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Introduction to Computers

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J.K. Rowling’s Influence on Children’s Literature

Some children’s books are more influential than others. Some of the most influential include *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie, *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and *Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper. These books have been widely read, have inspired other books and certain movies, and could be considered kid classics. This elite club gained another member when *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published in 1996. J.K. Rowling created a cultural phenomenon in Harry Potter, whose influence is felt around the world, inside theme parks and in movies and merchandise. And one influence may be more significant than any others: the influence on children’s literature. Rowling set new standards for success, influenced a new age of authors, and changed the face of children’s literature. Despite these significant accomplishments, J.K. Rowling did not improve children’s literacy and reading habits.

The success of Harry Potter has caused the children’s market to explode with many new authors and books similar to *Harry Potter*. Many accomplished adult authors have moved into the children’s market. They include: Carl Hiaasen, Clive Barker, Ron Carlson, and Isabel Allende. Another example of this growth in children’s writing is that there were 68 Young Adult titles published between January 2003 and February 2004 in the fantasy genre alone. All of these fantasy books are a result of numerous authors who want Rowling’s spotlight (Cart). Writers now know that if they want success in today’s children market, they need an appeal similar to *Harry Potter*. Books such as *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *The End of Life as We Know It* by Susan Pfeffer have followed up on *Harry Potter’s* violent, world-destruction theme (Springen). Other books are also similar to *Harry Potter*. One of these books is *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyers. Some common themes between *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* are: the mystical creatures, the magic, and the violent, war theme (Carpenter). According to *The Writer*, in June of 2001, children’s hardcover fiction was up 25.2% and adult hardcover books were down 14.3%. This shows that more authors are following in J.K. Rowling’s steps and writing for kids (Epstein).

Perhaps the great achievement of Rowling is how she managed to change the way in which children’s literature is viewed. Catherine Grey, writing in *Stylist* Magazine, said “Children’s fiction was a stagnant backwater which nobody really took very seriously at all. There’s been a revolution which is mostly due to Harry Potter”. Hardcover fiction for children was always hard to sell. Now, however, it is selling in considerable amounts (Roback). An illustration of this increase in children’s literature sales due to Rowling’s books is, according to one general manager of Borders, that the stores were once less than 5% children books, but now are more like 10% to 15% (Duryea). Before *Harry Potter*, violent, end-of-the-world books were almost non-existent in children’s literature. Now, it is one of the biggest themes in children’s books. *Harry Potter’s* themes of world domination and fighting started some of this (Springen). Her books have popularized the genre so much that even older fantasy books are more popular now. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Redwall*, *The Hobbit*, and *A Wrinkle in Time* have “experienced increased sales during the decade”. This is a result of Harry Potter readers wanting more of the same genre and theme (“Literature” 50).

Although Rowling has influenced authors and changed children’s literature, she has not improved children’s literacy and reading habits. The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that children who read for fun drops twenty-four percentage points between fourth and eighth grade. When *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* came out, “the results were identical,” says Motoko Rich of *The New York Times.* The several Harry Potter books are “not enough to reverse the decline in reading”, says Rich. After each Harry Potter book everyone will stop reading and go back to watching television andusing their devices (Johnson). According to Matt Antonio, manager of Barnes & Noble in South Tampa Bay, Florida, said that children do not like reading more, but they like reading Harry Potter more (Duryea). Federal statistics show that kids who read for fun keeps dropping as they age, almost at the same pace as before *Harry Potter* was released. The books have done a great deal for other topics. This may lead to people believing that they have improved literacy and reading habits, “but a revolution for literacy and critical thinking is not about to happen as a result of the Harry Potter series”, said Aidan Johnson of *Globe & Mail.* Although J.K. Rowling helped the children’s market grow and strengthen children’s literature, she has not affected children’s literacy and reading habits.

Rowling’s series has managed to influence many new authors and books and change the way children’s literature is viewed. Even though she accomplished these great feats, she did not increase children’s literacy and reading habits. Her books have created some of the most loyal fans, much like those of the Star Wars movies. They have also put a new life into children’s literature. This new life has made literature expand, grow, and evolve. However, the seven books are not enough. She may seem superhuman to some, but even she cannot do everything.

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