

A Few Things Writers Can Learn from the Harry Potter Series

Cheryl B. Klein

I gave this speech at the Terminus Harry Potter fan convention in August 2008, about a year after the publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. It distills a lot of the craft ideas I talk about within my books into one speech, and it was tremendously fun to write and deliver for a roomful of fellow fans.

- My name is Cheryl Klein
- I'm a senior editor at Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.
- And the continuity editor for the U.S. editions of the Harry Potter books.
- And it is a great pleasure to be with you here today
- Because before I was any of that
 - Before I started as Arthur's editorial assistant
 - Or moved to New York City
 - Or even thought about being in children's publishing
- I was a Harry Potter fangirl.

- I discovered the series nine years ago this month, in August of 1999
- In a white Dodge Dynasty
- as I drove from Missouri to Minnesota with my best friend
 - for our senior year of college.
- She was driving, and I was sitting in the back.
- So I picked up this book she'd been raving about
- *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
- Just to see why it was such a big deal.
- And when I read "Harry Potter was a highly unusual boy in many ways"
 - Followed by the detailing of all the ways he was so very, very strange
 - It didn't take long: I was hooked.
- My friend noticed I was awfully quiet all of a sudden, and she said "Are you reading my book?"
 - "No," I said.
 - "You are! You are! That's mine!"
- And it got to the point where neither one of us wanted to drive because we both wanted to read.
- When we finally reached school, I bought *Sorcerer's Stone* along with my fall course textbooks
- I read *Chamber of Secrets* over winter break
- I haunted the Unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club for news about Book 4
 - Any of you remember that website? Run by Jenna?
 - The Leaky Cauldron/Mugglenet of its day
- And I waited in line at midnight for *Goblet of Fire*.

- When I was hired at the end of the summer of 2000 as Arthur Levine’s editorial assistant
- I literally jumped up and down, knowing I might get to work on Harry Potter
- And doing so has been the biggest honor and excitement of my editorial life.
- And the greatest pleasure, too—
- The pure reading pleasure that all of us have shared
- As we followed this series over the years of its unfolding.
- There have been lots of wonderful talks here at Terminus
 - exploring the characters, world, and philosophy of J. K. Rowling’s books
 - and the fandom they’ve spawned.
- In this talk, I’d like to go back to the books themselves
- To explore how that pleasure was created—
 - the narrative techniques that make these books mean so much to us all.
- Focusing on the big four elements of fiction: character, voice, theme, and plot.
- And, for you fiction writers out there, I hope to offer some practical suggestions on how you can develop these elements in your own writing.
- I am so very honored to be here
- I want to say thank you to Amy and the Terminus staff for inviting me,
- And thank *you* very much for your kind attendance and attention;
 - I’ll try to make it worth your while.

- So I’m going to start with Character.
- The first thing that J. K. Rowling does well
 - At the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*
- Is so basic and so invisible that it’s very easy for us readers to take it for granted
- But it’s absolutely essential to everything that follows,
 - And masterfully done here.
- And that is that she gets us readers to identify with her hero.
- Because Harry is real and interesting to us, we care about him
 - Because we care about him, we want to know how his story will come out
 - And we want to know that so much, we eventually line up at bookstores at midnight wearing funny hats.
- So how does she make us care about Harry?
- First, she gets us to sympathize with him
- By making him live with the horrible Dursleys
- It’s easy to forget sometimes, looking back over the whole series
 - That the first book doesn’t begin with Harry or magic at all.
- It begins in our Muggle world, with Muggles who think they are perfectly normal, thank you very much
 - But who instead are perfectly awful: Gossiping, greedy, disapproving, cheating
 - And unloving to their orphaned nephew/cousin
- And what happens here is basic literary math: We readers dislike the Dursleys, and the Dursleys dislike Harry, so we automatically like Harry.
 - See how that works?

- The second step in getting us interested in Harry: Ms. Rowling gives him an intriguing backstory and destiny
 - The first non-Dursley people we meet in the book are Professor McGonagall, Professor Dumbledore, and Hagrid
 - People who can transform into cats, put out streetlamps with the flick of a lighter, and ride motorcycles through the sky
 - *Much* cooler and more interesting than the Dursleys
 - And they dislike the Dursleys too, you'll note
 - So we readers now have someone to identify with—
 - The magical people.
 - Anyway, they talk about Harry as a child with a great mystery behind him
 - “How in the name of heaven did Harry survive?” Professor McGonagall asks.
 - and a great future ahead of him
 - “I wouldn’t be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future!” she says later.
 - And this past and future together sets up the plot that will drive all seven books
 - And further increases our interest in Harry
 - What’s the solution to this mystery?
 - What will happen to him next? *I want to know.*
- And finally—the third technique J. K. Rowling uses in getting us to identify with Harry—
- She makes him a good person.
 - For me this is exemplified by the Brazilian snake scene in Chapter Two
 - You all know how this goes: Dudley whines, orders, and moans at his father to get the snake to move, but nothing happens. Then:
- << Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn’t have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself—no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. >>
 - Harry goes on to have a conversation with the snake, where he sympathizes further with people banging on its tank and finally sets it free.
 - We’ve seen a lot of reverse characterization of Harry in the book up to this point—we like him because we dislike the Dursleys, who treat him terribly—
 - But this is simple positive characterization: He sympathizes with the snake, of all creatures, and puts himself inside its head rather than being self-centered like Dudley and demanding things of it.
 - And then he lets it go, showing his kind heart.
 - And of course, he can talk to snakes, period! *Tres* cool.
- These three things—sympathy, mystery, likeability—make his story nearly irresistible to follow.
 - And are three tools for you writers to remember in establishing your own protagonists and plots.
- Many writers have used these techniques before and since, of course
 - *Especially* since
- To the extent that when I read a fantasy manuscript now, I have to say,

- I often roll my eyes at the moment when someone prophesies a great destiny for our put-upon boy hero.
 - A moment that happens in about 75 percent of fantasy manuscripts, if not more
- What makes the HP books different
- Is the unpretentious honesty that accompanies the prophecy
 - Note that Dumbledore says the fame that leads to “Harry Potter day” would be *awful* for Harry—it would “turn his head” and it’s better if he grows up away from it.
 - Hardly the expected start to a heroic narrative!
- And the side details that anchor all of these characters, even the Dursleys, in reality.
 - Mr. Dursley strokes his mustache when he thinks.
 - Dumbledore likes lemon drops.
 - Harry gets excited about a treat like the zoo
- These are people whom we readers recognize
 - Because they share the habits or tastes or emotions that we nonfictional people have ourselves.
 - Or know to be within the bounds of reality.
- And now that we’re interested in Harry
- And he’s established as fictionally real
- J. K. Rowling uses these techniques—
 - unpretentious honesty and an eye for the well-observed detail
- To develop him and his friends-and-relations through all seven books.
- Even as the magical world becomes ever wider
- She keeps deepening the psychological reality of her characters
 - By showing how their innate qualities—their personalities and their histories—drive the action
 - And by letting them make mistakes.
- In terms of personality, in the first couple books, Harry is sort of the Barack Obama of children’s literature
 - (Barack Obama in 2007, I should say)
 - A nice guy who everyone likes,
 - a hero for his interesting biography and good looks,
 - but a little bit of a blank slate beyond that essential goodness—someone on whom people project what they want to see.
- But he acquires real personality and depths—
 - or rather, we come to see the personality and depth that was always there
- as the series progresses and he is tested:
 - Not always making the right choices, but learning from all of his choices on the way.
- We discover his virtues
 - His bravery in going after the Sorcerer’s Stone in Book 1
 - His kindness to Dobby in Book 2
 - His sense of justice when he won’t kill Sirius in Book 3
 - His loyalty to his friends throughout

- And his flaws, which are often the flip side of those same virtues.
- One of my favorite moments in Book 5 is when Hermione says to Harry, “Don’t you think you’ve got a bit of a – a – *saving-people thing?*” right before they take off for the Ministry.
 - It’s the author’s explicit acknowledgement of the double-edged sword in her hero’s personality
 - That he loves his friends and proto-family so much
 - Having been without friends or family for so long
 - That he has a tendency to plunge in without getting all the information
 - Or thinking his decisions through.
- This sort of acknowledgement is an incredibly brave thing for a writer to do,
- because it invites the reader to step away from Harry’s point of view and examine his choices—
 - to stop identifying with him if we think he’s making a mistake
- And of course he *is* making a mistake here—one that leads indirectly to Sirius’s death.
- In Book 7, the same test happens again, when the Deathly Hallows are revealed to Harry.
 - He can indulge his impulse to act—
 - to seize the Elder Wand and defeat Voldemort
 - Becoming the Master of Death and saving all his friends.
 - And the Harry of Book 5 would do that very thing.
- But in Book 7, tempered by the deaths of Dobby and Wormtail
- He chooses *not* to act—to continue instead on the course he was set
 - Trusting Dumbledore, even without all the information at his disposal.
- That moment is the surest sign that Harry has grown up
- And one that leads directly to his ultimate defeat of Voldemort.

- I’ve often heard adult readers get indignant
- About the fact that the HP series is classified as children’s or young adult literature.
 - Arguing that they’re adult books in the complexity of their plots and themes.
- I have to say that this is not an argument I have much sympathy with.
- First of all because it assumes that children’s or YA books can’t have complex plots and themes—that those qualities belong solely to adult literature
 - Which is condescending and wrong
- But more importantly because what makes a book adult vs. children’s vs. YA
 - Is the psychological age of the protagonist and of the emotional journey he undertakes
 - How it forces him to change and grow—and what he changes and grows into
- And the seven books of the Harry Potter series are a classic young-adult emotional journey
 - From the simple "Yay School!" atmosphere of Book 1,
 - to the revelations of family history in Book 3,
 - to dealing with death in Book 4,
 - to Harry's discovery of seemingly every single adult's feet of clay in Book 5,
 - (Not to mention the irrational anger and the hilariously bad first romance there)
 - to his taking control of his destiny and becoming a man in Books 6 and 7.
- It’s a growth process I think all of us can see in our own lives

- Even though the details are different for we Muggle non-orphans.
- The Harry Potter series wouldn't have experienced even a quarter as much success as it did
- If J. K. Rowling weren't able to make us care about Harry and his friends at the beginning
 - And to keep them real and their lives recognizable over the course of their growing up.
- To restate something I said at the beginning,
- The plot may have kept us turning the pages
- But our knowledge of and love for the characters is what makes that plot matter.

- So if you're a writer, and you've got an awesome idea for a plot
- By all means develop that
- But I urge you to spend at least an equal amount of time thinking about character
 - What sort of character will grow the most within the sort of plot you've created?
 - What are her virtues? Her flaws?
 - How will those qualities drive her actions, and therefore that plot journey?
 - What are the telling details that will make her real?
- And then give her the freedom to be who she is
 - Without you the author getting in the way
 - Overexplaining who she is or why she's doing something
 - Or worse, protecting the character from the consequences of her actions because you love her so much.

- And this leads me to the way in which the story is told
 - What's called the narrative voice.
- We editors and writing teachers toss this adage out over and over again: Show, not tell.
 - Where telling is the writer's informing the reader of a particular quality or circumstance
 - And showing is the writer's dramatizing this idea for the reader.
- For instance, if Ms. Rowling had written, "Draco Malfoy was an extremely spoiled and unpleasant boy," that would be Telling.
- But instead, within thirty seconds of meeting Harry, Draco says "I don't see why first-years can't have their own racing brooms. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."
 - That's Showing.
 - And—what a jerk!
- As that example demonstrates, showing is much more powerful than telling
- Because it allows the reader to react to the action
 - based on firsthand experience,
 - rather than having to take the author's word for it
- And the Harry Potter books are almost entirely Show.
- We readers are there with Harry every step of the way
 - Seeing what he sees
 - Experiencing the class, the Quidditch game, the kiss, the battle right alongside him
 - And therefore feeling the joy or terror he feels
 - Without Ms. Rowling having to say "Harry felt terrified."

- When I'm reading manuscript submissions, I'm always alert to the use of the word "felt," especially in the first ten pages
 - Because if you-the-writer are having to tell me how your character feels,
 - Then that probably means you haven't succeeded in getting me in the character's head
 - So I'm not feeling those emotions alongside the character
- And I read books precisely to get out of my own head and emotions
 - Into the experiences and feelings of these imaginary people.
- The lesson for writers, I would *like* to say, is "do not use the word 'felt'"
 - But rather show me how the character came to feel however he or she feels.
 - Let me get to know him, and put me in the action with him,
 - So when he sees the girl of his dreams pashing another guy, I feel the kick in the gut the same way he does.
- Now, Ms. Rowling does use "felt" fairly often, as I'm sure you know
- But if you look closely at when that happens, the Telling there usually serves as a confirmation for the reader,
 - Directing the emotional takeaway from whatever just happened
 - An emotion we were likely feeling already.
- The truth is, both Showing and Telling have their place in fiction
- Because sometimes readers need the plain straightforward direction of telling
 - To elucidate the point of all that showing.
- How many of you learned about topic sentences in school?
- A topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph, which sets forth its main idea or hypothesis
- And while it's mostly used in nonfiction or expository writing,
 - It's a wonderful structure for description or narration as well
- Because it makes each paragraph function almost like an argument
- You set forth your premise, which is often Telling
 - For instance, "The dungeon was, most unusually, already full of vapors and odd smells."
- Then you back it up with evidence that supports the point you're making—the Showing
 - "Harry, Ron, and Hermione sniffed interestedly as they passed large, bubbling cauldrons. . . . They chose the [table] nearest a gold-colored cauldron that was emitting one of the most seductive scents Harry had ever inhaled: Somehow it reminded him simultaneously of treacle tart, the woody smell of a broomstick handle, and something flowery he thought he might have smelled at the Burrow."
- Then you conclude the paragraph and move the story forward.
 - "A great contentment stole over him; he grinned across at Ron, who grinned back lazily."
- That structure recurs over and over again throughout the books
 - Indeed, I think it's Ms. Rowling's natural narrative voice
- And I'd argue that one of the main reasons HP has been such an unprecedented worldwide phenomenon is precisely this abundance of showing.
- Ms. Rowling describes things so thoroughly
 - And we're in Harry's head and in the action so completely

- That my experience reading, say, *Goblet of Fire*
- Was very similar to those of readers in England and Germany, Japan and Australia
- Because we were all seeing the same things
- And caught up in the emotions of the story the same way.

- And this leads me to the third element of fiction I'd like to discuss—Theme
 - Or, the Big Ideas
- How many of you read the epigraphs to *Deathly Hallows* before diving in to the text?
 - How many of you just started with Chapter 1?
- Well, if you read them, you saw this quote from William Penn:
 - “Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. . . . This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.”
- Those of you who read the epigraphs—how many of you saw that and thought, “OK, that’s it, Harry’s gonna bite it?”
 - I know I did, the first time I read the manuscript
- And I have to say, I got teary-eyed over that page more than once after reading the book
- Because the ideas of death and love are central to the series.
 - Even more central than power, I would say.
- The whole story happens because Voldemort does not want to die—as simple as that
 - He tries to kill Harry because Harry is supposed to kill him
- But Harry is protected by his mother’s blood—
 - the physical manifestation of her love.
- On Harry and the reader’s end, each one of the books introduces, in a fashion appropriate to their age and understanding, a way of thinking about or dealing with death
 - From the first three, when he’s seeing the reflections of his parents and the past everywhere around him
 - Literally, in the mirror of Erised, the diary, and the Marauders
 - To *Goblet of Fire*, where Harry witnesses death in person
 - To *Order*, which brings the deaths closer, and introduces him to the idea of his own in the prophecy
 - “Neither shall live while the other survives”
 - And finally *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*
 - Which introduce the Horcruxes—Voldemort’s instruments of avoiding death
 - And the Hallows—the objects the Peverells literally take from Death.
- And with Book 7, we saw that Ms. Rowling’s slow approach to the subject, the slow accretion of character and backstory
- Was all preparing Harry for his own death on behalf of the people he loves—
- Teaching him that, as Dumbledore says in Book 5, “There are things much worse than death”
 - Like the *loss* of people we love
- And, at the very beginning of the whole story, back in Book 1: “To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.”

- This sort of thematic richness in a writer’s work grows out of serious engagement with the questions that are important to them and to us all
 - About what matters in life,
 - What’s the right way to live,
 - How we should treat each other
 - What we live for.
 - And if you are a writer, then you can do worse than starting from these questions
 - Constructing a story to explore the options or illustrate your answers
 - Or, if you have a solid draft of a story in hand, asking yourself
 - What do I want to say here? What point do I want to make?
 - Is my plot at present accomplishing that?
 - Novels are really philosophy books in narrative disguise
 - And—presuming greatly here—I think Ms. Rowling’s philosophy might ultimately be expressed in something else Dumbledore says:
 - “Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love.”
 - Not looking back at the past, at the dead, but looking forward
 - To the life we all share, and the good we can do each other within that.
-
- And the idea of looking forward brings me, finally, to Plot.
 - Truly I could have started with plot, and made this entire talk about the plot of the Harry Potter books,
 - Because I don’t think anyone since Dickens has plotted like J. K. Rowling,
 - And even Dickens spun his story across only one book, not seven.
 - To toss out some literary theory here, I believe there are basically three kinds of plots:
 - A conflict: Two people or forces in opposition to each other
 - This can be an internal conflict as well as an external conflict
 - A mystery: Where some piece of information needs to be found out
 - the name of the murderer, the location of an object on a quest
 - And a lack: Where something is missing from the protagonist’s life at the beginning, and it is earned or fulfilled by the end.
 - One of the reasons the series as a whole works so brilliantly
 - Is because it offers readers all three types of plot across all seven books:
 - The conflict: Harry vs. Voldemort
 - The mystery: Why Voldemort couldn’t kill baby Harry, and how the grown-up Harry can eventually defeat him
 - And the lack: Harry going from not having friends or family to being surrounded by them at the end of Book 7
 - And then each individual book has at least one internal mystery or conflict
 - Like the identity of the Heir of Slytherin, or the Triwizard Tournament, or the search for the Horcruxes
 - That provides propulsion and story for that book
 - Even as it contributes to the overall course of the action.
 - Now, if you are a writer trying to plot out your work
 - And looking to the HP books as a model

- You might very easily just throw up your hands and quit.
 - Because how do you compete with that?
 - Hard to do and still be original
- Still, I think there are two useful lessons you might take away here.
 - One theoretical, one practical.
- First, the theory.
 - (I really love narrative theory, in case you can't tell,
 - So I hope I'm not boring you with this)
- In *The Poetics* by Aristotle
 - The first major work of literary criticism in Western civilization
- Aristotle defined dramatic action as “the change from good fortune to bad, or bad fortune to good”
- The key word here is *change*
- That means your protagonist's circumstances are different at the end than they are at the beginning—for better or for worse
 - Otherwise, you will have made a reader plow through 200 pages
 - To discover nothing is different. And that would be infuriating.
- But more than that, your *character* must change as a result of his experiences.
 - Growing in some way—kinder or more bitter or wiser or more insulated
- When I read the manuscript of Book 7 for the first time,
- I cried as I have never cried at a book before in the chapter “The Forest Again,”
 - When Harry goes to meet Voldemort with his parents, Sirius, and Lupin.
- Correction: I didn't cry. I wept. I bawled. I sobbed.
 - I almost couldn't see the pages through my tears
 - Though of course, I also couldn't stop reading.
- And I realized later that this was because
 - I identified with Harry so thoroughly (Character)
 - I was so completely in his point of view (Voice)
- That it was like I was going to my death as well.
 - And it was horrible but necessary to save everyone else Harry loved.
- And that, of course, is Ms. Rowling's Theme—that as scary as death is to us,
 - Love is stronger and more important.
- My point here is, Ms. Rowling constructed a plot in which her hero,
 - Would, in the whole course of the seven-book action,
 - Thanks to the loss of his parents,
 - And the loss of Sirius,
 - The search for the Horcruxes
 - And the conquering of his desire for the Deathly Hallows
 - Come to discover her theme.
- And this is what good plots do:
 - They provide a structure and events
 - Through which your protagonist has painful experiences, learns from them, grows, and triumphs
 - In a way that conveys the Big Idea the author has in mind
- And since we readers identify with the main character,

- We are making those mistakes along with him
 - And then we learn the same emotional lesson that he learns from the experience
 - And we come away changed as well.
- (The Theme is ultimately the Big Idea the character, and the reader, takes away from the plot)
- So, if you're a writer, ask yourself—
 - How do my character's circumstances change?
 - And how does the character himself or herself change?
 - What do the events of my plot teach my character?
 - Is he discovering my theme or point for himself, as a result of what he learns through the action? Or are the events just one darn thing after another?
 - And if the latter, you may need to tweak your plot or your theme to fix that.
- The second thing—the practical thing—I think writers can take away from J. K. Rowling's plotting
- Is the value of planning and outlining.
- Now, I do not mean to say that you have to think out every step of your book from the beginning.
- There are some writers who do that
 - Sort of the classical music model—very structured and controlled
- And others who literally make everything up as they go along
 - The jazz model—improvising, freewheeling
- With most writers falling somewhere in between
 - What I guess we'd call the “American Idol” model
 - They have a sense of the overall tune, but what makes it interesting is the variations on the way
- And all of these writing models are totally fine:
 - What's important is finding the one that works for you.
- J. K. Rowling, clearly, is a classical musician on the order of Mozart or Bach
- In the way she planned and ordered all the plots in the series.
- And we all know that she had outlined all the books from the beginning
 - Which allowed her to weave a plot of this complexity.
- But if you aren't a plotter of this type—
 - you're more of a jazz musician or David Archuleta
 - Or if you do outline everything, but then find yourself deviating from that as you write
- Then I suggest that, when you finish your first draft, you go back and outline the entire book, chapter by chapter
 - Making a “book map,” as it's called
 - Describing the key action and plot or character-development points of each chapter
 - And writing down key thoughts or lines.
- I do this with each and every novel I edit

- Because it allows me to see how the conflict develops, where the clues to any mysteries are being laid, how the protagonist is getting what he needs
- And more important, it lets me see how the book *isn't* working
 - Where the author is going for long periods without introducing any new developments or information
 - Where characters are behaving inconsistently
 - Where there's a dialogue scene that's fun but sort of pointless
 - Or where two scenes in a row establish the exact same plot points, so one isn't necessary.
- Thanks to the book map, I don't get caught up in the language of the book,
- So I can get a more global view of the kind of plot the author is developing—a Conflict, Mystery, or Lack
- And whether they've fulfilled the essential requirements of that plot:
 - Has the heroine overcome the enemy—or vice versa—in a conflict plot?
 - What is the answer to the Mystery?
 - Has the hero gotten what he needed in a Lack plot?
- And I can look at the themes the author is developing
 - And look for points where those Ideas might be underlined or strengthened.
- I'm going to wind up here with two last things that writers can learn from the Harry Potter series.
- The first is, take your time.
- I wrote the author biographies that appeared in the back of the American editions of the last three books—
 - my immense contribution to Potter lore—
- and with *Deathly Hallows* I made an especial point of including the following sentence: “J. K. Rowling has been working on the Harry Potter series since 1990.”
 - How many of you were less than five years old in the summer of 1990?
 - I myself was a high-powered eleven-year-old at the time.
- So that was *seventeen years* from the initial idea till the publication of Book 7.
- It was five years between the idea and the completion of *Sorcerer's Stone*.
- And in all that time, Ms. Rowling was working out her plots, deepening her characters and themes, writing and rewriting
 - Eager to be published, no doubt,
 - But also giving herself time to get it right,
 - As she ultimately did.
- And that brings me to my final point: Have fun, and write what you love.
- When J. K. Rowling wrote the first Harry Potter book
 - And my boss, Arthur A. Levine, bought the American rights
- Fantasy wasn't “hot.” Children's books weren't “hot.” British books weren't “hot.”
 - And publishing people sort of thought Arthur was nuts.
 - But he just knew he loved this book,
 - That it was one of the most fresh and wonderful things he'd ever read.

- And that magic happened because Ms. Rowling wasn't writing to please the market. She was writing to please herself.
- And she did that across all seven books,
 - In spite of the pressures of fans and reporters and the Internet and critics
- Keeping true to her vision every step of the way.
- So don't write what you think is going to sell
 - What you think the market wants—
 - because that's going to change by the time you publish anyway.
- But rather write the story you've always wanted to hear,
 - the one you've never read anywhere else,
 - the one that scares you with the pleasure of writing it.
- In a world that you alone can create—
 - Maybe a fantasy world, maybe the town next door
- And people that you alone can fill it with.
 - Characters you come to know and love
 - Through their experiences and the way they grow and change.
- And all that grows out of *your* unique experiences, the way *you've* grown and come to see the world
 - A perspective unlike anyone else's on earth.
- You have to take joy in the work of writing, for it is hard work,
- but when you can find that just-right word, that perfect plot twist—
 - there are very few greater pleasures.
- And then, even if your book is never published
 - Or if it is published, but never quite achieves 400 million copies in print
- You will still have the story you always wanted,
 - A little bit of yourself forever in the world.
- Because a book is kind of like a good Horcrux, if we can imagine that—
 - A piece of the writer's soul, preserved in a physical object for all time
 - And changing the lives of all those who come in contact with it.

- I know that nine years ago, in a white Dodge Dynasty somewhere in the wilds of Iowa,
- My life was changed forever, thanks to Harry Potter and J. K. Rowling.
- And I know that many of you can say the same.
- If you are writers, I wish you all the best with your own Horcri.*
- For all of you, I thank you for your kind attention
- And I hope that all of us can say, in the end,
 - "All was well."
- Thank you.

* *A Harry Potter fandom joke, as John Noe of the Leaky Cauldron insisted often that the plural of "Horcrux" should be "Horcri."*