

What's So Good About...? is a series of 15-minute programmes focusing on the popular children's writers: JK Rowling, Roald Dahl, Malorie Blackman, Jacqueline Wilson and Jamila Gavin. The programmes support Author Study and children's writing.

What's So Good About ... J K Rowling? comprises two episodes, which give an overview of the success of all the books currently available and considers why and how their popularity is reflected across the media and in merchandising. The first programme considers children's responses to the books and several Harry Potter fans explore the key elements of the stories that draw and hold them as readers. The second programme focuses on the Harry Potter phenomenon and examines what has made the books so popular with children of all ages. It features three teenage girls who are so Harry-mad that when they finished reading the fourth book, they created their own website called 'Harry Potter and the Freakish Fans of Linlithgow'.

Programme 1

Programme one begins with children's comments on what they like about Harry Potter books. These basically fall into the categories of:

- they're funny
- they're exciting
- they're a lot like real life
- they're full of suspense
- they contain words unique to them

We then meet three Harry Potter fans who talk about the appeal of the books and with them we explore the key features of the stories listed below.

Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$

This platform at King's Cross Station is the place that gives Harry and his friends access from the mortal Muggles' world to the world of witchcraft and wizardry. On location at the station, the three presenters talk and search for the barrier where platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ could be. They wish that the same magic would transport them into the parallel world of Hogwarts. Rowling writes at the edge

between fantasy and reality, and transports the reader from one world to the next. We experience the same tension as Harry, when he approaches the unmarked platform. He is full of doubt because he cannot believe that when he runs at the barrier he will pass through to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ where the Hogwarts Express will be waiting.

The children discuss the books with each other and the magical elements of the story as 'young children's dreams on paper'. But the Hogwarts students are based in reality and have to work for their achievements in anything from magic to quidditch.

Boarding school adventure

The trio's next visit is to a boarding school steeped in tradition in much the same way as Hogwarts. Pupils from the school join them for a chat about what life is like as a boarder and agree that their school is as near as you could get to Hogwarts without the magic! They discuss the accuracy of Rowling's descriptions of such establishments and that it is these that help give the books their credibility. Again, there is a sense that all these children are captured by the fantasy world that Rowling has created and wish they could be a part of it.

Quidditch

All the children get together and have a fast and furious quidditch match which sadly is not airborne! This is a great idea for basing a game on for children to play at school. After their match, the children talk about the significance of quidditch in the stories, a craze that has seized the wizarding nation, which again adds another layer of credibility to the fantasy world. The detail given in the lead-up and the playing of matches at Hogwarts draws the reader in to share the excitement and disappointments of players and spectators alike.

Magical beasts

In order to find out more about owls such as Hedwig, the children visit a hawk conservancy and ask all sorts of questions about owls. The children reflect on the relationship that Harry has with Hedwig, and on the magical nature of owls.

Scary bits

The intrepid fans are found in a dungeon – a good location for exploring some of the scary bits of the Harry Potter stories. The children agree that a big part of the appeal of the stories is the danger and suspense which can make the reader almost too frightened to read on at times! They suggest that the stories are

getting darker as they progress, as Voldermort is getting closer to killing Harry. They talk about how Rowling doesn't protect the reader from 'seriously' evil elements, so they share in Harry's fear. They are aware that the evil is getting stronger but up until now, good – in the form of Harry and his friends – has always countered it!

Activities

Before viewing

- Ask children to consider which elements of the Harry Potter books they like.

After viewing

- Design a class survey of readers' responses to the characters in Harry Potter stories. What makes them so credible? What makes you like, loathe or fear them? Record results.
- Use a selection of the Harry Potter books to create a word search of the most effective descriptions used to portray Rowling's characters.
- Using the game played in the programme as a model, children write down the rules of playing the Muggles version of quidditch.

Programme 2

In programme two we meet Julia Eccleshare – Children's book editor for the Guardian newspaper – who talks about the overwhelming success of the Harry Potter stories. She describes how readership of the books was built up by children themselves, who were avidly reading the first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and then recommending it to friends and passing the book from one to another on a scale never seen before in children's literature. This culminated in the children's unprecedented landslide vote for the book to win the Smarties Prize. This programme includes short archive clips of comments made by the author herself.

More than just books

The trio involved in this programme are three teenage girls from Scotland who were so devastated by the void left in their lives after completing the fourth title in the Harry Potter series that they decided to create their own website. These 'freakish fans' – as they describe themselves – are Rowan, Kat and Fiona.

The phenomenon

Julia Eccleshare describes the impact on sales of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* after it was awarded the Smarties prize, and looks at how the Harry Potter craze was born. We are told of bookstores that held sleepovers for fans wanting to buy the next volume, of how the author was mobbed by fans at King's Cross Station and how children themselves created this Harry Potter phenomenon rather than media hype.

Harry online

There are hundreds of Harry Potter websites but Rowan, Kat and Fiona wanted to create their own. They recognised the universal appeal of the Harry Potter books and wanted to share their enthusiasm with fans across the world.

Building a site

The girls got together in the holidays – working, eating and sleeping together to research everything that they could about the Harry Potter books, focusing on such aspects as spells and characters. They collected newspaper cuttings. Once they had collected all the information they needed, they considered design elements such as colour and font size and style. They then had to create their web page, which they launched under the title 'Harry Potter and the Freakish Fans of Linlithgow'.

What's on the site?

Fiona, Kat and Rowan wanted to create a site unlike anyone else's and they discovered that although sweets and food were integral to the stories, no other websites contained recipes. They looked at many of the favourite foods from the books and created Muggle recipes for them.

Onto the web

It was very exciting for the girls to monitor how many people visited their website when it was launched. The site enabled the girls to chat with other Harry Potter fans and they enjoyed receiving emails from children and teachers all over the world. They regularly update the information on their site.

Harry for sale

With the success of the books came the merchandising, as children increasingly wanted to become involved in all elements of the Harry Potter phenomenon. Popular extracts from the film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* are shown, which creates opportunities for discussing how well the filmmakers have interpreted what the readers see in their mind's eye.

Forever Harry

Over one hundred million Harry Potter books have been sold worldwide, as a result of children's enthusiasm about the characters and stories. It would be interesting to discuss with the children whether they imagine that their enthusiasm will be sustained over the planned next three titles, and what they think will become of Harry as he grows up.

Activities

Before viewing

- Discuss with the children how they know about the Harry Potter books. Were they recommended? Did they see an advert or poster? Make a list.

After viewing

- Hold a debate to explore Julia Eccleshare's view that the Harry Potter phenomenon is not media hype.
- Work in a group to design a web page around one of your favourite Harry Potter characters. What will you need to research? How will you attract visitors to your site?
- Write a critical review of the film of Harry Potter, making comparisons with the book.
- Write a report on the quality and range of Harry Potter merchandising and comment on the targeted consumers.

Support material for Book Box: Popular Writers

Resource Book: 206849 £6.95

Bookbox website: www.channel4.com/bookbox

For information and orders, consult 4Learning's annual brochure or visit www.channel4.com/learningshop Email: sales@4learning.co.uk
4Learning, PO Box 444, London SW1P 2WD

English for 7–11 year olds



Book Box: Popular Writers What's So Good About ... J K Rowling?



Book Box: What's So Good About ... J K Rowling?
was produced for Channel 4 by **Double Exposure**
Producer and Director **Paul Davies**

© 2002 Channel 4 Television Corporation.
All rights reserved.

Leaflet written by **Liz George**
Edited by **Adrienne Jones**
Designed by **John Burke**
Printed by **Graphic Litho**

Photograph copyright: Bloomsbury