

Endnotes

Understanding Harry Potter: Parallels to the Deaf World

Todd A. Czubek

Scranton State School for the Deaf

Janey Greenwald

Scranton State School for the Deaf

The Learning Center for Deaf Children

Every so often there are stories that take the world by storm and make such an impact that they become part of our everyday world. These stories, characters, and themes become established elements of cultural literacy. This is exactly what has happened with J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Harry and his cohort of wizards, witches, and their adventures have become an indispensable part of popular literature and popular culture. We have developed an innovative way to ensure that Deaf children, their families, and anyone studying literature (Deaf or general) gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. In fact, we go further by demonstrating how using a Deaf Lens provides the greatest insight into the fascinating world of Harry Potter. Utilizing a Deaf Studies Template and a Deaf Lens, we capitalize on the experiences of Deaf people everywhere while celebrating the valuable role American Sign Language has in academic programming.

Literature often provides us with opportunities to gain new insights into our world, and J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is no different. Harry and his cohort of wizards and muggles (nonmagical people) have taken our world by storm and, in the process, have brought the joy of magical literature to many children and adults. Rowling's work has also presented a new avenue for literature study. Everyone is aware of the numerous analyses of her work; however, after careful

The term *signed language* is used to represent all natural signed languages in the world. When ASL is used in this paper, it is not intended to be exclusive. Reference to ASL, signed language, and Deaf World can be applied to all Deaf people in the world. We thank the Deaf Community for sharing their language and culture with us everyday and wonder with you if J. K. Rowling really did have you in mind when she created the Harry Potter series! Correspondence should be sent to Janey Greenwald, PO Box 412, Waverly, PA 18471 (e-mail: janeygc22@adelphia.net).

consideration, one perspective above all is perhaps the most appropriate . . . that of Deaf Studies.

As with every sociological field of study, Deaf Studies intends to further our understanding of the human condition. Using a "Deaf Lens," we can gain greater insight into social arrangements in the same way that fields like Women's Studies and Black Studies have brought gender and race issues to a level of awareness we never imagined years ago.

A related development in the field of literature is the application of a different "lens" to tell well-known stories. A number of authors have begun to "narrate within classic novels" by creating roles and observations from characters we never knew were there (Garber, 2001). *The Wind Done Gone* is an account of the epic story *Gone With the Wind* as told by Scarlet O'Hara's mulatto half-sister. Similarly, Gregory McGuire has written a number of novels that afford us a striking new lens into *The Wizard of Oz*, *Cinderella*, and *A Christmas Carol*.

A reason for this trend has been attributed to a potential "crisis in narrative" where plots have become "finite resources," and writers are limited to producing works that recycle elements they know will elicit predictable responses (Garber, 2001). However, regardless of the reasons for this trend, the result is a new genre created by adopting an original vantage point that alters how we think about stories.

We will demonstrate how a Deaf Lens offers perspectives never before considered and how a Deaf point of view can "narrate within stories" to make unique

observations that contribute to our appreciation of literature and the human condition. In order to do this we have developed a “Deaf Studies Template” (Czubek & Greenwald, 2000). The template uses the following categories for literature analysis: *Only in the Deaf World*, *Minority Issues* (including Identity and Oppression), *Institutions*, and, finally, *Edenic Narrative*.

Using this template we have identified remarkable parallels between Harry Potter’s world and the Deaf World, effectively changing how we look at the Harry Potter series and all literature. The template is a tool that helps organize elements of stories and relate them to common themes from the Deaf World. By following this model, students can begin to look for particular themes in literature, analyzing narratives according to the four categories outlined above. The categories are by no means exhaustive, and students are encouraged to expand and create additional ideas of their own. The template is designed to assist them with comprehensive literary analyses as they read, using their own lives, experiences, and cultures.

Only in the Deaf World

This category describes events and experiences that illustrate distinctive features of life in the Deaf World. Though there are many parallels between the experiences of Deaf people and other minority groups, the following section highlights examples specific to the Deaf World.

Unique to the Deaf World is the phenomenon that approximately 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). This creates a situation in which parents and children do not share a language and culture based on heredity, as is the case with every other biological family. Hearing parents typically have not had contact and/or experience with Deaf people and, in many cases, have never met a deaf person. Similarly, in the world of Harry Potter, wizard children are born to muggle parents and muggle children are born to wizard parents. We believe that the Deaf World is the only group in which this occurs. Every other minority group has “minority babies” who are “like their parents” in terms of language and culture.

Often, deaf children of hearing parents (DCHP), due to innocent parental ignorance or intentional mo-

tives, are not exposed to the Deaf World as they are growing up. We have often seen deaf children comment that they will become hearing when they turn 18 years old. Deaf children who do not have exposure to Deaf adults and the Deaf Community assume that at a certain age they will become hearing because they have never seen a deaf person older than the students in their schools. Harry Potter also grows up without any idea about the Wizard World and who he really is. Harry’s guardians, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, purposely deny him information about the Wizard World and his heritage. Deaf children and Harry grow up feeling alone and “different” than everyone around them without understanding why. This leaves a tremendous void in their lives and highlights the critical nature of access to information, language, and the truth.

Deaf children growing up in hearing families are often left out of family dynamics for a variety of reasons. This is also true for Harry as he is isolated and excluded as opposed to Dudley, the treasured muggle son of Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, who is included and knows about everything in the family.

On the other hand, there are often cases where deaf children reportedly “get more attention” from their parents and families than their hearing siblings do for a number of reasons. Petunia Dursley expressed the same concern when she talked about how her parents gave more attention to her sister, Lily Potter, the wizard, than to her as they grew up.

Harry’s aunt and uncle feel ashamed about having a wizard in the family. Neither do they acknowledge Harry’s wizardry nor do they speak of Lily and James Potter (Harry’s wizard parents). This is often the case for a deaf child in a hearing family.

The idea of normalcy and the quest for making children “normal” is a common theme resonating throughout all the Rowling books. Deaf people constantly confront the pathological/audist view that they are a handicapped, abnormal population in need of “fixing.” There are many examples of the Dursleys trying to make Harry into something he is not. For example, “we swore when we took him in we’d put a stop to that rubbish—swore we’d stamp it out of him” (Rowling, 1997). This parallels the experience Deaf children may confront when their families opt for cochlear implants *and* refuse signing and other measures, intending

to deny their deafness. However, as in the Deaf and Wizard Worlds, this is not possible. No matter how hard people try to ignore the culture, language, and power of a strong community, it does not disappear.

The Dursleys' attempts to hide Harry from the Wizard World by bringing him to various obscure locations are closely analogous to those of parents obstructing their children's exposure to the Deaf World. Hagrid, the representative of the Wizard World and Hogwarts School, finds Harry no matter where the Dursleys try to hide him. This again parallels the cohesiveness of the Deaf World and the fact that Deaf people will find the Deaf Community or be found! There are many stories about "seekers" in the Deaf World; those people who literally "searched" for Deaf children in order to bring them to schools for the Deaf. Before the age of mass communication, specific Deaf individuals actively sought out deaf children in local communities and tried to convince their parents to send them to Deaf schools so that they could be educated in a signed language. How they found them or what they looked for is a remarkable (and some would say magical) feat (S. Ferrance, F. Beretsky, C. Lindeman, personal communications).

Hundreds of acceptance letters were sent to Harry from Hogwarts School no matter where he was, indicating the persistence and commitment to Wizard children. This parallels the Deaf Community's unwavering passionate commitment to deaf children and their futures as successful members of the Deaf World and society.

Wizards are accepted and trained at Hogwarts, a residential school for wizards and witches. The school is magically hidden and effectively separated from the muggle world. Deaf children also have a long history of residential programming where they learn with and from their deaf peers at residential schools. Historically, these schools have also been physically separated from their surrounding hearing communities by boundaries such as walls and iron fences.

The Dursleys blamed Hogwarts for promoting wizardry and relationships between wizards and witches. They claimed that Lily Potter was "lost" to the Wizard World, which parallels the fear that hearing parents "lose" their deaf children to the Deaf World. Schools for the Deaf have, throughout time, been blamed for promoting American Sign Language

(ASL) and the development of the Deaf Community and for "stealing" deaf children.

There is a famous Deaf narrative repeatedly shared in the Deaf World of deaf children being dropped at residential schools without really knowing what is happening. This parallels Harry being dropped at the King's Cross train station in search of Platform 9 3/4. When Harry was left at the train station by the Dursleys, he had no idea how or where to go. He was alone as he searched unsuccessfully for Platform 9 3/4. In both the above circumstances, deaf children and Harry are helped by "strangers" who are Deaf and wizards, respectively.

The use of both *magic* and *ASL* require tremendous precision in order to be effective and accurate. One small change when performing magic can cause a dramatic shift in a spell, just as one small change in articulation of a sign can cause a major difference in the meaning (much to the chagrin of many second-language learners!).

Harry feels like he does not know much because he is from a muggle family but is reassured by Hagrid, "... some o' the best (wizards) I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' muggles" (Rowling, 1997). "You'll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts" (Rowling, 1997). The Weasleys, for example, are all aware of the Hogwarts' rules and traditions as they are from an old wizard family. Deaf children from hearing families often arrive at a school for the Deaf for the first time and feel lost and unaware of the "rules" and traditions because they have never been told. As with Harry, Deaf children also learn quickly from their peers.

It is certainly true that many deaf children often feel more at home at Deaf schools than in their "real" homes. This is a result of the ability children have to communicate and the understanding they readily share with other Deaf people. Harry shares this sense of understanding with his friends and professors at Hogwarts and feels comfortable and respected as a wizard. At No. 4 Privet Drive (the Dursleys' address), he is not allowed to communicate with about or the Wizard World, and his aunt and uncle share no understanding with Harry about the world he loves.

Deaf parents may want their babies to be born deaf in order to share their language, culture, and

experiences. This parallels wizard families' excitement at having a child who is "wizard enough" to attend Hogwarts. Parents often bang pots and pans to "test" their child's hearing. Wizards also use informal measures (such as dropping babies from second-story windows) to test their child's *wizardness*. If children are Deaf or wizard enough, they can be enrolled in Deaf or Wizarding schools. Many families celebrate the deafness/wizardness of their children.

Some wizards want to limit school acceptance to wizards from wizard families and not allow wizards from muggle families to attend Hogwarts. This parallels the status often accorded to Deaf children of Deaf parents (DCDP) and large Deaf families and the leadership roles they often play at school and in the Deaf World. Again, there is a strong parallel between prefects at Hogwarts typically being of Wizard decent and leaders at schools for the Deaf being from Deaf families.

As in the Deaf World, there are many examples of wizards from muggle families (Lily Potter, Hermione) who are very successful. In these situations, parents are extremely supportive of their child's wizardry/deafness and are actively involved in pursuing the language and culture of their children.

Hermione's parents remain on the edge of the wizards' world like most muggles. Unlike the Dursleys, however, they are supportive of their daughter's magical gifts and encourage Hermione to study at Hogwarts. They also accompany Hermione to the Diagon Alley shops to buy her Hogwarts' school supplies and support her involvement in the Wizard World. As such, they are a wonderful model of nurturing parents who embrace the diversity in their family. Hearing parents of deaf children may also find themselves on the edge of the Deaf World. Like Hermione's parents, they often approach their families in a positive way. By supporting their Deaf children in learning a signed language and celebrating the Deaf Community, they contribute significantly to their children's success.

Both Deaf people and wizards have a culture, a language, traditions, and institutions of their own of which hearing people and muggles often remain unaware. Deaf people are often referred to as an invisible minority because, physically, they look like everyone else. This is also true for wizards. Similarly, the orientations that cultures establish create taxonomies that

we never consider. For example, the Dursleys did not know they were muggles until Hagrid found them on Harry's birthday and introduced them to the idea. It had never occurred to them to classify individuals in this manner. In much the same way, a friend and colleague remembers the day he "became hearing." In a humorous account, he describes arriving at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind only to discover that he was what is called *hearing*, and that unbeknownst to him he had been that way all his life! (H.-D. Bauman, personal communication). His cultural orientation (like the Dursleys' and most of the world's) never recognized the label that is so much a part of the taxonomies of the Deaf and Wizard Worlds.

The distinction between the hearing and Deaf Worlds creates another unique dilemma because hearing children of Deaf parents are also considered different from their very own parents. Harry Potter's world also has nonwizard children born to wizard parents. This group is not emphasized in the initial books, represented only by one character, Filch. Another child of wizard adults (COWA) emerges in the fifth book, *The Order of the Phoenix*—Mrs. Figg. There is still relatively little mention of this group, and this parallels the lack of attention traditionally paid to children of deaf adults (CODA) until the establishment of the national/international CODA organization. In fact, when the students at Hogwarts learn that Filch is not a wizard, they see him as having a different and "lesser" status than themselves.

Harry was not allowed to use magic during the summer when he returned to the muggle world. There are many stories about deaf children leaving their respective residential schools to go home for the summer or for vacations and being discouraged from signing. Too many stories describe the lengths to which children have gone in order to "hide" their signing. In addition, at oral schools, deaf children have to hide their use of signed language, as it is not allowed in the school.

The incredible dichotomy of Harry's life is evident in his celebrated status in the Wizard World. There he is renowned; his ability to speak parseltongue (talking with serpents), Quidditch skills, ability to conduct various spells, and incredible magical powers are all revered in the Wizard World while he is looked at with

disdain in the muggle world. On the one hand, muggles fear and dislike wizards; on the other hand, they surely would want to use magic to solve their problems! Initially, these disparate reactions generate incredible confusion for Harry.

The paradoxes that appear in the daily lives of Deaf people are mind boggling as well. For example, think of “A Day in the Life of a Deaf professional.” Typically, a Deaf person starts her day waking up to a flashing light and eating breakfast with her Deaf family. She goes to the train station where inevitably someone asks for the time and is shocked to find the person he or she asked is deaf. This same professional sits on the train with hundreds of unintelligible moving mouths until arriving at the School for the Deaf where she is employed. She arrives to see several hearing staff talking to each other without signing while they are supervising Deaf students. She is then scorned for having the audacity to remind them to use signed language. She enters the classroom where her students are thrilled to have a Deaf teacher who understands the Deaf World and uses their native language. She eventually leaves work and heads to the local hearing university to teach a signed language class. As she arrives, she finds the classroom door locked with no security personnel around to open the door. Because the phones have no TTYs, she cannot access the telephone and wanders the halls in search of a key. When she finally finds someone, he or she is flustered with her attempts at communication and is invariably unhelpful. Finally, she gets the point across and is treated with suspicion and disbelief that a Deaf adult can actually be a professor. When she begins teaching her class, the students sit in awe and wish they could sign like her. After finishing, she gets back on the train and arrives home to her Deaf family. We can only suppose what she must think as she goes to bed contemplating the dichotomies she will surely confront tomorrow navigating through another *typical* day!

Another parallel juxtaposing the two worlds occurs at the end of the school year. As wizard students leave Hogwarts, some (Harry Potter among them) head back to the muggle world. Harry, however, leaves Hogwarts with an inner strength, pride, and the knowledge that he will go back to live and learn with the other wizards. This parallels the experiences of some deaf chil-

dren at residential schools returning home for the summer to families with whom they cannot communicate. However, after living with deaf peers and staff for the academic year, deaf children are better able to handle life in the hearing world. A similar kind of confidence is described by Maya Angelou as she states, “I suppose, too, my family directly and my people indirectly have given me the kind of strength that enables me to go anywhere . . .” (Beilenson, 1992).

The theme of survival and overcoming imposing odds is prevalent throughout the Harry Potter series. Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore (the headmaster) question how Harry was able to survive the brutal attack by Voldemort (the evil wizard antagonist): “But how in the name of heaven did Harry survive? . . . We can only guess . . . We may never know.” The same question is often asked about deaf children who grow up and succeed in educationally and socially deprived environments. The answer is the same “. . . We can only guess . . . We may never know.”

And finally, the role of magic in the Wizard World parallels that of signed languages in defining the Deaf World. Magic is to the Wizard World what signed language is to the Deaf World—the factor that defines each.

Minority Issues

Although the issues we highlight in this section continue to demonstrate parallels to the Deaf World, they are examples of experiences common to many, if not all minority groups. This section is divided into two related components: (a) identity and (b) oppression.

Part 1: Identity

Identity is defined as “Sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing: ONENESS” or “Sameness of essential or generic character in different instances” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2003). Identity deals with the struggle of minorities to establish/understand themselves as proud members of their minority group, as well as their relationships with other groups.

At schools for the deaf, stories are legends where Deaf children thank their Deaf teachers for teaching

them academics and about life. At Hogwarts, Professor Dumbledore supported Harry in much the same way, for example, Harry says, “. . . instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help” (Rowling, 1997). This philosophy allows children to make mistakes while being instructed and guided as opposed to overprotected and, as a result, with limited opportunities to learn. There is a special value in being taught by other qualified wizards and Deaf teachers, and children realize this early on. The same issue is, of course, important to Black, Latino, and other minority children.

However, learning about other worlds is also important. Some wizards are fascinated with muggles and their technology, which they find baffling. Mr. Weasley (Harry’s best friend Ron’s father) is constantly collecting and marveling at the strange devices muggles use (telephones, cars, parking meters, etc.). This parallels some DCDP’s fascination with devices and technology for “hearing things” (radios, walkmans, phones, etc.).

Similarly, in the Wizard, Deaf, and minority worlds, effective understanding of both cultures has advantages. It is critical that those teaching deaf children promote understanding and awareness of both majority and minority cultures. There are many advantages to being bilingual/bicultural and an effective social agent in both worlds.

For example, Harry Potter does not know who he is. He arrives at Hogwarts to find that he is a hero in the Wizard World, after living as a “nobody” in the muggles world. This parallels the different status given to people depending on the “center” (hearing, deaf, wizard, and muggle) by which they are judged. Harry was also forbidden to ask questions about his childhood and was shielded from learning anything about his actual history and gifts. The denial and lack of information given to deaf children about their own language, history, and culture is also a significant issue. Even after he learned the truth about his parents and his own wizardry, Harry was forbidden to acknowledge and discuss them. This is also true for many DCHP.

The Mirror of Erised is an enchanted mirror that shows wizards their most sincere desires rather than their true reflections. All too often, deaf people feel that the perfect image of them depends on the ability to speak and/or to hear. Dumbledore comments that the happiest people in the world would see only their

own reflections, emphasizing the importance of a strong identity.

Another parallel is the tendency that wizards (and perhaps all humans) have to establish binary relationships as in “us and them.” The urge to create taxonomies that define the world as either wizard or muggle reflects a common outlook that many minorities use to define their own world. This compartmentalization of everything as either Deaf or hearing, Black or White, gay or straight, and so forth, demonstrates the power of identity especially as it applies to the worldview of minorities.

Part 2: Oppression

Oppression is defined as “Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2003). This category deals with discrimination (racism, audism, homophobia, and sexism) often directed toward minority group members simply because they are different.

Harry is involved in a constant struggle to persevere with the Dursleys, whom Hagrid calls “the biggest muggles I’ve ever seen” (Rowling, 1997). This is parallel to the idea that Deaf people have to fight audists and ignorant people everyday just to be viewed as capable, normally functioning individuals. The theme of oppression pervades the book, and we see Harry, as an innocent child, being alienated and ostracized for reasons he does not understand. This is also the experience of many Deaf children and adults.

Another interesting parallel is that despite the concern Wizards have with the muggle world, the most dangerous threat to their survival comes from within the Wizard World in the form of Lord Voldemort. Voldemort’s attempts to cleanse the Wizard World from muggle influences create unparalleled fear, paranoia, and divisiveness. This parallels the famous “crab theory” warning minorities about members of their own group working to prevent success and advancement for a variety of reasons.

Institutions

Institutions are defined as “a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2003).

Social institutions are a critical part of all of our lives; however, the institutions created by and for minority groups have an especially important role in preserving their unique culture and traditions. For this reason, this section has been created to highlight their significance.

The following is a list of the institutions of the Wizard World and their parallels in the Deaf World:

- Hogwarts is the wizard equivalent of residential schools for the deaf.
- Ministry of Magic is the wizard equivalent of the National Association of the Deaf.
- Daily Prophet parallels the NAD Broadcaster and formerly Silent News.
- The sport of Quidditch is one of the major institutions in the Wizard World. This parallels the significance of sports in the Deaf World.

In both the Wizard and Deaf Worlds, there are significant long-standing rivalries between schools.

Diagon Alley has special stores that sell wizard equipment and clothing that are required for wizard life at Hogwarts. This parallels the necessary purchasing of TTYs, light systems, baby cry signalers, pagers, and so forth in the Deaf World.

Edenic Narrative

Edenic is defined as “Of or pertaining to Eden; paradisaic”. Eden is defined as “The garden of God and the first home of Adam and Eve; A delightful place; a paradise; and a state of innocence, bliss, or ultimate happiness” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2003).

If we look closely, we can see that the story incorporates the pattern of an Edenic narrative comprising timeless elements of the classic tale of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace.

Stephen Jay Gould reminded us, “Human beings are storytellers, spinners of tales. We gather the complexities of our world into stories; we give order to the confusion of our lives, and to the apparent senselessness or cruelty of our surroundings, by constructing narratives that imbue the totality with meaning” (Gould, 1995).

To a great extent, the forms of the stories we tell, whether personal or culturally established, are strictly organized around definite patterns such as this. The

first element of the Edenic pattern is reference to a real or imagined time of bliss, the second involves a major incident that causes “the fall,” and the third is the struggle to regain that lost golden age.

Again, many groups have adopted this structure as they tell the stories reflecting their outlook on life and their culture. The Deaf World has also created its own story along similar lines. For example, we can review the classic account of “the beginning” as shared by American Deaf people.

For many, the story describes the early years (soon after Laurent Clerc came to the United States) representing the “golden age” of Deaf education. Statistics that show large numbers of deaf teachers and the successful pattern of deaf individuals themselves founding schools for the deaf are the primary basis for this designation. According to the story, these glory days were shattered and forever changed by the event known simply as the Milan Conference. The fall happened in 1880, yet even today many deaf people will point to the recommendations made over 100 years ago as the beginning of the end. These recommendations included strong support for speaking and listening at the expense of using signed language in instructing deaf children. And finally, ever after, Deaf people have, in various ways, been trying to combat audism (especially in Deaf education) in order to once again thrive in the present.

In much the same way, the times before Voldemort and the deaths of Lily and James Potter represent the time of bliss; the “good old” days. Voldemort’s ascension to power and the resulting fear/divisiveness represent the fall. The Wizard World has since struggled to recapture the golden age, and Harry represents the hope that they will.

But as the stories progress and we are made aware of all that have transpired we come to understand that things are also very complex in the Wizard World. It was not Voldemort alone who brought about the dark times. Why was it that so many were so willing to follow Voldemort and his ideas? Neither Harry nor Dumbledore seems to want to go back. Dumbledore, and in turn Harry, try to dispel the perceived problem (Voldemort) by being the only wizards willing to address him by name. Their actions suggest a movement forward, beyond common reactions instead of back to the way things used to be.

We therefore need to be careful of the kind of taxonomy we use to organize our perceptions. Gould (1995) responded to this by offering a cautionary note:

This propensity to tell stories grants us resolution, but also spells danger in avenues thereby opened for distortion and misreading. For our favorite stories unroll along definite and limited pathways (we call them epics, myths and sagas and they show eerie similarities across disparate cultures) and we often try to channel a much more varied nature along these familiar and edifying routes.

We must remember that these patterns can also distort our views of reality, sometimes generating limited understanding of the complex nature of the stories we tell.

Surely, the Milan Conference was an abhorrent declaration of oppressive and audist attitudes. But was the time before the conference truly a golden age for Deaf people? Calling that time the golden age does not account for how the environment was so ready to accept drastically new attitudes about deaf people of all ages and their education. The point being, perhaps times were not so golden after all. As such, we need to be aware of the complex nature of the history we may overlook because the pathways our characterizations must take do not always allow for diversions. Perhaps Robert Frost was even more insightful than we knew when he took the “road lesser traveled,” because it can make “all the difference.”

We may need to realize that true stories are not so easy to tell. Truth, as Dumbledore says, “is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution” (Rowling, 1997). True stories can be *beautifully* packaged in neat patterns such as the Edenic narrative or they can be *terribly* cumbersome, ill suited to the diversions necessary for a comprehensive account. In any event, the way we tell stories exposes our “literary biases for narrative continuity” giving us “the standard format for historical stories: purposeful, directional and sensible change” (Gould, 1995). This should not prevent us from enjoying our stories. In fact, if we approach our stories with critical, *cautious* awareness we can enjoy them more deeply and thoroughly.

We can, of course, appreciate the typical patterns we have come to know and love, patterns that may

represent a uniquely human way of understanding our world. At the same time, we can also be better prepared to understand what we might miss as a result of being conditioned to package stories according to traditional elements.

Implications

The parallels between Harry Potter and the Deaf World are striking. Our attempts at organizing the parallels have established an initial framework for analyzing literature using the insights and richness of the Deaf World. The Deaf Lens is a new and, to this point, rarely considered perspective. Our work has therefore created an opportunity for the Deaf Lens we “never knew was there” to narrate within established stories. Interestingly, many scholars, Michel Foucault and Stephen Jay Gould among them, have noted that exploring the features our taxonomies typically exclude are just as significant as those that we include. Reading narratives through the Deaf Lens will make significant contributions to our understanding of social arrangements, thus generating new ideas that transform our concepts of our world and ourselves.

This in-depth analysis is also important because it contributes to promoting ASL and English literacy. We can show children and adults that they have new ways to own stories while celebrating their life experiences. Approaching academic instruction in this way promotes critical thinking while confirming the experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing children as real and valuable. If students witness the application that their lives have to literature and literature study, it provides greater incentive for reading and general academic performance. As Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil (2002) stated “much of the art of teaching is associating what kids need to learn with what they already know.” Taking advantage of these associations will serve to enhance the quantity and quality of literature study by students and scholars alike.

The potential that this opens up for development of materials (both ASL and English based) for many forms of ASL and English narratives is great. Imagine the insight Deaf children, young or old, can bring to stories such as *The Ugly Duckling*, *Pinocchio*, and *Frankenstein* and the kinds of theme studies that could

be added to academic programming. Developing an awareness of themes and of the features of narrative can also encourage the creation of new stories and perhaps new vantage points for literature study.

Equally important are the implications this kind of study has in promoting awareness and access for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adults to literature and popular culture. "Successful learning from reading (or anything else) depends on the effectiveness of the communicative transaction" (Hirsch et al., 2002). Surely, Harry Potter and his Wizard World have made their way into the cultural literacies of every nation in the modern world. They have become parts of our "communicative transactions" that we now all assume are common knowledge. Everyone knows something about Harry Potter. As a result, the role this kind of study has in Deaf education becomes extremely powerful. It can build inroads to understanding and appreciating literature and social arrangements that have historically been difficult to access by deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

In addition, these ideas are valuable because stories and literature are often metaphors for universal and/or common experiences. There are stories we all know and refer to as we live and learn. There are also obscure tales that we cherish because of how they affect

us personally. Watching and listening to these stories, while adding insights from a vantage point that few have been able to find, is incredible. And all this from understanding Harry Potter!

References

- Beilenson, J. (1992). *Voices of struggle, voices of pride*. White Plains, NY: Peter Pauper Press.
- Czubek, T., & Greenwald, J. (2000). Presentation at the Deaf Studies Conference, Orlando, FL.
- Garber, M. (2001, April 8). The chapter after 'the end'. *New York Times*, Section 4, p.15.
- Gould, S. J. (1995). *Dinosaur in a haystack* (pp. 344–346). New York: Crown.
- Hirsch, E. D., Kett, J., & Trefil, J. (2002). *The new dictionary of cultural literacy* (pp. xiii–xv). New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.). (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.
- Mitchell, R., & Karchmer, M. (2004). Chasing the mythical ten percent: Parental hearing status of deaf and hard of hearing students in the United States. *Sign Language Studies* 4(2). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. New York: Scholastic Press.

Received November 15, 2004; revisions received March 5, 2005; accepted March 9, 2005.