That said, some secondary students may not be either."

Balmoral's Queenwood School for Girls head librarian Heather Voskyl said only senior school students were allowed to borrow the books from the library.

"There isn't a lot written for the Year 4 to 5 age group so they are quickly pushed into higher reading age groups. There is a mismatch between their level of maturity and their level of reading," she said.

St Anthony's Catholic primary school in Picton has asked parents not to let their children bring the book to school.

Emmi Payten, 10, from Bellevue Hill, has read three quarters of the first Twilight book.

"I know it's all just fantasy. I think it's really good, really interesting and bits of it are really funny," she said.