

## At a glance

### Author profile: Roald Dahl

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- Word and sentence level. Dahl's extraordinary use of language provides a rich and inventive setting for language work
- Fiction. Dahl's stories contain all the ingredients for modern day fairytales
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### Book reviews

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- New resources for literacy teaching

### Written by

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Roald Dahl's letter to his mother, written from his boarding school when he was nine years old.

# on target for literacy

## Author profile: Roald Dahl

October 11<sup>th</sup> 1925

St. Peters  
Weston-super-mare

Dear Mama

I am sorry I have not writting before. ~~We~~ There was a foot-ball match yesterday, ~~not~~ against clarence, and the first eleven lost by 2 goals, the score was 3 goals to 2, but the second eleven won by 5 goals the score was 5 nill. We playd Brien house on Wednesday, and the score was 1 all. I hope none of you have got coolds. It is quite a nice day to-day, I am just going to church. I hope mike is quite all right now, and Buzz. Major Cotton is going to recite something coled "as you like it" to night. please could you send me some conkers as quick as you can, but ~~don't~~ dont send to meny, ~~the~~ just send them in a tin. and wrap it up in paper.

Love from  
BOY



# Author profile: Roald Dahl

## Author profile

Why Roald Dahl makes such an ideal subject for an author study:

- Range of writing
- Fast narrative drive
- Rich, inventive language
- Humorous writing
- Larger-than-life characters
- Straightforward plots
- Detailed descriptions
- Modern-day fairy stories

## Dahl's ability to see the world as children do.

'Matilda and Lavender saw the giant in green breeches advancing upon a girl of about ten who had a pair of plaited golden pigtails hanging over her shoulders.'



## Teaching issue

Roald Dahl's incredible popularity, his rich and varied writing and his unerring ability to see the world as children do, all make him an ideal subject for a Literacy Hour author study

### Favourite author

Roald Dahl is, without doubt, most children's favourite author. In numerous surveys into children's reading habits, his titles top the polls as the best-loved and most widely read stories. Dahl's rich and varied work encompasses picture books, storybooks, poetry and autobiography - and some of his books have also been adapted for the cinema and theatre.

### What is Dahl's appeal?

His stories entertain, offering a freshness and excitement hard to match. They are characterized by a fast narrative drive and a flair for language. He catches readers from the first sentence, holding their attention to the very end. He taps into children's imagination and sees the world as children do - from a perspective which is self-contained, subjective and unambiguous in the delineation of right and wrong. His plots are focused, stripped to essentials, his characters larger than life and his descriptions

powerful - and his superb storytelling is complemented, for the most part, by Quentin Blake's exuberant illustrations.

### Fiction

Dahl's stories are modern-day fairy tales. His universe is one of magical happenings, peopled by characters who are obviously good or obviously bad. This polarization of characters is reinforced by detailed descriptions, usually of their physical attributes. His characters do not mature or experience a spiritual crisis through the development of the plot. On the contrary, their actions and responses to each other trigger the events. Try using Dahl's characterization as a model for children to write their own character sketches, focusing on details which evoke instant sympathy or dislike.

### Plots

The plots in Dahl's stories are straightforward and linear, culminating in satisfying, unambiguous endings in which the 'baddies' get their come-uppance. They provide ample opportunities for exploring essential ingredients of narrative - from introduction to build-up to conflict and conflict resolution. Key incidents are easily recognizable and can be charted through the use of simple storyboards.

### Viewpoint

The viewpoint is crucial to the way we interpret the text - which means that a story can be read in different ways, depending on who is telling it.

### Danny the Champion of the World

is told by Danny in the first person narrative so that the reader empathizes with Danny and sees things from his perspective. A third person narrative usually offers a neutral standpoint - providing an overview of all the characters and events. However in Dahl's stories, his third person narratives are often more complex. He breaks them down with another, anonymous voice - whose function is to disrupt the smooth unfolding of events and make the reader see things from a definite slant. Using asides and running commentary, the anonymous narrator introduces beliefs, opinions, likes and dislikes which colour our view of the story. Encourage children to try to identify who is telling the story and to examine how this affects the way they see the characters. In their own writing, they can explore point of view by retelling a story from another character's standpoint.

### Comparing stories

In Dahl's stories, the main characters are often children from one-parent families like Danny or orphans as is James in **James and the Giant Peach**, Sophie in **The BFG** and the narrator in **The Witches**. The child symbolizes innocence and a force for good, and is pitted against adults who embody negative forces - of evil, brutality, stupidity or simply incompetence.

### Recurring themes

Night-time, especially the aspect of moonlight, is an important element in the books. Moonlight plays havoc with our senses and infuses the landscape with fluidity and soft shapes. It heralds a world of magic and dreams and is the perfect fantasy setting. It is in the moonlight that Sophie first lays eyes on the BFG while the main events of **Danny the Champion of the World** take place at night under the spell of the moon.

### Poetry

Dahl's poetry is rich in rhyme, rhythm and humour. **Dirty Beasts** and **Revolting Rhymes** will encourage children to seek out poetry. It will also help them to develop listening and oral skills. Sounds and word patterns are almost as important as the content of Dahl's poems. Enjoyment often comes from his fusion of incongruous, disparate and unexpected images. Use the fairy tale characters in **Revolting Rhymes** as models to trigger children's own alternative poems.

### Wit

Humour permeates all of Dahl's work and takes different forms. An unexpected turn of events, exaggeration, absurd behaviour, wordplay, nonsense words, the grotesque and dark humour are just some of the ways by which Dahl holds his young audience.

### Non-fiction

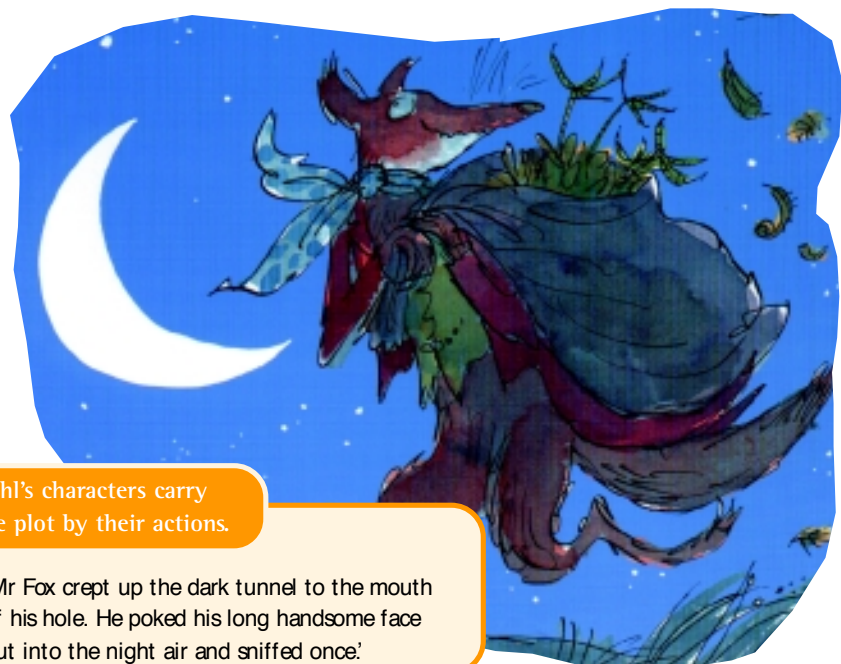
Dahl's account of his childhood is set out in his autobiography, **Boy**. The events and situations which he describes here are the basis for themes which he develops in his fiction - punishment at the hands of grown-ups, a fascination with

Moonlight is an important element in Dahl's stories.

'The wood was murky and very still. Somewhere in the sky the moon was shining.'



sweets and confectionery and a burgeoning love of nature, fully developed in later years in **My Year**. His own strong, individualist personality, an integral part of all of his main characters, is rooted in personal experiences of growing up in a world dominated and frustrated by adult values.



Dahl's characters carry the plot by their actions.

'Mr Fox crept up the dark tunnel to the mouth of his hole. He poked his long handsome face out into the night air and sniffed once.'

# Author profile: Roald Dahl

Dahl's relish for words and wordplay and zest for language.

'The Enormous Crocodile laughed so much his teeth rattled together like pennies in a moneybox... Very quickly, the crocodile reached up and snapped his jaws at the Poly-Poly Bird.'

## Word Level

Roald Dahl has an extraordinary and inventive way with language. In his hands it sparkles with wit and assumes a life of its own - open to endless possibilities of meaning

### Feel for language

Roald Dahl delights in the sounds and music of words, their meaning and rhyme. He enriches his fiction with a whole vocabulary of invented words - gobblefunk, uckyslush, lickswishy - whose meanings derive from their sounds. His prose sizzles with wordplay, giving his language a freshness, spontaneity and vigour. His non-fiction writing, especially in *My Year*, is lyrical, fluid and precise, with simple descriptions of the nature he so loved. The richness of both his fiction and non-fiction makes them perfect for reading aloud.

### Wordplay

Humour in Dahl's work derives from his obvious relish for words. Dahl uses language to create humour, often playing havoc with our sense of logic and order. His fiction is brimming with spoonerisms - transposing the initial letters or syllables of two or more words, malapropisms - using a word in mistake for one sounding similar, and deliberate misspellings.

*The BFG*, one of the wittiest children's books ever written, exemplifies Dahl's extraordinary zest for language. The BFG has had little education, he claims. Besides, he lives in a world of his own and models language to his own purpose. His hearing is acute and so, naturally, his understanding of language is phonic-based to produce words such as langwitch and vegetibbles. Some words and phrases become muddled - a mixture of spoonerisms and malapropisms: curdbloodingling, skin and groans, catasterous disastrophe, squeakpips, elefant and squarreling. His explanations often culminate in Am I right or left?

### Onomatopoeia

Dahl's sensitivity to the richness of language is most obvious in his use of onomatopoeia - the formation of words by imitating sounds. Prevalent in all his work, it is at its most creative in the character of the BFG, who constructs a whole new language from sound-words.



He sorts the dreams he collects into good and bad - soft, sonorous words denote the good dreams, consonant-heavy, stressed vowels and lumbering sounds describe the nightmares - trogglehumpers, bogthumpers and grobswitchers as opposed to the melodious winksquiffers and phizzwizards. In **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**, Loompaland, the original home of the Oompa-Loompas who work in Willy Wonka's factory, is infested with dangerous beasts including hornswogglers, snozzwangers and whangdoodles.

#### Similes and metaphors

Similes, comparing one thing with another using the words 'like' and 'as', and metaphors, where one thing is another, abound in Dahl's writing. He uses them to colour his descriptions of characters, bringing them vividly to life like the Bloodbottler in **The BFG**, who has two purple frankfurter lips, or the BFG whose toes are as big as bumblehammers. Aunt Sponge in **James and the Giant Peach** is like a great white soggy overboiled cabbage. Grandma in **George's Marvellous Medicine** has a small puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom. The BFG calls Sophie quacky as a duckhound and asks her to be still as a starfish. Comparisons, too, are vivid; twilight shadows, the setting for **Danny the Champion of the World**, are darker than a wolf's mouth.

#### Alliteration

Alliteration, having the same letter or sound at the beginning of several words, adds spice to a text and heightens comic effect. Muggle-Wump refers to the Twits as two fearful frumptious freaks while Miss Trunchbull addresses Matilda as you clotted carbuncle. The BFG describes himself as brimful of buzzburgers while the wicked giants regard him as a shrivelly little shrimp! Mucky little midget! Squaggy little squib! Grobby little grub!

#### Puns and nonsense words

'Humans beans from Wales is tasting whooshey of fish' the BFG declares in the first of many puns based on different word meanings (homonyms) and spellings (homophones). Nonsense words combine into meaningful sentences - 'You must be cockles to be guzzling such rubbsquash' booms the Bloodbottler, referring to the BFG's favourite vegetable, the snozzcumber. Place and character names are richly symbolic, carrying humour and meaning even further. Proper nouns conjure an instant image - Crunchem Hall primary school, Mr Wormwood, Mr Kranky, the Twits, Miss Trunchbull,

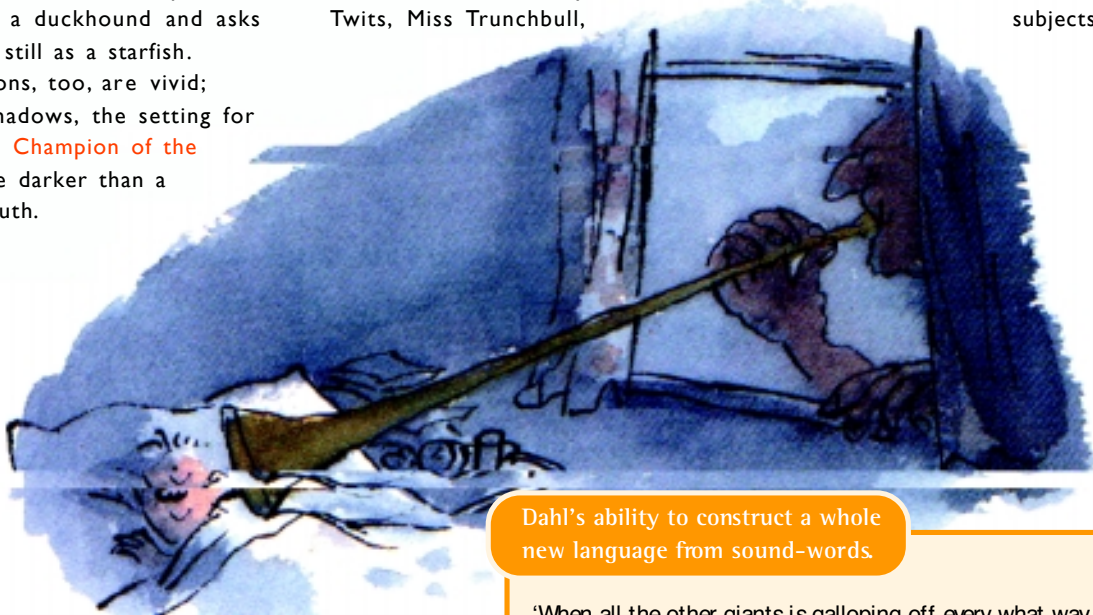
aunts Spiker and Sponge - not forgetting the dim-witted farming trio Boggis, Bunce and Bean and, of course, the mellifluous, gentle Miss Honey.

#### Poetry

Dahl's poetry is humorously written from a child's perspective and is strongly rhythmic with simple rhyming patterns. Both **Revoltin' Rhymes** and **Dirty Beasts** have clear, energetic rhyming patterns and strong, catchy rhythms. Rhythm and rhyme encourage children to play with sounds - and help instil a love of language and its possibilities. Introducing children to Dahl's poetry will provide enormous pleasure while helping them to develop their own language and thinking skills and to choose words and phrasing with care.

#### Rhyming couplets

Dahl's poetry is based on rhyming couplets, that is a pattern of two successive end-words that rhyme. The end-words often consist of only one syllable - feel/meal, hat/that, fell/well. Rhyming couplets, based as they are on word expectation, add further humour to his light-hearted subjects.



Dahl's ability to construct a whole new language from sound-words.

'When all the other giants is galloping off every what way and which to swollop human beans, I is scuddling away to other places to blow dreams into the bedrooms of sleeping children.'

# Author profile: Roald Dahl

Dahl demands that his readers suspend belief from the moment they enter his world.

'Every one of these "creatures" was at least as big as James himself, and in the strange greenish light that shone down from somewhere in the ceiling, they were absolutely terrifying to behold.'



## Fiction/Poetry

To fully appreciate the richness and complexity of Dahl's stories, they should be placed firmly within the fairy tale tradition - of magic, good and evil, punishment and revenge

### Fairy tale genre

Taken at face value, as descriptions of reality, Dahl's stories may appear outrageous, dark, cruel and amoral. Situated within the fairy tale tradition - of psychological happenings, eternal truths and the struggle of good over evil - they become powerful, optimistic, believable and moral. Ingredients essential to the fairy tale genre - magic, fantasy characters, wish-fulfilment, punishment, revenge and a happy ending - are all to be found in Dahl's fiction.

### Dahl's world

In true fairy tale tradition, Dahl demands that his readers suspend belief the very moment they enter his world. Reality is topsy-turvy. Unusual and improbable events are presented as ordinary, everyday happenings which could be experienced by anyone at any time.

### Good and evil

There is a strong delineation of good and bad in Dahl's work, and his characters are strongly polarized. What interests him is the juxtaposition of opposing forces. Each good person is balanced by an evil character. Spiritual growth and the attainment of self-knowledge have no place in his work.

Those who are powerless or deprived in suffering family



Dahl's stories are modern-day fairy tales.

'A great round ball as big as a house had been sighted hovering high up in the sky over the very centre of Manhattan.'

deprivation like Sophie in **The BFG**, or poverty like Charlie in **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**, embody goodness. Those who hold power but abuse it, like Mr Wormwood and Miss Trunchbull, or who use it to bully or subjugate the defenceless, like the Gregg family in **The Magic Finger**, are wholeheartedly bad. To adults, Danny and his father may seem outside the law and therefore 'bad': to children they embody the principle of fair play, especially when pitted against the obnoxious and flashily rich brewer, Mr Hazell.

### Justice

Upholding the fairy tale tradition, evil is always punished. Punishment feeds into a child's sense of justice, of what is right and wrong, and from this perspective it is an essential ingredient. Revenge, too, is both sweet and necessary.



Dahl presents unusual and improbable events as ordinary.

'They all peered down anxiously at the sharks who were cruising slowly round and round the peach.'

### Magic

Many of Dahl's characters are endowed with supernatural powers. The girl narrator in *The Magic Finger* has the ability to transform the Gregg family into birds. Her extraordinary talent is triggered by a red hot tingling feeling which concentrates in the tip of her finger. Matilda can conjure a feeling of hotness which gathers in her brain, allowing her mind to shift objects at will. Spells are also cast by the mixing of ingredients. In *George's Marvellous Medicine*, George stirs a concoction

of snails and lizards, shaving soap and shampoo into a powerful potion which stretches his granny before shrinking her to nothing. The Grand High Witch relies on a brew to turn the boy narrator into a mouse in *The Witches*, while a strange, little old man offers James a bagful of magic in *James and the Giant Peach*. The BFG mixes magic powders, arranging them into dreams and nightmares - the good dreams to be blown into children's ears at night, the nightmares exploded into nothing.

### Fantasy characters

Dahl's fictitious world abounds in giants, wizards, witches and fantastical creatures. In *The Witches*, the gruesome gang are symbols of dark, irrational forces out to change the world to favour their evil purpose. They may appear ordinary but, as the anonymous voice warns, in reality they are bent on destruction. The BFG is the least threatening of the giants. The Bloodbottler, the Fleshlumpeater, the Meatdrinker, as their names suggest, prey on human beings, especially chiddlers. Willy Wonka, from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, epitomizes the modern-day wizard. In *James and the Giant Peach*, James' fate is determined by the grotesquely oversized minibests.

### Magic wishes

Wish-fulfilment is essential to many of Dahl's stories and provides his characters with the means to realize their dreams. A wish may take the form of personal, material enhancement - such as Charlie's dreams coming true - or of vendettas against the adult world, as in *The Magic Finger*.

### Happy ending

In all of Dahl's books, the protagonist endures a series of ordeals but comes through unscathed. The just are rewarded - saved by their wits, as is Matilda, or by external circumstances, as is James, in his extraordinary adventure. The happy ending demands the punishment of the bad - and Dahl revels in descriptions of the punishments he hands out.

### Heroes

Dahl's heroes are always unambiguously good. His boy heroes are usually passive, prey to external forces which propel them into adventure. His girl heroes, Matilda and the little girl in *The Magic Finger*, are active and the catalysts for the unfolding of events.

# Author profile: Roald Dahl

Above right: Quentin Blake's drawing of himself with Roald Dahl.

Below: Dahl working at home with Quentin Blake.



## Non-fiction

Roald Dahl's autobiography focuses on his early life and gives an intriguing insight into the ideas, experiences, people and themes that came to dominate his stories and poems

### Biography and autobiography

Biography and autobiography provide factual information about a person's life. They are both examples of recount writing. A recounted text includes details of who, what, why, where, when and how. In a recount, key events are set in chronological order and the text is usually written in the simple past tense.

### Similarities

Both biography and autobiography start from the premise that the subject is worth writing about. In both cases, the title usually offers clues about the content. Chris Powling's excellent biography is simply called **Roald Dahl** while Dahl's own account of his childhood is **Boy**. The illustrative material in both biography and autobiography consists of photographs, letters, maps and other reference material which relates directly to the subject. Setting is entirely at the mercy of what is being narrated. It can be omitted altogether, or expanded, depending on the point which is being made in regard to the central character. Characters have a definite function - to throw light on the events and behaviour of the central person - and can be introduced and dismissed at whim.

### Differences

A biography aims to take an objective stance and to be accurate and truthful about its subject. It is based on knowledge of and, often, discussion with the person being written about. It takes a well-rounded approach and is more likely to be critical.



An autobiography is more likely to be selective as the author dips into memories which have fluctuated with time. The biographer is more likely to adopt a detached tone while the autobiographer, intent on drawing the reader in, uses a warm and direct voice. In biography, the narrative voice is the third person and in autobiography, the first person.

### Dahl's autobiography

In his autobiography, **Boy**, Dahl traces the formative years of his life, beginning with his parents and his primary and secondary school life and ending with the excitement of his first job and the beginnings of adulthood. In these pages we can trace the incidents and preoccupations which Dahl later reworked into his fiction. His delight in the sweet shop and in chocolate bars, his fascination with flying, his interest in nature and his brush with bullying and corporal punishment are just some of the personal experiences which stayed with him and which he wove into his stories.



## Biography

Read Dahl's autobiography, *Boy* and then use our biography to compare some of the aspects of his life.

**R**oald Dahl was born in Cardiff in 1916. His parents were Norwegian but were living in Britain because his father was a shipbroker. He had one brother and four sisters and when he was seven years old, he went to Llandaff Cathedral School. Two years later he became a boarder at St Peter's School in Weston-super-Mare - and then at 13 he moved to Repton School, in Derbyshire.

Roald Dahl was not interested in going to university. He wanted to travel and so joined the Shell Oil Company with the ambition of becoming part of their foreign staff. In 1938 he got his wish to go abroad - the company sent him to Mombasa, in Kenya, where he sold oil to the owners of diamond mines and sisal plantations.

In 1939, when World War II broke out, he joined the RAF in Nairobi and learned to fly aircraft. He was sent to Cairo, then ordered to go into the Libyan desert, ready for action.

It was here that his plane crashed, leaving him with spinal injuries from which he was to suffer all his life. After convalescence in an Alexandria hospital, he rejoined his squadron and saw action in Greece, Crete, Palestine and the Lebanon.

In 1942, after a short stay in England, he was posted to Washington as an assistant air attaché at the British Embassy.

There he met the author CS Forrester who was instrumental in getting Dahl's first short story, *The Gremlins*, published. The book attracted the attention of Walt Disney, who soon invited him to Hollywood to write the script for the film version.

In 1952, Dahl met actress Patricia Neal. They were married in the following year and returned to England to live at Gipsy House in the village of Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire. He lived there for the rest of his life.

Dahl and his wife had five children - Olivia, Tessa, Theo, Ophelia and Lucy. But between 1960-65 tragedy struck the Dahl family. Baby Theo was brain-damaged in a traffic accident, Olivia died from a complication of measles and then Patricia suffered a stroke. It was during these years that *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) were published.

In the late 1970s Dahl met Quentin Blake, who was to illustrate his latest story, *The Enormous Crocodile*. This collaboration marked the beginning of a flourishing partnership.

In 1983 he won the Children's Book Award for *The BFG* and the Whitbread Award for *The Witches*. He won the Children's Book Award again in 1989 with *Matilda*. In 1983 Patricia Neal and Dahl divorced. Later that year, Dahl married Felicity D'Abreu, with whom he was to remain for the rest of his life.

Roald Dahl died in 1990 at the age of 74.



*A young Roald Dahl with his mother.*



*Roald Dahl on the beach at Weston-super-Mare.*



*Dahl learned to fly aircraft in Nairobi.*

*As I grow old - by Roald Dahl*  
*As I grow old and just a trifle frayed*  
*It's nice to know that sometimes I have made*  
*You children and occasionally the staff*  
*stop work and have instead a little laugh.*



Welcome  
to the  
scrumdiddlyumptious



World of

Roald Dahl



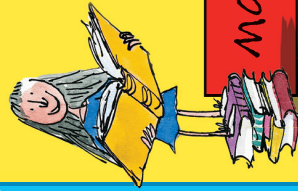
Celebrate Roald Dahl Month this September!

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# September

## Celebrate Roald Dahl Month in September!



MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT SUN
<p>Have a laborious day—just kidding, we're swizzfiggling you!</p> <p><b>LABOR DAY</b></p> <p>In honor of Roald Dahl's birthday yesterday, host a Roald Dahl month party one day this week.</p> <p>Partner with another class for the day. Be reading buddies or perform a Reader's Theater!</p> <p>Host a Roald Dahl movie-watching party and show the <i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i> DVD!</p>	<p>Don't be a Twit—join the Roald Dahl Club on roalddahl.com</p> <p>Give everyone a great big smile today . . . Don't be like <i>The Twits</i>, whose ugly thoughts grew upon them year by year.</p> <p>If the power of <i>The Magic Finger</i> could help you swap places with anyone in the world, who would you want to be?</p> <p>Combine ice cream, chocolate, marshmallows, and other delicious ingredients to create your own Wonka's Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight!</p> <p>Use egg cartons, pipe cleaners, markers, and other art supplies to create Miss Spider, Glow-worm, Centipede, Ladybug, and other characters from <i>James and the Giant Peach</i>.</p>	<p>Channel your inner Matilda and read a wonderful book today. Designate a special table in your classroom library as "Matilda's Favorite Books."</p> <p>Catch dreams like the BFG! You can make a dreamcatcher from some string tied tightly across a hoop. Decorate it with feathers, foil, buttons, anything that would attract pleasant dreams!</p> <p>Take a trip to the library, one of Matilda's favorite places—and read a scrumptious new book!</p> <p>Put together the most <i>glorumpious</i> mismatched outfit you can find, and wear it to school today.</p> <p>Host a read-aloud of Roald Dahl books to commemorate the end of Roald Dahl Month!</p>	<p>Decorate a "golden ticket" party invitation in advance of your Roald Dahl month celebration.</p> <p>Don't forget to plan for the community service project on page 9 of this booklet!</p> <p>Decorate the bookmarks on page 3 of this booklet to mark your place in the whimsical world of Roald Dahl.</p> <p>Use the word <i>scrumdiddlyumptious</i> ten times today!</p>	<p>Devise your own revolting recipes—a <i>splendiferous</i> way to learn measurements and numbers!</p> <p>Have a <i>fantastic</i> day . . . and visit <a href="http://FantasticMrFoxMovie.com">FantasticMrFoxMovie.com</a> to see the latest news on the movie version of Fantastic Mr. Fox.</p> <p>Creativity is the most <i>marvelous medicine</i> to cure boredom. Visit roalddahl.com and have some fun!</p> <p>When you see anyone today, tell them, OLEEH! Words that are written backwards worked very well for Mr. Hoppy in <i>Esio Trar</i>.</p>	<p>5/6</p> <p>Today is Roald Dahl's birthday! 12/13</p> <p>19/20</p> <p>26/27</p>
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30

These dates work for September 2009, but make calendars of your own and celebrate with these suggestions year after year!

# Welcome to the Scrumdiddlyumptious World of Roald Dahl!

A masterful storyteller, Roald Dahl has kept children of all ages entertained with reading since the 1960s. Bring his scrumdiddlyumptious world to your classroom with the lesson plan ideas contained in this booklet. We suggest celebrating a Roald Dahl Day during his birthday month of September, but these suggestions are designed to be used all through the year.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

**Meet the author:** Get to know Roald Dahl and see how his childhood and family life inspired his prolific writing career. The information on this page will help you set up an author study unit for your classroom!

**Celebrate a Roald Dahl Day:** Host a classroom celebration in honor of Roald Dahl Month with these suggestions for students of all ages!

**Bookmarks:** We want students to get lost in the stories of Roald Dahl—but not *literally*. Print as many copies of these bookmarks as you need onto sturdy cardstock, distribute to students, and have them decorate their favorite characters—they'll never lose their places again!

**Discussion Questions and Activity Suggestions:** Don't miss these great book-specific ideas for discussion and activities to easily incorporate Roald Dahl stories into your lesson plans—all across the curriculum!

**Reading Log:** Give each student a copy and encourage them to fill out the log with the books they've read and their comments about them. Students will love seeing how many pages they can read in a month or a year! This page is also an easy way to track the work students complete in their literature circles during a Roald Dahl Author Study Unit.

**Five Essential Elements of a Story:** Use this outline and work sheet to break down the essential elements of a story with students. Additional copies can serve as brainstorming organizational tools to inspire your Roald-Dahls-in-the-making to create their own marvelously masterful tales!

**Venn diagram:** There's no better way to study Roald Dahl's characters, plots, settings, novels, and all-around splendor than with a Venn diagram. Make as many copies as you need and help students organize their thoughts through all of their reading adventures!

**Stickers:** Sticker compliments to your students for great work! Use this template to print as many stickers as you need onto Avery labels for use all year long.

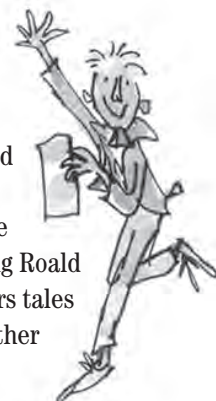
**Book List:** Collect all the gigantuously great tales of Roald Dahl with this complete title listing, found on the back cover.



Visit [www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com) for additional activities!



# Meet the splendiferous author Roald Dahl!



Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff, Wales, in 1916. His parents were Norwegian, and he was the only son of a second marriage. His father, Harald, and elder sister, Astri, died when Roald was just three, leaving his mother, Sofie, to raise two stepchildren and her own four children by herself. Young Roald loved stories and books. His mother told Roald and his sisters tales about trolls and other mythical Norwegian creatures. His father was a tremendous diary writer. Roald himself kept a secret diary from the age of eight.

Roald was thirteen when he started at Repton, a famous public school in Derbyshire, England. He excelled at sports but was deemed by his English master to be “quite incapable of marshalling his thoughts on paper.” There was one huge advantage to going to Repton. The school was close to Cadbury’s, one of England’s most famous chocolate factories and one which regularly involved the schoolboys in testing new varieties of chocolate bars. At eighteen, rather than going to university, Roald joined the Public Schools’ Exploring Society’s expedition to Newfoundland. He then started to work for the Shell Company as a salesman in Dar es Salaam in Africa. At twenty-three, when World War II broke out, Roald signed up with the Royal Air Force in Nairobi, where he was accepted as a pilot officer. Eventually, he was sent home as an invalid, but transferred, in 1942, to Washington, D.C., as an air attaché.

In 1942, during his time in Washington, author C. S. Forester, who was in America to publicize the British war effort, asked Roald to describe his version of the war, which Forester would write up for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Ten days after receiving Roald’s written account, Forester wrote back, “Did you know you were a writer? I haven’t changed a word.” The piece appeared anonymously in *The Post* in August 1942 under the title “Shot Down Over Libya.”

Roald’s career as a children’s book author did not begin in earnest until the 1960s, after he had become a father himself (to five children!). In the meantime, he devoted himself to writing short stories for adults. Settled with his family in Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire, England, at Gipsy House, he wrote most of his unforgettable stories in a small hut at the bottom of a garden. Roald first became interested in writing children’s books by making up bedtime stories for his daughters Olivia and Tessa. This was how *James and the Giant Peach* came into being. His second book was *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which went on to achieve phenomenal success all over the world.

Roald Dahl passed away on November 23, 1990, at the age of seventy-four. Since his death, his books have more than maintained their popularity. Total sales of the United Kingdom editions are around 50 million, with millions more sold every year. Not bad for a man who couldn’t type and always used a pencil to write!

## Did you know...

Roald Dahl was born on September 13. That’s why we celebrate Roald Dahl Month in September!

Visit [www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com) where you can listen to audio clips of an interview with Roald Dahl, see pictures of him growing up, and take a quiz to see how much you REALLY know!

# Bookmarks

Readers easily get lost in the whimsical world of Roald Dahl, but you don't want them to *literally* get lost in their books! The bookmarks below will help students to always know where they are. Photocopy this sheet onto sturdy cardstock, and then cut along the dotted lines to make a bookmark featuring Willy Wonka, Fantastic Mr. Fox, The BFG, or Matilda. Have each student write his or her name in the space provided, color in the character, and thread wool, ribbons, or string with beads through holes punched out at the top of each bookmark.



Willy Wonka



This bookmark belongs to:

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[www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com)  
Illustrations © Quentin Blake



Fantastic Mr. Fox



This bookmark belongs to:

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[www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com)  
Illustrations © Quentin Blake



The BFG



This bookmark belongs to:

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[www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com)  
Illustrations © Quentin Blake



Matilda



This bookmark belongs to:

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[www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com)  
Illustrations © Quentin Blake

# Travel Across the Curriculum and Into a Fantastical-and Educational-World with the Books of Roald Dahl

Discussion Questions & Activity Suggestions

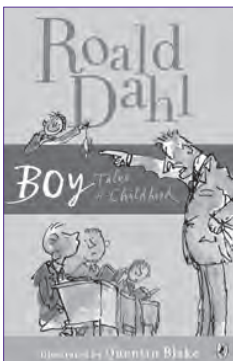


Vocabulary

## The BFG

**Discussion:** Talk about fear. Why is Sophie afraid of the BFG? Is the BFG at all afraid of Sophie? Why or why not? What scares you? How do you deal with your fears? Have you ever been afraid of something only to find out it wasn't really scary at all? Share your experiences with the class or write about them in a journal entry.

**Activity:** The BFG makes up all kinds of words, like "snozzcumber" and "scrumptlet." While reading *The BFG*—or any Roald Dahl story—keep a list of "real" words that you do not know. Spend time with your teacher looking up some of these words in the dictionary and clarifying their meanings. Then come up with a word of your own, like the BFG does, that you think should be a part of the English language. Share your creations with one another and see what kinds of wild new words you can add to your vocabulary!



Biography

## Boy: Tales of Childhood and D is for Dahl

**Discussion:** What are the differences between autobiographies, biographies, and fiction? Read the first few chapters of *Boy*. Could you tell that it was nonfiction? Now that you know *Boy* is Roald's autobiography, which of his childhood experiences seem to have influenced his writing career? Can you see where he got some of his story ideas from? *D is for Dahl* is another nonfiction book about Roald Dahl you will like!

**Activity:** Write your own autobiography, using current aspirations and your imagination to write the chapters about your future (jobs, family, location, etc.). Then write an ABC autobiography like *D is for Dahl*, where every letter stands for something different about you and your life. Which did you like writing better?



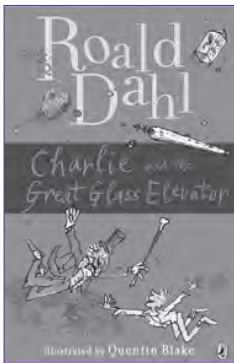


Performing  
Arts

## Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

**Discussion:** Have you ever read this book or seen one of the movies? What is the difference between reading a story in book form and seeing it imagined on-screen? Which do you like better, and why? After reading, discuss the character of Charlie Bucket. Roald Dahl calls Charlie the hero of the story. Do you think Charlie is a hero? What qualities about him are heroic? Does he do anything that might question your classification of him as a hero? How is he different from the other children? Who else in the story might be considered a hero?

**Activity:** *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is one of Roald Dahl's most imaginative stories—and perhaps his best-known and beloved classic. Encourage students to get in touch with their creative sides by picking up *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory: A Play* and performing the piece for the rest of your school. If you have more students than there are parts in the play, use your Wonka-like imaginations and create additional parts!

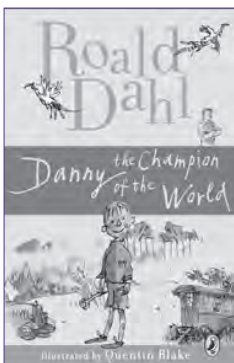


Geography

## Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

**Discussion:** In the first chapter of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, the three grandparents who haven't yet met Willy Wonka don't trust him to keep them safe in the elevator. Grandma Josephine even calls him "cracked." Discuss what it means to prejudice people before you really know them, based on something you've heard about them or how they might look. Have you ever done this to someone? Why? Has it ever been done to you? How did it make you feel? What can you do to avoid passing judgment on someone before getting to know him or her? How do the grandparents' opinions of Wonka change as they get to know him?

**Activity:** Charlie and his family visit some pretty strange places in this book, like outer space and Minusland. Talk about traveling. Where have you always wanted to go? Research a (real) place that you've always wanted to visit. Gather facts about the destination: pictures, images of the flag (if applicable), and anything else interesting you can find. Present what you learn to the rest of the class. For a creative twist, imagine the types of magical creatures you might meet in the places you want to visit. Then, as a class, compile information about the community where you live. What might you tell someone who wanted to visit your town or school? Make a travel brochure for visitors, complete with pictures of your local area and its attractions.



Creative  
Writing

## Danny the Champion of the World

**Discussion:** Discuss greed with your classmates. Who in this story is greedy? What are the consequences of each character's greed? Do you think any of them learned a valuable lesson?

**Activity:** Danny becomes the Champion of the World when he and his hero—his father—hatch a wild scheme to take down an enemy. If you could accomplish one thing to become the "champion of the world," what would it be? Tap into the Roald Dahl inside you and write an imaginative, adventurous story of how you become the champion of the world!







Math

## Esio Trot

**Discussion:** Talk about lying. Does Mr. Hoppy lie to Mrs. Silver? Is he right or wrong? If the story were to continue, do you think he would tell Mrs. Silver the truth? Should he? Why or why not?

**Activity:** Mr. Hoppy has to trick Mrs. Silver by replacing “Alfie” each time, because he knows he can’t fake the measurements she is taking. Measurements are very precise and the best indication of height, weight, or length. Practice taking measurements by using a ruler or meterstick to measure different items in your classroom. Mimicking Mrs. Silver, measure your classmates’ heights and mark them all down on a growth chart. Do this on the first of each month to see who has gotten taller. Alternatively, create a “reading-growth” chart, where you add an inch for each book read by the class. Build inch-size slips of paper on top of one another to create a chart that gets taller with each book. Keep your chart taped to a wall in your classroom as an incentive to make the chart grow. When you reach a certain height, have a class celebration! The chart will measure what great readers you and your classmates are, and that’s no lie!

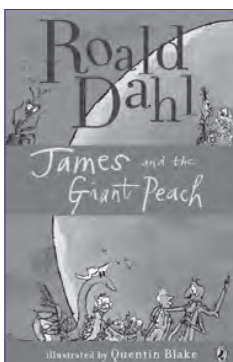


Conflict Resolution

## Fantastic Mr. Fox

**Discussion:** Think about the way Mr. Fox feeds his family. Is he stealing? Why or why not? Do you think the farmers have a right to be angry with him? What would you have done if you were Boggis, Bunce, or Bean?

**Activity:** When people have problems with one another, sometimes they fight about the issue and other times they compromise. In small groups, brainstorm some other ways that *Fantastic Mr. Fox* might have ended. What if Mr. Fox had come out of the hole and fought with the farmers? What different compromises could the fox and the farmers have agreed on?



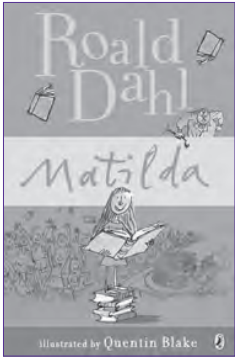
Science

## James and the Giant Peach

**Discussion:** Compare and contrast the many characters in *James and the Giant Peach* using the Venn diagram on page 13 of this booklet to help you organize your thoughts. What are some differences between James and his two aunts? Are there any similarities? Imagine how the aunts might have behaved if they were on the peach instead of James. What about the Earthworm and the Centipede who appear not to get along too well? How do you think their relationship would have changed if the story continued?

**Activity:** There is tons of Roald Dahl magic in nature! Plant a small garden of your own in your school’s courtyard or by a window in your classroom. Whether you plant flowers, vines, or vegetables, research the growth process. How long will it take for sprouts to push up out of the soil? How big is your plant expected to be? What do you need to do to care for it? Take some additional time to research earthworms, centipedes, and grasshoppers. Where do they *really* live, if not inside a peach pit? What else can you learn about these insects?





Story  
Analysis

## Matilda

**Discussion:** Talk about bullies and mentors. Have you or a friend ever dealt with a bully like Miss Trunchbull? What did you do? How would you advise a friend to deal with a bully? On the other hand, do you have a mentor or someone you look up to like Miss Honey? What is special about this person? How does he or she help and inspire you?

**Activity:** Matilda and Mrs. Phelps agree that a good writer makes the reader feel that he or she is “right there on the spot watching it all happen.” Can you do that? Analyze *Matilda* according to the *Five Essential Elements of a Story* (found on pages 11 and 12 of this booklet). Next, use the same outline to brainstorm—and then write—your very own stories. Be as creative as possible!

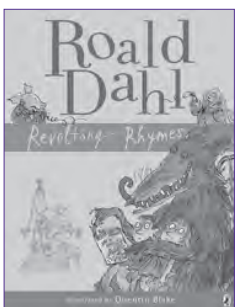
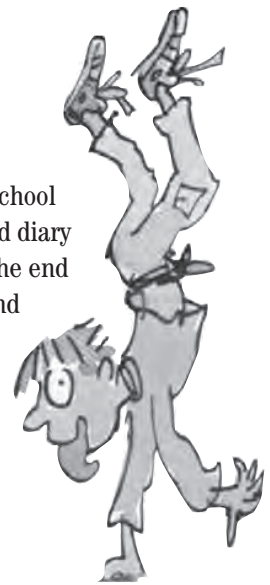


Nutrition

## Revolting Recipes and Even More Revolting Recipes

**Discussion:** Kick off a unit on health and nutrition by asking your school nurse or health specialist to read these recipes with your class. Keep a food diary for one week, tracking everything you eat and drink during that time. At the end of the week, ask your nurse or health specialist to return to your class and hold individual conferences with you and your classmates about your food choices.

**Activity:** Cooking and eating, of course! Make a few revolting recipes during your Roald Dahl Day celebration. Don't forget to bring in a few healthy choices to represent smart snacking!



Poetry

## Revolting Rhymes

**Discussion:** Read aloud the six poems in *Revolting Rhymes*. How does hearing a poem aloud, instead of reading it silently to oneself, change the experience? Which do you prefer? Why? Talk about the differences in plot between the original fairy tales and these revolting versions. Come up with three additional adjectives to describe the revolting version and make a list on the blackboard, whiteboard, or chart paper. Use a thesaurus to round out your list.

**Activity:** Learn about the different types of poetry, like haiku, sonnets, and limericks, and use the Internet to find examples of each. Then, individually or in pairs, rewrite as a poem (revolting or not) either a universally known tale or a story you've recently read in class. Compile everyone's poems into your own classroom anthology, come up with a name for the volume, and give everyone a copy of their very own book!



Art

## The Twits

**Discussion:** Read the descriptions of Mr. and Mrs. Twit in the beginning of *The Twits*. Discuss the characterization of these two: What do their appearances say about their personalities and lives? How does Roald Dahl's word choice help the reader to get a clear picture of the Twits' looks? Do you think you could envision what each one looks like even without the illustrations?

**Activity:** Roald Dahl used to cut pictures of mouths, eyes, and noses from newspapers and magazines to get ideas for new characters. Do this in the weeks leading up to your school's Roald Dahl Day. Then, during your celebration, work in groups to paste together pictures to create a new character of your own. Present these characters to the class, along with five facts about each wacky character and his or her adventures.



Community Service

## The Witches

**Discussion:** Think about the main character's relationship with his grandmother throughout the novel. How does the reader know that they are close? How do they become even closer? Share a story about a family member or friend you feel particularly close to. Why this person? What experiences have you shared with family or friends that have tightened your relationships?

**Activity:** The boy and his grandmother are out to save the children of the world by eliminating all the witches. Brainstorm a community service project that your class can do during your Roald Dahl Day celebration. You could have party attendees bring in canned food or outgrown clothes to donate to charity, clean up your school grounds, visit a senior citizen center, and more!

# Perform a Reader's Theater!

Reader's Theater offers students an opportunity for interpretive oral reading as they use voices, facial expressions, and hand gestures to interpret characters in stories. Assign each student a different part to play—whether actor, narrator, or part of the set crew. Then put on your show for another class, students' parents, the school principal, or whomever you celebrate with. These stories already come adapted as plays, making it easy to perform a story during your Roald Dahl Month festivities, or you can create your own!





# The World of Roald Dahl Reading Log

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

My page goal for the month of \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ pages.

Date	Book Title	Number of Pages Read	Comments	Recommend to a Friend <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
				<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
				<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
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				<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

# The Five Essential Elements of a Story

Attention ALL writers!

All stories, even Roald Dahl's wacky ones, have five basic but important elements. These five components are as follows: the characters, the setting, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. These essential elements keep the story running smoothly and allow the action to develop in a logical way that the reader can follow.

## Characters

The characters are the individuals that the story is about. The author should introduce the characters in the story with specific information so that the reader can visualize each person. This is achieved by providing detailed descriptions of a character's physical attributes and personality traits like Roald Dahl does in *Danny the Champion of the World*. Every story should have a main character. The main character determines the way the plot will develop and is usually the person who will solve the problem the story centers around. However, the other characters are also very important because they supply additional details, explanations, or actions. All characters should stay true to the author's description throughout the story so that readers can understand and believe the action that is taking place—and perhaps even predict which character may do what next.

## Setting

The setting is the location of the action. An author should describe the environment or surroundings of the story in such detail that the reader feels that he or she can picture the scene. Unusual settings (such as a vast chocolate factory or a giant peach) make Roald Dahl's stories even more exciting!

## Plot

The plot is the actual story around which the entire book is based. A plot should have a very clear beginning, middle, and end—with all the necessary descriptions and suspense, called exposition—so that the reader can make sense of the action and follow along from start to finish.

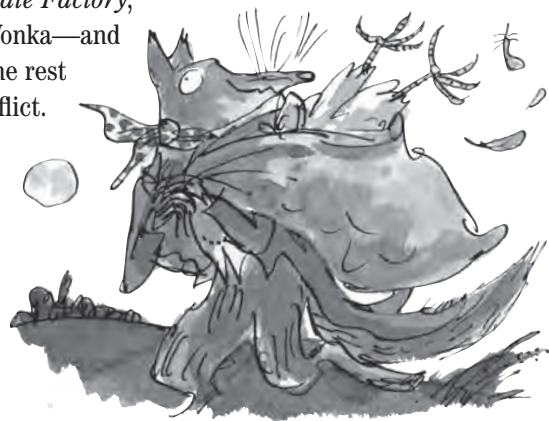
## Conflict

Every story has a conflict to solve. The plot is centered on this conflict and the ways in which the characters attempt to resolve the problem. When the story's action becomes most exciting, right before the resolution, it is called the climax.

## Resolution

The solution to the problem is the way the action is resolved. Roald Dahl often resolves a conflict by having the main character carry out some inventive plan. For example, in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Mr. Fox finds a way to feed his family and the other starving animals, and in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the fact that Charlie is the last child left means the day with Wonka—and Wonka's search—is over. It is important that the solution fit the rest of the story in tone and creativity and solve all parts of the conflict.

Roald Dahl always said—  
*Grab them by the throat with  
the first sentence.*



# Using the Five Elements of a Story in Reading and Writing

While reading a Roald Dahl story, fill in the blanks on this sheet with the necessary elements. Once you've completed this sheet, use another copy to outline and write your own story. Remember, if you don't include all five elements, your main character may never get to a resolution!

Book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Characters: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Plot: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Conflict & Climax: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

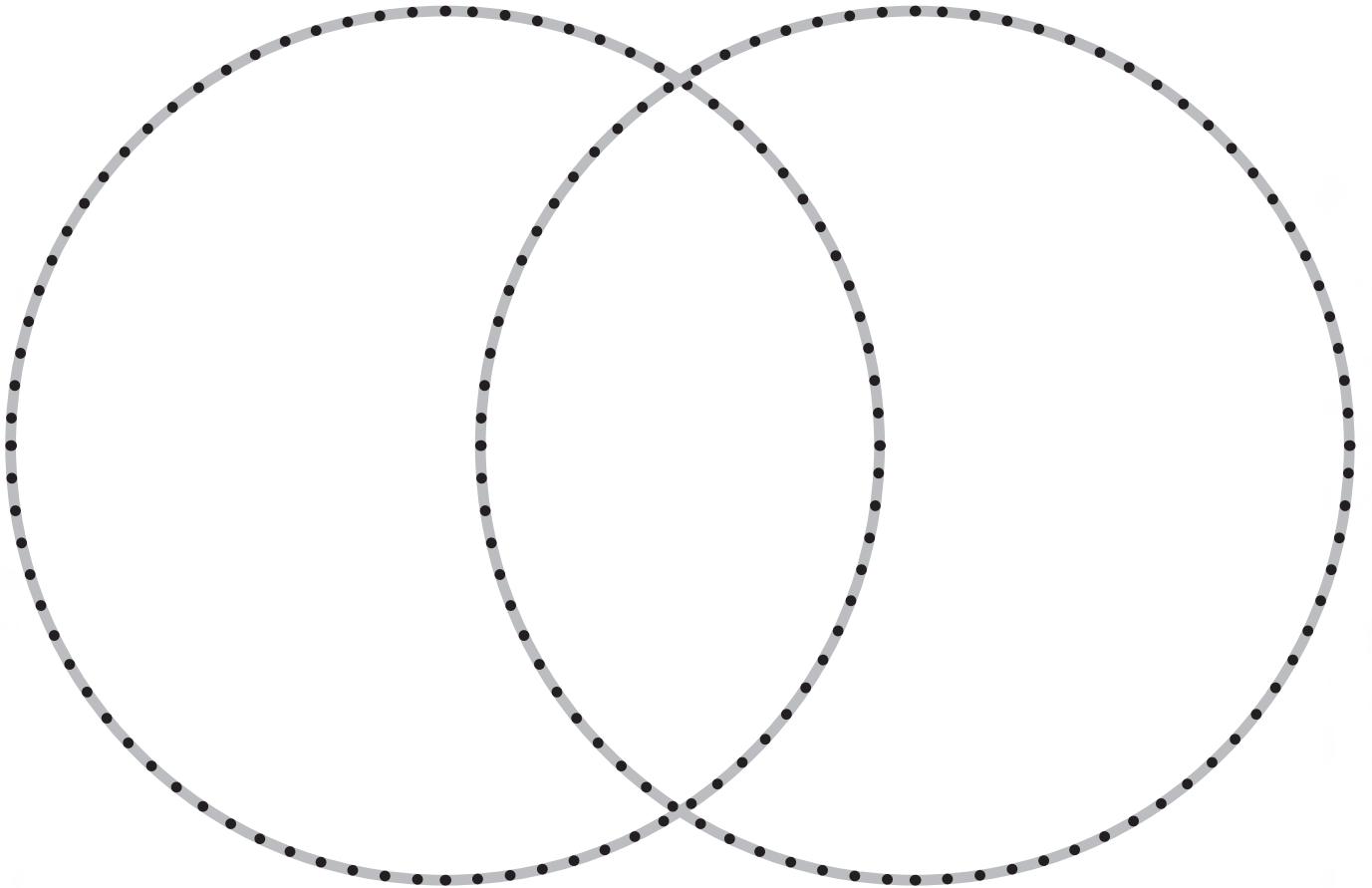
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# Venn diagram

## Compare and Contrast the Characters of Roald Dahl

*Directions:* Characters don't get any kookier than they are in a Roald Dahl story! Photocopy and use the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast two characters in the same story, two characters in different stories, yourself and one character, or two individual books. The possibilities are endless! Don't forget to write who or what you're comparing on the lines below each circle.

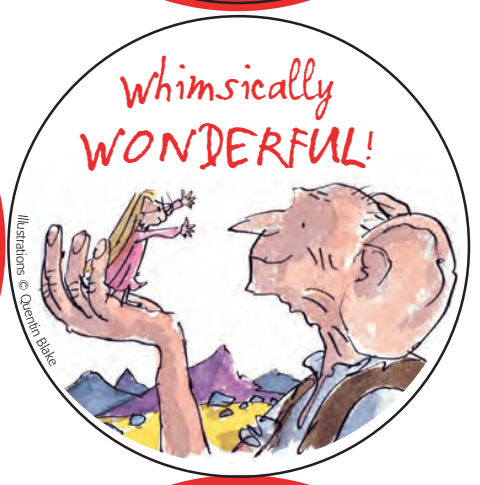
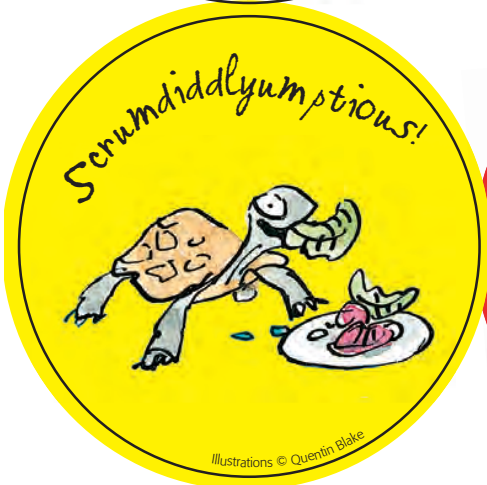


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# Dah-licious Stickers!

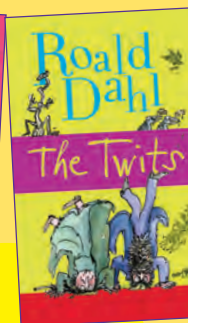
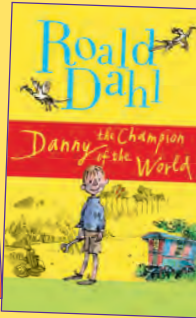
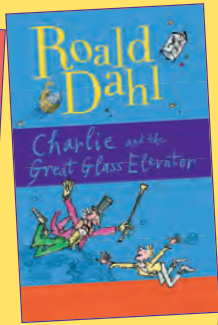
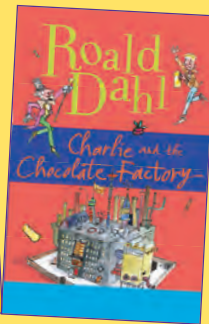
Directions: Pick up Avery® 5294 2 1/2" round labels from a local office supply store and print out as many stickers as you need for students.





# Welcome to the Scrumdiddlyumptious world of Roald Dahl

Collect all these whimsical, phizzwhizzing, magical, gloriumptious adventures!



## The BFG

(PB) 978-0-14-241038-7 • \$6.99 • Ages 7 up  
(PB) 978-0-14-240792-9 (A Set of Plays) • \$5.99

## Boy: Tales of Childhood

(PB) 978-0-14-241381-4 • \$6.99 • Ages 8 up

## Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

(PB) 978-0-14-241031-8 • \$6.99 • Ages 7 up  
(PB) 978-0-14-240108-8 • \$6.99 • (PMC)  
(PB) 978-0-14-240790-5 (A Play) • \$5.99

## Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

(PB) 978-0-14-241032-5 • \$6.99 • Ages 8 up  
(PB) 978-0-14-240412-6 • \$6.99

## D is for Dahl

A gloriumptious A-Z guide to the world of Roald Dahl  
(PB) 978-0-14-240934-3 • \$5.99 • Ages 7 up

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(PB) 978-0-14-240791-2 (A Play) • \$5.99

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## Matilda

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## Revolting Recipes

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## Revolting Rhymes

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(PB) 978-0-14-037533-6 • \$6.99

## Roald Dahl's Even More Revolting Recipes

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## The Twits

(PB) 978-0-14-241039-4 • \$5.99 • Ages 7 up  
(PB) 978-0-14-240793-6 (A Set of Plays) • \$5.99

## The Umbrella Man

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## The Vicar of Nibbleswicke

(PB) 978-0-14-036837-6 • \$6.99 • Ages 5 up

## The Witches

(PB) 978-0-14-241011-0 • \$6.99 • Ages 7 up  
(PB) 978-0-14-240794-3 (A Set of Plays) • \$5.99

## The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar

(PB) 978-0-14-130470-0 • \$6.99 • Ages 3 up



## Fantastic Mr. Fox

It is a 2009 American stop-motion animated comedy film based on the **Roald Dahl** children's novel of the same name. This story is about a fox who steals food each night from three mean and wealthy farmers. The farmers are fed up with Mr Fox's theft and try to kill him, so they dig their way into the foxes' home.

While **raiding a squab farm**<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Fox and his wife Felicity **trigger a fox trap**<sup>2</sup> and **become caged**<sup>3</sup>. Felicity **reveals**<sup>4</sup> to Fox that she is **pregnant**<sup>5</sup> and **pleads**<sup>6</sup> with him to find a safer job when they **escape**<sup>7</sup>.

Two years later (twelve years in Fox Years), the Foxes and their son Ash, are living in a hole. Fox, now a newspaper **columnist**<sup>8</sup>, moves the family into a better home **in the base**<sup>9</sup> of a tree, **ignoring**<sup>10</sup> the warnings of his lawyer Badger about how dangerous the area is for foxes. The tree is located very close to three **mean**<sup>11</sup> farmers' homes- Walter Boggis, Nathaniel Bunce, and Franklin Bean. Soon after the Foxes move in, Fox's nephew Kristofferson comes to live with them, as his father has become very ill. Ash finds this situation **intolerable**<sup>12</sup>.

Fox and the opossum, Kylie Sven Opposum, steal **produce and poultry**<sup>13</sup> from the three farms. The farmers decide to kill Fox and camp out near the family's tree. When Fox **emerges**<sup>14</sup>, the farmers open fire, but manage only to shoot off his **tail**<sup>15</sup>. They try to catch Fox, they destroy the home of Fox and **discover**<sup>16</sup> the Foxes have dug an escape tunnel.

The farmers think that the Foxes will have to get some food and water. Therefore the farmers **lie in wait**<sup>17</sup> at the entrance to the tunnel. Underground, there are also Badger and many other local animals. The animals begin **fearing starvation**<sup>18</sup>, Fox leads a digging expedition to tunnel to the three farms, robbing them.

Discovering that Fox has stolen their produce, the farmers flood the animals' tunnel network with **cider**<sup>19</sup>. The animals are forced into the **sewers**<sup>20</sup>, and Fox learns that the farmers plan to use Kristofferson to **lure him into an ambush**<sup>21</sup>.

Fox asks the farmers for a meeting in town. He will **surrender**<sup>22</sup> in exchange for Kristofferson's freedom. The farmers set up an ambush, but Fox and the others realize it and **launch a counterattack**<sup>23</sup>. Fox, Ash and Kylie slip into Bean's farm. Ash frees Kristofferson.

The animals get used to living in the sewers. Ash and Kristofferson become good friends. Fox leads his family to a **drain opening**<sup>24</sup> built into the floor of a supermarket owned by the three farmers. Celebrating their new food source and the news that Felicity is pregnant again, the animals dance **in the aisles**<sup>25</sup> as the film ends.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN9VS2uwoJ0&list=PL0D911D1CD4D78D3F>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiDX2UwNG9c>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5pQvytHIEE>

Answer the following questions. Summarize the movie in your own words (200-250 words).

**Who?**

**What?**

**Where?**

**Why?**

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2		
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25		
New words:		



# Lesson Idea

## LOOKING AT STORY STRUCTURE AND CHARACTER (FANTASTIC MR FOX)

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

To explore ways in which Roald Dahl uses elements of traditional stories in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Specifically to examine the character of the trickster, Mr Fox, and the duped characters, Mr Boggis, Mr Bunce and Mr Bean.

*Note: It is important that the class have either read *Fantastic Mr Fox*, or had the story read to them, before undertaking this unit of work as they will need to be familiar with the structure of the story.*

### INTRODUCTION

Read

- The beginning of chapter 2, 'Mr Fox'
- Extract from chapter 14, 'Badger Has Doubts'





# Lesson Idea

'Mr Fox'

On a hill above the valley there was a wood.

In the wood there was a huge tree.

Under the tree there was a hole.

In the hole there lived Mr Fox and Mrs Fox and their four Small Foxes.

Every evening as soon as it got dark, Mr Fox would say to Mrs Fox, 'Well, my darling, what shall it be this time? A plump chicken from Boggis? A duck or goose from Bunce? Or a nice Turkey from Bean? And when Mrs Fox had told him what she wanted, Mr Fox would creep down into the valley in the darkness of the night and help himself.

Boggis and Bunce and Bean knew very well what was going on, and it made them wild with rage. They were not men who liked to give anything away. Less still did they like anything to be stolen from them. So every night each of them would take his shotgun and hide in a dark place somewhere on his own farm, hoping to catch the robber.

But Mr Fox was too clever for them. He always approached a farm with the wind blowing in his face, and this meant that if any man were lurking in the shadows ahead, the wind would carry the smell of that man to Mr Fox's nose from far away. Thus, if Mr Boggis was hiding behind his Chicken House Number One, Mr Fox would smell him out from fifty yards off and quickly change direction heading for Chicken House Number Four at the other end of the farm.





## Lesson Idea

### 'Badger Has Doubts'

Suddenly Badger said, 'Doesn't this worry you just a tiny bit, Foxy?'

'Worry me?' said Mr Fox. 'What?'

'All this . . . . this stealing.'

Mr Fox stopped digging and stared at Badger as though he had gone completely dotty. 'My dear old furry frump,' he said, 'do you know anyone in the whole world who wouldn't swipe a few chickens if his children were starving to death?'

There was a short silence while Mr Badger thought deeply about this.

'You are far too respectable,' said Mr Fox.

'There's nothing wrong with being respectable,' Badger said.

'Look,' said Mr Fox. 'Boggis and Bunce and Bean are out to kill us. You realize that, I hope?'

'I do Foxy, I do indeed,' said the gentle Badger.

'But we're not going to stoop to their level. We don't want to kill them.'

'I should hope not, indeed,' said Badger.

'We wouldn't dream of it,' said Mr Fox. 'We shall simply take a little food here and there to keep us and our families alive. Right?'

'I suppose we'll have to,' said Badger.

'If they want to be horrible, let them,' said Mr Fox. 'We down here are decent peace-loving people.'

Badger laid his head on one side and smiled at Mr Fox. 'Foxy,' he said, 'I love you.'





# Lesson Idea

## DISCUSSION

Ask the class what they think of Mr Fox.

Do they admire him? What qualities do they admire?

Do they think he is wrong to take the chickens from the farmers?

How does he convince Badger that what they are doing is acceptable?

Do they know any other stories where a fox outwits other characters?

(e.g. Aesop's Fables, Fables of La Fontaine, Beatrix Potter The Tale of Mr Tod, Margaret Wild & Ron Brooks' Fox provides a twist on a traditional theme).

What characteristics are associated with the fox (e.g. clever, cunning, sly, charming, greedy)?

Tell the class that trickster is usually an underdog who outwits the more powerful characters in a story. Tricksters are often talking animals that possess human characteristics. The powerful characters are usually confident that they will come out on top until the very end of the story, when it becomes apparent that they have been tricked.

Explain that the fox has been used as a trickster character in European folk tales at least since mediaeval times. Reynard the Fox was one of the earliest printed stories, (William Caxton Historie of Reynart the Foxe 1481). The fox as trickster has developed from these early stories.

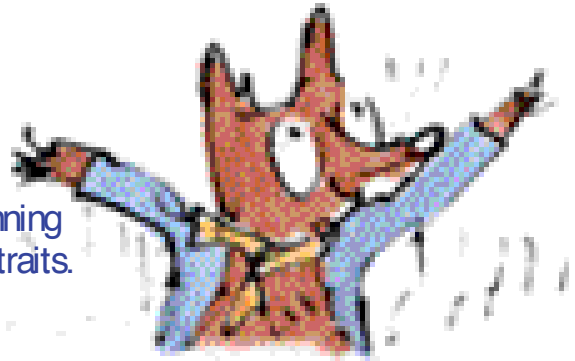




## FOCUS

Mr Fox, The Trickster

Investigate the extracts that were read at the beginning of lesson to build up a bank of Mr Fox's character traits.



Example

Character trait	Evidence
clever	'Mr Fox was too clever for them'
clever	Always approached a farm with the wind blowing in his face
charming	Uses persuasive language to convince Badger that they are not doing anything wrong. 'But <i>we're</i> not going to stoop to their level.'

Ask the class to suggest other incidents from the book. For example:

cunning	He frightens the rat away from Mr Bean's cellar. 'Mr Fox gave a brilliant smile, flashing his white teeth. 'My dear Rat,' he said softly, 'I am a hungry fellow and if you don't hop it quickly I shall eat-you-up-in-one-gulp!'  Note the menacing undertone 'he said softly'
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# FOCUS

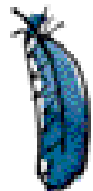


How do the other characters in the story feel about Mr Fox?

Character trait	Evidence
hated by the farmers	'Dang and blast that lousy beast!' cried Boggis. 'I'd like to rip his guts out!' said Bunce. 'He must be killed!' cried Bean
loved by the wild creatures and his family	Mr Badger laid his head on one side and smiled at Mr Fox 'Foxy,' he said, 'I love you.'  I just want to say one thing, and it is this: MY HUSBAND IS A FANTASTIC FOX' Everyone clapped and cheered

Discuss how the narrator guides the reader to sympathise with Mr Fox e.g.

- By making his adversaries so unattractive (chapter 1)
- The children's attitude towards Messrs Boggis, Bunce and Bean is negative and we take a cur from them (chapter 1)
- By giving him admirable qualities (outlined above)
- The ingenuity of his plan (trick) to dig underneath the farmer's storehouses
- Use of humour - we laugh at his exploits ( when he threatens to eat the rat)
- By showing his caring attitude towards his family
- Because the woodland characters admire him
- Using logical appeal - the fox really does need to eat to survive





## FOCUS

Does Mr Fox possess any characteristics that are less likeable?

e.g.

- At the beginning he is too sure of himself
- His treatment of the rat might be described as menacing. He flashes his teeth and makes a verbal threat.

Discuss whether these less likeable characteristics have any real impact on the readers' feelings about Mr Fox.

Encourage the class to discuss their ideas freely.





# Tasks



## 1. Choosing the right word

Ronald Dahl describes Mr Fox as clever and, at the beginning of the story, cocky.

Which words and phrases from the following list could be used to describe a trickster like Mr Fox?

Use a dictionary to check the meaning of any words you don't already know.

smart	stupid	funny
clever	easily tricked	clumsy
shrewd	humorous	wily
idiotic	foxy	calculating
bumbling	foolish	cocky
careful	sharp-witted	acute
devious		

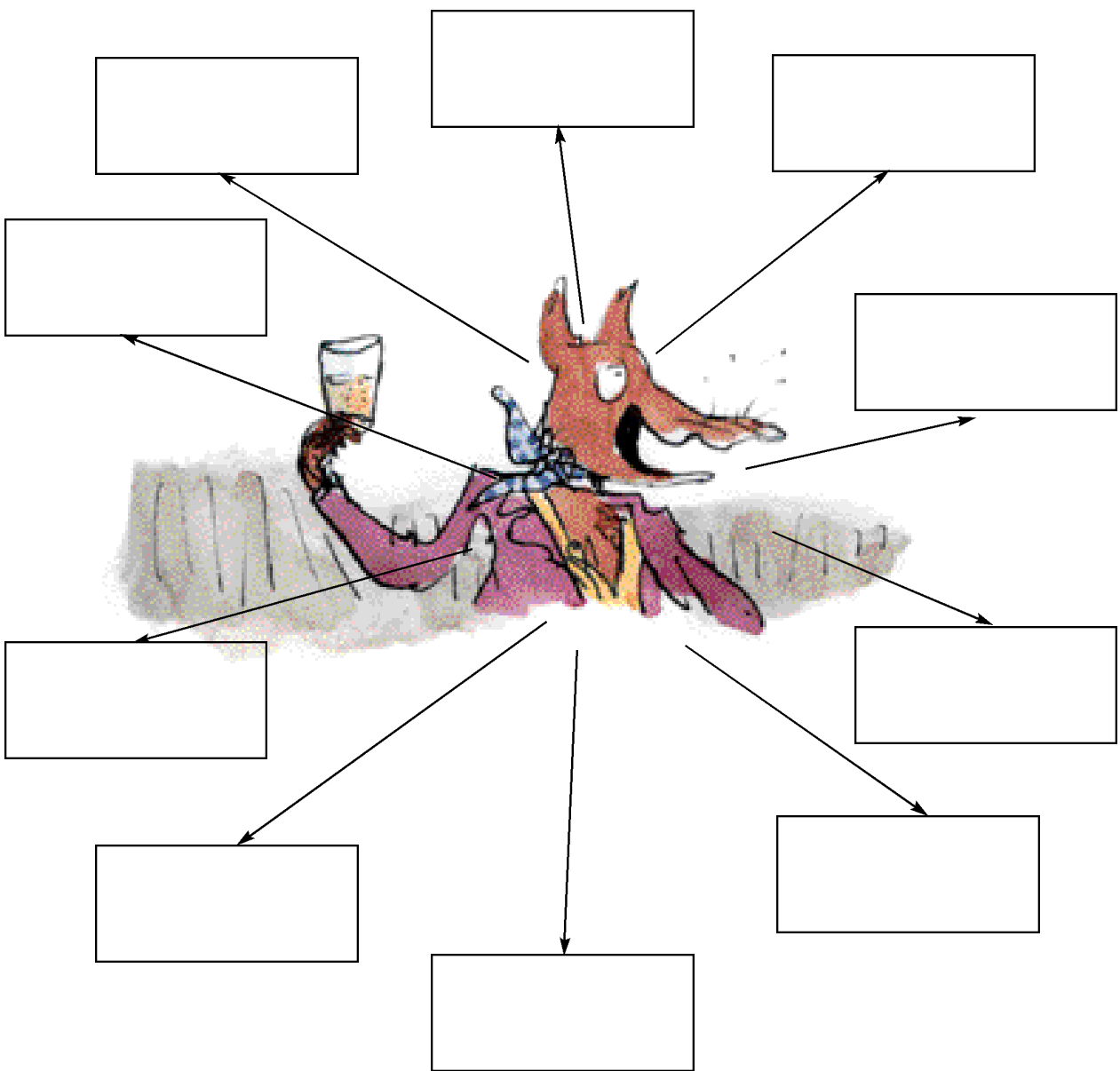


Words that could describe a trickster like Mr Fox	meaning
cocky	over confident



# Tasks

Now add some words of your own to the list





# Tasks



## 2. Storyboarding a Trickster Story.

- Can you imagine what Mr Boggis, Mr Bunce and Mr Bean will be feeling when they find out they have been outwitted by Fantastic Mr Fox? They will probably want to take revenge on the clever trickster.
- What plans do you think they will make to get their own back?
- How will Mr Fox outwit them this time?



Draw a storyboard for your own sequel to Fantastic Mr Fox. Remember, trickster stories often have:

- A clever trickster (Mr Fox) who is also the less powerful character (Mr Fox doesn't have weapons)
- Powerful characters who oppose the trickster (the farmers)
- The powerful characters remain confident until the end of the story
- The trickster plays a trick on the powerful characters
- The solution is short and to the point



Introduction	Complication: The farmers' plot	Developing Conflict What happens next?
Climax How is the trick played?	Resolution: What happens after the trick is played?	Conclusion: What happens to Mr Fox at the end? What happens to the farmers?



# Tasks

## HOTSEATING EXPLORING CHARACTERS

Mr Fox is the 'good guy' in this story although he regularly steals the farmers' chickens and he threatens to eat the rat. On the other hand the farmers try to protect their property but they are clearly the 'bad guys'.

You are going to imagine what these characters really think and feel.

Work in a small group (no more than 6 in a group). Take it in turns to take on the role either of Mr Fox, one of the farmers, or Badger.

The other members of the group ask questions of the character in role to try to find what they think and feel. For example you might :

- ask Mr Fox why he doesn't find an alternative way of feeding his family
- ask Mr Fox if he enjoys outwitting the farmers
- ask Mr Fox if he would like his children to follow the example he set
- ask Badger why he was uneasy about taking food from the farmers' stores
- ask Badger whether he was convinced by Mr Fox' argument for taking the food
- ask the farmers why they haven't tried to find a less violent way of solving the problem.

Think up some more interesting questions to ask these characters.





# Tasks



## FOXES IN CHILDREN'S STORIES: AN INVESTIGATION

Use the classroom resources to find out about foxes in children's books.

Working on your own or with a partner explore one of the books about foxes and complete a copy of the worksheet.

Foxes in Children's Books	
Title:	
1.Circle the age group to which you think this book appeals. You can circle more than one choice.	
0 - 5	7 - 9      9 - 11      11+
2.Circle the category that the book belongs to:	
Fiction non-fiction	poetry
3.Is this book a traditional or modern story? _____	
4.Is the fox presented positively or negatively in this book? _____	
5.Is the fox presented realistically or unrealistically? _____	
6.Is this book humorous?	
7.Are there any similarities between the fox in this book and Fantastic Mr Fox?	
8. What did you find interesting about the fox in this book?	

Now in a small group discuss what you have found out.

Can you find any patterns? ( e.g are foxes portrayed differently in fiction and non-fiction?)



# Reflection



Ask groups to feedback from the tasks.

Ask individual pupils to:

- suggest one new thing they have learnt about foxes in children's books.
- suggest one new thing they have learnt about trickster tales

Read chapter 17 'The Great Feast' from "At last, Badger stood up." to the end. Ask the pupils to think about they have learnt in the lesson as they listen to the story.

Some suggested resources to support this activity:

- Alan Baron (1997) Red Fox Dances Walker Books  
John Burningham (1991) Harquin, the Fox Who Went Down the Valley Red Fox  
Betsy Byars (1976) The Midnight Fox Puffin  
Jean de la Fontaine & Marc Chagall (1997) The Fables of La Fontaine New Press  
Michael Foreman (2000) Chicken Licken Red Fox  
Vivien French & Korby Paul (1999) Aesop's Funky Fables Puffin  
James Marshall (1993) Fox be Nimble Red Fox  
Michael Morpurgo (1990) Little Foxes Heinemann  
Michael Morpurgo & Christian Birmingham The Silver Swan  
Phyllis Perry (2000) Crafty Canines Franklin Watts  
Wendy Shattil (1997) City Foxes Alaska Northwest Books  
Judy Schuler (1997) Foxes for Kids Northward Press  
Aki Sogabe (1999) Aesop's Fox Harcourt  
Margaret Wild & Fon Brooks (2000) Fox Cat's Whiskers, Watts Publishing







# Writer Biography

Nikki Gamble is a freelance children's book consultant and visiting lecturer at the University of London, Institute of Education. She is a passionate advocate of children's books and young people's writing and is currently working in partnership with Essex Literature Development and Ultralab at Anglia Polytechnic University on a creative writing project for young writers aged 11 - 21.

Nikki is editor of *Write Away!* an online creative writing magazine for teachers and students. She is co-editor of *Literacy and ICT* (with Nick Easingwood), co-author of *Family Fictions* (with Nicholas Tucker) and *Guiding Reading at Key Stage 2* (with Angela Hobsbaum and David Peedy). Her forthcoming book *Exploring Children's Literature* is to be published by Paul Chapman in May 2002.

# The Five Essential Elements of a Story

Attention ALL writers!

All stories, even Roald Dahl's wacky ones, have five basic but important elements. These five components are as follows: the characters, the setting, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. These essential elements keep the story running smoothly and allow the action to develop in a logical way that the reader can follow.

## Characters

The characters are the individuals that the story is about. The author should introduce the characters in the story with specific information so that the reader can visualize each person. This is achieved by providing detailed descriptions of a character's physical attributes and personality traits like Roald Dahl does in *Danny the Champion of the World*. Every story should have a main character. The main character determines the way the plot will develop and is usually the person who will solve the problem the story centers around. However, the other characters are also very important because they supply additional details, explanations, or actions. All characters should stay true to the author's description throughout the story so that readers can understand and believe the action that is taking place—and perhaps even predict which character may do what next.

## Setting

The setting is the location of the action. An author should describe the environment or surroundings of the story in such detail that the reader feels that he or she can picture the scene. Unusual settings (such as a vast chocolate factory or a giant peach) make Roald Dahl's stories even more exciting!

## Plot

The plot is the actual story around which the entire book is based. A plot should have a very clear beginning, middle, and end—with all the necessary descriptions and suspense, called exposition—so that the reader can make sense of the action and follow along from start to finish.

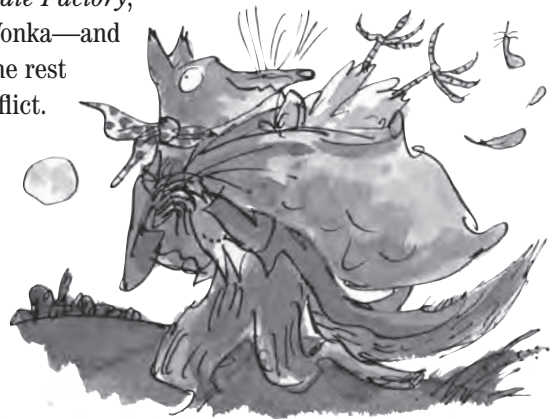
## Conflict

Every story has a conflict to solve. The plot is centered on this conflict and the ways in which the characters attempt to resolve the problem. When the story's action becomes most exciting, right before the resolution, it is called the climax.

## Resolution

The solution to the problem is the way the action is resolved. Roald Dahl often resolves a conflict by having the main character carry out some inventive plan. For example, in *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Mr. Fox finds a way to feed his family and the other starving animals, and in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the fact that Charlie is the last child left means the day with Wonka—and Wonka's search—is over. It is important that the solution fit the rest of the story in tone and creativity and solve all parts of the conflict.

Roald Dahl always said—  
*Grab them by the throat with  
the first sentence.*



# Using the Five Elements of a Story in Reading and Writing

While reading a Roald Dahl story, fill in the blanks on this sheet with the necessary elements. Once you've completed this sheet, use another copy to outline and write your own story. Remember, if you don't include all five elements, your main character may never get to a resolution!

Book Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Characters: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Plot: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Conflict & Climax: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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