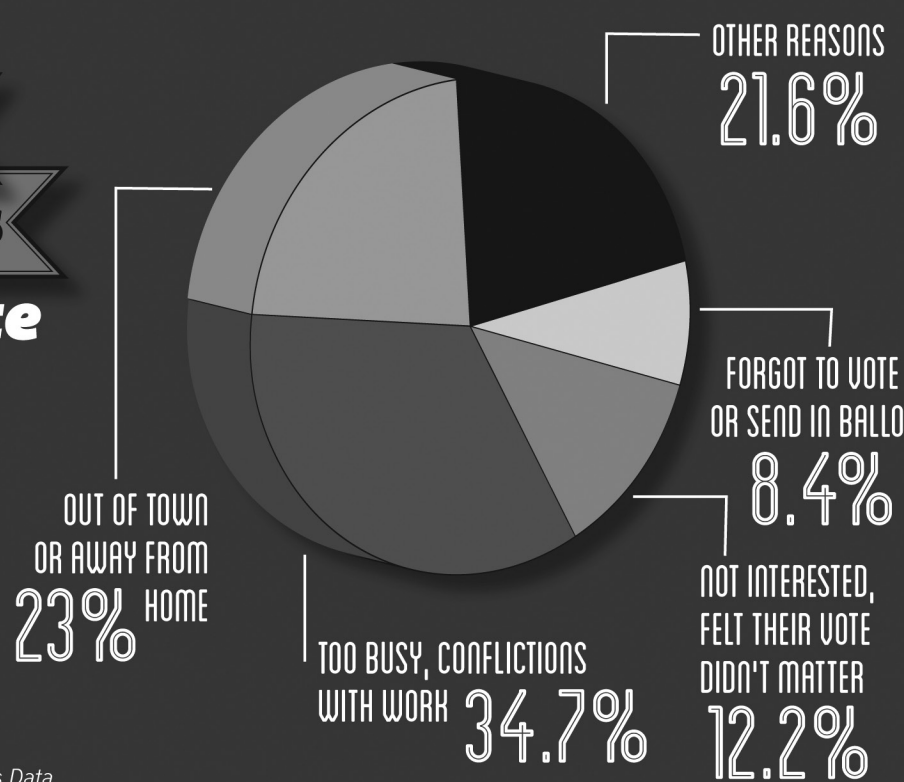


Why College Students Don't Vote



Info based on 2010 U.S. Census Data

Book characters belong to readers



John Riti

There's trouble brewing for Muggles everywhere. The Harry Potter fandom ignited in dispute after a Feb. 2 preview of a "Wonderland" magazine interview with author J.K. Rowling. During the interview, Rowling voiced her regret for pairing the characters Ron and Hermione together. She said it was a choice she made for "very personal reasons, not for reasons of credibility," according to the article.

Predictably, the Internet exploded at this news and set fans everywhere abuzz. Is Ron and Hermione's relationship valid? Should Hermione have been with Harry?

I'm a Harry Potter fan, but I cared less about this news of Hermione and Ron and more about the huge questions Rowling's claims spark regarding authorial intent and literary criticism.

The question is raised — who "owns" a fictional character? The outcry surrounding Rowling's claims show these obviously are beloved characters, but that most readers still believe Rowling owns them. Certainly, Rowling has direct claim and legal possession of her characters, but I would argue once a character is put forth in a published work, the reader gains possession of them.

Readers are free to make fictional characters whatever they want in their minds. They're free to form all sorts of opinions about them. There really are no rules as to what you can or cannot feel about a fictional character — this certainly gives the reader a powerful possession of characters in a story.

Authorial influence after the publication of a work only can influence readers to a certain extent. The author can elaborate the characters of their creation during interviews and clarify certain things as much as they want — but if it's not in the text, I'm not obligated to agree.

It certainly is a testament to Rowling's writing skills that her characters have such a hold on her readers so many years after publication. However, as a reader, I'm free to completely ignore her after-the-fact claims.

I'm venturing into reader-response terrain here. Reader-response criticism focuses on the reader and their individual experience with a text. The text has meaning through your own interpretation of it. The keyword for me here is "text" — many of Rowling's assertions aren't textual, simply afterthoughts.

It reminds me of when Rowling made the announcement she always thought the character Albus Dumbledore was gay. That announcement made similar headlines and also caused uproarious debate — albeit for more political reasons — but I remember having a similar response. Rowling never states in the books Dumbledore is gay, so this new information from the author either can be accepted or discarded. It's up to the reader to decide, not the author. During the reading process, your view of Dumbledore has become your own completely — in a sense, he's yours now, not Rowling's.

While the current debate among fans might seem trivial, it actually pinpoints a much larger question about how readers respond to fiction.

So don't let Rowling's announcement shatter the vision in your head of Ron and Hermione living together forever. Rowling handed her characters to her readers, as all authors do. They relinquish them to us. They choose to subject them to our interpretations. Authors present them, but the rest is up to the reader. What happens to these characters after we turn the final page should be up to us.

John Riti is a senior English major from St. Louis, Mo.

Think twice before voting



Sarah Muir

Before April comes and Kirksville holds local municipal elections, students should think about the impact of their votes when it comes to local elections and consider several factors before deciding to vote.

Before I go any farther, I want to clarify I'm not saying students shouldn't have the legal right to vote in local elections. However, there are three things students should take into account before deciding to vote in local elections — knowledge of the issues, personal relevance of the issue and long-term effects of the election.

The first topic to consider before voting in local elections — or really any election — is your knowledge of issues and candidates. If you're not well-informed about what you're voting for, you probably shouldn't be voting. Along similar lines, if you're only voting because you want to vote for a certain party, but don't know anything other than a candidate's party affiliation, it doesn't count as being knowledgeable about the issues. I cannot stress this enough — voting the party line for its own sake is detrimental and should be avoided during all elections. This especially is true for local elections, when party identification doesn't give voters much information. If you consider yourself a knowledgeable student voter when it comes to election issues, continue to the next consideration.

The second consideration before voting is personal relevance, or how important the issues are to you personally. While there can be a lot of differences between what people consider important, money seems to rank highly for voters across the board. This is an area particularly relevant

to students, especially those who live off-campus. Proposals dealing with the price of utilities, for example, would be highly relevant to off-campus students. This is the kind of issue students should be concerned about and should vote on if they are educated about the issue.

In contrast, a proposal dealing with planning and zoning likely will not affect students very much. In this case, someone might be well educated about the issue, but not care about the outcome. This is a situation in which a student might refrain from voting because the issue isn't relevant to them. But that same issue could be relevant to a local long-term resident who has lived next to an empty lot for years. If you're knowledgeable about the issues and they are relevant to you as a student voter, please move to the third and final consideration.

Perhaps the most important thing to think about when voting in local elections is the short-term versus long-term consequences. Students aren't likely to spend more than five years in Kirksville, whereas a local resident probably has been and will be here much longer. The issues students vote on now have consequences that extend far beyond the time students spend here, so it is essential to consider how important the short-term impacts are compared with the long-term impacts students won't have to deal with. This is related to being knowledgeable about an issue, because knowledge is necessary for considering the impacts of an election. This can be hard to determine, but at least consider how the outcomes of an election might affect the future before voting for the immediate fix.

Yes, everyone who can register to vote has the right to do so, but when it comes to students voting in local elections, it's a matter of being an educated and respectful voter. If as a student you remain unconvinced, try to imagine yourself as a long-term Kirksville resident. You'll probably realize how nice it would be if the short-term residents were considering these three questions before casting votes for something that could impact you more profoundly and for a longer time.

Sarah Muir is a sophomore political science major from Lee's Summit, Mo.

What do you think about J.K. Rowling's recent controversial statement?

"I'm not fond of the stereotype that the main character always gets the girl. I'm glad the goofy sidekick got the girl."

Lindsay Hickman
Junior



"I think it's funny how crazy people get, and offended. But I agree that Ron and Hermione should be together."

Colleen Gallagher
Senior



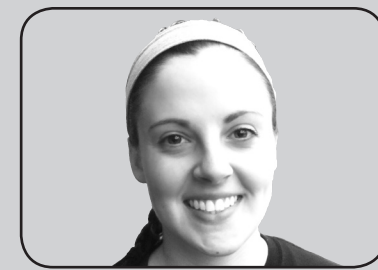
"I believe [J.K. Rowling] also gives context to what she said. I don't think it's a big deal, but I do see Harry and Hermione together."

Josh Crow
Senior



"When I read the books, I always thought Hermione and Harry would end up together, so I was shocked anyway by Ron and Hermione."

Jessica Bals
Senior



AROUND THE QUAD

Gender identity should be celebrated inclusively



Lacy Murphy

Despite our intuition — or human arrogance — telling us we are the ones who know ourselves best, I've observed other people most often identify our defining character traits more clearly. I often hear people say, "Nobody knows me like I do." But I'll be the first to admit I am the biggest mystery to myself in the world. I am completely incapable of objective self-observation and I lack a lot of information necessary to understand myself.

Simple things such as race and sex are anatomical aspects

of my being. However, there are several aspects that are harder to observe and, dependent on the person, those aspects might never become clear and concise. Two things often discussed concerning self-identification are gender and sexual orientation. Many people cannot understand why we celebrate these differences. Sure, acceptance is one thing, but celebration? Let me explain.

Celebrating our cultural heritages, for instance, is part of our self-identification. It's our community, the history of our families. Race inherently is a part of how we identify ourselves. So why not celebrate sexual orientation or gender identity as well? These are profoundly intimate and personal parts of our identities. If, as a society, we can have a black history month, why can't we have a homosexual history month?

Celebration lets a community know that a group of people exist and are deserving of equal rights.

It leads members of those groups to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

In addition, prejudice and unfair laws still necessitate civil action and demonstration. When people claim heterosexual people don't celebrate their love so openly, I sneer as I consider the fast approaching Valentine's Day. It's important to remind the world that diversity exists and give members of under-represented groups a platform to share their identity publicly.

However, it also is up to these groups to celebrate in a way that is inclusive to other groups. Some people find LGBT groups to be alienating. People outside LGBT groups sometimes ask why we need to give special attention to these communities.

I've observed demonstrations and celebrations that led to solidifying boundaries and the perception that different identities should be treated differently.

I can understand how non-LGBT members might translate these sorts of celebrations that way. Both parties need to remain open-minded and create a space that is safe for people of all identities, doesn't intimidate anyone and certainly doesn't make anyone feel intrusive.

We all are human and we deserve humane treatment. I don't believe most LGBT members think lesbian individuals deserve lesbian treatment or gay people deserve gay treatment. Treat people like people, no matter who they are or with what community they identify.

Know thyself. It's a phrase you probably have heard throughout your life. You probably interpret it to mean something along the lines of understanding who you are as an individual. That's one way to think about it. The original Latin translation has been used several other ways. It can be a warning to pay no attention to the opinions of the masses. Perhaps the more fitting meaning is a reminder for

someone to know their place in the world so they won't forget where they stand in the hierarchy.

How will you use and interpret the words? Will you decide for yourself or will you go with popular opinion? Will you insist upon keeping those of differing sexual orientations and gender identities in "their place"? Can you put your own arrogance aside and admit you aren't even familiar with your own identity, and therefore shouldn't judge someone else for theirs?

I for one don't think anyone's identity is less important than my own. In a world where I'm not feeling too sure of who I am myself, I applaud and encourage anyone who feels secure in their identity to celebrate it — as long as everyone is welcome to the party.

Lacy Murphy is a senior French major from Springfield, Mo.