

An era ends for 'Harry Potter' fans

Written by

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At the stroke of midnight, it all ends.

That's been the trending phrase on Twitter anyway. But just because the final "Harry Potter" **movie** opens this week, -- with the young wizards we've followed since their first year at Hogwarts fighting the ultimate battle between good and evil -- does that mean the end of the series?

Members of the Potter generation say no.

These lifelong fans -- whose journey with Harry, Ron and Hermione began Sept. 1, 1998 -- simply see "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows -- Part 2" as an opportunity for a new generation to discover the world of Quidditch and spinach-flavored jelly beans.

Since the breakout of this worldwide phenomenon, much has been written on the influence the series has had on fans, young and old. According to J.T. Barbarese, associate professor in the English department of Rutgers-Camden and something of a Harry Potter connoisseur, the mass appeal of the series' supernatural element has been profound enough to transcend race, gender and even generations.

Dubbing the series an "ancient **hero** narrative," Barbarese explains that while the saga has touched multiple generations of readers, "The best move (J.K. Rowling) made was having Harry age with his intended audience."

He says that although younger children **will** likely perpetuate the series, the attraction will not be as intense as it was for readers who grew along with the characters.

Barbarese is certain, however, that fans who went from childhood through adolescence with the series will likely pass their obsession along to their own children.

That's not to say **parents** of Potter generation kids have been immune to the series' charms.

"The kids read it, the teens read it and the parents read it," says Theresa Preziosa, children's librarian at Pemberton Community Library.

"And when the kids grow up, you'll see

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them read Harry Potter to their kids. And then they'll see the movie based on the book."

Barbarese says it was his daughter who initially convinced him to add a few installments of the series to the reading list for a survey course he was teaching on children's literature.

As he and his daughter read the books together, they would have conversations along the way that gave Barbarese great insight into the way readers Harry's age viewed the series.

"Parents should do that more often," he says. "Read books that their kids are reading."

That hasn't been a problem for Debbie Swansen, a 54-year-old **mother** of three from New Gretna. Swansen -- who began reading the books with her daughters when they were first released -- says the mystery of the unknown and appeal of the fantasy world is just as potent for adults as it is for kids.

It also made a believer of one of Swansen's kids.

"Even my oldest who doesn't read all that much read the books," she says.

The Harry Potter series "has turned more kids on to reading than any other book," says Kyle Good, vice president of corporate communications for Scholastic Inc., the series' U.S. publisher.

"It's a modern classic, and it will be read for generations to come."

At Cherry Hill Library, every book in the series has been known to disappear off of the shelves in anticipation of each new film.

"There are classics, but Harry Potter's sustained popularity has been greater than any other classic book," Shields says. "As kids get older, new kids discover the series, so it'll always be popular.

"There is never going to be another generation that will experience growing up with the books and the **actors** like this generation did; it's a singular experience."

So singular, in fact, the Harry Potter experience has led countless readers to the Internet to manifest their unrivaled obsession.

Bri Ozalas, for example, began a blog -- www.booknerdblog.com -- for her own reviews of the books.

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"I started reading (the Harry Potter books) when I was 8, and they're what made me want to be a writer," says the 15-year-old Mullica Hill resident.

"That's really the best thing you can do, to create your own world and your own characters."

Of the series finale, Ozalas says: "It doesn't end. It's always going to be there."

So raise your mugs of butterbeer and make a toast: to the end of an age, and to the beginning of the newest generation of Potter enthusiasts.

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