

Wands: Can't Live with Them, Can't Live without Them!

The wand is the most important tool to any young wizard, or adult wizard for that matter. A wand is a tool that can protect them in times of battle or can even be used to attack if the wielder so chooses. When buying their wands in Diagon Alley, this is the first time any muggle-born wizards get to see magic, be it their own or other wizards' magic. A wizard's wand also gives them senses of individuality in that no two wands are alike. Without their own personal wand a wizard is left to use a wand that never will properly work.

"The wand chooses the wizard..." (*Stone* 85), and with every wand being different this gives the wizard an identity. Identity is one of the biggest and most constant drivers of the entire series. Harry's scar gives him his identity as the boy who lived, and the Weasleys' red hair gives them their identity as being part of their family. Without your own wand you lose part of who you are and a simple way for other people to tell who you are. An example from the text to show how important wand identity is comes in at book seven:

"You have ... identification?" asked the goblin.

'Identification? I — I have never been asked for identification before!' said Hermione.

[. . .]

'Your wand will do, madam,' said the goblin" (*Hallows* 530). The wand is all that needs to be seen in order to tell who you are, if you are indeed who you claim to be or an imposter using polyjuice potion. It is such a part of wizards and who they are that they don't know how to react when their wands are broken:

The holly and phoenix wand was nearly severed in two. One fragile strand of phoenix feather kept both pieces hanging together. The wood had splintered apart completely. Harry took it into his hands as though it was a living thing

that had suffered a terrible injury. He could not think properly: Everything was a blur of panic and fear. (*Hallows* 348)

Harry reacted to the breaking of his wand in the same manner in which some people react to death: with confusion. He felt as though part of him had been taken away and in some manner he was incomplete. Ron, in the second book, reacted to the loss as if it caused him actual pain: “Ron let out a low, despairing groan.

‘Are you okay?’ Harry said urgently.

‘My wand,’ said Ron, in a shaky voice. ‘Look at my wand-’ It had snapped, almost in two; the tip was dangling limply, held on by a few splinters” (*Chamber* 74). Despairing groan, really? This just goes to show exactly how much these wands mean to them.

Breaking a wand isn’t the only way a wizard can lose their sense of identity; the wand can also be stolen from them. A won wand will work for whoever disarmed the previous owner though it will never work as well as it did for the original owner. This can be seen with Harry and the wand he won off of Draco:

Harry raised the hawthorn wand beneath the cloak, pointed it at the old goblin, and whispered, for the first time in his life, ‘Imperio!’ A curious sensation shot down Harry’s arm, a feeling of tingling warmth that seemed to flow from his mind, down the sinews and veins connecting him to the wand and the curse it had just cast. (*Hallows* 531)

Tingling warmth implies that the spell was familiar to Harry even though he had never performed it before. This begins to raise the question of whether the wand has some sort of muscle memory and remembers the spells that it has cast before with its previous owner. If the wand is stolen and not won, it won’t work for the new wizard, or if it does it never works as well as if it had been won. Harry discovered this in the seventh book when attempting to use a stolen wand that he had not won: “Harry looked down at the blackthorn wand. Every minor spell he had cast with it so far that day had seemed less powerful than those he had produced with his phoenix wand. The new one felt intrusively unfamiliar, like having somebody else’s hand sewn to the end of his arm” (*Hallows* 392).

Voldemort also experienced the same difficulties when trying to wield the Elder

Wand during the Battle of Hogwarts. Harry says, ““That wand still isn’t working properly for you because you murdered the wrong person. Severus Snape was never the true master of the Elder Wand. He never defeated Dumbledore.”” He goes on to ask, ““Didn’t you listen to Ollivander? *The wand chooses the wizard*. . . . The Elder Wand recognized a new master before Dumbledore died, someone who never even laid a hand on it. The new master removed the wand from Dumbledore against his will, never realizing exactly what he had done, or that the world’s most dangerous wand had given him its allegiance”” (*Hallows* 742). It takes Harry explaining to him what exactly happened the night Dumbledore died for him to realize who the true master of the Elder Wand was and whose identity it now defined. The identity that the elder wand gives its owner is the most powerful wizard in terms of duels. Dumbledore in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* describes the Elder Wand as “...never being destroyed or buried, but has survived accumulated wisdom, strength, and power far beyond the ordinary” (Rowling 105). The fact that this wand has gained so much over the years makes it give the identity of powerful to its owner.

Wands given to a wizard from another wizard also don’t work properly. This is seen with both Ron and Neville. Ron is given one of his older brother’s old wands in the first book and he isn’t really good at any sort of spells until he obtains his own personal wand in the third year. The same can be said of Neville; he doesn’t obtain his own wand until he breaks his father’s wand that he has been using in year five during the battle against the Death Eaters. As soon as Neville gets his own wand he starts to be able to do the upper level spells that Harry was teaching Dumbledore’s Army. They both also go on to become important members of the magical community, Ron as an Auror and Neville as the professor of Herbology at Hogwarts.

Wands and identity are one and the same in the Harry Potter series. The wands give their masters the identity that they wish and if the wand hasn’t chosen a certain wizard to give their identity to then it won’t properly work for that said wizard. Some wands have different identities, the Elder Wand has the identity of power and Harry and Voldemort’s wands have a bonded identity.

Works Cited

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