

"Rita Skeeter's Quick-Quotes Quill": Developing a *Harry Potter* Curriculum

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"You won't mind, Harry, if I use a Quick-Quotes Quill? It leaves me free to talk to you normally..."

"A what?" said Harry.

Rita Skeeter's smile widened. Harry counted three gold teeth. She reached again into her crocodile bag, and drew out a long acid-green quill and a roll of parchment, which she stretched out between them on a crate of Mrs. Skower's All-Purpose Magical Mess-Remover. She put the tip of the green quill into her mouth, and sucked it for a moment with apparent relish, then placed it upright on the parchment, where it stood balanced on its point, quivering slightly.

"Testing...my name is Rita Skeeter, *Daily Prophet* reporter."

Harry looked down quickly at the quill. The moment Rita Skeeter had spoken, the green quill had started to scribble, skidding across the parchment:

Attractive blonde Rita Skeeter, forty-three, whose savage quill has punctured many inflated reputations -

Rowling, J.K. (2000) *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. 266-267.

Introduction

A novel studied at the grade seven level in South-Western Ontario is J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*. Integrated curriculum for this novel is currently being developed by the University of Windsor. In creating any curriculum for novel-based study, one of the most difficult challenges is bringing the text to life for the students. This has proved to be particularly challenging with the *Harry Potter* series since the books are based in another world of "wizardry and magic." One creative writing exercise being developed for the curriculum is a "Quick-Quills" article (excerpt above). The SMART Board seemed to be a logical use of technology for the development of this particular activity, since it introduced an element of "magic" into an ordinary classroom, or could possibly enable one portion of the curriculum to mirror the "magic reporter's pen" in the novel(s).ⁱ As a result, pre-service teachers and grade seven students from local Windsor classrooms were arbitrarily chosen to work in control (blackboard) and test (SMART Board) groups to test the following question related to the curricular development of this activity: Does the SMART Board enable a higher level of curricular creative writing responses (as defined by the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*), or are the SMART Board responses equivalent to those created using a regular blackboard?

Research Design

The design of this research involved two stages, each composed of a control (blackboard) group and a test (SMART Board) group. The participants involved in the first stage of the research were pre-service teachers; the participants in the second stage were grade seven students.

During stage one of the research, the control group, pre-service language arts teachers, brainstormed possible Quick-Quill questions on the blackboard which Rowling's reporter Rita Skeeter might have asked the character Harry. Using their notes from this session, the class was then given one week's time to create ten Quick-Quill questions, which, in turn, would be evaluated for the "most creative" based on the *Torrance Tests for Creativity (TTCT)*. A second,

test group of pre-service language arts teachers used the SMART Board to brainstorm possible Quick-Quill questions. The SMART Board notes from this session were then e-mailed to all of the participants (example of one such board appears below), and the participants were given one week's time to create ten Quick-Quill questions, which would also be assessed by *TTCT*. The top questions, from both groups, receiving the highest *TTCT* score, would be used during stage two of the research.

Stage two of the research used the top ten "most creative"ⁱⁱⁱ Quick-Quill questions with a group of grade seven students. These students, a control and test group, would then brainstorm (as in stage one) and create answers to the Quick-Quill questions for character Rita Skeeter's column in the *Daily Prophet* (Rowling 2000). These Quick-Quill responses would, in turn, be evaluated for a *TTCT* score. The group – control or test – to receive the highest overall *TTCT* mean would be said to be the "more creative."

The number in each group was dependent upon the enrolment of those particular classes and sections during the school term. A breakdown of these numbers is as follows:

Stage One – Pre-service Teachers (Developing Quick-Quill Questions)

Control Group (Blackboard)	Test Group (SMART Board)
15	35

Stage Two – Grade Seven Students (Creating Quick-Quill Answers)

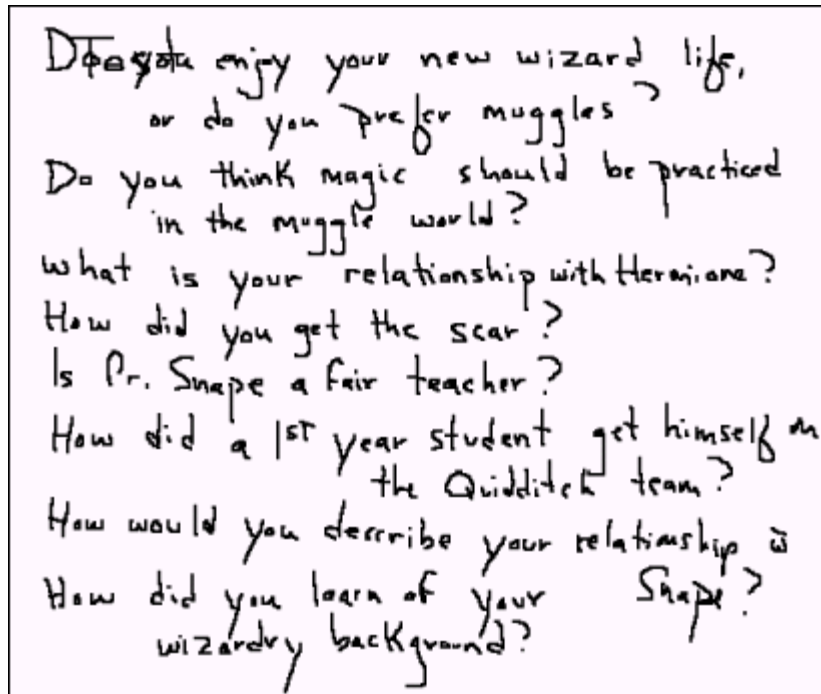
Control Group (Blackboard)	Test Group (SMART Board)
10	11

Both the Quick-Quill questions and the *Daily Prophet* columns developed in the process of this research, along with the *TTCT* scores of all of the groups, have been included in this paper under their appropriate stages.

Stage One – Pre-service Language Arts Teachers Create Quick-Quill Questions for Students

Following a brainstorming session, two groups of pre-service teachers were asked to write ten Quick-Quill questions that *Daily Prophet* Reporter Rita Skeeter might have used in an interview. These questions were to be designed for the grade seven level, and were meant to elicit sensational, heretical responses (as a Quick-Quill would do). Questions developed would eventually be tested on an actual grade seven class.

The first group, the test group, brainstormed using the SMART Board (illustrated below). The SMART Board brainstorming session was later e-mailed to the students in this group.



The second group, the control group, brainstormed using a regular blackboard. Notes were taken. No further information was e-mailed to the latter group. Both groups were required to submit their top ten Quick-Quill questions for a grade seven class in one week's time.

The *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT)* was used as the measurement of "creativity" for the above questions. Those questions receiving a higher [fluency and] originality score, were deemed to be "more creative."

The creative mean of the test group was slightly higher than the creative mean of the control group. There were 31 questions developed from the SMART Board test group of 35 pre-service teachers, and 15 questions developed from the blackboard control group of 15 pre-service teachers. Rate of return was higher for the control group due to the absence of technology. In the test group, two technological problems existed which resulted in four null returns. Seven teachers had difficulty accessing their e-mail (due to home server problems or computer software incompatibility), and three teachers checked their e-mail only once during the week (due to telephone cost), and as a result, had less time to create questions. Thus, four sets of test questions were returned later than the deadline of one week, and as a result, were not admitted into the test group. The *TTCT* scores per participant (based on one set of 10 questions each) were as follows:

Control Group	Test Group
9	24
19	23
30	14
15	15
21	28
22	16

24	19
15	18
15	20
15	17
10	9
11	13
11	10
10	22
16	14
Mean = 16.2	25
	14
	16
	20
	15
	18
	20
	16
	23
	22
	25
	17
	17
	55
	16
	20
	Mean = 19.39

The test group's mean score was 19.39, 3.19 higher than the control group. Even if the one, extraordinary score of 55 was removed from the test group due to its abnormal nature, there is still a mean difference of 2.0. *Ergo*, the responses of the pre-service teachers' SMART Board test group were "more creative" than the blackboard control group.

The ten "most creative" questions developed for grade seven students from the sets of questions submitted by both groups were as follows:

1. When you had the Philosopher's Stone in your pocket, did it cross your mind to use it to make the nectar that allows everlasting life? Would you even *want* to live forever? (Steve MacDonald)
2. You did extremely well in your first attempt at flying, and that was with a standard-issue school broomstick. Do you think having a Nimbus 2000 will help you that much more, or could you be a Quidditch champion with any broomstick? (Steve MacDonald)

3. Did anyone ever call the child welfare authorities regarding your Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon? Did *you* ever consider doing this yourself regarding your situation? (Steve MacDonald)
4. Why do you think Snape and Dumbledore have kept such a close watch on you? (Jennifer Laforet)
5. Wouldn't you have liked to perform a little magic on Malfoy to make him pay for some of his nasty actions? (Janice Coleman-Sanagan)
6. Do you think I am beautiful? Who is the most beautiful witch you have met here at Hogwarts? (Brent Dyck)
7. Many believe that Neville Longbottom should not belong to Gryffindor, or for that matter, shouldn't be at Hogwarts at all, given that he is such a klutz and a dimwit. What is your opinion on the matter of muggles? (Anna Mancini)
8. You lead people to believe that you are naïve, yet you insist on using the real name of "he-who-shall-not-be-named" quite frequently. Is this only an act? Is the real Harry Potter actually quite confident? (Brent Reaume)
9. During your evaluation, you were asked a question that required your use of logic, not magic. Does it follow that you may not have any real wizard skills at all? (Brent Reaume)
10. What do you remember about your mother and father; how does it feel being an orphan, and how do you feel about the man who did this to your family Harry? (Diane Weiser)

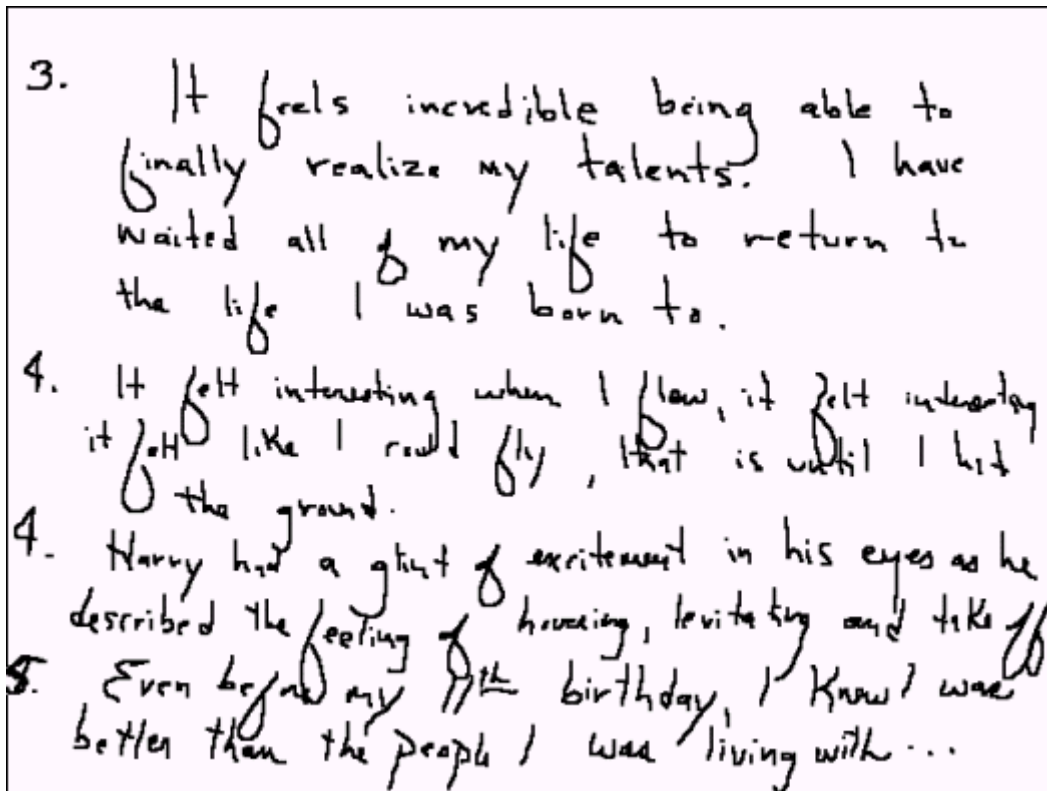
The above questions were then given to grade seven students during the week of March 12 to 16, 2001, in stage two of the research. Students were then able to choose *one* from the above ["most creative"] ten questions and write a Quick-Quill answer to the question chosen based on the example provided in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Because, in the first stage, the control group was not provided with the same opportunity to review (as the test group was via e-mail), it was thought that the technology, and subsequent e-mail, may have simply served as a memory review, rather than a prompt for "more creative responses." To eliminate this possibility, the control group was given an oral/aural review in stage two of the research.

Stage Two – Grade Seven Students Answer the Quick-Quill Questions in the *Daily Prophet*

During the week of March 12 to 16, 2001, grade seven students were able to choose *one* Quick-Quill question from the top ten developed during stage one of the research. To eliminate the possibility that the SMART Board simply acted as a memory review (a possibility identified in stage one), an additional oral/aural review was provided to the control group in this stage of the research.

Ten students developed Quick-Quill answers to the questions of their own individual choosing for the control group; eleven students developed Quick-Quill answers to the questions of their choosing for the SMART Board test group. There was a 100% return rate from both groups, and no perceived technical problems receiving the data.ⁱⁱⁱ

All possible responses were first brainstormed by the test group; an illustration of this SMART Board brainstorming is below:



As in stage one, the *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT)* was used as the measurement of "creativity" for the stage two creative writing responses. Those responses receiving a higher [fluency and] originality score, were deemed to be "more creative." The *TTCT* evaluates the [gifted] ability to produce new ideas by bringing together elements usually thought of as independent or dissimilar. Simply, each new thought or item within a piece of writing is counted. Pieces of writing containing *more* unique elements are said to be "more creative."

In this particular stage, the blackboard/control group's writing outperformed the SMART Board test group; however, there were some interesting gender distinctions, and the SMART Board group preferred to write on one particular question, which may have hindered their performance. The overall *TTCT* results of the two groups' responses were as follows:

Test Group (SMART Board)	Control Group (Blackboard)
4	6
1	11
3	2
2	2
8.5	1.5
1	4
5	4
1.5	4
1	3
2.5	2.5
1.5	
Mean = 2.81	Mean = 4.0

Exceptionalities (8.5 and 11) eliminated: Test Mean = 2.25; Control Mean = 3.22

Thus, equalizing the review time between the two groups, there appeared to be no significant increase in "creative" writing responses from those students who brainstormed answers using the SMART Board.

There were significantly more males than females in this sample. Females, for example, outperformed their grade six male counterparts on the 2000 EQAO standardized test (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training). In stage two of this research, there were almost three times more males than females, and of the female responses evaluated, the top five overall ranked responses belonged to females. Broken down by group and gender, the responses appear as follows:

Test Group (SMART Board)		Control Group (Blackboard)	
Male	Female	Male	Female
4	3	4	11
1	8.5	3	4
2	1.5	2.5	6
1		2	7
5		2	
1.5		1.5	
1		4	
2.5			
Mean = 2.25		Mean = 4.33	
		Mean = 2.71 Mean = 7.0	

Female participants in the control group still outperformed the female participants in the SMART Board test group; however, the difference between the male participants was null. This may indicate that the difference in performance between the control and test group has more to do with gender than with the technology with which they are working. The gender results do support current research on gender and language performance (Gormley, 1992; Thomas, 1994); *ergo*, regardless of the SMART Board, one of the largest differences in the groups' performances appears to be due to their sex. A study involving a homogeneous group of one gender would eliminate this distinction.

Besides the difference in gender performance, each group displayed a different predilection towards one particular question. The majority of the SMART Board test group (55%) for example, chose to write on the following Quick-Quill question: "Wouldn't you have liked to perform a little magic on Malfoy to make him pay for some of his nasty actions?" (Question 5, Stage One). The test group's top three answers (8.5, 5, and 4) all responded to this question. It is also the only question developed in stage one that required an answer specifically dealing with magic. Since none of the other Quick-Quill questions require the student to create a scenario based on an unknown world, this level of creativity may have hindered some of the more creative writers in this group. It is interesting to note, however, that the SMART Board participants were more interested in questions relating to magic, and the use of magic. This may indicate, as we had originally hypothesized, that the SMART Board did introduce a unique element of a type of "magic" for the students working on these creative responses.

The control group, on the other hand, most frequently (40%) chose question 2 from stage one of the research, or, "You did extremely well in your first attempt at flying, and that was with a standard-issue school broomstick. Do you think having a Nimbus 2000 will help you that much more, or could you be a Quidditch champion with any broomstick?" The "most creative" responses from the group wrote on this particular question.

In summary, although the SMART Board test group did not outperform the blackboard control group with "more creative" responses during stage two of the research, they did identify a well-documented distinction between gender abilities at age twelve (Gormley, 1992; Thomas, 1994), and they did identify those questions that are most likely to elicit more creative responses from students studying *Harry Potter* in the intermediate years. Rather than a conclusion to this research, what follows is a portion of the curriculum, using the questions from stage one, which was able to be developed from the SMART Board technology.

Developing a *Harry Potter* Curriculum

Once questions, which work towards stimulating good creative writing, are developed, teachers often look for ways to "publish" such work in a classroom setting. It is appropriate, at this point of the curriculum, if students can generate publishing ideas of their own. The students involved in the SMART Board research took all of their creative responses, from both groups, and merged them together to create their own "*Daily Prophet*" newspaper, a news flyer that they thought would resemble Rita Skeeter's column in Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000). Below is an illustration of this paper, as the students themselves conceived it, unedited, in its original form:

THE DAILY PROPHET

THE DAILY PROPHET

A RITA SKEETER EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH HARRY POTTER

Using her famous "Quick-quill" to "puncture many an inflated ego", our own Rita Skeeter captured a rare interview with the now famous Harry Potter. Here are some of the questions she asked Harry:

You did extremely well in your first attempt at flying, and that was with a standard-issue school broomstick . Do you think having a Nimbus 2000 will help you that much more , or could you be a Quidditch champion with any broomstick ?

It just so happens that Harry Potter reported to me that he obviously would want a Nimbus 2000 to win a Quidditch match just after his appearance of almost swallowing the snitch in his second match verse Slytherin. Harry also reported to me that Quirrell was jinxing Harry's broom, but Hermione reported to me that she thought Professor Snape was behind it.
(Adam)

After talking awhile about Quidditch, we got on the subject of the first day. When I asked him if he could be a Quidditch Champion with any broom, he replied snobbily, "Of course I could. But now I'm so rich, I don't have to. And I don't think that my admirers would appreciate me on a Comet two-sixty." Well, what a snobby, rude,

At this point Harry had to leave because he was too sad about his mother and father and how that awful Draco Malfoy teased him shame on you!

"Mad eye is the best he turned Malfoy into a ferret and I thank him for that. Malfoy better watch his back, because I know very well that all fellow Gryffindors would love to zap him good and so do I. He is always ruining my fun and everything I try to do he also tries to do that too. I mean remember when I was the seeker on the Quidditch team, Malfoy that very next year happened top be playing seeker on the Slytherin team. Then when he finally found out he was no good he tried to make look bad top by holding the back of my broom. What a copycat. I can't wait to get out of Hogwarts to zap Malfoy from here to Canada. I am going to ruin your life Malfoy liked you ruined mine. MALFOY you have been warned."

and rich little kid! What is our world coming to!
(Emily)

Harry Potter, the flying fraud? How would it be possible for a "muggle made wizard" to attempt an amazing lift off such as he did on his first try? Well this newly introduced wizard has quite some talent or does he? He claims "of course I could win the Quidditch Championship on any broomstick, unlike any other player on my team. I thought it was a joke, but the young orphan Potter re-assured me that he was the best of his kind. Talking about Neville Longbottom, Potter says, "he is so slow that a garden gnome could catch him by the end of his broom; and if he was on the Quidditch team, we would lose by minus points." He also said that a Nimbus 2000 was a push over (he could win with it easily) but what he wanted was a Fire Bolt and he'd do anything to get it. Anything...

This shy little fellow isn't keeping his thoughts to himself, he suggests that his team-mates should be very grateful and should promote him to captain. He said he would not be surprised if they said "no", and that they should all be jealous. (Sadie)

"Well, even though he is a total klutz and a dimwit and a huge dummy, he is still a part of the Gryffindor team". Implied Harry "He has some good quality's, I think." He said. (Marc)

Na, I don't need no stupid Nimbus 2000 to be a Quidditch Champion. (Taylor)

What do you remember about your mother and father; how does it feel being an orphan, and how do you feel about the man who did this to your parents?

Even though I didn't get to know my parents very well I think they were the best parents in the world. When you're an orphan, put yourself in my shoes for instance, you think you can do anything without your parents telling you, but after a while you remember how much time they spent with you. I don't know why a man killed my parents. If he hated my parents he had no right to kill them. When I become a real wizard I would like to seek revenge!!!!
(Alyson)



(Hannah)

The 14 year old boy got the answer pretty fast like he was waiting a long time to get it off his chest, but he did not say too much about his parents though I think I made him remember something horrible from a long time ago. (Joel)

Actually, I would love to get my hands on that greasy slime ball but I am Harry Potter, the best wizard in the world and the most handsome boy in Hogwarts and I don't think being mean to somebody even someone like Malfoy, a dirty, horrible person, would be fair. And in my deep, loyal heart I know that even though Malfoy is mean, I am a GREAT person and I would never try to get even with him.
(Ozge)

When asked of hurting the young boy Malfoy I could tell a surge of rage and fury come over the boy. The young Harry Potter is well versed in some of the most gruesome spells and charms. Harry said through gritted teeth he has pictures of Malfoy shredded and melted covering his bed. "Watch out Malfoy, Harry's going to get you." (Casey)

"Definitely!" snickered Harry evilly "He is the meanest, slimiest git I've ever met!" yelled Harry "I would love to put an end to his schemes. Maybe a wizard's duel..." and Harry went on with his horrible plans, which are to horrible to describe. (Kieran)

No, not really!

Of course I would have loved to swipe Draco's sly smile off of his face. I would have gotten him good, but I didn't want to get expelled from Hogwarts. Now I'm warning Draco to stay away from me! Or else!! (Ruwan)

The 14 year old boy got the answer pretty fast like he was waiting a long time to get it off his chest, but he did not say too much about his parents thou I think I made him remember something horrible from a long time ago.
(Chris)

Harry sadly doesn't remember his parents he just wishes he could see them.

He is devastated the dark killed his parents!
With a dark red face he said

He wanted to triumph over dark! (Alexander)

Young Harry Potter is extremely sad about his parents death and is in complete hatred of he who should not be named. (Chris)

When you had the Philosopher's Stone in your pocket, did it cross your mind to use it to make the nectar that allows everlasting life? Would you even want to live forever?

Oh, yes it did! But then it crossed my mind that people would find out and they'd know what an evil mind I have, so I didn't. And yes, I would like to live forever, with my fame.
(Braydon)

"I've never told anybody this" said young Harry Potter slyly "but I only say 'Voldemort' to impress my friends and fans." Brave Harry Potter hesitated before saying the Dark Lord's name, and goes on to say "I really am actually very frightened of the Dark Lord, after all, look at what he did to my parents, I only got away because I'm lucky." It's obvious that Harry Potter is not all that people think he is.
(Landon)

Wouldn't you have liked to perform all little magic on Malfoy, to make him pay for some of his nasty actions?

At this question Harry Potter the famous wizard flipped.

"Of course I would have loved to get Malfoy back, I mean think of all the things he has done to me. From the very first time I met him in I knew he was really bad news. I mean his blonde hair and long nose. He reminded me of Snape a lot, maybe they are related. Anyway



I would like to perform every nasty spell on Malfoy that I have learned. I would perform the body locker curse then beat him up. (Matt)

"Yes, Malfoy needs a good smack for what he's done. I'd like to cast a very strong spell on him. Maybe the imperial curse, make a fool of himself in front of the whole school." Said Harry So Harry really wants revenge on Malfoy. Harry says that Malfoy has always insulted him and his friends especially Hermione who is half-muggle, half-witch.
(Patrick)

Many believe that Neville Longbottom should not belong to Gryffindor, or for that matter, shouldn't be at Hogwarts at all, given that he is such a klutz and a dimwit. What is your opinion on the matter of muggles?

Harry admitted that he thinks muggles are extremely stupid, and do not have any sense at all. He also agreed that Neville Longbottom should be kicked out of Hogwarts, because he was probably going to fail anyway, with all his clumsiness. (Laryssa)

"I have pity on that poor Longbottom boy. Of course no wizard can match my wizardry skills." Boasted Harry Potter with a sneer, that sunny afternoon in Hogwarts. "Neville is an idiot and a very clumsy boy. But for me to keep up my famous reputation I must put up with him." Harry said glumly. During the rest of the interview Harry continued to pass out rude comments about this poor and misunderstood boy. What does Harry really think of you?
(Deniz)

Do you think I am beautiful? Who is the most beautiful witch you have ever met at Hogwarts?

he has always hated me. He wants to watch me fail. The way he tease's my parent's is just....just...too much..."

Yes I think you are the most beautiful person I have met at Hogwart's. Even more beautiful than my perfect girlfriend Hermione Granger. I love everything about you you're nice curly hair you're great glasses and you're glamorous robes. I hope to be seeing you again. With a smile on Harry's face. (Guino)



Endnotes

- i. The "Quick-Quill Quotes" are magical, sensational, heretical responses to questions, as the introductory excerpt from Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire illustrates.
- ii. Responses with the highest TTCT score.
- iii. In stage one, there were some technical problems with e-mail, as noted.

References

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