Novel Notes
Matilda
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Matilda

Matilda Wormwood is four years old. She lives with her parents, Mr and Mrs Wormwood, and her older brother Michael. Mr Wormwood is a crook who sells second hand cars. While he works, his wife plays bingo, leaving Matilda home alone. Matilda uses her time alone to visit the local library. Despite her young age Matilda is an advanced reader. Her parents, however, do not nurture her talent and instead force her to watch television. They are frequently mean to Matilda. She is a clever girl and has a lot of fun getting revenge, particularly on her father who treats her especially poorly.

When Matilda starts school it becomes clear to her teacher, Miss Honey, that she is a genius. Matilda can already do complicated maths as well as read adult novels. The school Matilda attends is called Crunchem Hall Primary School, and unfortunately for Matilda and the other students the headmistress is a particularly unpleasant woman who despises children. When Miss Honey brings Matilda's genius to the attention of the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, she refuses to move her to a higher grade. Further, she claims that Matilda is evil and must be watched carefully.

A frustrated Miss Honey bravely goes to Matilda’s parents’ house to discuss the matter. Instead of finding encouraging parents she meets a hostile environment. Miss Honey tries to convince the Wormwoods that their daughter is exceptionally smart but they disagree and claim that she is a brat. It becomes clear to Miss Honey that she will not find support for Matilda with the Wormwoods.

At school, Matilda and her new friends are warned about Miss Trunchbull’s meanness towards children. Miss Trunchbull enjoys lifting children, throwing them and locking them up. The children witness Miss Trunchbull’s character when an assembly is called. A boy called Bruce Bogtrotter is made to eat a full chocolate cake in one sitting as punishment for stealing some from Miss Trunchbull. To her surprise and disgust, the boy manages to finish the cake.

One day Miss Trunchbull visits Matilda’s class. A child called Lavender secretly puts a newt into Miss Trunchbull’s water. This infuriates the headmistress and Matilda gets the blame. Amazingly, Matilda realises she has magical powers as she manages to overturn a glass of water onto Miss Trunchbull. After class, Matilda explains to Miss Honey that she had made the glass turn over using her eyes. Miss Honey is fascinated and invites Matilda back to her cottage to fully investigate the extent of her newfound powers.

Instead of testing Matilda’s powers, Miss Honey tells Matilda about her life and how she ended up being poor. Miss Honey lives in poverty in a very small cottage. She tells Matilda that when her parents died her wicked aunt raised her and stole her house and money from her. Her wicked aunt is none other than Miss Trunchbull. Matilda hatches a plan to teach Miss Trunchbull a lesson for her cruelty.

At home, Matilda spends a week practising her magic. Then, when Miss Trunchbull returns to her class Matilda uses her magical powers to write a scary message on the board for Miss Trunchbull, ordering her to return the house to Miss Honey. Miss Trunchbull collapses with the fright of it and agrees to return the house so that Miss Honey can move in.

Matilda returns home one day to find her family furiously packing; they are moving to Spain. Matilda is upset and asks Miss Honey to care for her instead. When her parents agree to this Matilda gladly moves in with Miss Honey.

Themes and issues dealt with in this novel include the relationships between adults and children, neglect, abuse, childhood and magic.
Roald Dahl is one of the world’s most famous children’s authors. He was born in Wales in 1916 to Norwegian parents and had a tragic life. Many people close to him died, including, at an early age, his father and elder sister, leaving his mother to raise the other children alone.

As a child, Dahl loved stories and books. He began writing his own stories for children when his first child was old enough to understand them. Some of his most famous novels include *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, *The Witches*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Many of these stories won awards and were made into films. Dahl died in 1990 aged seventy-four.

**About the Author**

**Objectives**

**Curriculum Objectives**

The child should be enabled to identify unfamiliar words by reference to word parts, prefixes and suffixes; use simple dictionaries effectively; explore new interests and perspectives through reading; continue to develop a range of comprehension strategies to deal with narrative, expository and representational reading materials; engage in talk about books.

**Learning Outcomes**

- Draw a picture of some characters from the novel based on their written descriptions.
- List some adjectives used to describe various characters in the novel.
- Write a diary entry from the perspective of Miss Honey.
- Discuss points for and against Matilda’s actions towards Miss Trunchbull.
- Make a ‘favourite word’ collage using words from the story.
- Evaluate the appeal of visiting one of the settings from the novel for a week.
- Pretend that you have been selected to write a sequel to this story. Write a short summary of the sequel. Include information about the sequel’s plot, setting and main characters.
- Compare the book with the movie version. Which version do you prefer? Why?
Cross-curricular Links

Maths
Children can revise their times tables and play games using them such as Fizz Buzz.

History
The class can investigate the life of Roald Dahl from a historical perspective. For example, they can create timelines and fortune lines, examine what changed in his life and the causes of change, etc.

Science
Children can learn more about the newt, its natural habitat, life cycle, position in the food chain, etc.

Visual Arts
Children can complete a series of works around the theme of magic. For example magical creatures, fairy tales and black magic could all be explored. Children can create paintings, prints, sculptures and so on.

Gaeilge
The children can learn the names of people, e.g. brother, sister, mother, father, teacher, principal.

Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Draw pictures of Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey based on the descriptions in the novel.
- Write some of the adjectives used to describe [a] Matilda, [b] Lavender, [c] Miss Honey, [d] Miss Trunchbull and [e] Mr Wormwood.
- Imagine you are Miss Honey. Write a diary entry to record the biggest shock/surprise you got out of all the things that happen in the story.
- Do you think Matilda was right to scare Miss Trunchbull at the end of the novel? Write reasons for and against scaring Miss Trunchbull.
- Make a ‘favourite word’ collage using words from the story.
- Think about one of the settings of this story, e.g. Matilda’s house, the school and so on. Describe it and write about why you would or would not like to spend a week visiting this place.
- Pretend that you have been selected to write a sequel to this story. Write a short summary of the sequel. Include information about the sequel’s plot, setting and main characters.
- Compare the book with the movie version. Which version do you prefer? Why?
Web Links

The official Roald Dahl website:  
http://www.roalddahl.com/

Website for the illustrator of the novel, Quentin Blake:  

Poems by Roald Dahl:  

Trailer for Matilda the movie:  
http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3465871641/

A link to one of Roald Dahl’s revolting rhymes based on Cinderella:  
http://monologues.co.uk/Childrens_Favourites/Snow_White.htm

Pre-reading Activities

Oral Pre-reading Questions

Chapter 1  
Look at the title of the chapter. What do you think the chapter will be about?

Chapter 2  
What does the title of this chapter tell you about Matilda’s father? Predict what other information we will learn about him in this chapter.

Chapter 3  
What do you think will happen in this chapter?

Chapter 4  
Do you think ‘The Ghost’ is a good title for a chapter? Why?/Why not?

Chapter 5  
What do you think arithmetic might have to do with this story?

Chapter 6  
How do you think Matilda will get revenge on her father for calling her a cheat?

Chapter 7  
Who do you think Miss Honey is?

Chapter 8  
From what you have read so far, how do you think Miss Trunchbull will differ from Miss Honey?

Chapter 9  
Do you think Matilda’s parents are aware that she is a genius? Why?/Why not?
Chapter 10
What might this title refer to?

Chapter 11
Predict what will happen next in the story.

Chapter 12
What do you think this chapter might be about?

Chapter 13
What do you think will happen to Lavender in this chapter?

Chapter 14
Do you think Miss Trunchbull will pick on Matilda because Mr Wormwood sold a bad car to her?

Chapter 15
How else do you think Matilda will use her powers?

Chapter 16
What sort of home do you think Miss Honey will have?

Chapter 17
What might we learn about Miss Honey in this chapter?

Chapter 18
What do you think the title means?

Chapter 19
What do you think Matilda will be practising?

Chapter 20
Can you recall what Matilda’s other miracles were?

Chapter 21
How do you think the book will end?

Vocabulary
Miss Trunchbull uses many unpleasant terms to describe children such as ‘foul carbuncle’, ‘nauseating little warts’ and ‘ignorant little slug’. Make a list of ten such terms and then generate positive phrases in their place. For example ‘poisonous little pockmark’ could be transformed into ‘pretty little peach’. Children could use dictionaries and thesauruses to expand their vocabulary.

Comprehension Activity Sheets
Presented over the following pages are a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.
1. How is Matilda different to other children?

2. What does Matilda do on afternoons when she is left alone at home?

3. What is Matilda’s favourite book from the children’s section of the library?

4. Why does Matilda read so many books, do you think? Give at least two reasons.

5. If you were to recommend a book to Matilda what book would it be? Explain your answer.

6. How are Matilda’s parents different to other parents?
1. Describe Matilda’s house.

2. What does Mr Wormwood do that Matilda thinks is dishonest?

3. What sort of dinners do the family eat?

4. What decision does Matilda make in bed that night?

5. Do you think Mr Wormwood is a clever businessman? Why?/Why not?

6. In what ways could Matilda get her parents back for being mean to her? Give three examples.
Chapter 3

‘The Hat and the Superglue’

1. How does Matilda get her father’s hat off the peg?

2. What happens when Matilda’s father goes to work?

3. How does the hat effect Matilda’s father’s sleep?

4. How does Matilda’s father get the hat off?

5. Do you think Matilda’s father deserves what happens to him?

6. If you were Mr Wormwood, how do you think you would handle the situation?
1. What book is Matilda reading when her father comes home from work?

2. How does Matilda react when her father rips the book up?

3. Where does Matilda get the parrot from?

4. Describe what Matilda does to get revenge on her father.

5. Do you think Matilda’s plan is a good plan? Why?/Why not?

6. What do you learn about Matilda’s father in this chapter? Discuss at least two things.
1. What qualities would Matilda like to see in her parents?

2. What does the phrase ‘run rings around them’ mean?

3. Why does Matilda’s father never sell cars for a round figure?

4. Why does Matilda’s father think she is a cheat?

5. Do you think Matilda is clever to reveal the correct answer to her father? Why?/Why not?

6. Would you like to have Matilda as a sister? Why?/Why not?
1. How does Matilda’s father keep his hair looking good?

2. What does Matilda do to her father’s hair oil?

3. How does Mrs Wormwood react to her husband’s new hair?

4. What worries Mr Wormwood more than the colour of his hair?

5. Do you think what Matilda does is a bad thing? Why?/Why not?
1. Why is Matilda late starting primary school?

2. Describe Miss Honey.

3. What advice does Miss Honey give to her class about Miss Trunchbull?

4. How does Matilda impress Miss Honey?

5. Do you agree with Matilda that all children's books should be funny? Give a reason for your answer.

6. Do you remember your first day at school? Was it a pleasant experience? Why?/Why not?
1. What kind of clothing does Miss Trunchbull wear?

2. How does Miss Trunchbull know Matilda’s father?

3. What words does Miss Trunchbull use to describe Matilda?

4. Why do you think Miss Trunchbull got the job of headmistress?

5. How do you think Miss Honey feels leaving the office?
1. What does Miss Honey do to help Matilda learn more?

2. Why does Miss Honey visit Matilda’s parents?

3. Why does Matilda’s father think Miss Honey has come over?

4. Why does Matilda’s mother think that looks are more important than books?

5. Do you think that looks are more important than books? Why?/Why not?

6. If you were Miss Honey, would you say or do anything differently to try to make Matilda’s parents understand? Explain what you would have done.
1. How do Matilda’s friends know that she is clever?

2. What is ‘The Chokey’?

3. Why is Hortensia put in The Chokey?

4. Why is Miss Trunchbull good at throwing children?

5. Why do you think Miss Trunchbull works in a school if she does not like children?

6. Who do you think is meaner, Mr Wormwood or Miss Trunchbull? Give a reason for your answer.
1. According to Matilda, what is Miss Trunchbull’s secret?

2. What does Bruce Bogtrotter take from Miss Trunchbull?

3. What sort of cake does cook bring out from the kitchen for Bruce Bogtrotter?

4. What does Miss Trunchbull make Bruce Bogtrotter do?

5. How does Miss Trunchbull react to Bruce Bogtrotter’s success?

6. What is the point of Miss Trunchbull’s plan, do you think?

7. What might have happened if Bruce was unable to finish the cake?

8. How do you think Miss Trunchbull feels when he finishes the cake and the children cheer him on?
1. What does Miss Honey prepare her class for?

2. What important job does Lavender offer to do?

3. What is Lavender’s plan to get back at Miss Trunchbull for being a mean headmistress?

4. Do you think Lavender’s plan is a clever one? Why?/Why not?

5. What do you think will happen when Miss Trunchbull pours the water?

6. Summarise the events in this chapter.
1. How does Nigel Hicks get Miss Trunchbull’s attention?

2. What does the word ‘peeved’ mean?

3. How does Miss Honey teach her class to spell long words?

4. Do you think Miss Trunchbull’s way of teaching children is a good way? Why?/Why not?

5. Do you think Miss Honey is brave? Explain your answer.
1. Why does Lavender feel guilty?

2. What does it mean to ‘see red’?

3. How does the newt get out of the glass?

4. What is the most exciting part of the chapter? Why?

5. Do you think the title of this chapter is a good one? Why?/Why not?

6. How do you think Matilda will use her powers in the future?
1. What does Matilda want to talk to Miss Honey about?

2. How does Matilda shock Miss Honey?

3. How is this ‘miracle’ different to the last one?

4. Why do you think Miss Honey invites Matilda to her home?

5. Does Matilda remind you of any characters from other stories? Explain your answer.
1. What do Matilda and Miss Honey pass as they walk through the village?

2. Why does Miss Honey want to be cautious about Matilda’s powers?

3. What does Miss Honey teach Matilda on their walk home?

4. How can Matilda tell that Miss Honey is poor?

5. Does anything about Miss Honey surprise you in this chapter? Explain your answer.

6. How do you think Miss Honey and Matilda will test Matilda’s powers?
1. Why does Miss Honey call Matilda a grown up child?

2. How did Miss Honey come to live with her aunt?

3. What effect did living with her aunt have on Miss Honey?

4. Why is Miss Honey poor?

5. Why do you think Miss Honey tells Matilda her story?

6. Does this chapter change your opinion of Miss Honey? Why? Why not?
1. What does Miss Trunchbull do to Miss Honey in the bath?

2. Why does Matilda want to go home?

3. What promise does Matilda make to Miss Honey?

4. What three questions does Matilda ask Miss Honey?

5. Why do you think Matilda asks those questions?

6. Do you think Miss Honey is worried about what Matilda might do? Give a reason for your answer.
1. Where are Matilda’s family when she returns?

2. What does Matilda first practise her powers on?

3. What could Matilda make happen in her room?

4. Why do you think Matilda spends so much time practising her magic?

5. What do you think Matilda will do to help Miss Honey?
1. What does Miss Trunchbull test the class on when she visits on Thursday?

2. What causes Nigel to jump to his feet?

3. What does Matilda do to scare Miss Trunchbull?

4. How do the school staff react to Miss Trunchbull’s collapse?

5. If you were Miss Trunchbull, how do you think you would have reacted to the writing?

6. Do you think anything will change as a result of Matilda’s miracle? Explain your answer.
Chapter 21  ‘A New Home’

1. What was left to Miss Honey in the will?

2. What changes occur in the school when Miss Trunchbull leaves?

3. Why does Miss Honey think Matilda has lost her powers?

4. What is happening when Matilda returns home?

5. If you were in Miss Honey’s position would you want to look after Matilda? Explain your answer.

6. How do you think Matilda’s life will change when she lives with Miss Honey?

7. Did you like the ending of the novel? Give reasons for your answer.
Book Report Sheet

If you don’t have enough space to write your answers, use the notes section on the following pages.

Pupil’s name: ___________________________ Class: ___________ Date: ___________________________

Title of book: ___________________________ Author: _______________ Illustrator: ___________________________

Setting (where the story took place): _________________________________________________________

List the main characters:
1. ___________________________ 2. __________________________________________
3. ___________________________ 4. __________________________________________

Describe your favourite character: __________________________________________________________

Describe your favourite part of the story: _____________________________________________________

This book was: Exciting [ ] Boring [ ] Complicated [ ]
(✓ tick all that apply) Interesting [ ] Slow-moving [ ] Imaginative [ ]
Scary [ ] Fast-paced [ ] Amusing [ ]

Did you like the book? Why?/Why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Grade the book (✓ Tick one)

Easy to read [ ] Just right [ ] A little difficult [ ] Difficult [ ]

Rate the book out of ten: /10

_____________________________________________________________________________________

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