

Harry Potter™

THE MAGIC STARTS HERE

DISCUSSION GUIDE
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone



Belonging⁺

Feeling needed, loved, and respected in your family, community, and in the world as a whole.



Feeling Different

When Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone begins, the reader gets a vivid picture of where Harry doesn't belong: number four, Privet Drive. We see immediately that Harry doesn't fit in with the Dursleys; despite being a member of the family, his aunt, uncle, and cousin treat Harry horribly. In chapter two, look at how Harry is treated throughout breakfast and through the beginning of the day. What are the ways the Dursleys make Harry feel unwelcome, ignored, and discouraged? Read aloud some examples from the book.

Hope and Resilience

Harry makes the best of his circumstances, but he clearly wishes he could find a friend. What are the signs in chapter two, at the zoo, that show you Harry is looking for a place to belong? Where has Harry found refuge with any people, places, or activities in the Muggle world? How does he show he hasn't lost hope of finding people who accept and love him?

Finding Your Place

When Harry learns of his place in the wizarding world, he discovers a whole new world in which he is not only accepted but celebrated. Read Hagrid's revelation to Harry in chapter four. When Hagrid tells Harry of his heritage, how does that affect Harry? When he and Hagrid visit Diagon Alley, what interactions show that Harry has found a welcoming community?

Building Community

Hogwarts is a large school with many types of students, including witches and wizards from all backgrounds, as well as creatures like centaurs and ghosts. How do students build community through the way they study and play together? How does the House system encourage camaraderie? Does competing for House points divide or unite students?

Respect

Respect is a key part of making sure a community sticks together despite differences. How do the professors at Hogwarts demonstrate respect for each other? For their students? Can you pinpoint a moment when a professor treats a student better than expected? Worse?

What's Your House?

Hogwarts Houses are not randomly assigned but are chosen magically in keeping with each student's character and wishes. How do the Houses build a sense of community? Read Neville's confrontation with Draco in chapter thirteen. What happens when a student doesn't quite feel at home in their House? How do their fellows help them feel they belong? Do you have a strong sense of which Hogwarts House you would be placed in? Why do you feel you belong in that House?

Feeling at Home

When do you think Harry's feeling of belonging is strongest? How about for Hermione? Ron? Neville? Draco? Looking at the whole book, pick a moment when you think each character truly felt like they belonged at Hogwarts and read it aloud.



Curiosity⁺

Fostering a willingness to explore new territory and test new theories.



Exploring New Worlds

Harry is curious by nature, and he finds fellow explorers in Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Of the three friends, who would you say is the most driven by curiosity? What makes you pick that character? Read aloud excerpts from the text to support your reasons.

Asking Questions

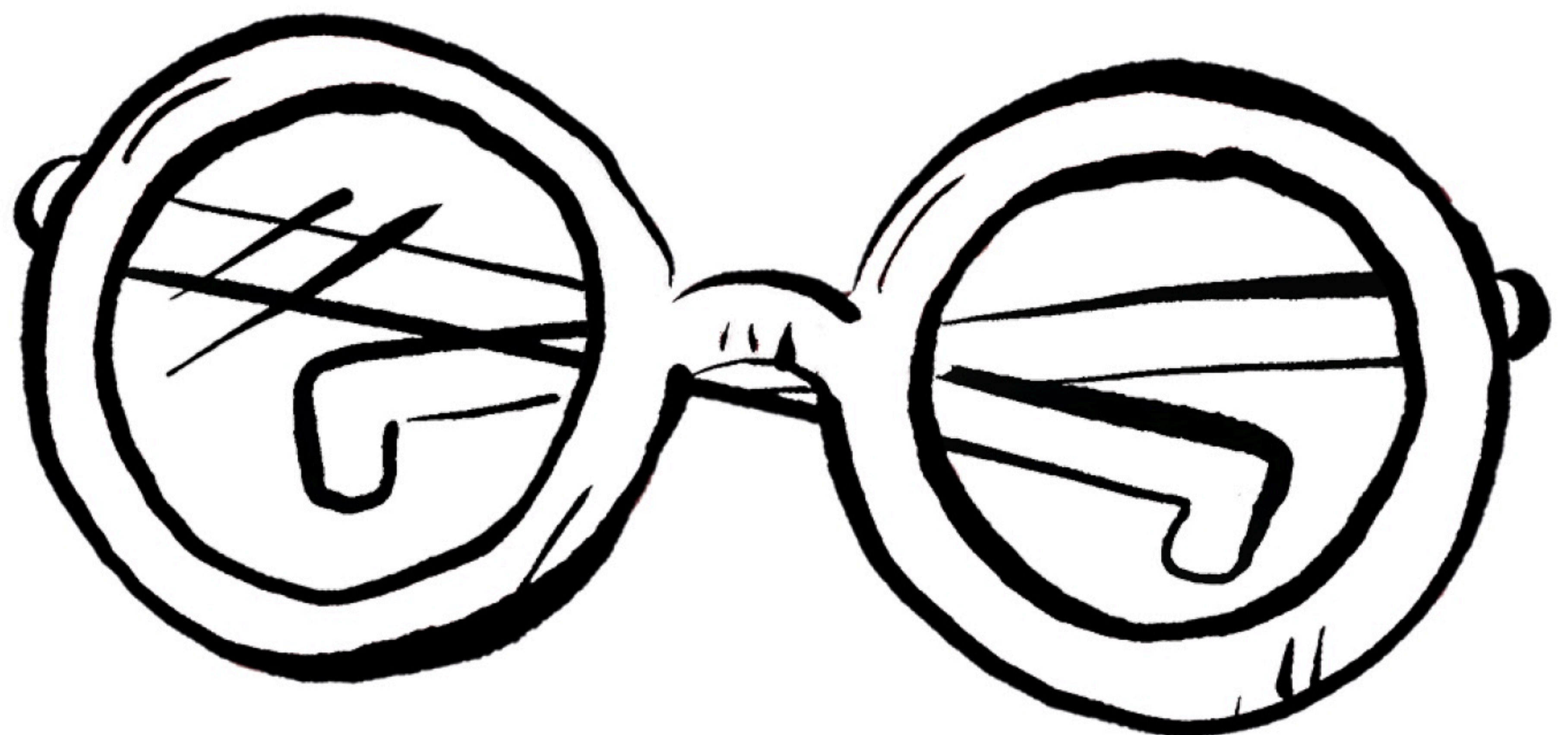
In chapters eleven and twelve, Hagrid does everything he can to discourage the students from further investigations about the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. This doesn't stop them from using every resource they have to find out more details. Explain why something that's off-limits might be more interesting or appealing. Is there a good reason to stop asking questions? What are some other ways you can find out answers besides asking questions? After Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover Fluffy and hear about Nicolas Flamel, what are some ways they try to get answers? Find an excerpt from the text and read it out loud.

Curiouser and Curiouser

Do you think the characters show different kinds of curiosity? Who would you say wants to figure things out by conducting an experiment? Who wants to learn more about the world through research and reading? What are the benefits of both ways of finding out answers? What do you prefer: testing theories or diving into a book?

Bending Rules

Being curious can also lead to risk. Hogwarts as a school encourages students to experiment in class, but also has a lot of rules and restrictions about what, when, and where students can explore. What rules make sense to you? Which events in the story might never have happened if the characters weren't curious enough to bend rules? Do you remember times in the book when professors bend the rules too?



Friendship^{☆+}

Having close, trusting relationships with others.

Friends for All Occasions

People count on different friends for different interests and needs. Ron is devoted to Quidditch while Hermione loves a day of learning in the library. What does Harry depend on Ron for in their friendship? What does he depend on Hermione for? What do each of them look to Harry for help with? List some of the interests and activities of characters in the book. Is there any overlap?

Making Friends

In chapter six, Harry gets settled aboard the Hogwarts Express and has interactions with many other students. How does he decide who to befriend and who to be wary of on the train? Are there any clues in this chapter about what will make Ron and Hermione good friends for Harry? Find a passage from the book and read it aloud.



Trust

Friendship is built on trust. How do the characters, both students and adults, show they trust each other in this first adventure? Find a passage where you can see one character showing another character that they trust them and read it out loud.

Unexpected Allies

When readers recall Harry Potter's adventures, our three main characters, Harry, Ron, and Hermione, are the first people many remember. Harry and Ron became friends within hours of meeting, but it takes a long time for Hermione to become a trusted friend. In chapter ten, Ron declares that Hermione is "a nightmare" and says, "She must've noticed she's got no friends." Harry shows concern that Hermione overhears Ron and is in tears, but Ron is not too bothered. How does the adventure with the troll change how Harry and Ron see Hermione? After this, what do Harry and Ron each value about Hermione—and how does that compare to how they thought about her before this incident?



Kindness

Being tender toward others in the world who are in need, both near and far.



Words and Deeds

Many people grow to understand how to behave from the adults and older mentors around them. How do the different professors at Hogwarts show kindness toward the students in their care? Which adults in the first book are more kind than others? Discuss a time in the book where adults are modelling kindness. Do any of your first impressions of the adults change over the course of the book?

Balancing Kindness and Caution

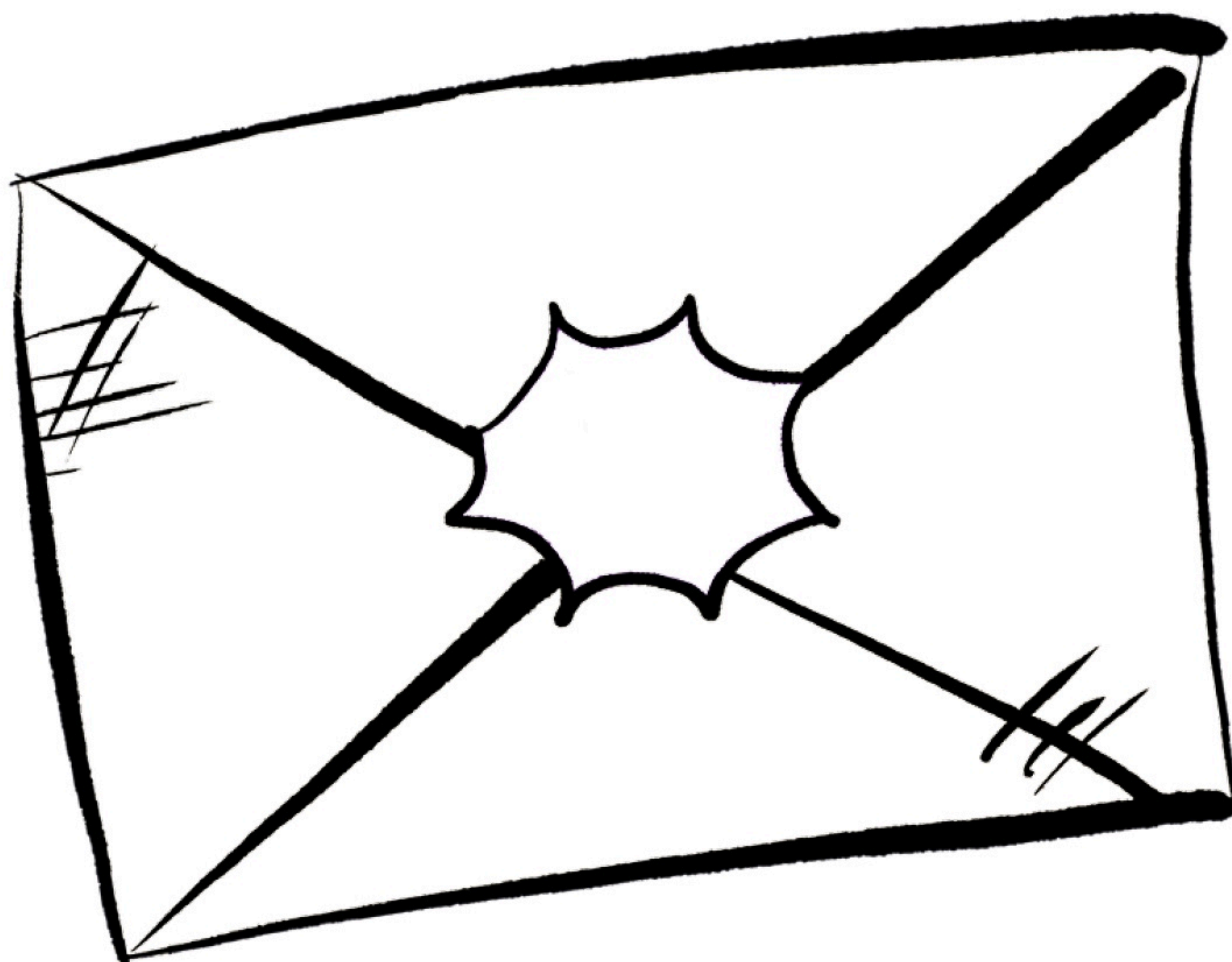
Of all of the characters we meet in this book, Hagrid's desire to be kind overwhelms his other instincts. This leads to Hagrid offering encouragement and support to his friends and allies, but also creates difficult situations, like the dragon egg fiasco. When is Hagrid's kindness shown in the best light, helping someone? When does his instinct toward being kind cause problems? How can he balance kindness with caution?

Holding Back

Sometimes being kind means stopping yourself from saying something that might be hurtful, even if it might also be true. Remember a time where a character prevents themselves from saying or doing something in order to be kind to someone and read the passage out loud.

Reacting to Cruelty

Acts of kindness can take place in many different ways, and it can sometimes be harder to be nice in the face of meanness than it is to be mean in return. Read the passage in chapter nine when Draco steals Neville's Remembrall, focusing on Harry's reaction. Then read the passage in chapter thirteen when Draco has tripped Neville with a Leg-Locker curse, paying attention to how Hermione, Ron, and Harry react. Which reaction do you think helped Neville the most?



Confidence^{☆+}

Thinking independently
and expressing ideas with
assurance.



Book Smart

Hermione is a character who shows a lot of confidence from the first moment we meet her. In what moments do you notice Hermione showing confidence? How do the people around her react to her in those moments?

Too Confident

Draco is another character who shows confidence in his ideas, especially in how he judges other characters. What is it that might make Draco's confidence negative rather than positive? Are there any positive aspects to his confidence?

Well-rounded

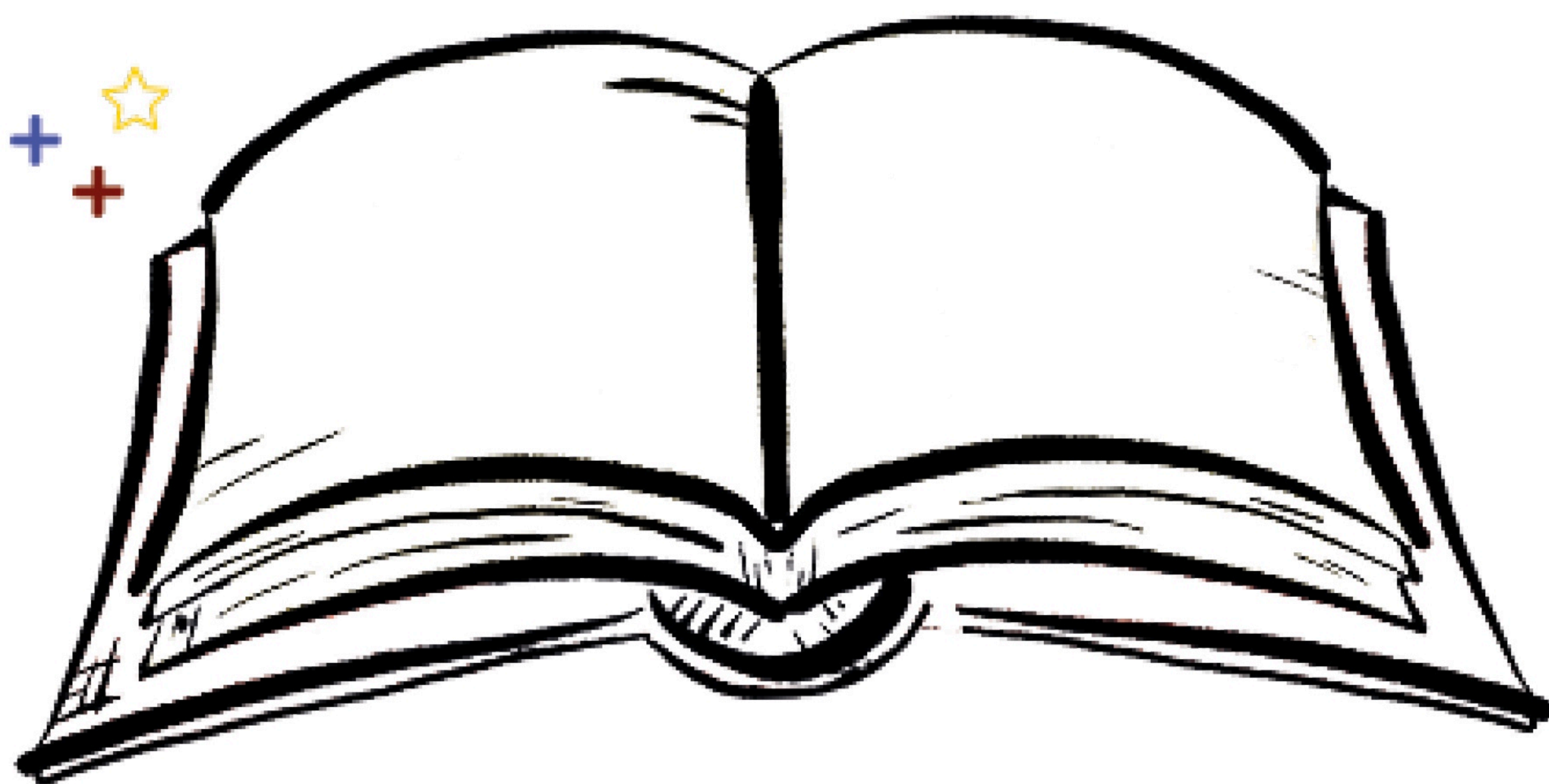
Harry is confident, but what else must he be in order to be a hero? To be a trusted friend? To be a good student?

Teamwork

As Harry, Ron, and Hermione approach the final challenges starting in chapter sixteen, their ability to work as a team is crucial. Being confident about your abilities is important. What actions show each character's confidence in their abilities? How do they rely on each other to make sure they will succeed?

Jumping to Conclusions

Harry is very confident throughout his first year that he knows who is helping You-Know-Who to regain power. How persuaded were you by Harry's arguments about who was at fault? Did anything that happens as the story moved forward make you doubt his certainty? What was his reaction when he discovered he was wrong?



Courage



The strength to do something that you know is right, even though it may be difficult.



Facing Enemies

How do you define courage? Which aspects of Harry's personality help you figure out what being courageous means? Share a passage that displays a moment of courage in another character.

Courage Challenges

Courage isn't always doing what you think is right— it's doing so even when it's difficult. What characters show confidence by doing something right even when others don't agree? Find and read the passage in chapter sixteen where Neville Longbottom has the confidence to show courage. What did you think of how Neville acted when you first read it? Did Dumbledore's reaction change how you thought about Neville's actions? Share passages from the beginning and the end of the book that show how Neville becomes braver during his first year at Hogwarts.

Looking in the Mirror

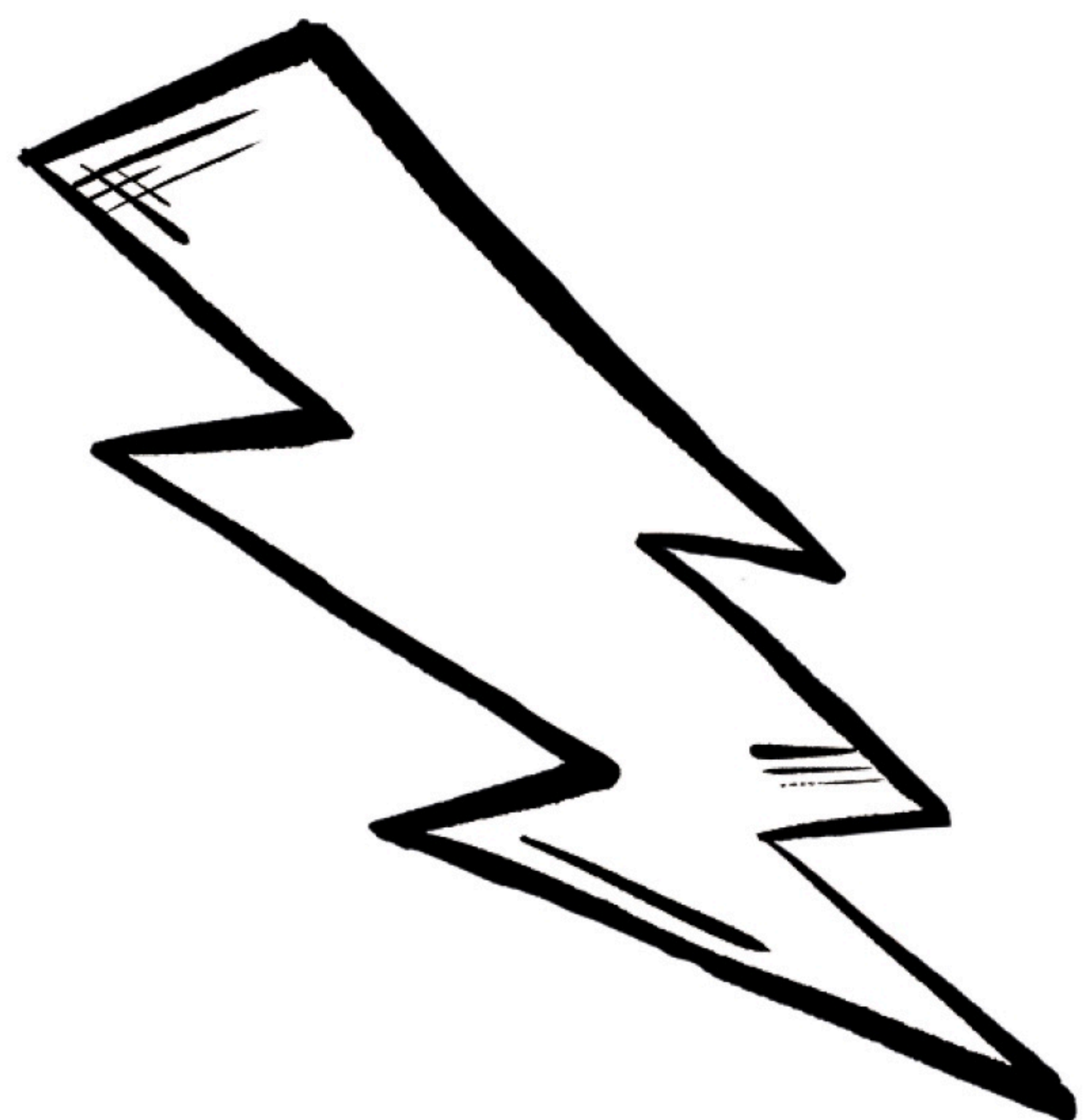
In chapter twelve, Harry discovers the Mirror of Erised. The mirror has an astounding and subtle power, and Harry and Dumbledore discuss its allure. What is enticing about the mirror? What about it gives the viewer false happiness? Why is it difficult to turn away from the mirror?

What's in a Name?

Consider how intimidated most of the wizarding world is by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and the superstition around saying his name out loud. Harry didn't grow up in that world, so he doesn't really understand the reluctance to call the enemy by their name. When Harry and Dumbledore discuss the Philosopher's Stone in chapter seventeen, what is Dumbledore's advice about this name? Would you say it aloud if you were in Harry's shoes?

Small Acts

Courage can be shown on a small scale when we apologize for a mistake, admit when we have misjudged someone, or stand by our beliefs when someone we admire challenges us. Find a moment when a character shows a small act of courage like these and read aloud the excerpt.



Hope

Thinking optimistically and believing that today's efforts will produce good things in the future for yourself and for the world.



Future Plans

In the very beginning of the book, we get a strong sense of what the Dursleys' hopes are for their family's future. Those plans don't include Harry, and he's learned very little about what his parents might have wished for him. Thinking about what you know of Harry's parents from those who remember them, make a list of what hopes Harry's parents might have had for him. Do any of those hopes come true in Harry's first year at Hogwarts?

Hopes and Dreams

What are Harry's hopes when he's living with the Dursleys? What does he wish for in chapter two, before he gets to Hogwarts? How do Harry's hopes change during his time at Hogwarts? What does he wish for by chapter eleven in the midst of a Quidditch competition? And by the finish of the first year?

Dealing with Disappointment

At the start of chapter fifteen, Harry, Hermione, and Neville have lost a record number of House points in one night. How does each of them cope with disappointing everyone? How do they find optimism in that moment?

Dark Prophecies

In chapter fifteen, read the section where Harry finds out more about the prophecy and Voldemort. Although the future does not look good, the centaurs hope that they may be wrong. How do you remain optimistic in the face of someone or something frightening? How does Harry stay hopeful that things will be OK?

Overcoming Fear

In chapter sixteen, find and read aloud the passage where Harry, Ron, and Hermione realize they might be the only ones who can stop Voldemort from stealing the Philosopher's Stone. How do Harry and his fellow students figure out what's most important? They know they will lose House points and risk expulsion. Why do they go anyway and what part does hope play in their actions?

This guide is modified from the original, produced for Harry Potter Book Night and World Read Aloud Day. It was written by Robin Brenner, Teen Librarian at the Public Library of Brookline in Massachusetts. When not presenting programs and providing reading guidance, she writes features for publications, including Voice of Youth Advocates, Horn Book, Library Journal, and School Library Journal. She is an active member of YALSA and has served on awards committees, including the Michael L. Printz Award, Margaret A. Edwards Award, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards. She is the editor-in-chief of the graphic novel review website No Flying No Tights.

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