

The BFG Study Guide

The BFG by Roald Dahl

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Plot Summary

Sophie, a young orphaned girl, is lying awake one night with a moonbeam shining in her eyes. She gets up from her bed in the dormitory of the orphanage where she lives to close her curtains and sees a giant coming down the street. She watches as the giant sticks something that looks like a trumpet through the bedroom window of some neighbor children and blows. When the giant turns he sees Sophie and snatches her from her room. The giant takes Sophie to Giant Country where he lives in a cave.

Once there, Sophie learns that the giant is called the Big Friendly Giant (the BFG) because he does not eat people, unlike the nine other giants living in Giant Country. The other giants are much larger and uglier than the BFG and they often bully him. These giants travel nightly to countries around the world to eat people. Sophie isn't able to go back to the orphanage because the BFG is afraid she'll tell others about the existence of giants and he'll be forced to live in a zoo.

The BFG tells Sophie that he often travels to Dream Country to collect dreams, which he places in jars and blows into the windows of children. This is what she saw him doing with the trumpet in her village. He takes her to collect dreams and she finds out he can also catch nightmares. The two devise a plan to mix up a nightmare for the Queen of England to convince her of the existence of giants so that they can stop the giants from ever eating another human being.

Sophie and the BFG deliver the dream to the Queen who treats them very kindly. She orders the Army and the Air Force to follow the BFG to Giant Country to capture the giants. The BFG and Sophie lead the military there and they tie up the giants to bring them back to England where they will live out their lives in captivity.

Upon their return to England, the giants are placed in a huge pit where they will eat nothing but snozzcumpers, a terrible tasting vegetable, for the rest of their lives. The Queen has a huge house built for the BFG and a small cottage built for Sophie. Sophie teaches the BFG how to speak, read, and write better and he becomes an author.



Chapters 1-3: The Witching Hour, Who?, and The Snatch

Summary

The BFG by Roald Dahl is the story of the friendship between an orphaned girl and a Big Friendly Giant. Sophie is an eight-year-old girl who lives in an orphanage. She's a curious little girl, and on one sleepless night she meets the BFG as he steals quietly through the town blowing dreams into the windows of children. The two form a friendship that ultimately leads them to overcome what makes them feel different from the rest of the world and to conquer their fears as they seek to rid the world of human-eating giants.

In the first chapter, The Witching Hour, Sophie is lying quietly in her bed in the orphanage unable to sleep as a particularly bright moonbeam shines through a gap in the curtains. The night is very quiet and she is aware that it is the witching hour when people are all asleep and things of the night are free to roam the earth. Sophie sneaks out of bed, risking the wrath of the adults who forbid children to be out of bed during the night, to close the curtains. When she reaches the window she cannot resist taking a peak at the sleeping town outside. As she does, she sees a very large and very dark shadow moving up the street.

In the second chapter, Who?, Sophie gets a closer look at what is coming up the street toward the orphanage. The black shape is so tall that it actually has to bend to look into the windows of the houses. Sophie can tell that it is not a human, but that it is some sort of giant person. She can see that the giant is carrying a long trumpet and a suitcase and that it wears a black cloak. The giant stops at a house, takes out a jar, and pours its contents into the end of the trumpet. He then puts the end of the trumpet through an open window and blows through it. There is no noise, but Sophie knows that whatever was in the trumpet has been blown into the room. As the giant pauses to pick up his suitcase, he glances back and sees Sophie in the window. Sophie dives back into her bed and hides under the covers.

In the third chapter, The Snatch, Sophie chances a peak from underneath her blanket and sees the huge, wrinkly face of the giant peering through her window. In the next instant, he reaches his enormous hand through the window and plucks Sophie from her bed, blanket and all. The giant arranges the blanket so that it acts as a basket in which to carry Sophie and sprints out of the village at an alarming speed. Sophie pokes her head up through a gap between the blanket and the giant's hand and watches the countryside fly by as the giant runs. She is certain he is running so fast because he's hungry and can't wait to get home to eat her.



Analysis

In this section of the book Dahl introduces Sophie, one of the two main characters. Sophie is an orphan living in an orphanage. Sophie is probably a lonely child, having no parents and not giggling or whispering with a friend when she cannot sleep. She is clearly a bright and curious little girl as she contemplates the witching hour and what might be happening in her village as all of the people lie sleeping in their beds. She is so curious that she cannot resist a look out the window. Sophie is also brave as is evidenced by the fact that although she screams when the giant picks her up, she does not continue to scream, but instead pokes her head out of the blanket to watch as the giant carries her away from her village.

Dahl also introduces readers to the BFG, albeit only superficially. At this point, we have only a physical description of the giant who is described as extremely tall and having a long wrinkly face.

A common theme found in Dahl's works is the relationship between children and adults. Dahl frequently includes in his novels cruel adults who exhibit villainous behavior where children are concerned. The BFG is no different in that the adults who run the orphanage severely punish children for being out of bed after lights out, even if they need to use the bathroom. Although this doesn't prove to be a major theme of the BFG, Dahl simply can't resist including it, perhaps because his own upbringing in boarding schools apparently contained a number of adults who often punished his sometimes mischievous ways.

Discussion Question 1

Sophie is one of the main characters of *The BFG*. What does the author reveal about Sophie in the first three chapters? What is different about her from most children? What do we know about her personality?

Discussion Question 2

Although Sophie is frightened by the BFG, she reacts with curiosity. Have you ever been in a situation that frightened you, but also made you curious to know more or to see what would happen next? What was the situation? What did you do? Did you learn anything from it?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author's description of the BFG and his actions as he moves up the street build suspense?

Vocabulary

brilliant, dormitory, pavement, punished, peer, enormous, cloak, pale, hedges, village



Chapters 4-6: The Cave, The BFG, and The Giants

Summary

In chapter 4, The Cave, the giant continues to run swiftly over the earth with Sophie riding in the blanket. He runs so fast that the wind whips Sophie's face. She feels as though the giant's feet aren't even hitting the ground and they are flying. Sophie wonders if they might even be moving over oceans. When the giant finally slows, Sophie sees that they are running through dense forests and over rivers and finally into a strange wasteland where the rocks are blue, dead trees stand here and there, and a big mountain rises against a sparkly sky.

The giant stops in front of the mountain and rolls a huge stone aside to reveal a cave, which he carries Sophie into. He sets Sophie down and moves away. Sophie waits in the dark, full of fear, as she wonders how the giant might prepare her to be eaten. Suddenly, the cave lights up and Sophie can see that the walls are lined with shelves containing row after row of glass jars like the one she had seen the giant take out of his suitcase. There is also a giant-sized table and chair. The giant removes his cloak and walks toward Sophie while rubbing his hands together.

In chapter 5, The BFG, the giant picks Sophie up from the floor of the cave and places her on his table. While the giant is staring at Sophie she notices for the first time that he has enormous ears and that he is able to swivel and move them about. The giant declares that he is hungry and Sophie begs him not to eat her. The giant begins to laugh and tells her, in his odd way of speaking full of made up words and poor grammar, that they are indeed in Giant Country where giants gobble up humans, which he calls human beans. The giant goes on to explain that people from different countries have different flavors. For example, Turks from Turkey taste like turkey. Different giants prefer different kinds of people. When Sophie asks what kind of humans he eats, the giant explains that he is different from other giants and never eats people. In fact, he introduces himself as the Big Friendly Giant, or the BFG for short. Sophie introduces herself as well.

In chapter 6, The Giants, Sophie questions the BFG about why he stole her. He tells her that he had to because she saw him. He is worried that if she is allowed to stay at home, Sophie will tell others about him and he'll end up in a cage at a zoo. Sophie admits that that is probably true and asks what will happen to her now. The BFG says he is going to keep her and that she can never leave the cave without him because the other giants will eat her.

The BFG carries Sophie to the door of the cave and shows her the other giants who are lying amongst the rocks outside the cave. The other giants are even bigger than the BFG and incredibly ugly. He tells Sophie that the giants will soon be running off to other



countries, including England where Sophie is from, to eat people. Sophie asks why no one stops the giants. The BFG says that no one can. These giants are twice as big as the BFG and there are nine of them. Each night all nine of these giants go out into the world and eat several people.

Analysis

In this section we learn more about the BFG and who he is beyond his alarming appearance. He's an odd giant with huge ears that move about and he lives in a well-lit cave full of shelves containing glass jars. Unlike the other giants, he wears regular clothing instead of the rag-like loin cloths the other giants wear. He speaks in an odd manor full of made up words that sometimes make no sense to Sophie. The reader is left to determine the meaning of the words through context. Fortunately, Dahl is a master and the non-sensical words are easy to figure out. They lend the BFG a certain charm and make him a silly, sweet giant rather than one to be feared.

Although the first section introduced Sophie and showed that with her thick glasses, status as an orphan, and intense curiosity she is different from other girls, it is in this section that the author truly begins to explore what it means to be different. The BFG describes himself as a "freaky giant" and "runty." He's quite unlike the other giants, not only in his actions, but also in his physical appearance. While the BFG is different, he also points out during his lengthy description of how people from various parts of the world have distinct flavors that everyone is different.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is the BFG different from other giants? How does he seem to feel about his differences? Why does he feel that way?

Discussion Question 2

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt different from those around you? Did your differences help or hinder you? How?

Discussion Question 3

What is different about the way the BFG speaks? Why do you think the author chose to make him speak in this manner? What effect does his speech have on the way you feel about the BFG?



Vocabulary

sensation, prevent, craggy, heaving, patriotism, peculiar, hullabaloo, wasteland, colossal, fierce, disgusting



Chapters 7-9: The Marvellous Ears, Snozzcumbers, and The Bloodbottler

Summary

In chapter 7, The Marvellous Ears, the BFG worries that Sophie's parents must wonder where she went. Sophie tells him she does not have parents and lives in an orphanage with nine other little girls. She says the woman who runs the orphanage is mean and locks them in the cellar when they break the rules. The BFG is upset to hear of the woman's cruelty and begins to yell and cry. Sophie marvels at how moody the BFG is. She tells him that she is worried about having to stay in the cave forever, since at least when she lived at the orphanage she knew she would leave there some day. Again the BFG begins to cry because he is the one who kidnapped her and it's his fault she'll have to stay in the cave.

Sophie changes the subject by asking the BFG what he was doing in her village. At first the BFG doesn't want to tell his secret because he is afraid Sophie will tell the other giants. She reminds him that she can't do that because the giants will eat her the moment they see her. Reluctantly, the BFG tells Sophie that he was blowing a dream into the bedroom window of the children in the house. He explains that he captures the dreams as they float through the air making their own special music, which he is able to hear because he has marvelous ears. His ears are so amazing that he can hear the quietest of sounds that a human could never hear, like ladybugs walking and caterpillars chatting. Sophie asks what the BFG uses to catch the dreams and he shows her a big net with a long handle, like a net used for catching butterflies.

In chapter 8, Snozzcumbers, Sophie asks the BFG what he eats if he doesn't eat humans. He tells her he eats snozzcumbers. Sophie says there is no such thing, but the BFG tells her there are lots of things that exist that she simply hasn't seen yet. After all, just the day before she didn't believe in giants. The BFG pulls a large snozzcumber from his closet. It is similar to a cucumber. The BFG says they taste horrible, but it's what he has to eat since he refuses to eat humans and would be reduced to "skin and groans" if he didn't eat the repulsive snozzcumbers. Sophie corrects his speech and the BFG says that he tries his best but there are no schools in Giant Country. Sophie asks why his mother didn't teach him and the BFG tells her that giants do not have mothers. In fact, there are no female giants. Giants are not born, they simply appear. The giant goes on to tell Sophie that he has no idea how old he is, but knows he appeared a long time ago. He also says that giants do not die, though occasionally one will disappear.

The BFG takes a bite of the snozzcumber and begins complaining about how horrible it tastes. He offers Sophie a bite, but she refuses. The BFG reminds her that it's all she'll have to eat from now on, so she takes a small bite. Sophie is disgusted by the taste and asks if she really has to eat it. The BFG tells her she'll blow away into thick air if she doesn't eat. Sophie again corrects him, telling him that it's thin air not thick. The BFG



laments the fact that he mixes up his words. Sophie tells him that everyone mixes up words sometimes and that she thinks he speaks beautifully. The BFG is thrilled by her compliment.

In chapter 9, The Bloodbottler, the giant named the Bloodbottler hears the BFG talking to Sophie and comes into the cave to ask the BFG who he's talking to. Sophie quickly ducks behind the snozzcumber lying on the table and the BFG says he was talking to himself. The Bloodbottler accuses the BFG of bringing a human home for a pet and insists he will find the human and that the BFG will help him. He grabs the BFG by the arm and pulls him toward the jars on the shelves. Sophie peeks around the snozzcumber and gets a better look at the hideously ugly giant.

When the BFG and the Bloodbottler move back toward the table, Sophie realizes she can't hide behind the snozzcumber because she'll be seen if the Bloodbottler picks it up. She scoops out some seeds and hides inside the snozzcumber. The Bloodbottler grabs the snozzcumber with Sophie in it off the table and questions the BFG about eating it. Not knowing that Sophie is in the snozzcumber and looking for a way to distract the Bloodbottler, the BFG tries to convince the other giant to taste the snozzcumber. The Bloodbottler takes a bite of the snozzcumber and Sophie winds up in his mouth. When he realizes how bad the vegetable tastes, he spits the snozzcumber and Sophie out. Sophie flies through the air and lands in the BFG's cloak hanging on the wall. The Bloodbottler tells the BFG he is going to go to Chile and eat delicious chilly humans, then leaves the cave.

After the Bloodbottler leaves the cave, Sophie comes out of hiding and tells the BFG she had been in the snozzcumber and then in the giant's mouth. The BFG says he hates the other giants more than ever now and wishes there were a way to get rid of them for good. Sophie says she will try to think of a way to help the BFG do that.

Analysis

This section further reveals the character of the BFG. He is shown to be a truly gentle soul who cries when he hears how horrible the woman who runs the orphanage is to the children there. He also cries when he realizes that it's his fault Sophie will have to stay in the cave forever. At the same time, like a small child, he is delighted by silly things like the idea of having an elephant to ride while he picks peaches.

The BFG also shows his greatest vulnerability when he is embarrassed by the way he speaks. He clearly wishes he spoke more eloquently, but says he never had the opportunity to learn since there are no schools for giants and giants don't have mothers to teach them. More than once in this section he is upset by his mixed up way of speaking. Sophie, being the caring child that she is, comforts the BFG by saying she likes the way he speaks and thinks it's beautiful. The BFG is absolutely tickled that someone would like the way he talks and feels he's been paid the best compliment of his life. The fact that he is so excited to have been complimented for his speech shows that the BFG is self-conscious about the way he talks and it is one of the things that



makes him feel so different from the rest of the world. It is also interesting to note that while the BFG becomes upset when Sophie corrects him, he is very quick to tell Sophie that she knows nothing and that her head is full of cotton when she doesn't know about giants. Perhaps he is covering up his own insecurities about his lack of education by making fun of Sophie.

It is also in this section that one of the BFG's most wonderful differences is introduced. That difference is his enormous and amazing ears. These magnificent ears may make the BFG look different from the other giants, but without them he wouldn't be able to catch dreams. His huge ears make it possible for him to hear dreams as they float through the air so that he can catch them in his net. The giant is clearly very proud of his ears because he gets very excited while telling Sophie about all the wondrous things he can hear with them. Dahl uses this particular difference to indicate that differences should be celebrated because they are what make us special.

Dahl also introduces the nature of dreams. Dreams are ethereal and not something the BFG can see, but rather something he can hear because each has its own special music. It is shortly after this initial description of dreams that the BFG says he would like to rid the world of the bad giants and Sophie says she'll try to help him think of a way to do that. This is a case of foreshadowing since Sophie and the BFG will later go on to use his ability to catch dreams as an integral part of their plan to capture the giants.

Discussion Question 1

The BFG is a character of many moods. Which moods does he display in this section? Does he seem to be on an even keel or do his moods change quickly? How does this affect the way you perceive the BFG? Does it make you like him more or less? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What compliment does Sophie pay the BFG that absolutely thrills him? Why is he so thrilled? What does this say about the BFG and what he values?

Discussion Question 3

What is special about the BFG's ears? How does he feel about them? What statement is the author making about our differences through the use of the BFG's ears?

Vocabulary

orphanage, cellar, dreadful, brutes, suspiciously, girth, perambulator, muddled, honorable (honourable), whisk, repulsive



Chapters 10-12: Froboscottle and Whizzpoppers, Journey to Dream Country, and Dream-Catching

Summary

In chapter 10, Froboscottle and Whizzpoppers, Sophie asks the BFG for some water to drink. He tells her there is no water; they drink frobscottle instead. Froboscottle is a sweet, fizzy, green drink a little like soda, except that the bubbles go down instead of up. When Sophie tells the BFG the bubbles go the wrong way, he becomes flustered and again treats Sophie as though she doesn't know anything. He insists that bubbles going up are wrong since they will cause a person to rudely burp. Sophie correctly deduces that if bubbles travelling up make you burp, then bubbles travelling down must cause flatulence. The BFG calls this whizzpopping and says it's a sign of happiness.

Sophie is embarrassed and says they don't talk about "whizzpopping" where she comes from. The BFG thinks that's ridiculous since everyone does it, so why not talk about it? He drinks some of the frobscottle and soon begins to whizzpop very loudly and rockets about the room as he does so. Sophie can't help herself and begins to laugh. Soon she drinks some of the frobscottle and joins the BFG in whizzpopping about the room.

In chapter 11, Journey to Dream Country, the BFG invites Sophie to travel with him to Dream Country to capture some dreams. He places Sophie in his pocket where she can see out a hole and the two leave the cave. Of course, this means they must make it past the other giants. The giants see the BFG coming and decide to make sport of him. They catch him and begin tossing him back and forth between them. When they tire of the game, they drop him on the ground and tell him to run. The BFG gets up and runs very quickly. Sophie is still in his pocket. When they are far enough away, the BFG slows to catch his breath.

Sophie asks how the giants usually catch the people they eat. The BFG says they usually just reach into houses and snatch them and then goes on to describe the other ways giants catch humans. Sophie wonders how no one ever notices all of these people disappearing. The BFG reminds her that people disappear all the time without any help from the giants. After all, people are killing each other all the time. Sophie declares that people don't eat each other. The BFG agrees that that is true, but tells her that humans are the only animals that kill their own kind. Giants might eat humans, but they don't kill each other like humans do. Sophie insists that the giants are terrible because humans have never done anything to deserve being eaten. The BFG tells her that pigs probably feel the same way about humans.

The two continue to travel and eventually reach Dream Country.



In chapter 12, Dream-Catching, Sophie and the BFG have reached Dream Country and the BFG stops to set down his suitcase. He tells Sophie they must be very quiet. There is swirling mist all about and when the BFG stands up straight his head disappears into the mist. When Sophie looks up she can see that his ears are swiveling out from his head and waving about. He swings his net, catches a dream, and deposits it in a glass jar. He declares it an excellent dream, calling it a “golden phizzwizzard.” He catches another dream, but this one is a nightmare, which he calls a “trogglehumper.” The BFG is so upset by the trogglehumper that he decides it is time to go home. He races home as fast as he can to find the other giants asleep on the ground.

Analysis

This section introduces the theme of human nature. The BFG is very confused by the idea that humans find it embarrassing to talk about things that all people do, like flatulence. He points out how ridiculous it is to be embarrassed by something so natural. At the same time, he also points out that human beings are the only animals that kill each other. Interestingly enough, though this would seem to be very unnatural, Sophie defends the fact and even tries to deflect the BFG’s criticisms by saying the giants are more horrible because humans don’t do anything to deserve being eaten, to which the BFG says pigs feel the same way about people. He goes on to say that everyone makes rules to suit themselves and humans are no different.

Dahl also uses this section to discuss the theme of bullying, a common theme in his children’s books. The BFG is subjected to terrible bullying from the other giants. He is smaller than they are and is, therefore, an easy target. This is reminiscent of the way adults in Dahl’s books are often mean to smaller children.

The capturing of the trogglehumper is significant in that it shows that the BFG is capable of capturing both good dreams and bad, which will be important when the two begin to put their plan for capturing the giants into play.

Discussion Question 1

What aspects of human nature are illustrated in this section? What does the BFG think about the way humans act? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

The BFG is bullied by the other giants. Why does the author include this instance of bullying in the book? Have you ever witnessed someone being bullied? How did it make you feel?



Discussion Question 3

How does the BFG react to catching the trogglehumper? Why doesn't he just release the bad dream? What does this say about him?

Vocabulary

fizz, orchestra, forbidden, rude, ecstasy, reverberated, astonishing, quivering, nervous, loped, runt, vying, horizon, phenomenal, anguish, exasperated



Chapters 13-15: A Trogglehumper for the Fleshlumpeater, Dreams, and The Great Plan

Summary

In chapter 13, A Trogglehumper for the Fleshlumpeater, The BFG explains to Sophie that the giants always sleep a bit before they go off to eat humans. He says that humans sleep much more than giants. In fact, he says humans aren't nearly the age they think they are because they sleep so much of their lives away. As he is trying to convince Sophie that rather than being age eight she is really only four due to the amount of time spent sleeping, the BFG suddenly has an idea. He sneaks up to the worst of the giants, the Fleshlumpeater, and blows the nightmare he captured into the Fleshlumpeater's face.

The Fleshlumpeater begins to thrash about and scream that he is being chased by Jack. The BFG explains that giants are afraid of Jack and his beanstalk because they've heard he is a great giant killer. As the Fleshlumpeater flails around, his arms and legs strike the other giants causing a huge brawl. Sophie and the BFG look on in amusement.

As chapter 14, Dreams, begins Sophie and the BFG are sitting at the table in the cave and the BFG is writing a label for the jar containing the good dream he caught. Sophie asks how he knows what to write and the BFG tells her he knows what the dreams are about by the way they sound. He says it's a little like the way humans feel when they listen to music. The music makes people feel a certain way even if they can't understand what the music is about. The BFG hears the music of the dreams and he understands it. Sophie says she finds that hard to believe and the BFG tells her that humans don't seem to know much because they only believe in what they can see.

The BFG tells Sophie the dream they caught would cause a child to dream she'd saved her teacher from drowning. He tells Sophie to look in the jar and she'll be able to see the dream. Sophie looks into the jar and sees an iridescent shape about the size of an egg that is pulsing and seems to be alive. The BFG says it is indeed alive so Sophie asks what he'll feed it. He tells her it doesn't need food. It's like the wind that can move and touch your face, but doesn't need feeding. Sophie find that many of her old ideas are being disturbed by the things she is learning from the BFG.

Sophie begins to read the labels on some of the other jars. She asks the BFG how he learned to write. He shows her an old tattered copy of Charles Dickens' book Nicholas Nickleby. He says he borrowed it from a boy about 80 years ago when he blew a dream in the child's window. He read the book hundreds of times and taught him self to read and write.



Sophie and the BFG hear the giants go galloping off to eat humans. They loudly proclaim that they are going to England where there are “gigglehouses” and “boggleboxes” from which to stuff themselves, which means they are going to schools for girls and schools for boys to eat the children there. Sophie insists they must stop the giants, but the BFG tells her there is nothing they can do.

In chapter 15, The Great Plan, Sophie continues to try to convince the BFG that they have to keep the giants from eating the boys and girls in England. She tries to get the BFG to put her in his pocket so they can run to England and warn everyone. The BFG refuses and says he will never show himself to humans because he doesn't want to be put in a zoo because humans are not kind. Sophie tells him that not all humans are mean and that the Queen of England is very nice.

Speaking of the Queen gives Sophie a fantastic idea. She tells the BFG that she will go to the Queen and tell her about the giants. The BFG says that will never work because the Queen won't believe in giants. Sophie says that they'll make her believe it by having her dream it! She asks the BFG if he can create specific dreams. He says he can mix up a dream to create the one they want. Sophie suggests they create a dream for the Queen in which the giants are coming to England to eat children. In the dream the Queen will see a girl sitting on her windowsill who will tell her where there is a big friendly giant who can tell the Queen where to find the giants so she can send the military to capture them. She'll believe the dream because when she wakes up Sophie will be there and will introduce her to the BFG.

The BFG is a bit hesitant, but Sophie tells him she's sure the Queen won't put him in a zoo. In fact, he'll be a hero and he'll probably never have to eat snozzcumbers again. The BFG is convinced and they decide to carry out the plan that night.

Analysis

The BFG gets a bit of revenge against his bullies in this section when he causes the Fleshlumpeater to have a nightmare. It seems a little out of his nature since he's proven himself to be such a kind giant, but it does show that, like most children, he has a mischievous side. It is perhaps this incident that later gives Sophie the idea of mixing up a nightmare for the Queen of England so that she will help them rid the world of the giants.

This section shows the BFG to be an intelligent and wise being in spite of his mixed up speech and child-like ways. Sophie is quite impressed by the fact that the BFG has taught himself to read and write using a Charles Dickens book. At the same time, she is a little disturbed by some of the new ideas the BFG is giving her. For example, he tells her that humans only believe in what they can see. This is another of Dahl's commentaries on human nature. He is suggesting that humans lack the imagination to believe in anything beyond their own physical world.



Sophie is again the champion for the human race as she insists that not all humans are unkind. She is certain the Queen will be kind and would never dream of putting the BFG in a zoo. The BFG holds on to his more cynical view of humans and, in fact, is only convinced to speak with the Queen by the prospect that he may not ever have to eat snozzcumbers again.

The nature of dreams is further discussed in this section as well. Sophie is able to see the good dream they caught and it's really quite beautiful. It seems to pulse and move as though alive. The BFG tells Sophie that dreams really are alive, sort of like the wind that can touch your face.

Discussion Question 1

Are there different kinds of intelligence? Can a person be considered intelligent without being educated? Is the BFG intelligent?

Discussion Question 2

As she gets to know the BFG better, some of Sophie's ideas about the world around her change. Which of her ideas are changing? How are they changing? What causes the change?

Discussion Question 3

The BFG says that dreams are alive. In what ways might dreams be considered living things?

Vocabulary

admit, sprawled, diabolical, infinite, scarlet, colossal, famous, patience, laborious, pupils, translucent, shimmering, mystical



Chapters 16-18: Mixing the Dream, Journey to London, and The Palace

Summary

In chapter 16, *Mixing the Dream*, the BFG places Sophie on his table and asks her to remain quiet while he gathers the right dreams to mix together to create the dream they want. He goes to the shelves and gathers dreams from many jars into one huge jar. He then mixes the dreams together using a giant egg beater. The dreams become foamy as they are mixed and beautiful, soapy bubbles float to the ceiling of the cave and out the door. The BFG explains those are the parts of the dreams he is not using. The dream remaining in the jar is clearly a nightmare and it flings itself about the jar. Sophie is concerned about giving the Queen a nightmare, but the BFG tells her it can't be avoided since a dream about giants eating children can't be anything but a nightmare. Besides, surely the Queen will be happy to have a nightmare if it is what helps them stop the giants.

The BFG places the jar with the dream in his pocket. Sophie does not want to sit in the pocket with the dream so she asks the BFG to swivel his ear out like a bowl and she will sit there as they travel to England. The BFG cautions Sophie to speak quietly since her normal voice is very loud when she sits in his ear. The two set out for England.

In chapter 17, *The Journey to London*, the BFG and Sophie are speeding toward London to deliver the dream to the Queen. Sophie is so warm and comfortable in the BFG's ear that she falls asleep. When she wakes up they are in a green country. They see the other giants running home after their feast.

The two arrive in London and Sophie is surprised by the way no one in the busy streets of London notices the BFG. It's as though he possesses some kind of magic. When they reach Hyde Park, the BFG thinks they are lost, but Sophie tells him they are actually very near the palace. The BFG leaps over Hyde Park Corner and steps over the gate behind the Palace and they find themselves in the back garden of the Palace.

In chapter 18, *The Palace*, Sophie and the BFG move quietly through the Palace's back garden and right up to the wall of the Palace. The BFG begins to inspect the windows to find the Queen's bedroom. When he does, he carefully opens the window, plucks Sophie from his ear, and places her on the Queen's windowsill, cautioning her to be careful not to fall. He then takes out his trumpet, empties the contents of the jar into it, and blows the dream into the Queen's bedroom. Sophie watches from the windowsill, feeling quite scared but trying hard not to show it.

The BFG tells Sophie the dream could take an hour or more to work. He says he will wait in the garden and that Sophie only need call him and he'll come back. He then kisses her on the cheek and moves away.



Analysis

The mixing of the dream is a lovely, magical scene. Sophie watches as the BFG moves confidently about his cave taking jars from the shelves and emptying them into the larger jar on the table. When he is working with dreams the BFG is clearly in his element. It is in this capacity that he transforms into a confident being with none of the insecurities he often shows when he is speaking.

The dreams themselves are described quite beautifully. As they are mixed together using an ordinary (if giant-sized!) egg beater they froth and create delicate soapy bubbles that float away – presumably back to Dream Country. In this way, nothing is wasted.

The friendship between the BFG and Sophie is really at its peak in this section. He has developed a profound trust in Sophie as he agrees to conquer his fear of being discovered by humans to help her save children from being eaten. Sophie, too, has become quite comfortable with her one-time captor. So comfortable, in fact, that she falls asleep in his ear as they travel to London. Then, there is a very sweet moment when the BFG places her on the window sill, tells her to be careful, and kisses her on the cheek before leaving her there much like a father would his own daughter. Their relationship has clearly shifted toward more of a parent-child relationship.

Sophie again exhibits her extraordinary braveness as she sits upon the Queen's windowsill. She is likely frightened of falling, getting in trouble, and meeting the Queen all at once, but she refuses to let it show. Instead, she remains securely perched on the windowsill while she waits for the Queen to have a nightmare.

Discussion Question 1

In what way has the relationship between Sophie and the BFG begun to change? What has caused the change?

Discussion Question 2

What is different about the BFG when he is working with the dreams? Why do you suppose he is different?

Discussion Question 3

Although Sophie is frightened as she sits in the Queen's window, she is determined not to let it show. Have you ever been in a situation where you were scared or nervous, but were determined not to show it? What effect did your resolve have on the situation?

Vocabulary

tense, beloved, contraption, proper, swivel, crinkles, landscape, glide, deserted, tidy



Chapters 19-21: The Queen, The Royal Breakfast, The Plan

Summary

Chapter 10, *The Queen*, begins with Sophie sitting upon the Queen's windowsill behind the curtain waiting for the Queen to experience the nightmare and wake to find her. As Sophie watches, the Queen cries out in her sleep. There is a knock at the bedroom door and Mary, the Queen's servant, enters the room. The Queen tells her that she's just had a horrible dream about children being snatched from their beds at their boarding schools and eaten by giants. Mary's face goes white and she drops the tray she's carrying. She tells the Queen that newspapers have been reporting that children have been disappearing from their boarding schools and bones have been found beneath the windows.

Mary then opens the curtains and screams when she sees Sophie. The Queen looks up and freezes at the sight. Mary yells at Sophie and tells the Queen she'll take her away. The Queen stops Mary and says she dreamed there was a girl sitting in her window. Sophie introduces herself and the Queen says she dreamed that Sophie had been put there by a giant. Sophie says that's true and he's in the garden. Sophie calls the BFG to the window. The Queen tells Sophie to come down from the window so she won't fall and they watch as the BFG approaches the palace in a very dignified manner. The BFG introduces himself and the Queen greets him in a polite, composed manner. The Queen invites Sophie and the BFG to have breakfast with her in the ballroom—the only room large enough for the BFG.

In chapter 20, *The Royal Breakfast*, Mr. Tibbs, the Queen's butler, sets about preparing the ballroom for breakfast. He calculates the proper size the table and chairs will need to be for the BFG and that all of the food must be multiplied by four to feed a giant. He orders the servants under him to move the grand piano to the center of the room and stack a chest of drawers on top of it to serve as a chair. Then he has the servants gather four grandfather clocks to use as table legs and the Prince's ping pong table to be used as the table top. Mr. Tibbs then calls for an unused garden fork and spade for the BFG's cutlery. A sword is removed from a wall to be his knife. Then a smaller table is set up for the Queen and Sophie.

The Queen and Sophie enter the ballroom. Sophie is dressed in a blue dress that once belonged to the Princess and is wearing one of the Queen's sapphire brooches. The BFG crawls through the ballroom door and when he stands he breaks an expensive chandelier. The Queen is slightly put out, but reacts calmly. Mr. Tibbs orders the mess to be cleaned up and the BFG is seated at his makeshift table. Footmen arrive and serve great platters of eggs, bacon, sausages, and fried potatoes. The BFG is delighted with the food and soon eats everything that has been brought in and asks for more.



The BFG finds he does not like coffee and asks where the frobscottle is. He goes on to say they should all be whizzpopping together. The Queen thinks he is talking about singing and, although Sophie tries to explain, the Queen gives the BFG permission to whizzpop. He lets out a very loud whizzpop, startling the Queen, who responds politely that she prefers the bagpipes, but she can't keep from smiling a bit.

Sophie tells the Queen all about her visit to Giant Country. When the Queen asks the BFG if he recalls where the giants went the night before they came to England, he tells her they were in Sweden. She asks Mr. Tibbs to get the King of Sweden on the phone. The King of Sweden tells the Queen of England that 26 of his loyal subjects have been snatched and eaten. When the Queen asks the BFG where the giants went three nights ago, he tells her they went to Baghdad, so she calls the Sultan of Baghdad and confirms that he, too, has had people disappear. The Queen is now fully convinced and demands that the Head of the Army and the Head of the Air Force be summoned immediately.

In chapter 22, The Plan, the Queen of England quickly explains the situation to the Head of the Army and the Head of the Air Force. The Head of the Army says he knew something like this was going on and the two military men tell the Queen they'll bomb the giants and shoot them with machine guns. The Queen says she does not approve of murder and demands that the giants be captured alive. The two men ask how they are supposed to do that and the BFG tells them that the giants nap every afternoon. He says they should sneak up on the giants while they're sleeping and tie them up. The Queen approves of this plan.

The military men then wonder how they're supposed to get nine giants back to England. The BFG suggests they attach the giants to the bottoms of helicopters like torpedoes and transport them in that manner. The Queen orders them to take nine helicopters, one for each giant. The men ask if the BFG can show them on a map how to get to Giant Country. The BFG tells them they are talking nonsense and he can't do that. The military men are immediately determined to give up. The Queen admonishes them by telling the BFG to tell the "dim witted" men what to do. The BFG tells them that he will lead them to Giant Country. The Queen says she will be sure they are prepared to handle the giants when they're brought to England.

Sophie tells the Queen she'd like to go with the BFG and shows her how she rides in his ear. The Queen tells him he's a "wonderful giant" and he asks if he can bring his collection of dreams back to England. The Queen says he can and wishes them a safe journey.

Analysis

In many of Dahl's books there is one adult character who is kind and helps the child protagonist. In the BFG, that person is the Queen of England. Sophie is in awe of her and a bit nervous to meet her since she's grown up seeing the Queen's face on postage stamps and hearing her voice on the radio. However, the Queen proves to be a kind



woman who offers Sophie a dress to wear and serves both Sophie and the BFG a delicious breakfast. The Queen is tolerant of the BFG's clumsy movements and unusual way of speaking. After spending some time with him, she even seems to see his wisdom since she refers to her military leaders as "dim witted" and asks the BFG to give them instruction. She is also a woman with a sense of humor since she's not put off by the BFG's whizzpopping and even tries to suppress a smile.

The breakfast scene is delightful and shows the great range of Dahl's imagination as he describes a fantastical breakfast scene with makeshift giant furniture. The scene is clearly designed especially for the youngest of readers with its description of furniture made from pianos and dressers and clocks and ping pong tables. The scene is completed by the absurdity of a proper English butler gliding about the room and climbing a ladder to deliver a plate of eggs to the BFG, which are eaten in one gulp using a garden fork and spade.

It's also interesting to note that with this change of setting, the language of the book becomes a bit more sophisticated. This slight change lends to the royal feel of the palace scenes. However, the BFG continues to speak in his mixed-up manner, which further illustrates how different he is from those around him.

Another aspect of human nature is revealed in the blustery, arrogant military leaders. They are quick to say they knew there was something like giants behind the disappearance of people even though they clearly had no idea. They are also quick to suggest killing the giants with bombs and machine guns. They are, in fact, quick to jump to many things without giving much thought. When the BFG says he can't show them how to get to Giant Country on a map, they immediately become flustered and want to give up. Then, when the BFG says he can lead them, they try to give up when met with the challenge of transporting the giants back to England. Again the BFG supplies the answer.

Sophie shows her growing attachment to the BFG when she requests to travel with him to Giant Country to capture the giants in spite of the danger they'll be facing.

Discussion Question 1

What does it take to convince the Queen that giants are snatching and eating people? Does it seem like it takes a lot of convincing? Do you think the Queen's reaction to Sophie's story is reasonable? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What do we learn about the Queen's personality in this section? What is she like? How does she treat Sophie? How does she treat the BFG?



Discussion Question 3

What are the military leaders like? Why do you think Dahl portrays them in this manner?

Vocabulary

absurd, patience, motionless, distressed, quivering, crockery, famous, headlines, punctuated, rubbish, disbelief, nobleman, personage, ingenuity, adaptability, versatility, dexterity, cunning, sophistication, sagacity, discretion, mahogany, damask, delicate, brooch, chandelier, appalled



Chapters 22-24: Capture!, Feeding Time, and The Author

Summary

In Chapter 22, Capture!, the BFG travels to Giant Country and finds that this time the journey is much different from the many times he's taken it in the past. He is travelling in the daytime with nine helicopters flying overhead and he's doing it for the Queen. People stand by and stare as he passes with Sophie riding in his ear.

The Head of the Air Force looks at an atlas and wonders where on earth they are going. The pilot beside him says he has no idea, but that it's fun to go to new places. Where they're flying isn't in the atlas. The pilot is confident that the BFG will lead them to the right place while the Head of the Air Force is certain they're being lead to disaster.

The BFG stops and the helicopters land. The military men don't see any giants. The BFG tells them they had to land a ways away from the giants so as not to wake them. They travel the rest of the way as quietly as possible by jeep. As they near the giants, the Head of the Army is sure he hears guns and shouts at the soldiers to turn back, but the BFG assures him it's only the sound of giants snoring. The soldiers are frightened when they see the giants and the BFG cautions them that they'll be eaten if the giants wake up. The Head of the Army and the Head of the Air Force stay toward the rear in their jeeps and order their men forward to capture the giants.

They quickly tie up eight of the nine giants, but the Fleshlumpeater wakes up as they are trying to tie him. He scoops up a soldier and is about to eat him when the BFG bravely yells at him to put the man down. The BFG runs at the Fleshlumpeater, but the bigger giant knocks him down. Sophie tumbles to the ground. She pulls the Queen's brooch off her dress and sticks the Fleshlumpeater in the ankle with it. The BFG convinces the Fleshlumpeater that he's been bitten by a snake. He tells the Fleshlumpeater to hold his ankle and close his eyes while the BFG takes the snake's teeth out. While the Fleshlumpeater is holding his ankle, the BFG ties him up.

The BFG tells the military men it's now time to drive over to his cave to pick up his jars of dreams. The Head of the Army says they can't waste time on that, but Sophie reminds them it was the Queen's order, so they go get the jars. The BFG also brings out a big sack filled with something, but he won't say what's in it.

They fly back to England with the giants slung beneath the bellies of the nine helicopters.

In chapter 23, Feeding Time, the helicopters arrive back in England to find that the Queen has had a huge pit dug to put the giants in. The giants are lowered into the pit, but no one wants to go down to untie them. The BFG states that he will do it because



giants won't eat giants. The Fleshlumpeater asks why they're being put in the pit and the BFG tells him it's because they have been eating humans. The Fleshlumpeater roars that perhaps they should eat the BFG instead. The BFG grabs the rope just in time and is hauled up out of the pit.

Once safely out of the pit, the BFG reveals what is in his sack. He pulls out a snozzcumber and says it's the only thing the giants will be eating from now on. He throws several of them into the pit. The Queen asks what they'll feed the giants when the Snozzcubmers are gone. The BFG tells her he has also brought snozzcumber plants and will give them to the royal gardener. The Queen compliments the BFG on his cleverness.

The final chapter, The Author, ties up the story by sharing what becomes of the BFG and Sophie after the capture of the giants. The two receive accolades and gifts from rulers all over the world, including the elephant the BFG had wished for. The Queen has a huge house built for the BFG to live in and a small cottage next to it for Sophie. The Queen names the BFG the Royal Dream-Blower and he is able to travel all over England to blow dreams into the windows of children.

The BFG indicates he'd like to learn to speak better, so Sophie teaches him. He is a terrific student who loves to read. He reads many books, including everything by Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. He even begins to write essays about his life, which Sophie says are very good. She encourages him to become an author. The BFG works very hard on a book about Sophie and himself. He shares it with the Queen who reads it to her grandchildren. The book is published, but the BFG is modest so he asks that someone else's name be put on the book, and it is the book the reader has just finished reading.

Analysis

This final section deals largely with the theme of bravery. Empowered by the trust the Queen has placed in him, the BFG comes into his own and acts with great courage. He leads the military to the land of giants and it is noted that this time the journey is much different for him. He is carrying out the orders of the Queen and he is clearly proud to be doing so. He is, for the first time ever, travelling in broad daylight and is doing so with much fanfare. He confidently instructs the military on how to capture the giants. When the Fleshlumpeater, the worst of the giants, picks up a soldier it is the BFG who bravely yells at the giant and rushes toward him to save the man. Of course, this is where Sophie also exhibits her bravery by stabbing the Fleshlumpeater in the ankle with the Queen's brooch when she sees her friend the BFG shoved to the ground.

In sharp contrast to the bravery of Sophie and the BFG, the Heads of the Army and the Air Force are quite cowardly. They whine and complain about travelling to a place that isn't even in the atlas. Once there, they try to turn back at the sound of the giants snoring. They also order their soldiers ahead while they remain a safe distance behind



in their jeeps. However, when the giants are finally captured, the Head of the Army is quick to say that the Queen is sure to give him a medal for carrying out the mission.

The soldiers themselves are portrayed as being brave. The pilot who flies the helicopter carrying the Heads of the Army and Air Force is described as a fearless young man who finds travelling to new places fun. He goes so far as to say that the last pages of an atlas are left blank so that one can fill them in with their own adventures.

The BFG once again proves how clever he is in spite of the fact that he is uneducated. He orchestrates the plan to capture the giants brilliantly and even thinks to bring food in the form of snozzcumpers for the giants to eat while in captivity. The Queen compliments him for being so clever and even points out that he is clearly intelligent even though he hasn't received a formal education. While the author is surely making a point that people can be intelligent even if they aren't educated, it should be noted that he hasn't discounted the value of a good education entirely since the BFG does go on to be taught, albeit by Sophie, to speak, read, and write better.

The book neatly wraps up with all the dreams of Sophie and the BFG being realized. Both have nice homes to live in and they are no longer lonely outsiders since they have each other and the BFG has been given a royal title. Sophie even thinks of the BFG as a father figure and in this way she is no longer an orphan. The BFG has become educated and is able to wield words so well that he becomes a published author—a huge step from the giant who once lamented his mixed up speech.

Discussion Question 1

How has the BFG changed since the beginning of the book? Has this character progressed? If so, how?

Discussion Question 2

The BFG brings dreams to children. Which of his own dreams have come true? How did he achieve his dreams?

Discussion Question 3

How do Sophie and the BFG differ from the Heads of the Army and the Air Force? Are they similar to any of the soldiers?

Vocabulary

gaped, pilot, skimming, throttles, atlas, moustache, jeep, trembling, palm, coward, viper, trussed, mobilized, colossal, clever, gratitude, cottage



Characters

Sophie

Sophie is an eight-year-old girl who lives in an orphanage. She wears thick, steel rimmed glasses and spends most of the novel dressed in only her nightgown. Sophie is extremely curious and it is her curiosity that leads her into a grand adventure with the BFG in which the two save the world from vicious, human eating giants.

Sophie is snatched from her bed by the BFG. Though she's frightened at first and certain the giant will eat her, she soon learns that she's been captured by a friendly giant who does not eat humans. In fact, he only takes her because he is worried that she will tell other people that giants exist and he will then be caught and placed in a cage.

Sophie is horrified to learn that there are nine other giants who go out into the world every night and eat several humans. When she learns that the BFG is able to catch dreams, she hatches a plan to convince the Queen of England to mobilize military forces to catch the vicious giants. Sophie asks the BFG to mix up a dream especially for the Queen in which the horrible giants go about eating people and a little girl comes to the Queen's window to tell her about a BFG that can tell her where to find the giants. When the Queen wakes up from her nightmare, she'll see Sophie sitting on her windowsill and she'll know that the dream is true.

Sophie and the BFG carry out their plan, and when the Queen sees Sophie on her window, she invites both Sophie and the BFG to breakfast. Of course, Sophie is still in her nightgown so the Queen lends her a dress and a broach to wear. After breakfast, Sophie and the BFG lead the military to Giant Country. The military forces tie up the giants, but when one of the giants manages to pick up a soldier it is brave Sophie who comes to the rescue. She pulls the broach from her dress and sticks the giant in the ankle with it.

At the close of the book Sophie lives in a little cottage next to the huge house the Queen orders be made for the BFG. Sophie loves the BFG like a father and helps him to learn to speak more properly and even encourages him to write a book.

The BFG

The Big Friendly Giant, or the BFG, is a 24-foot tall giant with enormous ears that can swivel out from his head, move about, and allow him to hear even the quietest of sounds. The BFG is very different from other giants in both the way he looks and in the way he acts. He is far less ugly than the other giants, wears more clothing, and is only about half their size. He is also kind and no threat to humans unlike the other giants who are mean and eat humans.



The BFG lives in a well-lit cave in Giant Country. He eats nothing but snozzcumpers. His speech is quite whimsical and consists of a large array of made up words. He frequently mixes up his words, which seems to embarrass him. He has taught himself to read and write from a copy of Charles Dickens' book *Nicholas Nickleby*, which he borrowed 80 years ago from a child's bedroom.

The BFG spends his time capturing dreams in Dream Country and delivering them to children around the world. He places the dreams in jars that he keeps on shelves in the cave where he lives. He carries them out into the world in his suitcase and blows them through the bedroom windows of children using his long trumpet. He delivers only good dreams and never nightmares.

The BFG snatches Sophie from her bedroom in the orphanage one night out of fear that she might tell others about him after she sees him from her window. He carries her back to his cave and the two become friends. When the BFG tells Sophie that he wishes he could rid the world of the other giants, she develops a plan to use the dreams the BFG captures to do just that.

The BFG mixes up a dream especially for the Queen of England in which she will see the horrible giants eating people and a little girl (Sophie) on her windowsill who tells her where to find a friendly giant that will show her where to find the bad giants. When she wakes up, Sophie will be sitting on her windowsill and the BFG will come to the window.

The plan works and, at the Queen's command, the BFG leads military forces to Giant Country to capture the giants and place them in a big pit where they will eat nothing but snozzcumpers for the rest of their lives.

The Queen has a giant-sized house built just for the BFG. He becomes educated and writes a book.

The Bloodbottler

The Bloodbottler is one of the nine human-eating giants. He hears the BFG talking to Sophie in his cave and accuses the BFG of keeping a human as a pet. When Sophie hides inside a snozzcumper to avoid being discovered, the Bloodbottler nearly eats her. The Bloodbottler also instigates the game of catch using the BFG as a ball when he tells the other giants he thinks the BFG is keeping humans as pets.

The Fleshlumpeater

The Fleshlumpeater is the largest and meanest of the giants. The BFG causes him to have a nightmare just for the pleasure of watching the giants brawl amongst themselves. One of the Fleshlumpeater's greatest desires is to eat the Queen of England herself. He is the giant that Sophie sticks in the heel with the Queen's brooch when he picks up one of the soldiers trying to capture him.



The Bonecruncher

The Bonecruncher is one of the nine human-eating giants. His favorite food is Turks from Turkey because they taste like turkey.

The Manhugger

The Manhugger is one of the nine human-eating giants. He is mentioned only briefly.

The Childchewer

The Childchewer is one of the nine human-eating giants. He prefers to capture children on the beach because they are more tender than old grandmothers.

The Meatdripper

The Meatdripper is one of the nine human-eating giants. He likes to stand in a park holding branches over his head to disguise himself as a tree. When families come to picnic under the “tree” he picks them up and eats them.

The Gizzardgulper

The Gizzardgulper is one of the nine human-eating giants. He prefers to hunt for humans in cities where he lies on the roofs of buildings and snatches people off the streets.

The Maidmasher

The Maidmasher is one of the nine human-eating giants. He is mentioned only briefly.



Symbols and Symbolism

The BFG's Ears

The BFG has enormous ears that he can swivel and move about. His ears are a symbol not only what makes him different, but also what makes him special. The other giants do not have huge ears like his. The BFG uses his fantastic ears to listen for dreams to collect. With his ears he is able to hear things that ordinary people (and giants!) cannot, like the conversations of insects. The way the ears move about is significant because when Sophie is travelling with the BFG he swivels an ear out so that it forms a bowl in which Sophie sits comfortably as the BFG runs – so comfortably that she falls asleep there. His difference is one of the things that comforts Sophie, perhaps because she is different too.

Nicholas Nickleby

Nicholas Nickleby is a novel by Charles Dickens. It is the book that the BFG used to teach himself to read and write. The book represents education and intelligence. The BFG doesn't believe himself to be very intelligent because he often mixes up his words. However, he obviously is an intelligent being since he was able to teach himself using a single book.

Dreams

The dreams the BFG collects symbolize the BFG's desire to connect to the human world. He collects the dreams and keeps them in jars on his shelves. He then takes the dreams and blows them through the windows of children all over the world. He never delivers nightmares, which indicates his intentions toward people are good. The dreams are the only interaction he has with people prior to meeting Sophie. The dreams are the key to Sophie's plan for capturing the giants. When the BFG goes with the military to capture the giants he has just one request – that he be able to bring his jars of dreams back with him to England. They are clearly very important to him.

Snozzcumpers

Snozzcumpers are the repulsive cucumber-like vegetables the BFG lives on because he doesn't eat people like the other giants. They symbolize the hardships of his life as an outsider. He doesn't fit in with the giants, but he also can't live with humans at the beginning of the book because he is afraid of being put in a zoo. The prospect of not having to eat snozzcumpers anymore is what convinces him to travel with Sophie to England to meet the Queen. After the giants are captured and placed in the pit, the BFG gives them snozzcumpers to eat indicating that they are now the outsiders.



Whizzpoppers

Whizzpoppers, the BFG's word for flatulence, represent a childlike sense of fun and silliness. Dahl's books are full of silly scenes that appeal particularly to children and the scene in which the BFG introduces Sophie to whizzpopping is an excellent example of such a scene. Flatulence is a source of embarrassment in the human world, but for the BFG it's all part of the fun of drinking frobscottle. Sophie can't help but join in the fun after she sees the BFG whizzpopping about the room. Even the Queen of England can't completely hide her amusement when the BFG introduces her to whizzpopping. She politely says that she prefers the bagpipes, but can't conceal the smile on her face.

Giants

The horrible human-eating giants symbolize fear. They travel around the world snatching people, especially children, and eating them. They are described as being tremendously ugly and frightful. They are certainly a creature that children identify with fear. Sophie and the BFG must capture the giants, thus overcoming their fears, in order to leave their lonely lives as an orphan and an outcast giant. Once their fears are overcome, both Sophie and the BFG are able to realize their dreams. The BFG lives in a nice home where he never has to eat snozzcumbers again, is able to receive an education, has friends, and is given the title of the Royal Dream Catcher. Sophie, too, lives in a nice home and, most importantly, has a friend and parent in the form of the BFG.

Elephant

The BFG wishes he could have an elephant to ride around on and gather peaches. The elephant symbolizes the BFG's hopes and dreams. He tells Sophie that he would like to have an elephant to ride through forests because Giant Country is a horrible, hot place where nothing grows. The BFG wants a chance to be free from his difficult life and live somewhere better. In the end of the book, the BFG not only is given an elephant as thanks for his part in capturing the giants, but also a camel and a llama as well as many other gifts.

The Queen

The BFG delivers a dream to the Queen of England as part of the plan to capture the giants. When Sophie first proposes the plan, the BFG is certain it won't work and that the Queen will have him put in a zoo. The Queen stands for the BFG's fear of not being accepted by humans. Not only is she a human, she is one of the most influential humans in the world. Surely she would not accept a giant with enormous ears and mixed up speech! However, the Queen not only accepts the BFG, she trusts him to lead the military to Giant Country and compliments his cleverness. In the end, she has a



lovely big house built for the BFG and gives him a royal title so that he can live out his days in England among humans.

The Pit

After the giants are captured they are placed in a pit that they cannot escape from. The Queen refuses to allow the military to kill the giants, so they must be kept somewhere. People are able to come to the pit to see the giants and are especially fond of doing so at feeding time when the terrible tasting snozzcumpers are thrown down to the giants. The pit symbolizes the way that our fears never really leave us, but we can compartmentalize them and live with them.

The Military Leaders

The Head of the Army and the Head of the Air Force are a symbol of the less desirable parts of human nature. They are boastful men who think the best course of action in conquering the giants is to rush forward and simply annihilate them with bombs and guns. Throughout the book Dahl makes several comments on human nature and these military leaders give his thoughts physical form. At the same time as they want to rush forward, they don't want to do the deed themselves. Instead, these cowardly men hang back in the safety of their jeeps and send their soldiers forward to do the work of capturing the giants. Then, when it's all over, they expect to receive commendations for their bravery.



Settings

The Orphanage

The novel begins at the orphanage where Sophie lives. The orphanage is located in a village in England. Sophie is in her dormitory where she and the other children are supposed to be asleep. Dahl doesn't go into great detail about the orphanage except to say that it's run by a horrible woman who locks the children in the cellar as punishment. The cellar is dark and filled with rats. The orphanage seems to be a lonely place for Sophie. She never mentions missing any of the other children who live there, leading the reader to believe she doesn't have any friends at the orphanage.

Giant Country

After the BFG snatches Sophie from the orphanage, he takes her to Giant Country. It is described as being a wasteland. The ground is yellow and very flat. There is a huge mountain there that appears to be dark blue in color. In the side of the mountain is a cave where the BFG lives. There are also enormous boulders scattered about. The human-eating giants often rest amongst the boulders. Dead trees stand here and there. Giant Country is described in a way that is very uninviting, a place where no one would want to live. Like the orphanage where Sophie lives, Giant Country is also a lonely place where the BFG has no friends. In fact, the only warm and somewhat inviting place in Giant Country is the BFG's cave.

The Cave

The cave where the BFG lives is in the side of the great mountain in Giant Country. It is hidden by a big stone that the BFG must roll away from the door to enter or exit the cave. The cave is very dark when Sophie first arrives, but the BFG somehow turns on the lights and it becomes very bright inside. The source of the light is never revealed, lending to the magical feel of the place. The cave is mostly bare. The only furnishings seem to be a large table and chair (giant sized, of course!) and shelves that line the walls. The shelves are filled with row after row of glass jars with screw tops in which the BFG stores the dreams he collects. There is a hook on the wall where the BFG hangs his cloak. Although it's a sparsely furnished cave, it seems to be warm and inviting as Sophie is comfortable there in just her nightgown. Once she has gotten to know the BFG, she is quickly at ease in the cave and feels safe from the giants outside.

The Land of Dreams

The Land of Dreams is the place where the BFG goes to collect the dreams he delivers to children around the world. It's an ethereal place. Everything is pale grey and white. Mists swirl about. The air is damp and full of "ghostly vapours" that leave Sophie feeling



slightly wet. The grass is an ashy grey color. The dreams float overhead in the mists. When the BFG stands up straight his head disappears into the mist and it is from this area that he scoops dreams into his large net.

The Palace

The Palace is located in London, England and is where the Queen of England lives. Sophie and the BFG visit the Palace to deliver a nightmare to the Queen in order to convince her of the existence of human-eating giants. The Palace is surrounded by a brick wall with spikes on top of it. On the other side of the wall is a well kept lawn and lovely flower beds. Beyond the lawn is the Palace itself, which is made of whitish stone. The reader is introduced to only two rooms within the Palace. The first is the Queen's bedroom. Not much is said about the room except that in it is a bed in which the Queen sleeps. The focus of the scene is left on the interaction between the characters. The second room is the ballroom where the Queen, the BFG, and Sophie eat breakfast because it is the room with the highest ceilings and thus able to accommodate the BFG. Again, the room isn't described in great detail. There is an expensive Louis the Fifteenth chandelier hanging from the ceiling, which the BFG hits his head on and breaks. Other than that, the room is only said to be extremely large.



Themes and Motifs

Bravery

Bravery is an important theme in *The BFG*. The characters of Sophie and the BFG are used to illustrate Dahl's thoughts on bravery. It is their acts of bravery that lead to great changes in their lives.

The first act of bravery in the book is Sophie's stealing quietly from her bed in the orphanage to close the curtains. While doing so, she stops to take a peak outside. Simply getting out of her bed at night requires Sophie to be brave since the orphanage strictly prohibits children from being out of bed after lights out. Children in the orphanage are punished for breaking rules by being locked in the dark cellar full of rats. But, Sophie doesn't just get out of bed, dash to the window, and then dive back into bed. Instead, she pauses at the window to look out at the village below. Of course, this pause is what leads her into the adventure of a lifetime and eventually a better life.

The BFG exhibits bravery every time he leaves his cave because the other giants are very cruel to him. They bully him constantly, even going so far as to picking him up and using him like a ball in a game of catch. Perhaps the BFG's greatest act of bravery is going to meet the Queen of England. The BFG is terrified of being seen by humans because he is sure he'll be thrown in a zoo and ogled by people for the rest of his life. He believes that humans could not accept him into their world, and certainly a person as important as the Queen herself could not do so. Sophie eventually convinces him that the Queen is a kind person and would never put him in a zoo. Though he is still afraid of the consequences, the BFG takes a chance and travels with Sophie to meet the Queen. Overcoming this fear is what leads the BFG to a better life with a comfortable home, good food, an education, and friends.

Of course, both Sophie and the BFG show extraordinary bravery in carrying out their plan to face and capture the frightening human-eating giants. The BFG, in spite of his fear of humans, leads the military to Giant Country. When the worst of the giants, the Fleshlumpeater, wakes up and grabs a soldier, the BFG bravely runs at him to save the man. When she sees the BFG knocked to the ground by the bigger giant, tiny Sophie pulls the brooch from her dress and shoves it into the Fleshlumpeater's ankle.

Dahl uses the BFG and Sophie to show that when we step outside of our comfort zones and face some of our greatest fears, it can lead to amazing things. Sophie starts out as an orphan with thick glasses and no friends who lives in a place where adults are cruel to children. At the beginning of the book, the BFG is a lonely giant, different from all of the other giants because of his smaller size, huge ears, and his choice not to eat humans. Both are lonely and living miserable lives. However, when they overcome their fears, their lives drastically improve.



Intelligent vs. Educated

When Sophie first meets the BFG he is often embarrassed by his mixed up speech. Initially, Sophie corrects the BFG when he confuses some words, which causes him to become embarrassed. Sophie points out his mistakes a few more times before she realizes that her corrections bother the BFG and that he truly wishes he could speak more eloquently. He knows that the way he speaks makes others think that he is not intelligent. Upon realizing that the BFG's feelings are hurt when she corrects him, Sophie tells the BFG that she loves the way he speaks. The BFG is thrilled by the compliment and thinks it's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to him.

Later, we learn that the BFG taught himself to read and write using just one book, a copy of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. He borrowed the book from the bedroom of a child 80 years ago and has read and re-read it hundreds of times. In this way, he has learned to write so that he can write descriptions of the dreams he captures on the labels of his dream jars. Only someone with intelligence could teach themselves in such a manner.

When the BFG meets the Queen he is surely concerned that he will not be taken seriously due to the way he speaks. He attempts to conduct himself in a dignified manner by approaching slowly and bowing. He introduces himself to the Queen as her "humbug servant" instead of her humble servant, and rather than calling her Your Majesty, he calls the Queen "Your Majester." Sophie excuses him by telling the Queen that the BFG has never been to school to which the Queen replies that there are excellent schools in England and she will send him to one. It seems as though the Queen initially believes that education equals intelligence. As the story progresses the Queen sees that the BFG is actually quite intelligent in spite of his lack of education. In fact, she praises him for his cleverness as they work together to carry out the plan to capture the giants.

Through the BFG Dahl indicates that he believes that a person can be intelligent without being educated. However, this does not mean that he discounts the value of a good education. In the end, the BFG does receive an education which eventually enables him to author a book.

Being Different

The BFG deals with the theme of being different. Both Sophie and the BFG are outsiders who seem to have no real place in the world at the start of the novel. However, it is what makes the BFG different that leads them both to find their place.

When the book begins, Sophie is a lonely little girl living in an orphanage. The fact that she is an orphan makes her different from most children her age. In addition to that difference, she also wears very thick glasses with wire rims. It would seem that Sophie has no friends since she never mentions any of the children in the orphanage by name or indicates that she misses anyone there after the BFG takes her. And, it would seem



that no one misses Sophie either since there is no indication that anyone goes looking for her. Sophie is also a curious child with a great imagination, which leads her to pause at the window to see the world during the witching hour. Of course, it is that pause at the window that causes the BFG to see her looking at him so that he feels he must take her to prevent her from revealing the existence of giants to the rest of the world.

The BFG is different not only from the world of humans, but also from the other giants in Giant Country. At 24 feet tall, he is only about half the size of the other giants. He isn't nearly as ugly and fierce as they are. The BFG refuses to eat humans as the other giants do. On top of all of that, he also has unusually large ears that he can move about and that make him able to hear things that others cannot, including dreams. Because of his differences, the BFG leads a solitary life much like Sophie. He lives in a cave away from the other giants and is afraid of revealing himself to the human world for fear of being placed in a zoo and ogled for the rest of his life. The other giants are very cruel to the BFG. They bully him because of his different lifestyle and small stature.

Through the course of the story the reader sees that what makes Sophie and the BFG different is also what makes them special and able to carry out their plan to rid the world of the giants. Without his huge ears, the BFG would not be able to hear and collect dreams, a key component to the plan to capture the giants. And, without Sophie's imagination, the plan would never have been devised. In the end, their differences bring the BFG and Sophie together and cement their friendship. Because of their differences, Sophie and the BFG are afforded a place in the world living in lovely new houses right next to one another. Both receive everything they've ever wanted.

Human Nature

Human nature is one of the themes that appears in *The BFG*. Through *The BFG*, Dahl makes several comments about the way that humans act, and none of them is particularly flattering.

When Sophie first learns that giants eat humans, she is absolutely appalled. She cannot believe that giants would harm innocent humans. The BFG points out to her that perhaps humans really aren't so innocent. After all, giants might eat humans, but they don't kill each other. Humans, on the other hand, kill other humans every day. In fact, he points out that humans are the only animals that kill their own kind on a regular basis. When Sophie goes on to say that humans have never done anything to giants, the BFG points out that pigs probably feel the same way about humans—they don't do anything to hurt people, but they wind up on the dinner table just the same.

This leads the two to a discussion of rules. All people make rules to suit themselves. The BFG says that giants make rules that work for them, but don't suit human beings. And, humans make rules that don't suit the pigs they eat. That's just the way the world works. People create ways of living that work for them whether or not they work for others around them.



Another unflattering aspect of human nature is brought out in the characters of the Head of the Army and the Head of the Air Force. Both men are braggarts who are quick to resort to violence to solve problems. When confronted with the existence of giants, they want to rush in with bombs and guns and kill the giants, but the Queen orders them not to. When they actually arrive in Giant Country, the two military leaders order their men forward into battle with the giants while they remain safely in their vehicles. However, once the giants are captured, they're pretty quick to say they deserve medals for the victory.

Relationship Between Children & Adults

Dahl's most common motif of the relationship between children and adults is present in *The BFG*. Sophie lives in an orphanage where the adults who run it are very cruel to the children. They punish the children for even the smallest infraction of the rules, such as getting out of bed after lights out to use the bathroom. The punishment for breaking the rules is being locked in a dark cellar full of rats.

Though Dahl often includes a cruel adult in his stories, he generally balances out that relationship between children and adults by also including a kind adult who is helpful to the mistreated child. In *The BFG*, the helpful adult is the Queen of England. She treats Sophie, an orphan who shows up at the Palace wearing nothing but a nightgown, with dignity and respect. She even invites the BFG to have breakfast in her ballroom.

The BFG and the giants themselves might also be seen as a representation of this motif. In this case, the BFG is the innocent child who is much smaller and thus unable to defend himself. The giants are the adults, much larger and very mean to the BFG.

Dahl most likely returns to this motif as a result of his own childhood. His father died when Dahl was just three years old. Though his mother had family in Norway, she opted to remain in Wales so that her children could receive an English education as their father had wished. Dahl began attending boarding school around the age of eight. He found life in a boarding school to be very lonely and his teachers were sometimes hard on him.

Styles

Point of View

The BFG is told from the third person point of view. The point of view is both omniscient and reliable. The reader is privy to both Sophie and the BFG's feelings throughout the novel. The author reports the actions of the main characters and those around them while also revealing how each character is feeling. For example, when Sophie is in danger of being discovered by the Bloodbottler giant, the author describes the actions of the BFG, the Bloodbottler, and Sophie while also telling the reader that Sophie is terrified and certain that she will be eaten.

The story is told through a mix of exposition and a healthy dose of dialogue, which serves to keep the story moving along at a pace that is enjoyable to young readers. The dialogue mainly occurs between Sophie and the BFG as they are the main characters. This helps the reader get to know both characters and develop a connection with them. It also serves to show the deep relationship that develops between Sophie and the BFG over the course of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is whimsical and silly without ever dipping into condescendence. The BFG speaks in a language consisting of made up and misused words. However, Dahl does an excellent job of making the BFG's mixed up style of speaking easy to understand through context clues. This is important since the book is aimed at young readers who would otherwise be frustrated at being unable to understand the BFG. The BFG's silly speech is appealing to young readers and is the major source of humor in the novel.

While Dahl keeps the novel humorous through the language, he doesn't talk down to his readers. The prose sections are written in a descriptive style that uses larger words that may challenge younger readers. In addition, since the author is British, British spelling is used. This may be confusing to young readers who are still working on spelling skills, so it may be helpful to explain the differences between British and American English when discussing this novel.

The author also uses language to add to the feeling of the various settings. Up to the point when Sophie and the BFG travel to the Palace, the tone remains quite whimsical and informal. However, when they arrive at the Palace and meet the Queen, the language takes on a more formal tone that lends itself to the regal feel of the setting.

Structure

The novel is made up of 24 chapters. The chapters are titled rather than numbered and are relatively short, ranging from four to 18 pages in length. Each chapter title refers to an action that takes place or a character or setting that is introduced. The chapters themselves are comprised of sections of descriptive prose with a good amount of dialogue.

The plot of the novel is simple with no subplots, making it easy for young readers to follow. The book is about a young girl named Sophie who is captured by the BFG, a big friendly giant. When she learns that there are other giants in the world who eat humans she comes up with a plan to rid the world of the human-eating giants. Sophie and the BFG travel to England to convince the Queen of the existence of giants so that she can deploy the military to capture them. Sophie and the BFG assist the military to capture the giants. The novel ends with Sophie and the BFG living happily ever after in houses the Queen has built for them.

The novel is fast-paced, which is important in keeping the young audience interested in the story. Although there are a great deal of made up words in the novel, it is still fairly easy to read and keeps the reader wondering what will happen next. There are no flashbacks and the author sticks to the story without deviating to describe extraneous events or places, which keeps things simple for young readers.



Quotes

The Giant is running fast, she told herself, because he is hungry and he wants to go home as quickly as possible, and then he'll have me for breakfast.

-- Sophie (Chapter 3, The Snatch paragraph Last paragraph)

Importance: This is Sophie's thought as the BFG, who has just snatched her from her bed, runs away from the village where she lives. This is a foreshadowing of the human-eating giants that will soon be introduced.

Wales is whales,' the Giant said. 'Don't gobblefunk around with words.

-- The BFG (Chapter 5, The BFG paragraph 26)

Importance: The BFG says this to Sophie during their conversation about how humans from different places taste like different things. The BFG's demand that Sophie not "gobblefunk around with words" shows how important words are to the BFG. We later learn that he is often embarrassed by his mixed up way of speaking.

Because you SAW me,' the Big Friendly Giant answered. 'If anyone is ever SEEING a giant, he or she must be taken away hipswitch.

-- The BFG (Chapter 6, The Giants paragraph 2)

Importance: This is the BFG's response to Sophie when she asks him why he took her if he is such a friendly giant. This quote explains the reason that Sophie cannot return to the orphanage after meeting the BFG. It is also the first indication of the BFG's fear of being discovered by the human world.

But eating people is horrible!' Sophie cried. 'It's frightful! Why doesn't someone stop them?' 'And who please is going to be stopping them?' asked the BFG.

-- Sophie and the BFG (Chapter 6, The Giants paragraph 32 and 33)

Importance: This is a portion of Sophie's and the BFG's conversation when the BFG first shows Sophie the horrible human-eating giants. The quote is significant because it foreshadows their plan to capture the giants.

I would dearly love to have an elefant to ride on,' the BFG said dreamily. 'I would so much love to have a jumbly big elefant and go riding around through green forests picking peachy fruits off the trees all day long.

-- The BFG (Chapter 7, The Marvellous Ears paragraph 45)

Importance: This is the BFG's non sequitur statement to Sophie as they are discussing what the BFG was doing in Sophie's village. This statement reveals the BFG's desire to leave Giant Country forever and have a better life.

They maybe is looking a bit propsposterous to you,' the BFG said, 'but you must believe me when I say that they is very extra-usual ears indeed. They is not to be coughed at.



-- The BFG (Chapter 7, The Marvellous Ears paragraph 67)

Importance: The BFG says this to Sophie when he is explaining how he is able to catch dreams. The BFG's ears are one of the things that set him apart from the other giants. With his enormous ears, the BFG is able to hear things that ordinary people cannot, including the special music of dreams as they float through the air. Without his magnificent ears, the BFG would not be able to catch dreams and he and Sophie would not have been able to carry out their plan to capture the giants.

Here is the repulsant snozzcumber!" cried the BFG, waving it about. 'I squiggle it! I mispise it! I dispunge it! But because I is refusing to gobble up human beans like the other giants, I must spend my life guzzling up icky poo snozzcubmers instead.

-- The BFG (Chapter 8, Snozzcubmers paragraph 16)

Importance: This is the BFG telling Sophie about snozzcubmers, the only food he has to eat in Giant Country. They are horrible tasting vegetables, but they are the only food available to the BFG since he doesn't eat humans like the other giants do. The snozzcubmers are a symbol of the hardships the BFG endures because he is different from the others.

Human beans is the only animals that is killing their own kind.

-- The BFG (Chapter 11, Journey to Dream Country paragraph 73)

Importance: This statement is made by the BFG to Sophie when she declares how awful the giants are for eating innocent humans. The BFG is pointing out that humans are really not so innocent. While the giants might eat humans, they do not kill each other. This is not true of humans who murder each other and kill each other in war every day.

The matter with human beans,' the BFG went on, 'is that they is absolutely refusing to believe in anything unless they is actually seeing it right in front of their own schnozzles.

-- The BFG (Chapter 14, Dreams paragraph 28)

Importance: The BFG says this to Sophie as they discuss how he can determine what a dream is about by listening to it. This discussion leads to the two talking about all of the things that exist that humans don't believe in because they haven't seen them. The quote is important because it helps to explain how giants have been able to snatch people without being discovered. Since people have never seen them, they would never even consider giants as the cause of the disappearances. In addition, this is a statement about the cynical nature of humans who are skeptical of anything they don't witness for themselves.

Sophie was silent. This extraordinary giant was disturbing her ideas. He seemed to be leading her towards mysteries that were beyond her understanding.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14, Dreams paragraph 50)

Importance: This quote is significant because it talks about the way Sophie changes



and grows as she gets to know the BFG. At the start of the book, she's very certain of her own beliefs and of what is real and what is not. As she spends more time with the BFG, she begins to discover that there's much more to the world than she thought.

'We'll bomb the blighters!' shouted the Head of the Air Force. 'We'll mow them down with machine-guns!' cried the Head of the Army.

-- Military Leaders (Chapter 21, The Plan paragraph 9 and 10)

Importance: This is the military leaders' initial response to learning that giants exist and the Queen wants them to be stopped from eating humans. This shows the violent nature of humans as the first thing these men want to do is kill the giants. The Queen steps in and tells them she doesn't approve of murder, so they will instead capture the giants alive.

'What a clever fellow you are,' the Queen said. 'You are not very well educated but you are really nobody's fool, I can see that.'

-- The Queen (Chapter 23, Feeding Time paragraph Last paragraph)

Importance: This is the Queen speaking to the BFG. The BFG has brought back snozzcumpers from Giant Country to feed the captive giants and the Queen is quite impressed by the way he has thought things through. This line captures the theme of intelligence vs. education. Although the BFG has not received a formal education, it is clear that he still a very intelligent being.