Harry Potter

Sample Essay

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Harry is actually not the true hero in the Harry Potter series.
To what extent do you agree?

It’s easy to mistake talent and luck for heroism. Being "the chosen one", Harry is often regarded as the hero of the Harry Potter series, however, a close inspection of the text reveals that this is not the case. J.K. Rowling’s repeated use of chance encounters and focus on destiny, show that luck, more than true sacrifice or heroism, is Harry’s defining trait. Moreover, there are many other candidates throughout the novels who are far more heroic and selfless - both Ron Weasley and Neville Longbottom show far more courage than Harry, since they are not merely fated to fit a role but instead act heroically of their own volition. Ultimately, Harry is hardly a hero at all. Though the series is named after him, he is merely a vehicle for Rowling to showcase her universe through inexperienced eyes. The true heroes are hidden in the folds of the story, and are often overlooked.

It can be suggested that Harry is not the central hero at all, and merely a lucky protagonist who prevails due to luck. Many times, he is rescued by a convenient plot twist revealed at the last moment to resolve the story in his favour. In 'The Philosopher's Stone', as soon as Quirrell tries to touch Harry, his skin conveniently blisters, and he dies before he can do any harm to the protagonist. In 'The Chamber of Secrets', Fawkes arrives just in time to deliver the Sorting Hat to Harry, which in turn gifts him the sword of Godric Gryffindor - a magical artefact which can kill a basilisk. 'The Prisoner of Azkaban' shows Harry able to cast such a powerful patronus merely because he had “already done it” in a previous timeline, and even the notion of time travel is not revealed until it is convenient. Whether it can be chalked up to lazy storytelling or the fact that Rowling was originally aiming to write for children, these convenient plot points all allow Harry to win the day without any true acts of heroism. Crabbe, a character who until 'The Deathly Hallows' does not have any spoken parts suddenly conjures up “friendfyre”, one of the few ways to destroy a horcrux. This providential act achieved something which even Dumbledore was barely capable of doing. The convenience of Harry’s surroundings can only lead to one conclusion: Harry is not the true hero of the series.

He may occasionally display heroic qualities, there is no doubt of that, but at his core it is likely that the primary reason for those acts is either the naivety which is required for the audience, or in later books his knowledge of the prophecy. Being the "chosen one" who will bring about Voldemort’s downfall meant that all Harry had to do was play a role. No real level of 'heroism' was required. The heroic acts which Harry displays are often just him fulfilling his 'role'. Snape, arguably one of the more powerful and insightful wizards in the series, suggests that harry is only a "mediocre wizard" who merely surrounds himself with talented friends. His heroism can really be attributed to the requirement that he fill the prophecy. Harry is merely the centre point of the series, not the central hero. The audience needs a character who is aware of both the muggle and wizarding worlds so that they can explore the fundamentals of
the new society without narration simply explaining everything to the reader. Instead, as Harry learns more about Hogwarts and the Ministry of Magic, so do we.

In contrast, Ron is more of a hero than Harry, but a less appealing central character. Since the audience would have less ability to relate to Ron, as he grew up in the wizarding world and thus needs no introduction to concepts which are foreign to the audience, the style of story Rowling uses would require far more exposition. He does, however, display true heroism throughout the series. There is no prophecy requiring Ron to be a hero, and yet in his first year at Hogwarts, he actively searches out a troll and overcomes a fear of his to save a friend. Ron initially thought the determining test for sorting into houses was "wrestling a troll", and he bests one without much aid. His selfless nature makes Ron an archetypal hero for fantasy protagonists. Even though it might be suggested that Ron is a hero in his own right, and that this doesn’t detract from Harry’s own heroics, it must be acknowledged that Ron is always in the shadow of someone else. He was the 6th child in his family, and was always being given second-hand clothes and even a second-hand wand, and had a lot to live up to. The moment that he breaks free of this and goes to Hogwarts, he is overshadowed by Harry Potter, "the boy who lived". Any time someone meets him, they think of him as “another Weasley”. Ron has no particular motivation to be a hero, yet he fills the role admirably.

Neville is also a likely contender for the 'true' hero of the Harry Potter series. The generations of Harry Potter mirror each other - Harry and Ron are very similar to James and Sirius respectively, Hermione takes the role of Remus because of her studious nature and tendency to follow the rules, and Ginny has many of the character traits of Lilly. The role left for Neville to fill is that of Peter Pettigrew, the "traitor" who turned James and Lilly over to Voldemort. He even faces many of the same challenges as Pettigrew, but chooses a different path. Pettigrew always gravitated toward whoever was winning, which was why he followed James and Sirius around constantly. However, when faced with the certainty that Harry was dead and that Voldemort had won, Neville still fights for what he believes in. He pulls the sword of Godric Gryffindor out of the Sorting Hat, proving that he’s a hero, and also destroys Nagini, one of Voldemort's horcruxes. Neville’s heroism is actually apparent far before then, though. In the first book, he stands up to his friends Ron, Harry and Hermione for breaking the rules. Neville has an uncompromisable set of morals, something very common in fantasy heroes, and isn’t afraid to alienate himself from the few people who he cares for at Hogwarts if it means doing the right thing. Neville is the 'everyman' hero - he doesn’t have any particular skills or attributes which make him stand out, but still acts heroically in many situations. Unlike Harry, he is unaware of the fact that he also fits the prophecy of the child who will destroy Voldemort, and acts purely of his own volition. Throughout the series, he often comes to Harry's aid and is rarely acknowledged. Neville and Pettigrew are very similar, but unlike his predecessor Neville rises above the challenges set before him, and ultimately turns the tide of the Battle of Hogwarts.
There are many different types of heroes, and in the 'Harry Potter' series there is not necessarily one central character who takes the title of 'hero'. Everyone performs heroic actions, but it is the motivation which makes the hero. Harry himself is motivated by convenience - it is almost as if the adventure fell into his lap and he decided to take it on. He filled the role that everyone was expecting of him. Other characters had to rise through adversity to face adversity, though. Like the wildcard of Hogwarts, Neville is originally thought to be a very minor character but eventuates to be a hero in his own right. Ron also never quite manages to step out of Harry's shadow, but still fights for what he believes in. A multitude of other characters also display their bravery and selflessness throughout the series, and each has their own role to play. It is, perhaps, a testament to Rowling that there is no clear hero. Every ally to Harry in the series is the central hero in their own story.