

candles which were floating in mid-air over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the Hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting. Professor McGonagall led the first-years up here, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked upwards and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, 'It's bewitched to look like the sky outside, I read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*.'

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn't simply open on to the heavens.

Harry quickly looked down again as Professor McGonagall silently placed a four-legged stool in front of the first-years. On top of the stool she put a pointed wizard's hat. This hat was patched and frayed and extremely dirty. Aunt Petunia wouldn't have let it in the

house.

Maybe they had to try and get a rabbit out of it, Harry thought wildly, that seemed the sort of thing – noticing that everyone in the Hall was now staring at the hat, he stared at it too. For a few seconds, there was complete silence. Then the hat twitched. A rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth – and the hat began to sing:

*'Oh, you may not think I'm  
pretty,  
But don't judge on what you  
see,  
I'll eat myself if you can find  
A smarter hat than me.  
You can keep your bowlers  
black,  
Your top hats sleek and tall,  
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting  
Hat  
And I can cap them all.  
There's nothing hidden in your*

*head  
The Sorting Hat can't see,  
So try me on and I will tell you  
Where you ought to be.  
You might belong in  
Gryffindor,  
Where dwell the brave at  
heart,  
Their daring, nerve and  
chivalry  
Set Gryffindors apart;  
You might belong in  
Hufflepuff,  
Where they are just and loyal,  
Those patient Hufflepuffs are  
true  
And unafraid of toil;  
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,  
If you've a ready mind,  
Where those of wit and  
learning,*

*Will always find their kind;  
Or perhaps in Slytherin  
You'll make your real friends,  
Those cunning folk use any  
means  
To achieve their ends.  
So put me on! Don't be afraid!  
And don't get in a flap!  
You're in safe hands (though I  
have none)  
For I'm a Thinking Cap!*



The whole Hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then became quite still again.

‘So we’ve just got to try on the hat!’ Ron whispered to Harry. ‘I’ll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll.’

Harry smiled weakly. Yes, trying on the hat was a lot better than having to do a spell, but he did wish they could have tried it on without everyone watching. The hat