

**RIDDLES IN J.K.ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER* SERIES**

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Folklore is a wide field which incorporates Myths, Epics, Legends, Charms, Spells, Ballads, Proverbs, and Riddles, stories of great warriors and king's victories and tragic deaths. The relationship of folklore to literature is very strong and they are inseparable. The elements and features of literature are borrowed from folklore. Particularly, fantasy is the most ancient genre which is rooted in folklore and myth. Writers of both ancient and modern include the elements of folklore in their writing. Witchcraft, proverbs, riddles, charms and spells are important features of folklore which have acquired their special but minor place in literature, most probably in fantasy works.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines riddle as "a question or statement intentionally phrased so as to require ingenuity in ascertaining its answer or meaning". Riddles, a shorter element of folklore has obtained a position in the works of great fantasy writers. In J.R.R.Tolkien's fantasy novel *The Hobbit* the protagonist Bilbo Baggins has to solve a riddle of Gollum to get away from the tunnel and save his friends. One of Gollum's riddle is,

"It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,  
Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.  
It lies behind stars and under hills,  
And empty holes it fills.  
It comes first and follows after,  
Ends life, kills laughter."

The answer is "dark".

In Stephen King's fantasy fiction series *The Dark Tower* the main characters wrestle for their lives against the evil yet brilliant speed train named Blaine. The protagonist confronts Blaine to a riddling challenge to save their lives. Another fantasy fiction series that had hit the

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world with its charms and spells is *Harry Potter* by J.K.Rowling. Since its appearance the books have achieved enormity, critical compliments and commercial sensation universally.

The Harry Potter series contains the elements of folklore and myth in its plot, characters, narrative and theme. An attractive component of folklore that has been found in *Harry Potter* series is the Riddles. It is positioned for the development of plot. Rowling used the riddles to hold back the important secrets and in turn increase the reader's eagerness and excitement towards the plot.

The first riddle in the *Harry Potter* series crops up when Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione goes to the forbidden chamber to protect the Philosopher's Stone from Professor Snape. In that chamber they stumble upon a series of challenges and each requires a extraordinary skill possessed by one of the three. In that challenges the final one is Potions Riddle. The riddle is,

"Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,  
Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,  
One among us seven will let you move ahead,  
Another will transport the drinker back instead,  
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,  
Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.  
Choose, unless you wish to stay here for evermore,  
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:  
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide  
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;  
Second, different are those who stand at either end,  
But if you would move onwards neither is your friend;  
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,  
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;  
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right  
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight." (207)

Based on Hermione's deductions, from right to left, the potions line up is:

1. Poison,
2. Nettle Wine,
3. Potion to move the drinker through the black flames,
4. Poison,
5. Poison,
6. Nettle Wine
7. Potion to move the drink backwards through the purple flames.

Hermione helped Harry by judging the exact potion to let him move through the black flames. Finally, Harry meets the villain and saves the Philosopher Stone from Lord Voldemort. The Potions Riddle really is testing and Hermione's deduction is brilliant which saved their lives and the Stone.

The second riddle occurs in the fourth book titled *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Harry has been elected as a competitor in Triwizard Tournament along with three other competitors Viktor Crum from Drumstrang Institute, Fleur from Beauxbatons Academy and

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Cedric of Hogwarts School. In their first task of the tournament they have successfully seized a golden egg from four dangerous dragons. The clue for the next task is hidden in the eggs. That clue can be found only when the egg is opened in water. When Harry opens the egg under water, the Merpeople sing song of riddle,

“Come seek us where our voices sound,  
We cannot sing above the ground,  
And while you are searching, ponder this:  
We have taken what you’ll sorely miss,  
An hour long you’ll have to look,  
To’ recover what we took,  
But past an hour – the prospect’s black  
Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back”. (402)

Based on the riddle first Harry has to find out a technique to stay under water for an hour. But Harry has not found any method for the task. Just few hours before the challenge Dobby, a house elf at Hogwarts has brought Harry a Gillyweed which would give gills to Harry so that he can breathe under water for an hour. Ron, Hermione, Gabrielle and Cho Chang are enchanted and surrounded by Merpeople. Both Krum and Cedric have rescued their friends. Since Fleur fails to save her sister Gabrielle, Harry rescues both Ron and Gabrielle against a tough fight with sea creatures. Harry achieves the respect of fellow competitors and secured high marks for his moral fibre in the task.

Next riddle too takes place in Harry’s final task inside the maze. All the competitors, on their search of The Triwizard Cup have to encounter some obstacle. When Harry strode down a long, straight path he saw a sphinx blocking the path. He has to fight with the sphinx to continue his search. The sphinx offers Harry a riddle and if he solves it he can proceed with his search. The riddle is,

“First think of the person who lives in disguise,  
Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.  
Next, tell me what’s always the last thing to mend,  
The middle of middle and end of the end?  
And finally give me the sound often heard  
During the search for a hard-to-find word.  
Now string them together, and answer me this,  
Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?” (546)

Harry with subsequent thought comes up with the answer. The answer to each part is SPY-D-ER, which is clearly "spider." Once he utters the answer the sphinx leaves the path to Harry. Both Cedric and Harry reach the cup at the same time. Though Harry wins the tournament it ends with the death of another Hogwarts student Cedric.

The motive behind including riddles in the neck of the moment has been written by Rowling herself in the last book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. There are four houses in Hogwarts School – Gryffindor, Slytherine, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. Each house is located in different towers. The door of the common room opens only when the student gives the correct password. And this password is not always the same instead it has been changed often. Since the House of Ravenclaw stands for wisdom the students of the house have to solve a riddle or a tricky question for the door to open.

When Amycus Carrow tries to enter the Ravenclaw tower, he is asked a tricky question, “Where do vanished objects go?” (476). Carrow is unable to answer the question and he is saved by brilliant Professor McGonagall who answered “Into non-being, which is to say everything” (476). Professor Dumbledore hands over the responsibility of finding Voldemort’s Horcruxes and destroying them. So that Voldemort can be vanquished easily. The diadem of Rowena Ravenclaw is one of the Horcrux and Harry guesses that it might be hidden in the Ravenclaw tower. Harry is accompanied by a Ravenclaw student Luna and in the tower they have been asked a question,

“Which came first, the Phoenix or the flame?” (472)

Luna shrewdly answers that “a circle has no begging”. The voice congratulated them for reasoning well and allowed them into the room. In the common room Harry encounters the statue of Rowena Ravenclaw one of the four founders of Hogwarts School. He has noticed something written on the tiara that Rowena is wearing. He has gone near to it and read it aloud,

*Wit beyond measure is Man’s greatest Treasure* (473)

The man’s wit, elegance, intellect, shrewdness and presence of mind are the objective of education. Hermione, Ron, Luna and Harry are intelligent and smart. The wit of Hermione always gives her merit in all her years in school. The intelligence and talent of Ron is expressed in playing wizard chess which have not been solved by anyone from Hogwarts. His victory has scored points to Gryffindor house and the house wins the year end reward.

J.K.Rowling’s motive of employing riddles in the series is praiseworthy. Every reader of the series would have tried solving the riddles instead of finding the answer in the text itself. Rowling insists through the riddles that children must develop the ability of quick understanding. The importance of being intelligent and wise is stressed through these riddles. J.K.Rowling though the *Harry Potter* series states the necessity of wit over wealth for a better living.

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