

Relationships

Harriet the Spy explores the differences in gender roles, spaces, and relationships through Harriet's experiences with her family, friends and spy route. Harriet must learn how to stay true to herself by getting her friends back and keeping her dreams of becoming a writer and a spy alive. She does this through the wise words from Ole Golly about how little lies that make people feel better are not bad ^{but} and that Harriet must always tell the truth to herself.

The novel breaks down the barriers of stereotypical gender roles. Harriet dresses like a boy and wants to be a spy and a writer which are very male dominated professions. Janie is a ^{almost mad scientist who wants to blow up the world} nerdy scientist who spends all her time conducting dangerous experiments. Harriet's other best friend Sport is in a reverse role as a feminine caretaker character. Sport cooks and cleans and must take care of his father. Fitzhugh is trying to show that stereotypes are meant to be broken and children do not have to conform to society's unwritten rules when it comes to gender roles.

The most important space in Harriet's life is her notebook. She carries it with her at all times and writes down whatever she sees or is thinking with no concept of whether what she is writing could hurt someone's feelings. Harriet's space becomes violated when the other children

read her notebook. Harriet must regain her power and learn to live by society's rules and lie when it is in the best interest of the other people that are involved.

Harriet's identity is changed through the growth in relationships she has with other characters. The most important relationships that I will focus on are Harriet's relationships with Ole Golly, her parents, Sport and Janie, and the other kids at school. Each relationship helped Harriet to discover something different about herself.

Through gender roles, spaces, and her relationships with other characters I would like to further explore the theme of difference found in this novel. I think the difference and uniqueness of this novel is a major reason why *Harriet the Spy* has remained so timeless since its publication in 1964.

~~Works Cited~~ Works Cited

Paul, Lissa. "The Feminist Writer as Heroine in *Harriet the Spy*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 13.1 (1989): 67-73. Print.

- This article points out that *Harriet the Spy* shows few signs of becoming dated even though at the time the article was written the novel was twenty-five years old. This article refers to how other critical articles gloss over the questionable morality present in the novel. The novel is a successful female kunstlerroman. Fitzhugh tricks critics into a "doublethink" where, in order to sanction the book, they have to make lying and gossip look like appropriate ways of getting along in society. It also explores Harriet's role as a feminist writer.

Wolf, Virginia L. "*Harriet the Spy*." *Children's Literature* 4 (1975): 120-126. Print.

- *Harriet the Spy* was praised for its vigor and originality. Fitzhugh was called "one of the brightest talents of 1964." More extensive reviews that this article focuses on is that the book has received object strongly to its "disagreeable people and situations" and questions its "realism" and its suitability for children.

Horning, Kathleen T. "On Spies and Purple Socks and Such." *Horn Book Magazine* January/February 2005: 49-55. Print.

- The article deals with themes of difference found within the novel. Depicts Harriet as a role model and savior for kids who felt different. Wonders how an adult author could know what really went on in the minds of children. Makes connections between gay or lesbian references and Harriet dressing like a boy and the boy with the purple socks which the color has symbolic meaning to the gay community. The article breaks apart gender stereotypes with Sport and Janie in opposite gender roles.

Montagne, Renee. "Unapologetically Harriet, the Misfit Spy." *NPR: Morning Edition*. Natl. Public Radio, 3 Mar. 2008. Web.

- This podcast talks about how children's books and children were changing in the 1960s. It demonstrates how it was not a bad thing that Harriet was a flawed, rude and disheveled character. Why some schools in the '60s actually banned the book because Harriet saw too much, said too much, threw temper tantrums and had to see a psychiatrist. Young readers love Harriet because she has a great sense of herself. Harriet paved the way for "a fresh crop of young rebels" to come along, "characters who were flawed or who didn't fit in, and who stayed that way to the last page."