Introduction

- Philosophers and ideas about death
- Related to Harry Potter but can relate to numerous films and television programmes e.g. Lord of the Rings
- Learning outcome 1: key terms and theoretical approaches to the study of popular culture and media studies.
Images of death

“I'd like a second opinion.”

“Rest in peace, Madiba.”

#38
I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens.

~ Woody Allen
Death and Philosophy

- Heidegger (1889-1976) — authenticity
  - Atheist
  - Death as imminent - shapes how we live
- Epicureans (ancient Greece) — unconcerned about death
- Plato ‘true philosophers make dying their profession’
- Harry Potter — confronted with death from early age
Search for meaning

- Harry Potter
  - Whether there is life after death is a theme
- John Locke (1632-1704) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) - did believe in life after death
- Heidegger did not believe in life after death
- Harry Potter
  - Every book results in death of someone
‘the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death’ at the grave of Harry’s parents
The Approaching Battle

- Forbidden Forest to meet his doom

Heidegger -

- shouldn’t be morbid about death
- come to terms with death
- so that we can move into our remaining future
- Taking hold of opportunities

Harry Potter’s actions are an example of authentic Heideggarian living

- Recognising limitations, seizing opportunities, accepting one’s mortality
King's Cross Station

Heidegger

◦ Should look into our past to uncover new possibilities
◦ And have a dialogue with someone we can use to guide us
◦ E.g. Dumbledore and Harry

Purgatory

◦ Penitence and spiritual growth in Catholic doctrine

Lord of the Rings also has quest for immortality
Reaping a destiny

- William James (1842-1910): ‘sow a thought, reap an action: sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.’

- Our mortality and how we live are important
  - Voldemort - No remorse for mistakes
  - Dumbledore - remorse

- Aristotle (348-322 BC)
  - Notes how our actions put us on a trajectory
  - Turning us into particular kinds of people
Aristotle and Behaviour

• Repeated wrong or right behaviour
  ◦ more likely to continue doing wrong or right

• Rowling & Heidegger -highlight the Jamesian point that our choices here shape our destiny

• Death final/not final differences

• John Locke (1632-1704)
  ◦ Things that give us the most real identity are memories and character

• Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
  ◦ To ensure happiness we have to assume an afterlife
Ambiguity in Harry Potter

- Ambiguous whether death is the beginning or the end
- Portrayed as the next great adventure
- Harry Potter
  - Imperfect and morally flawed characters with choices between what’s good and what’s easy
  - Choices we make in this life are consequential
Death is present in popular culture

- Death is shown in many films
- May be search for meaning
- Determine how the characters live
- Characters portrayed as evil may get killed off
- Humour may be used in relation to death and portrayals (coping mechanism)
- Gallows humour (Life of Brian)
- Some films have the quest for immortality as their theme.
Bibliography