

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator Study Guide

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator by Roald Dahl

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Plot Summary

The following version of the book was used to create this study guide: Dahl, Roald. *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*. Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher, 2001. The illustrations are by Quentin Blake, 1998.

This study guide is based on the 2001 hardcover edition of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, a work of fiction by Roald Dahl. The subtitle is *The Further Adventures of Charlie Bucket and Willy Wonka, Chocolate-Maker Extraordinary*.

The book picks up after *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The action begins just after Willy Wonka, owner of the famous Chocolate Factory, had announced that Charlie, a polite, unassuming boy, would inherit the factory upon Wonka's impending retirement. All of his family came out to the factory and gathered into the Great Glass Elevator to become a part of Charlie's new life. This included Charlie's Grandpa Joe, who was always more than willing to share in Charlie's adventures. He was a kind and loving man, who acted younger than his years. It also included Charlie's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bucket, who were mostly unhappy. Also along for the ride were his three other grandparents, who never got out of bed. They acted older than their years. Still, they all fit into the huge, clear elevator. They even pushed the bed onto the elevator so that the three other grandparents, collectively known as the Old Ones, did not have to leave the bed.

The elevator was full of buttons that could make it do fantastic things. It took off through the roof of the factory. It was not attached to any rails or pulleys. Rather, it floated through some unseen means. Wonka's plan had been to go so high that he could crash land back into the factory in another spot. However, one of the old ones distracted him, and he did not pull the elevator back in time. It took them into space where they encountered a spaceship hotel. This was a huge building floating through space, with all the amenities of a ritzy hotel. It was being attacked by evil aliens, the Vermicious Knids. These creatures could change their shape as if they were made out of clay, and they liked to eat people. Wonka and company outsmarted them and they saved a spaceship full of hotel employees commuting there. The Knids wound up burning up in Earth's atmosphere, becoming little fireballs, like shooting stars.

During this adventure, the president of the United States watched on cameras from the spaceship. He was thoroughly confused by the big, see-through rectangle with eight people on board, some of them in their nightshirts. At first, he assumed they were from an enemy country, or perhaps they worked for Hilton hotels. Later, he came to the conclusion that Wonka and friends were aliens, too. After the hotel commuters were rescued, he figured the people in the elevator were brave astronauts. The president was surrounded by trusted advisers, although all of them were pretty incompetent.

The elevator crash landed back into the Chocolate Factory. The group found themselves in the chocolate room, where a jungle made of chocolate filled the room.



They were surrounded by Oompa-Loompas, who were very small people who helped Wonka in the factory.

Since Charlie was going to take over the factory, Wonka assumed that the rest of his family would want to help. Grandpa Joe agreed to help; Charlie's parents were worried; the old ones did not want to leave the bed. Wonka offered them some Wonka-Vite, a miraculous vitamin. Each pill would reduce one's age by 20 years. A year would tick away every second. The old ones got greedy, though. They each gulped down four pills. It turned the two oldest grandparents into babies. The youngest, Grandma Georgina, was only 78, so she became -2. She disappeared.

Wonka asked Charlie if they should go save her, and he said they should. Wonka deferred to Charlie because Charlie was the rightful owner of the Chocolate Factory at this point. Charlie said they should risk their lives to help Grandma Georgina, because it was the right thing to do. It was about this point in the book that Wonka gave up some of his control of the situation and let Charlie do what needed to be done. It was like a torch was being passed.

The two of them got back into the elevator. Wonka and Charlie left the other adults behind to care for the babies, with help from the Oompa-Loompas. With just the two of them, there was no one to tell them they could not do things, and no one to argue with them. They worked very well together. Wonka steered the elevator to Minusland, where people go when they have been minused. It was a gray, dreary world of mists. It was inhabited only by people who have been minused. Gnoolies also lurked here. They were invisible creatures that could turn you into a Gnoolie with one bite. Fortunately, they found Grandma Georgina pretty quickly, before they encountered any Gnoolies. She was partially transparent, and Charlie's hand was able to go right through her. Wonka sprayed her with a liquid that would age her, called Vita-Wonk. She faded out completely. Wonka said that she would have reappeared back in the Chocolate Room.

They headed back and there she was, in bed, but she was now more than 300 years old. They had to give her enough Wonka-Vite to reduce her age again, and they got her back to 78 again. Then, Wonka administered Vita-Wonk to the babies to bring them back to their old ages again. There had been some protesting from Mr. and Mrs. Bucket, because they were worried about what these chemicals could do. Ultimately, they were talked into letting Wonka use them.

Then, there was much commotion from the Oompa-Loompas. A helicopter had landed near the factory. A letter from the president was brought in. It said that the astronauts who rescued the space hotel employees were tracked to the factory. They were all invited to be his guests at the White House. At this, even the Old Ones jumped out of bed and ran to the helicopter. The parents were excited, too. Charlie, Wonka, and Grandpa Joe happily went off on their next adventure.

The book serves as Dahl's attempt to address two different readers. For children, he tells a fantasy-filled yarn with space aliens, strange worlds, and stranger people. For adults, he picks fun at politicians, lazy people, and people who are either stupid or



cowardly. There is a fair bit of moralizing. Adults will be able to read between the lines. Some lessons children will be able to pick up easily, while some of them are more subtle.

The book is full of illustrations by Quentin Blake. There could be several drawings in just one five page chapter. Blake's characters are full of energy. There is not much detail in his drawings, but the frenetic quality matches the whimsical storytelling.



Section 1: Chapters 1-6

Summary

The book begins with a quick description of what happened in the previous book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Charlie and his family, including his parents and grandparents, were going to live at the famed factory. At the start of the story, Charlie, Willy Wonka, Mr. and Mrs. Bucket, Grandpa Joe (who had gone on the adventure with Charlie in the first book), Grandma Josephine, and Grandpa George and Grandma Georgina were in the Great Glass Elevator.

The three grandparents, besides Grandpa Joe, who never left their group bed and were often referred to collectively as the Old Ones, were getting worried about Wonka's contraption, the Great Glass Elevator. Wonka dodged questions about how it worked, which did not instill a whole lot of faith in the grandparents about its safety. Charlie assured them that Wonka was a friend, stated that he loved him, and asked that they do not cause any trouble by asking too many questions. Even Grandpa Joe said "Mr. Wonka knows exactly what he is doing" (3).

Wonka moved the the elevator up faster and faster, so that the machine left Earth's atmosphere. The elevator had to reach a certain height, Wonka explained, so that when it came back down, it would be going fast enough to punch a hole in the chocolate factory upon their return. Apparently, that was the only way to get where they were going.

The elevator continued to climb. The Old Ones panicked at their climb into space. Even Grandpa Joe and Charlie started to get scared, but they had to trust Wonka. As they left Earth's atmosphere, Wonka warned them that he had to push a certain button at just the right moment or else all would be lost. Grandma Josephine panicked and grabbed Wonka, shaking him cartoonishly back and forth, trying to get him to right the crazy machine. Wonka called out to Charlie to push the button, but it was too late, and the elevator became lost in space.

In Chapter 2, the Great Glass Elevator drifted near the Space Hotel "U.S.A." This was literally a hotel one thousand feet long with a great many rooms and amenities. It was completely empty, since no one thought it was safe. Even the crew lived in a separate space ship called the Commuter Capsule.

This ship was being piloted by three astronauts, named Shuckworth, Shanks, and Showler. They saw the Great Glass Elevator careening through space and tried to tell mission control on Earth what they saw, but no one believed them. President Lancelot R. Gilligrass of the United States eventually took over the call, and said that the elevator was really an enemy spaceship. The eight people floating weightlessly inside were enemy astronauts in disguise. The bed floating around in there was a bomb. They must have been there to blow up the beloved space hotel. The astronauts were told to keep



an eye on them. Also, they used an onboard camera to broadcast video of the elevator to televisions at home. People all across the world watched the elevator in space and the eight strange people inside.

Chapter 3 takes the reader back inside the elevator. Wonka taught Charlie how to move around in zero gravity. By blowing air out his mouth, he could propel himself through the elevator. The three grumpy grandparents started doing this as well, and commenced to colliding with each other and bouncing around the elevator. Wonka asked them to stop, but it was no use, as they were finally having fun. They grew tired and ran out of air, so they eventually stopped.

Wonka, Charlie, and Grandpa Joe decided they wanted to see the inside of the space hotel, since it was empty. Each of them stationed themselves at different sets of controls and they slowly and carefully docked onto the hotel.

Chapter 4 changes the setting to the White House. The President watched on the T.V. as the elevator approached the beloved space hotel. He had gathered his advisers, which included Miss Tibbs, the ferocious vice president, who had been his nanny as a boy. It also included generals, heads of state, the Chief Financial Officer balancing the budget on his head, and a sword swallower from Afghanistan who was the president's best friend. Additionally, there was Mrs. Taubsypuss, the presidential cat.

They all tried to come up with a plan to determine what to do about these people who were boarding the space hotel. The leader of the army, who spoke mostly in explosion sound effects, wanted to destroy them all. The president's Chief Spy was called upon to see who he thought was behind it all. The spy turned the president's questions back around at him so that the president had convinced himself that either Hilton, the hotel magnate, or the Russians were behind it. So, he called the leader of Russia, who suggested that Wonka appeared Chinese, so maybe China was behind it. So, the president called the leader of China, who also claimed innocence. But, it did not matter because the president had become distracted with an idea for a new flytrap invention that would trick a fly into falling down a ladder.

Charlie, Wonka, and his family started to explore the space hotel in Chapter 5. The three old ones who never left their bed went back into bed and insisted on being pushed into the space hotel. They were on their way to raid the hotel's kitchen when a booming voice came over the loudspeaker. It was mission control in Houston, asking who they were.

Wonka burst out in a string of nonsense words, with a few space words thrown in for good measure, such as "Mars." Therefore, back on Earth, the people in the White House were even more confused than before. The president's Chief Interpreter said it was no language he had ever heard on Earth, so, naturally, they all decided that these people must be Martians.



The President tried to talk to the people in the space hotel in Chapter 6. Under encouragement from his advisers, he was told not to anger the space aliens. So, he invited them to the White House for a visit.

Wonka doubled over, trying to keep from laughing. The rest of the group was excited to be going to meet the president at the White House. However, since they were not able to go do that, they had to think of an excuse. Charlie's parents and Grandpa Joe said that it would be rude to ignore an invitation, and that Wonka needed to come up with an excuse to get out of it. While he was thinking something up, the hotel elevator's door opened and an alien appeared inside.

Analysis

The author tends to sum up groups of characters to make them all have the same personality. For example, the three grandparents who never leave bed are all curmudgeonly, pessimistic, and prone to hurling insults. They are later summed up by the author as “the old ones.” He refers to them by that collective moniker several times. Charlie's parents never smile. That is the only trait given to them. The astronauts really have no separate personalities. They are interchangeable. They just appear to be competent at their jobs, which is why the people in charge did not believe them. Only Charlie and Grandpa Joe are different. This makes them stand out and become more relatable.

The characters are often not described physically. It is unknown if the author intends for the reader to imagine what the characters look like or if there is an assumption that the illustrator would do the work in that regard. Their clothes are described, but not much else. The reader knows that Wonka wears a top hat and tails, and that the old ones are wearing nightshirts, their only clothing.

The illustrations are simple in appearance but really have more complexity than can be found on first glance. They are line drawings, just black ink on the page. They have a scratchy quality, as if Quentin Blake, the illustrator, dashed them off very quickly. Looks are deceiving, though. There is a noticeable difference between Grandpa Joe and the old ones, even though they are all wearing the same clothing and are all about the same age. Grandpa Joe is drawn with vigor, standing up straight and smiling. The old ones are usually hunched over and twisted. It feels as if the illustrations are a child's drawings on the walls, but in a good way. They are imaginative and evocative without delving deep into any details.

Dahl pokes fun at pride throughout this first part of the book. Sometimes, his lampooning is obvious, and sometimes it is subtle. His interpretation of the political figures is very obvious. They act solely out of pride and ignorance. They are in charge so they think they know best. They believe in the status that comes with the title, but Dahl is quick to show that the emperor is naked. On a more subtle level, examine the title of the space hotel: Space Hotel U.S.A. The name of the country in the title shows



what the author thought of the pride of Americans. The fact that no one could come up with a better name for the space hotel than "Space Hotel" is also a sleight against them.

People in charge seldom know what is going on. This will become a theme throughout the rest of the book. The mission control person speaks over the astronauts when they are describing the scene. Despite the fact that the astronauts are actually there, looking at something, mission control tells them they are wrong. The president takes it a step further, not only ignoring what the astronauts are saying, but making up a story about a bomb plot being carried out by some nameless threat. It seems, in Dahl's world, that the higher up someone is in a position of authority, the less that person knows.

The president even surrounds himself with further incompetence. The general peppers his speech with explosion sound effects, for example. Miss Tibbs is the power behind the throne, and has more of a brain than the rest of them, but does not help any situation she is in.

By the end of one chapter, the President and all his aides could not decide on a course of action, and instead do nothing. This is probably a good thing. If someone is a fool, it is better for everyone if they are indecisive instead of if they actually do something.

The president thinks like a child, and Wonka does, too, but in a different way. Charlie, also looks at things through the eyes of a child. It could be all about responsibility. Wonka is childlike in his nature but always takes care of everyone around him and tries to make people happy. Charlie shares these traits. The president acts like a spoiled child with his nanny constantly reprimanding him. The old ones act like spoiled children as well, in that they expect everyone else to do everything for them and do nothing for themselves.

Some parts of this book did not age well. Dahl pokes a bit of fun at Russian and Chinese names and accents in a way that would make modern readers cringe. The Soviet Premier is named Yugetoff. The President threatens him "I'm afraid we're going to have to show you just where you get off, Yugetoff!" (29). The Premier says that the people in the elevator are not Russians, but possibly Chinese. So, the President calls the Head of the Chinese Republic. He is misconnected with a few men named Wing and Wong before finally getting the leader of China, who answers "Gleetings, honorable Mr. Plesident. Here is Assistant-Plemier Chu-On-Dat speaking. How can I do for you?" (31). This book was written decades before political correctness, and it shows. If it had been published today, it would be called racist. It would never have been marketed toward children. At the time it was copyrighted, in 1972, jokes like this were fair game. In the past few decades, however, people have analyzed pop culture very closely. At best, jokes like these would be seen as "too easy" or "not funny." At worst, Dahl would be blackballed from the industry, or sidelined into a population who only laughs at jokes like that. Many actors, directors, writers, and other pop culture mainstays get a black eye from the press when they make an offhand comment that is racial. They usually have to make a public apology or go to some sensitivity lessons to regain their status. People are allowed to be racist, as long as it does not wind up in print.



Discussion Question 1

Why are Charlie's parents never smiling?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the old grandparents never want to get out of bed?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Dahl's perception was of America? As a British author, why do you think he makes the President of the United States a character? What makes the invitation to the White House so important?

Vocabulary

footle, cracked, whackers, lixivated, flabbergasted, piffle, rasping, loopy, dotty, mic, nit, balmy, starboard, port, propulsion, booster, muddling, tensely, maggot, petrified, centigrade



Section 2: Chapters 7-11

Summary

The creature in the elevator was a real alien. It looked like a brown egg with eyes. It did not speak, but just stared at the humans. One by one, each of the five elevators came to rest on the same floor. They all opened, revealing five similarly shaped aliens. Each of them started stretching out into a snake-like shape. They formed English letters, spelling out the word: "Scram." With this, the humans pushed the bed back into the Great Glass Elevator and flew off from the Space Hotel.

As the Great Glass Elevator charged through space, a Vermicious Knid the size of a whale hunted them. It ramped up speed and rammed them, but all that did was shake the elevator and give the big Knid a bruise. It made Wonka sing a long song about wanting to help the Knid by getting it a doctor, but the doctor was really a butcher. This action took place in Chapter 8.

Chapter 9 takes the reader back to the White House. The president and his staff congratulated each other on another wonderful operation successfully performed. They felt like they just saved the world from a diplomatic disaster by inviting the aliens to the White House. The President asked his nanny/vice president to sing a song about him. Her song told the tale of how she raised him from a baby. It was clear to her and his parents that he was an unintelligent, lying boy, without any particular skills. Surely, this child would have trouble holding down any kind of job, except politician. So, they steered him toward that profession.

The astronauts aboard the Commuter Capsule figured it was safe to board the Space Hotel, since the eight "enemy astronauts" or aliens or whatever they were had fled the area. Once inside, they all discussed how wonderful the hotel looked. Then, the Knids came out of the elevators. The people in the White House heard all kinds of chomping noises and screaming. Then, the astronauts phoned them from the Commuter Capsule. They had fled back to that small ship, after losing a "couple dozen" hotel staff to monsters who ate them in one gulp.

In Chapter 10, the story returns to outer space. Wonka and company were trying to outfly the giant Knid, but it was not working. Knids were great fliers and they had no chance of going faster or farther than it.

They flew all around the Earth and came back to the Space Hotel. They watched as the Commuter Capsule was under siege by squadrons of flying Knids. Grandma Josephine was screaming at Wonka to return to Earth. Charlie, Grandpa Joe, and Wonka thought otherwise. They saw that the people in the Commuter Capsule were in deadly danger, and needed rescue. Charlie shouted "We've got to do something! There are a hundred and fifty people inside that thing!" (p. 72). The Knids bashed into the side of the Commuter Capsule and damaged the rockets, so the vehicle was stranded in space.



Charlie suggested towing the Commuter Capsule back to Earth, which Wonka thought was a splendid idea.

In Chapter 11, the heroes in the elevator acted on Charlie's plan. Grandpa Joe lowered a cable down out of the bottom of the elevator. Wonka and Charlie steered until it hooked onto the Commuter Capsule. The rope held fast, and the elevator was able to drag the capsule away. Grandpa Joe had suggested that a rope would be eaten by the aliens, but Wonka said the rope was too tough for that.

The Knids gave chase, though. The flock of them regrouped and awaited another attack. The largest one stretched into a worm the length of a football field and constricted around the elevator. The grandparents inside worried that the creature would crack the elevator, but Wonka assured them that this was impossible. It was Knid-proof.

As the elevator hooked the capsule and attempted to carry it to safety, the Knids had another plan. The large horde of them all turned into links and created a very long chain. It snaked through space toward the elevator, with the intent to hook on to the large Knid that was wrapped around it. That way, they would pull the elevator that was pulling the capsule.

One of the grandparents shouted how she wanted to go home, and that reminded Wonka that that had been, in fact, their plan all along. So, they pushed some buttons to go back to Earth. Upon reentry, the Knids burned up and turned into shooting Knids, like shooting stars.

Analysis

Wonka makes up a lot of things as he goes, so that the characters – and the reader - never know whether what he is saying is real. Sometimes, it does not matter. The reader does not need to know that flocculated is a real word, or even what it means. The reader just needs to know that it sounds nasty and painful.

For example, when Wonka is telling the president about “grobes,” he is pretending to be an alien. He makes them out to be fairly threatening. Charlie assumes that the aliens in the space hotel are grobes. Wonka says that he just made grobes up to scare the White House. But Knids are very real. It is a fine line.

The mix of fantasy and reality in Wonka's stories (as well as Dahl's) provide curious jumping off points for science to become science fiction. Wonka goes through a detailed explanation of why the Vermicious Knids never invaded Earth in the past. His explanation involves retro-rockets and friction, and the slowing down of space ships. Dahl, in his life, had enlisted in the Royal Air Force, so certainly some of that informed his writing.

Holes in the plot are covered up with jokes. For example, Wonka goes into great detail about how ferocious Vermicious Knids are. If they are so ferocious, Charlie asks, why



do they spell out the word “Scram” instead of eating the people right away? Wonka says they are proud of their ability to write, and so they show it off. This answer does not satisfy Charlie. He follows it up by asking why they write that particular word. Wonka answers that it is the only word they know. His rambling story is wrapped up neatly and no one questions him any further.

It is likely that Dahl found this explanation a lot more entertaining than if the Knids had just attacked the main characters. After all, it would not be much of a children's book if the story descended into violence and many of Charlie's closest relatives were devoured. Especially not this early in the story. Many children's authors have learned that violence for the sake of violence is distasteful and boring. Aliens who simply eat large scores of people will not be very interesting. Making them spell out words and doing quirky things – that makes them unpredictable and interesting.

Grandma Josephine seems to be the most vocal inhabitant of the big bed. This draws her into conflict with some of the other characters, who are often happy enough to follow Wonka and go along for the ride. She is worried about the Knids attacking the Great Glass Elevator, even though Wonka assures her it is Knid-proof.

In a way, this is an example of positive thinking versus negative thinking. Grandpa Joe and Charlie know they have to save the people in the Commuter Capsule, even though they have no idea how to do it. They just want to do it because it is the right thing to do. The older folks in the bed, mostly personified by Grandma Josephine, are continually thinking that all is doomed and that there is no point in anything, and the only thing to do is stay home and be safe in bed.

Wonka is completely convinced that no harm would come to them because the Great Glass Elevator is Knid-proof. Charlie and Grandpa Joe have spent more time with the man, so they know that he is a man of his word, even if his words are labyrinthine. They trust him implicitly.

This causes conflict between the old married couple, since Josephine wants them to flee back to Earth, and Joe wants them to do the right thing. Chapter 10 ends with him telling her “You be quiet, Josie. There's someone over there needs a helping hand and it's our job to give it. If you're frightened, you'd better just close your eyes tight and stick your fingers in your ears” (75).

If there is a logical explanation for something, it will not happen. If there is an illogical reason for something, it will happen. For example, it is completely illogical for a large elevator made of glass to tow a space capsule. Yet, this happened. When Grandpa Joe suggests that a rope could be eaten, Wonka said that is impossible. So, it did not happen.

Dahl certainly likes to play with words. He uses words like “spillikins.” “It's made of reinscorched steel. If they try to bite through that, their teeth will splinter like spillikins!” (75).



Reinscorched is not a word. Spillikins is a word. Dahl is obviously a collector of strange words. He peppers them into the text quite often. However, when they are mixed with completely made-up words like “reinscorched,” it gives a strange sense throughout the book. The reader never really knows what words are real or not unless they look them up. Generally speaking, the reader can still decipher the meaning without any trouble. The reader can tell, from the above quote, that reinscorched probably means something like reinforced. Spillikins, even without looking it up, appears to mean something small, as in pieces of something. Dahl gives enough context clues for the reader to understand everything that is happening, even if the language is made up.

The book gives a feeling like reading “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll. When reading that poem, which begins “’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves...” the reader does not need to know what “slithy” means. The word itself sounds like a slimy, disgusting thing. In the same way, Dahl splices strange words into sentences. Even if the reader does not know what the word means, it can easily be deciphered.

Discussion Question 1

A reader assumes that in children’s books, everything is going to be OK in the end. In a book with this much whimsy, it would be hard to imagine horrible things happening to the characters. And yet, there are some real threats throughout the book. Aliens are attacking. Some people get eaten in one bite. People are ceasing to exist. In what ways does Dahl put the reader at ease that nothing truly tragic is going to happen, at least to any named characters?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways do the illustrations help tell the story? Are they necessary? Do they provide information that the text does not? If the book came without illustrations, how would your reading experience be different?

Discussion Question 3

If Wonka and the others had not been there to stop the Knids, what would have happened?

Vocabulary

malevolent, graceful, oozy, scam, sainted, fossilized, rasped, flocculated, vindictive, friction, triumphant, preposterous, sumptuous, the vapors, clot, dawdling, abreast, re-entry, booster, yowling, starboard, jetted, flabbergasted, gaped, tapering, ropy, colossal



Section 3: Chapters 12-14

Summary

In Chapter 12, the Great Glass Elevator crashed into the roof of the Chocolate Factory, guided by Charlie, Wonka, and Grandpa Joe. It was going fast enough to smash through the roof. There was a tremendous crunching sound, and then the elevator's descent smoothed into a movement almost like a roller coaster on sturdy rails. Charlie looked around and saw that they were now in the Chocolate Factory, in the Chocolate Room. This was a jungle where everything was made of chocolate.

The crew was greeted by a horde of Oompa-Loompas. These were energetic and agreeable little people who helped Wonka run the factory. They sang a song welcoming them back, because they feared that Wonka and his friends had been eaten by the Knids.

The Oompa-Loompas pushed the old ones' bed out of the elevator. By this time, the crew was readjusting to suddenly having gravity again. This meant that the old ones were back under the covers of the bed. Wonka, however, had other plans. He wanted to get the old ones out of bed and out helping Charlie run the factory.

"You must be joking," Grandma Georgina said (90).

"I never joke," Wonka replied (90).

Georgina fought with him, saying that he had got them into enough troubles for one day. Wonka replied: "I've gotten you out of them, too. And I'm going to get you out of that bed as well, you see if I don't!"(90).

In Chapter 13, Wonka swore that he would be able to get the old ones out of bed. George, Georgina, and Josephine refused. They would not get out of bed willingly. Floating through the air in space was one thing; there was no gravity. But now that they were back on Earth, they were back to their old station: being stationary.

Wonka said he had something that could get them out of bed, but was being characteristically cagey about it. He hinted about it, so that the old ones' curiosity grew. He said it would not be a good idea, using reverse psychology to make them more interested.

Finally, he revealed his secret: a vitamin called Wonka-Vite. It was a single pill that vibrated slightly, and changed color from yellow to blue and back again. Wonka said it will make someone 20 years younger. He had tested it on a brave Oompa-Loompa. He was very old. He took two pills and became a young man again.

The Oompa-Loompas sang a song about the wonders of Wonka-Vite. The old ones seemed interested. However, they were curious about the 131 Oompa-Loompas who



tested earlier versions of Wonka-Vite. Wonka suggested that their fate was less than desirable, but of course, obscured what really happened.

Chapter 14 is a short chapter that serves only to explain the lengthy and convoluted recipe for making Wonka-Vite.

Analysis

A gauntlet is thrown, in a way, as Wonka rises to the challenge of getting the old ones out of bed. The actual mission has finally been completed. They crash land back in the Chocolate Factory, which is why they went up in space to begin with.

Yet Wonka is determined to make his next mission getting the old ones out of bed. Georgina says they had been through enough troubles. Wonka responds "I've gotten you out of them, too. And I'm going to get you out of that bed as well, you see if I don't!" (90). This implies that he saw them being in bed as another problem to solve.

Wonka tells Grandma Georgina that he never jokes, and it makes the reader wonder if this is true. Everything that Wonka says turns out to be true on some level. Usually, however, it is clouded with a strange turn of a phrase or a made-up word so that the listener never knows if he is joking. In a way, when he says "I never joke," it is a joke (90).

Again, Wonka is the master of his domain. He knows everything that is going to happen, and can predict people's behaviors. He plays the old ones, piquing their curiosity. It could be that he had this plan all along. It is pretty clear that he is going to win this fight.

Wonka remains positive even when bad things happen, including the fate of the 131 Oompa-Loompas that tried earlier versions of Wonka-Vite. Part of this is likely Wonka's can-do attitude. If he thinks of something, however bizarre it is, he knows he can do it. He is extremely positive. Another part of it is misdirection and spin. He often covers up anything that would be negative. It can be inferred that Dahl prizes people who possess positive thinking. Characters who decide that they want to try something usually succeed. Characters who are too afraid or too worried are failures before even starting. Even the people in the White House in a previous chapter are pretty ineffectual when it really comes down to it.

Wonka is very childlike. Or, rather, a mix of a child and a strange old man who has seen everything. When he is searching for his recipe, he turns out all of his pockets, revealing a bizarre assortment of keepsakes, including a yo-yo and a homemade catapult, things only a child would have, and a tooth with a filling, which only a crazy person would have.

Sometimes, being a child is a good quality, Dahl seems to say. When Charlie looks at the world through rose-colored glasses, it is a good quality. Wonka sees a world of opportunity with every invention. This childlike optimism is well regarded by the author. He describes Wonka and Charlie with a lot of energy and fun. However, the president is



also very childlike, but not in a good way. He argues with others. He demands attention. He wants everything his way. The difference is that the president is more like a spoiled child, while Charlie is more of a good kid.

Discussion Question 1

Wonka is certainly a mouthpiece for Dahl. The old ones are very vocal as well. Charlie and Grandpa Joe have some dialogue. Even the president expresses some very pointed opinions. Do any of those characters also serve as mouthpieces for the author?

Discussion Question 2

Dahl writes a half dozen or so songs throughout this book. Why does he do that? Did they reveal more than the narrative? Are they used to develop characters or events? Are they used to entertain?

Discussion Question 3

The Willy Wonka books show a fantasy land with sweets and great inventions. Do you think Dahl wants any of those inventions in real life? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

scrabbling, footling, quivered, jittery, flabbergasted, ecstatic, parasite, saucy, quivering, coattails, manticore, cockatrice



Section 4: Chapters 15-17

Summary

Once more, Wonka offered the Wonka-Vite pills to the old ones in Chapter 15. Grandpa George made him swear that they would do only what he promised they would do. Charlie questioned the pill, remembering what happened when Violet ate a pill in the previous story, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. She had a terrible fate. Wonka reminded him that he never gave her the pill; she snatched it and ate it against his warnings. This time was different. This time, he was telling them it was safe.

He placed the pill bottle between them on the bed, and the three old ones snatched at it, grabbing furiously. Wonka lost interest and wandered off. He couldn't bear to watch people fight.

There happened to be 12 pills in the bottle, so each of the old ones took four. Mr. and Mrs. Bucket each wanted one, and Grandpa Joe wanted at least one, but the old ones were being greedy. They took all four while Wonka was standing by the chocolate waterfall. He had hoped that the waterfall would drown out the sounds of people fighting, but it did not. It also did not drown out the sounds of terror when the three old ones started shrinking.

Wonka had said, several times, that each pill reduced one's age by 20. Grandma Josephine was just over 80 years old. She became a baby. Grandpa George was 81. He was now one year old. Grandma Georgina was only 78, so she disappeared.

Grandma Georgina's daughter, Mrs. Bucket, was understandably upset by her mother ceasing to exist and the potential to have to change her baby father's diapers. Wonka assured her that her mother would reappear in two years. In the meantime, she would be waiting in the Waiting Room to appear out of nothingness. Mr. Bucket thought his father-in-law was a cute baby, and did not seem to mind that his mother-in-law disappeared.

At this, the Oompa-Loompas broke out into song. They sang an almost five-page song warning about the dangers of children who take pills from the medicine cabinet.

At the beginning of Chapter 16, Charlie watched his mother be inconsolable about the loss of her own mother. Wonka said to him that it was his factory, and if he wanted to try to bring Grandma Georgina back, they could try. Charlie said if it was possible, they should at least try.

Grandpa Joe was taking care of his three-month-old wife, and Mrs. Bucket was trying to feed her father, Grandpa George. A few Oompa-Loompas were dutifully helping them. Seeing as they did not need any more help, Wonka and Charlie left them.



They strapped themselves into seats in the Great Glass Elevator and zigzagged down into the depths of the Chocolate Factory. They passed by lots of strange wonders, like entire cities of Oompa-Loompas, rock candy caverns, and liquid chocolate derricks. The tour of the factory in the first book, Wonka explained, was just the tip of the iceberg. The full tour would take three weeks.

On the trip, Wonka explained how he invented Vita-Wonk, a pill that would reverse the youth pill Wonka-Vite. He was sad about the 131 Oompa-Loompas who disappeared after testing out earlier versions of Wonka-Vite. So, he collected some of the oldest things on Earth and mixed them together to get the pill he needed. Then, he had to find them. He learned that they all wound up in Minusland, which was where you went when you suddenly were less than zero years old. They had to hurry to find Grandma Georgina. If they were too late, she would wind up subtracted.

Minusland was a gray misty wasteland that smelled like a dungeon and seemed completely uninhabited. As Chapter 17 progressed, Minusland and its assorted dangers were elaborated upon. Minusland was dreadful and frightening for Charlie and Wonka. It was described as what hell would be like, without all the heat. Additionally, somewhere out in the gloom was something else called Gnoolies. These were invisible, completely imperceptible creatures. If they bit someone, they would become minused, and then they would become the victim of long division, and then they would become a Gnooly.

They did not encounter any Gnoolies, but they soon saw Grandma Georgina, floating horizontally, looking like a minus sign. She was transparent, and when Charlie reached for her, his hand went through her. Wonka sprayed her with Vita-Wonk out of a cartoonish spray gun and she disappeared completely. Cheering, he said that she was plused back into existence, and had returned to the Chocolate Factory. However, he warned, chances are she probably received too much Vita-Wonk and was now very, very old.

Analysis

Dahl plays a very specific numbers game with the Wonka-Vite pills. Each pill reduces one's age by 20 years. There are 12 pills in the bottle. If the old ones had shared, they would have been spared their fate. If Mr. and Mrs. Bucket each had one, they would have become young adults again. If Grandpa Joe, who is not being greedy and would have been happy with one, had received it, then he would have had 20 years taken off and would still have been healthy. That would have left the three old ones with three pills each. They would have lost 60 years each and wound up 18, 20, and 21 years old.

The old ones do not follow the rules, and are greedy, and because of that, they are punished by Dahl. They are just like Veruca Salt and Mike Teevee and the other kids from the first book. They are given warnings by Wonka, and the warnings are not heeded. Because of that, they are taken out by their own undoing.



Whenever a character is punished in Dahl's books, it is because of something they do. The Chocolate Factory is not a dangerous place unless someone does something they are not supposed to do. Those who follow the rules are rewarded; those who did not, are punished.

It is important to note that the punishment in Dahl's books often fits the crime. In the case of the old ones, wanting to be young again is not the problem. It is wanting to be too young, and preventing others from partaking in this gift, that does them in. They could have taken just a few pills and would have become full of youth and vigor. Instead, they overdo it, just like how Mike Teevee got trapped in a television. There is a bit of poetic justice in their fates.

In Dahl's books, there are always consequences. And the consequences are extreme because the situation is extreme. Reducing one's age was a very strange, wonderful, and powerful ability. It is easy to overdo it. Without thinking, the three old ones take too many pills.

There is more dual address in this section of the book, since adults and children are going to have much different points of view about aging. The idea of shaving 20 years of age away with a single pill is a tempting offer, for an older adult. Children always want to get older so they can do more things. They probably would not see the appeal in getting younger. They could see the appeal in a room full of chocolate. Even adults would love that. But to be young again is certainly geared toward older readers. Dahl was about 56 when this book was published. One pill would have been plenty.

Another case of dual address has to do with how Mr. Bucket does not seem to mind that his mother-in-law disappears. In a book full of grandiose science fiction and fantasy, and nonsense words and clowning around, this is a little bit of adult humor that Dahl sneaks in.

Charlie is always thinking like Wonka, but for the most part, a few steps behind. They are kindred spirits. They are both brave, and want the best for others. They both care deeply for their family. For Charlie, his family is literally his biological relatives. For Wonka, his family are the Oompa-Loompas. They are the people he spends all of his time with, and who he can always count on. When they had been minused after testing, before the book started, he felt bad and knew he had to find them and figure out a way to bring them back. Charlie would probably do the same for the Oompa-Loompas when he becomes fully in charge. He has chosen to do so for his grandmother, after all.

Wonka starts to divest a bit of his power in this part of the book. While his inventions are still responsible for all of the action, he makes very few choices. He leaves the decision to take the pills up to the grandparents. He leaves the decision of whether to rescue Grandma Georgina up to Charlie. It can be argued, however, that Wonka always knows what he is doing. He knows, deep down, that the old ones would probably cause trouble. Why else would he give them a bottle with 12 pills? He also probably knows that Charlie would make the right decision to rescue his grandmother.



Discussion Question 1

How much control does Wonka really have over the actions and events in the book? Does he expect characters to act a certain way? If so, then why do bad things happen to characters that make bad decisions?

Discussion Question 2

What would Dahl suggest is a better way of getting someone to do what they should do: gentle manipulation and reverse psychology or rewards and punishment?

Discussion Question 3

Are the consequences to taking the pills worth it for the effect they give?

Vocabulary

solemnly, squabbles, rabble, ruffle, nought, gin, trifle, laxative, chromosomes, jump seat, pneumatic, quarry, derricks, fusty, inhuman



Section 5: Chapters 18-20

Summary

Charlie and Wonka returned triumphantly to the chocolate room in Chapter 18, but the rest of the family looked scared. Lying in the bed was a woman so old she looked fossilized. Charlie embraced her as Grandma Georgina, but the rest of the family was wary.

They needed to give her Wonka-Vite to offset the overdose of Vita-Wonk that she received. Mrs. Bucket did not want any more meddling from Wonka, but Wonka convinced her that he was the only one who would be able to turn her back to the way she was. He offered to make her even younger, but no one but Charlie and Grandpa Joe trusted that he would be able to do it right. In order to give her enough pills, they first had to determine how old she was. One pill would remove 20 years. Wonka tried, but could not get her to remember her age. Charlie did better, asking what the earliest thing she could remember was. She remembered traveling on the Mayflower. They finally guessed that she was 358 years old. Wonka administered the correct number of pills and she slowly went back to her regular age. As she adjusted, she was going through the years, and remembering historical events, like the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Finally, she was her old self again, and was wondering who the two babies were in the bed with her.

In Chapter 19, the rest of the family was again wary of any help offered by Wonka. They were afraid of his pills and thought the two babies would age too far. Grandma Georgina in particular worried about an overdose so great that they would turn her husband into a 20,000-year-old caveman. Charlie assured her that when administered the correct amounts, the medicine would work just as it was intended to do.

Charlie and Wonka administered drops of Vita-Wonk to the baby grandparents and they instantly became their old selves again.

Wonka repeated that the old ones would enjoy helping Charlie run his Chocolate Factory in the beginning of Chapter 20. They replied that they would rather stay in their bed, as usual. Just then, a helicopter landed in front of the factory, and the Oompa-Loompas became very excited about something. They brought forth an oversized letter in an oversized envelope. Inside was a letter from President Gilligrass. It stated that the 136 people aboard the Commuter Capsule had been rescued by eight brave astronauts in a strange vehicle. Radar had tracked that vehicle to the Chocolate Factory. The president extended an invitation to the eight heroes to come be his guests at the White House. There was much rejoicing. Grandpa Joe and Charlie danced on the shore of the chocolate river. They all started toward the helicopter, but the old ones asked to be pushed in their bed. Wonka explained that there was no way to fit the bed on the helicopter, so they would have to stay. He nudged Charlie toward the door and hoped his reverse psychology would work. It did. The three old ones sprang out of bed and ran



to keep up. They had all the energy in the world, they had just been lazy all this time. They were still in their nightshirts, so Charlie suggested that they ask the helicopter pilot to land on the roof of a department store so they can pick up something to wear that would be suitable for a fancy trip to the White House. Wonka complimented Charlie on his ingenuity, and they all left the Chocolate Factory together.

Analysis

Charlie really comes into his own during this section, becoming the leader he will have to be to run the Chocolate Factory. Wonka is unable to save the day, but Charlie can. Wonka is unable to get Grandma Georgina to figure out her age, but Charlie asks the right questions. It is Charlie who is able to talk his older relatives into taking the Vita-Wonk. He tells them that if used correctly, the chemicals will do just what they are supposed to do. He also comes up with the idea to land the helicopter on the roof of a department store for his grandparents. He has become a problem solver over the course of this book.

The transition of ownership is definitely happening in this final part. Whereas throughout the bulk of the book, Wonka runs pretty much everything, here Charlie is taking center stage. His decisions help save people. True, all of the action is still dependent on Wonka and his crazy inventions, but without Charlie, the old ones would have stayed babies or minuses.

Trust is an issue with Charlie's family, particularly the old ones. Every time Wonka tries to convince them of something, they do not believe him. On top of that, they insult him every chance they get. Only Grandpa Joe and Charlie trust Wonka, probably because of what they had already been through together.

Granted, Wonka does not help matters in the way he acts or speaks. He is very hard to trust because most people see what he does as dangerous. He dresses ridiculously. He speaks in circles, and often in nonsense. His inventions often cause trouble if they are not used as directed. That is where the problem is: The family members do not trust Wonka, but they themselves are untrustworthy with the pills.

The book is very episodic. The first episode is the launch into space. The second is the fight with the Knids. The third is the issues with aging and de-aging. Dahl could have stopped the book earlier, and have the entire book deal solely with space aliens. He could have let it go another episode or two, and lengthened the book. Perhaps he was aiming for a certain length.

There was intended to be another sequel, Charlie in the White House, but it was never finished. According to online sources, the Roald Dahl museum has the first chapter on display.



Discussion Question 1

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator was copyrighted in 1972. Did any events of that time, either in America or Britain, inform his treatment of politics in this book?

Discussion Question 2

Dahl was middle-aged when he wrote this book. What do you think of his characterizations of senior citizens, given that he was not one yet? What do you think of his characterizations of children, since it had been a long time since he was one?

Discussion Question 3

Was the book brought to a satisfying conclusion? Considering there was a third book planned, was it necessary?

Vocabulary

catastrophe, meddling, cantankerous, row (as in a fight), gallant, pinging



Characters

Willy Wonka

Willy Wonka is the retiring owner of the Chocolate Factory. He is a master creator of sweets and inventor of fantastic things. With his helpers, the Oompa-Loompas, he has run the factory for an unknown amount of time. He is now in the process of passing the reins over to Charlie Bucket, a boy who won the factory in the previous book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Wonka is full of excited energy. It seems that he can barely contain his thoughts. The gibberish that sometimes spews from his mouth is proof that he can not keep up with his own brain. Sometimes, though, what appears to be nonsense is really carefully worded thoughts. In these times, he is congenially patronizing as he talks over the heads of slow-witted adults.

He is very childlike. At one point, he has to empty his pockets, and the items he unearths are those a child would have: a stinkbomb, a fake fried egg, a yo-yo, etc. He has a childlike optimism, and he often hopes for the best. He gets disappointed if someone fails to hold up to his standards and acts greedy, short-sighted, or mean.

Even though Charlie is referred to as “our hero,” in the opening chapter, it is clear that Wonka is the main character. Most of the action springs from his decisions. All of the action happens because of one or more of his inventions.

It is also fairly clear that Wonka is a mouthpiece for Dahl. Wonka prizes creativity, bravery, and being nice. The author rewards characters that show those qualities. Much has been written of Dahl using his books as morality plays, punishing people who are gluttonous, ignorant, or misbehaving.

Charlie Bucket

Charlie Bucket is a nice, polite, and brave boy. He loves his family very much, but he has a singular bond with his Grandpa Joe that is closer than even his relationships with his own parents. His parents and grandparents are older, and beaten down by the world. In Grandpa Joe, and in Wonka, he finds kindred spirits that still have hope, and who still enjoy the good things in life. Charlie definitely acts like a child throughout the book, but he is a well-behaved child. He is also older than his family members in a way, because he tries to coax them into trying new things and being brave.

Grandpa Joe

Although he is as old as the old ones in the bed, Grandpa Joe is very different from them in one very important way: he tries. It does not matter if he fails, or if he is afraid,



or if he has his doubts. The important thing is that he tries. He could be bedridden for the rest of his life, like his wife or the other two grandparents. Instead, he has pep, he has gumption, and he is on the forefront of whatever adventure they are on.

The Old Ones

The old ones are the three grandparents of Charlie's who never leave the bed of their own free will. They are Grandma Georgina and Grandpa George, who are his mother's parents, and Grandma Josephine, who is his father's mother. Josephine is Grandpa Joe's wife. Throughout the book, they generally do not want to do anything. They argue or sling insults whenever anyone wants them to do anything. At the very end, they leave the bed of their own volition, proving that they can get up and walk around if they are properly motivated.

President Lancelot R. Gillygrass

The President of the United States, Lancelot R. Gillygrass, is a buffoon. He is ridiculous and foolish. He is prone to rash judgments. He surrounds himself with advisers who have equally bad ideas. The only one who holds sway over him is his vice president, because she had also been his nanny. He acts childish, but not in a good way. He feels the need to tell everyone really bad knock-knock jokes, for example. When he does this, he does not come off as charming (like when Wonka acts childish) but as a fool.

Vice President Miss Tibbs

Miss Tibbs is the vice president of the United States, and the only person in the White House who the president takes orders from, because she used to be his nanny. She is firm, unrelenting, and a foreboding person. She frequently tells others to stop talking or offering any more bad ideas.

Vermicious Knids

The Vermicious Knids are aliens from the planet Vermes. They are as tall as a large boy, wide as a fat man, and shaped like an egg balanced on its pointy end. They are slightly wet, wrinkled, and greenish-brown. They have big round eyes toward the top. They can stretch their bodies into practically anything, as if made of clay. Most of them are small, but one of them is as large as a spaceship.

The Astronauts

The three astronauts piloting the Commuter Capsule are named Shuckworth, Shanks, and Showler. They are described en masse: "all of them handsome, clever and brave" (11). Like many of the other groups of characters in Dahl's book, they are



interchangeable with each other. Just as the three old ones are more or less the same, the three astronauts are more or less the same. It does not matter which one of them says a particular line; it could have come from any of them.

The Oompa-Loompas

The Oompa-Loompas are diminutive people who work in the Chocolate Factory. They are energetic and eager to please. They are not really described in terms of features, but the artist's rendition shows them with bright expressions, wild hair, and rags for clothes. They spring into action whenever someone needs help of any kind, and are even brave enough to test Wonka's potentially dangerous creations. They also have a tendency to break into song. They would all sing the same lyrics without any preparation. The songs are lessons on how to behave based on something that had just happened around them. Wonka does not think of them as employees. He describes them as his friends who help him run the factory.

The Buckets

Mr. and Mrs. Bucket are Charlie's parents. They are often described as worrying or frowning. They are not unkind people. It is clear that they cared for Charlie and their family. However, after working hard all their lives, they are tired and worn down and do not have much left to smile about. They tend to be wary of any of Wonka's schemes, and have to be gently talked into going along with them.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Great Glass Elevator

The Great Glass Elevator makes all locations possible, and therefore represents the power of the imagination. It matches the flights of fancy of its creator, Willy Wonka. Anywhere Wonka needs to be, it can take him. It opens any door to a myriad of fantasy worlds, like outer space or a room made entirely out of chocolate. Of course, some of these fantasy worlds are dangerous, like Minusland.

The Chocolate Factory

Literally anything can happen in the Chocolate Factory, which symbolizes fantasy in the novel. Created by Wonka, and manned by his friends the Oompa-Loompa, this is a fantasy land on par with Neverland or Wonderland. Every time a door opens, it leads to a new room with strange new possibilities. All these places have rules that must be followed, however. Those who follow those rules are allowed to enjoy the fantasy. Those who do not follow the rules are removed in some way.

Space Hotel “U.S.A.”

The Space Hotel “U.S.A.” represents the limits that wealth and opulence can go. It is more than just a hotel, it is a monument to greed. It also shows very poor planning. Its creators wanted to make money so badly that they did not think about if this hotel is safe.

Willy Wonka

Willy Wonka symbolizes several things, as he fulfills several roles in the book, as well as in Charlie's life. He is a surrogate father, who is more fun and agreeable than his real one. He is a family member Charlie always wanted. He is a playmate extraordinaire. He is like a reverse boogeyman, in which he is practically spun out of imagination, can seemingly do anything, but in this case he is beneficial.

Wonka-Vite

Wonka-Vite symbolizes the wish of people to become younger. It was a pill made from a variety of fantastical ingredients, like the hoof of a manticore and the trunk (and suitcase) of an elephant. It changed color from yellow to blue and vibrated slightly, as if full of youthful energy. One pill would reduce the recipient's age by 20 years. The old ones took too many and that started the adventure of trying to change them back.



Vita-Wonk

Vita-Wonk is created as an answer to mistakes that were made in the past, so it represents making amends. The opposite of Wonka-Vite, this would make people older. Wonka invented it after Wonka-Vite. Too many Oompa-Loompas had volunteered to take test versions of Wonka-Vite and ended up too young. This changed them back, because Wonka felt bad about what he had done to his friends. It was made from old ingredients, like the tail of a 207-year-old giant rat.

The bed

The bed represented the unwillingness of the old ones to try anything new. It was where the old ones spent the majority of the book. Unless they were floating about the Great Glass Elevator because there was no gravity, they were confined to bed. Any time they were offered anything, the old ones refused, saying they were too old and could not leave bed. Only at the end, when they were offered a trip to the White House in a helicopter, did they get up on their own volition.

Minusland

Minusland can be considered an allegory of purgatory, in that this is where people linger before they are brought into the world. Minusland is a gray smokey land of nothing. When Wonka and Charlie see Grandma Georgina, she is transparent, floating, and turning intangible. She is just like a spirit.

The President

President Lancelot R. Gillygrass represents any politician. They are generally foolish, ignorant, child-like, and poor losers. By extension, all of the people Gillygrass surrounds himself with are equally foolish. Some are just yes men. Some are just riding on his coattails. All of them are equally incompetent.

Charlie

Charlie is a good kid, and he symbolically represents what all good children should be like: noble, brave, polite, friendly, obedient, clever, and imaginative. He is a stand-in for all things that the author wants to see in children.



Settings

Space Hotel “U.S.A.”

The Space Hotel “U.S.A.” is a sausage-shaped ship more than 1,000 feet long. Inside, there is a tennis court, swimming pool, gymnasium, children’s playroom, and 500 luxury bedrooms, each with a private bath. Much of the action in the beginning of the book surrounds the space hotel. It is described by the author as a marvel of modern technology, but there is a bit of subtext in the language suggesting that the author is critical of such extravagance.

The Chocolate Factory

The Chocolate Factory is Wonka’s claim to fame, and the reason the outside world knows of him. In actuality, he is an inventor who happens to love candy. In this book, the reader sees only the chocolate room, where everything is made of chocolate. The space adventure kicks off because Wonka wants to go back to the factory. In order to do so, he has to go up into Earth’s atmosphere, and then drop back down.

The Great Glass Elevator

The Great Glass Elevator is the device that allows all the action in the book to take place. It is exactly what it sounds like: a large elevator made of glass, with numerous buttons. These buttons allow it to travel to amazing places, such as outer space and Minusland. It is not attached to cables or anything like a regular elevator would be; it just floats freely.

Minusland

Minusland is a gray wasteland that seems to have no floor, ceiling, or walls. There is no up or down. There is nothing there except gray fog and smoke. The main inhabitants are the Gnoolies. These are imperceptible creatures that can turn someone into a Gnooly with one bite. The other inhabitants are anyone who has been minused; they float through the fog, intangible and transparent, fading in and out. They are also lying on their side, looking like a subtraction symbol.

The White House

The White House serves as the headquarters for the President of the United States, and all of his many advisers. Most everyone in the room with the president is incompetent. The president surrounded himself with such people as an explosion-happy general, an unforgiving nanny, a sword-swallower from Afghanistan who was his

childhood friend, a spy who does not know anything, and his cat. The president's invitation to Charlie's family to meet him at the White House is what finally gets the old ones out of bed.



Themes and Motifs

Good behavior is rewarded, and bad behavior is punished

Dahl has a pretty clear message running throughout the book: if a character is nice, they will be rewarded, while those who are not nice are punished. The punishments usually stem directly from how the character behaves. If a character wants something too much, they subsequently receive much too much of it.

Charlie is a nice, friendly and brave kid. He is earning his place as owner of the chocolate factory. Charlie's Grandpa Joe is also congenial and always up for whatever was thrown at him. Nothing bad happens to these characters throughout the book.

Charlie's other grandparents, collectively known as the old ones, however, are mean, nasty, insulting people. They never want to get out of bed or try anything. Their answers to everything are negative. As a result, bad things happen to them throughout the novel.

It is important to note that even though there is danger all around, in the form of evil aliens and strange inventions, the only times bad things happen to characters is when they make bad decisions. If they decide to act mean, greedy, or if they refuse to follow the rules, Dahl ensures karma befalls them with some sort of punishment.

Even if the rules are strange, they still needed to be heeded, Dahl stresses. In the world of Wonka, Charlie and his family are exposed to plenty of strange inventions that they do not understand, go places they are unfamiliar with, and meet people and creatures they have never heard of. Still, the rules have to be followed. Wonka warns the old ones to take only one Wonka-Vite pill, as taking more could reduce their ages too quickly. The old ones do not listen and end up paying the price. Their greed for youth ends with two of the old ones as infants and the third grandparent minused.

Dahl is known for his books being morality plays. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the other four children touring the factory get taken out because of their own personal failings. Matilda punishes her lying parents and evil principal, even while the principal punishes naughty children.

Sometimes, these rules get reiterated by the Oompa-Loompas. They sometimes come out and break into song about whatever lesson should be learned. In one instance, the rule is not meant for the characters, but for the reader. After some of the characters take Wonka-Vite pills, the Oompa-Loompas sing a long song warning children who are reading not to take pills from their home medicine cabinets.



Fantasy and Reality Intermix

In a reality where people can get into a Great Glass Elevator and fly into outer space, the boundaries of what is real and what is imaginary gets fuzzy. Throughout the story, the characters question Wonka. They do not think he is capable of certain things, yet he always is. It seems if something is impossible, like a Knid-proof flying space elevator, it becomes possible. If something is possible, like a rope snapping, then it does not happen.

Sometimes, the mix of fantasy and reality is just an extrapolation of real life. Like the best science fiction, the strange situations are not meant to be different from reality, but an exaggeration of it. When the characters travel out into space, there is a weird mix of fantasy and reality. The space hotel is very much a fantasy element. However, it is really just an exaggeration of what happens in real life. There are resorts in third world undeveloped countries. The resorts have every modern convenience that money can buy, but the surrounding residents live in squalor. Having luxury in the depths of space is just the next step. This book was published decades before the first space tourists in the twenty-first century, where people could spend millions of dollars to accompany astronauts.

Some of the fantasy is based on reality from Dahl's life. Throughout the book, there are a lot of fantasy elements and whimsical names for things. Yet, the descriptions of how space craft move is oddly accurate. Retrorockets and other mechanisms are used appropriately. It could be that Dahl's experience in the Royal Air Force informs a lot of this action. Just a few years before the book was published, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Dahl would likely have found this fascinating, and perhaps it inspired some of this book.

Fantasy and reality mix even in Dahl's selection of language. It seems that every chapter has at least one word that is very rare, but real, and at least one word that is made up. Words like lixivated, fusty, dotty, nit, and troculated are sprinkled in. These are real words, but rare and strange ones.

Fantasy and reality even mix in things that Wonka says. It is quite clear that the things Wonka says makes sense to him, when he means them to. He mumbles nonsense from time to time just to entertain himself or to confuse foolish people. But at the heart of some of his statements there is some truth hidden. Consider this quote from Chapter 3, page 18:

“What if my beard were made of green spinach? Bunkum and tummyrot! You'll never get anywhere if you go about what-iffing like that. Would Columbus have discovered America if he'd said 'What if I sink on the way over? What if I meet pirates? What if I never come back?' He wouldn't even have started! We want no what-iffers around here, right Charlie? Off we go, then!”

In the quote, there are nonsense words like “bunkum.” There are made-up words like “what-iffing” that the reader can easily understand. Hidden within all these strange



words is Wonka's feeling that people should not let fear guide their choices. It is a noble idea, but it has to get mixed up in Wonka's mind before it comes out.

Wonka is a mouthpiece for Dahl

Even if what Wonka is saying is gibberish, he is still a mouthpiece for Dahl. The author uses the main character to voice his own opinions about children, senior citizens, politicians, and several other types of people. Sometimes, these opinions are spoken plainly. Sometimes, they are obscured by fanciful language.

The morals that the book tries to impart are ones that the author held dear. Do not be mean. Do not be greedy. Be kind. Have fun. Try new things. Love your family and friends. Everything in moderation. Listen to other people and learn from them. These messages are taught by Wonka throughout the book, whether the characters learn from them or not.

Dahl wrote this book when he was in his 50s, after the success of previous books. He might have seen himself as an elder statesman, imparting wisdom. However, he was still young enough to remember how to play. In this way, too, he was very much like the title character.

When Wonka's speech is mixed up with nonsense words, it is very easy to imagine Dahl saying these things as well. Dahl is a curator of strange words, and he uses them with glee as he describes what is happening. Wonka uses strange words as well. And, if there is not a real word that works, a fake one is improvised.

Even in narration, Dahl is still speaking through Wonka. There is one segment of Chapter 15 where the reader is made privy to Wonka's thoughts. In this scene, the old ones are fighting over the 12 pills of Wonka-Vite that would make them younger.

"It was an unhappy truth, he told himself, that nearly all people in the world behave badly when there is something really big at stake" (107).

This is certainly Dahl speaking directly to the reader, driving home an important message. It is not hidden in any strange language, but is presented very plainly so it would be understood even by children. Dahl wants to make sure that readers pick up on this.

People in charge seldom know what is going on

Authority figures in Dahl's books rarely know what is really going on. They usually blather about what they think is happening. They often think they are in control. They always order other people around who know more than them. The same happens in this book.



The President of the United States, Lancelot R. Gilligrass, is a Napoleonic fool. An unimpressive man without any verifiable strengths, he nonetheless bosses everyone around in the White House. The only one who has any sway over him is the vice president, because she is his nanny. Dahl, no doubt, enjoys subverting the power structure by making a vice president be the boss. Surely he also enjoys a president being reprimanded as if he is a spoiled child. All of the advisers, generals, and experts that come to speak to the president are completely worthless. They are his inner circle, the tops of their fields. And yet, they are just as useless as he is. It does not take deep analysis to see that Dahl has a sarcastic view of politics, and perhaps American politics in particular.

When there is direct proof of something, the ignorant people in charge still never sway in their opinions. This happens when mission control and the president do not believe what the astronauts are seeing. Even though the astronauts (who are described as good at their jobs) are seeing things first hand, the people in charge tell them they are wrong. Similarly, the old ones do not believe anything Wonka or Charlie tells them despite the fact that everything they say has been right so far.

Even the leader of the Knids is a fool. It leads the attack on the Great Glass Elevator, and gets a bruise on its bottom to show for it. When it becomes the main anchor for a chain of Knids, trying to capture the commuter capsule, it winds up leading its brethren to their deaths, as they all burn up in the atmosphere.

The exception to this rule is Willy Wonka. He is certainly in charge throughout the bulk of the story. All of the plot elements in the book hinge upon his decisions. There are a few times that Wonka defers to Charlie. For example, when he asks Charlie if they should go to Minusland to save Grandma Josephine. It can be argued that Wonka knows that Charlie is going to say "yes." In another situation, Charlie's quick thinking saves the day in the elevator. However, it is still Wonka controlling the elevator. Wonka is generally in charge, and people assumes that he does not know what is going on. The old ones, particularly, question his every statement. To be fair, his statements read like riddles at times. By any standard, he is not a respectable leader. Wonka appears to be the exception that proves the rule because he is in charge and he actually knows what is going on.

However, he does not always let the others know what is going on. Wonka is cagey. Sometimes he keeps people guessing because he is entertaining himself. It may also be that he wants to inject a little uncertainty, fantasy, and fun into grumpy people's lives.

Children are never in charge of anything. That is why it is so exciting for Charlie to be in charge of an entire Chocolate Factory. In Wonka's mind, only a child can have the innocence and simplicity to run his fantasy kingdom. Charlie has not yet been corrupted by adulthood.



Dahl reaches all readers through dual address

Throughout the book, Dahl addresses both kinds of readers: the children who the book is marketed toward, and the parents that might be reading to the children. This kind of dual address is common in children's fiction, and it is quite clear in this book. There is a physical story about fantastic adventures for kids, and some deeper meaning for the adults.

The average child reading this book will not get beyond Wonka's crazy contraptions and the silliness that ensues. There is a strong, fast-moving surface story that will carry children into space, through and below the Chocolate Factory, and to bizarre realms like Minusland. Some things in the book are simply what they are. The Knids, for example, are simply evil aliens. The author has no agenda in making them represent something for adults.

Children will gloss over language that they might not understand. They might not catch the subtleties. After all, when words like "spillikins" are bandied about, it might be difficult to know everything that is really going on. The temptation to just read past it and get to the next good part would probably carry them through.

If the child grows up and re-reads this book as an adult, they will learn the subtexts that are pervading the book. As a child, they might think that the president is acting silly. As an adult, they will pick up on the satire of a president acting like a spoiled manchild. A child might not be overly concerned about the old ones never leaving bed. An adult would see that Dahl is poking fun at lazy grown-ups who never do anything fun anymore. A child might be sad that Mr. and Mrs. Bucket are always sad. An adult would understand why they are sad. Certainly, any child can understand how sad Mrs. Bucket felt as her mother disappears. Only an adult would catch the joke that Mr. Bucket is all right with the idea of losing his mother-in-law.

Some of Wonka's linguistics are really for adult readers, as children will not get the subtleties. Wonka often plays on words, mixing babble with truth. This leaves the reader the challenge of parsing what is really meant from what is meaningless. Wonka is written similarly to the clown characters from classic literature. For example, in Shakespeare, usually there is a nurse or a handmaiden who, on the surface knows nothing, but through her dialogue hints at what is really going on. Moliere always has at least one fool who is really wise. Delving farther back, Greek mythology is populated with fortune tellers and seers who give portents that the heroes do not understand until it is too late and they meet their fate. It might be a bit over-the-top to compare Willy Wonka to these characters, but they serve the same purpose: They are wise people who are thought of as fools. They appear to be comic relief, but they are really more. They tell characters what is going to happen, whether the characters want to believe it or not. The difference is that Wonka is the main character when the nurse, clown, or seer is usually a mid-sized character.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told in third person but is not omniscient. The reader does not know anything that is not revealed by the characters. Very rarely does the reader get glimpses inside the characters' minds. One example that stands out happens in the Chocolate Room. Wonka has just given the old ones the bottle of Wonka-Vite. Once they started fighting over the pills, Wonka wanders off. Dahl lets us in on his thoughts a bit. He cannot stand to watch people fight. It is a rare moment of quiet introspection that the reader is invited to, because usually Wonka is a riddle. He rarely shows his hand.

Language and Meaning

Roald Dahl is a curator of strange words. There are a lot of unusual words mixed into the book. And if there is not a specific word that exists, the author makes one up. The reader might not know what a manticore is, for example, although it is a creature from mythology. It is listed as an ingredient in one of Wonka's concoctions. The reader might have never seen the word "tummyrot" in print, either. However, the way it is presented, as one of Wonka's outbursts, it really does not matter. The language is peculiar and there are a lot of strange words, but the reader can figure out what is happening without knowing the definitions.

The tone is very light and whimsical. Even if the author is describing the crunching noises of evil aliens as they eat, it is not done so in a frightening way. It is done in a cartoonish way. The language, and the tone of voice, used by each character matches the character. If Wonka spoke in a word bubble, the word bubble would be shaped like a curlicue. Charlie's language is pretty straightforward. The old ones' speech is pointed and accusatory.

Structure

All of the action took place in a single day. In fact, at the end, the characters were a bit amazed at all they had seen and done in that day. When they were invited to the White House, Wonka said it was time to go on to their next adventure. Presumably this could have happened in the same day as well.

Many chapters ended with a cliffhanger. For example, at the end of Chapter 6, the main characters see a Vermicious Knid appear in an elevator. This made the story move along a lot more quickly. The chapters were extremely short, as well. These decisions by the author made for a quick read.



Quotes

Dear lady, you are new to the scene. When you have been with us a little longer, nothing will amaze you.”

-- Willy Wonka (chapter 1)

Importance: Here, Wonka is telling Grandma Josephine about how the Great Glass Elevator works. In his typical style, he never really completes the story telling her exactly how it works, but just gives enough to create some mystery. It is one of the first amazing things that the other grandparents (besides Joe) experience, and they are completely unprepared for it.

What if my beard were made of green spinach? Bunkum and tummyrot! You'll never get anywhere if you go about what-iffing like that. Would Columbus have discovered America if he'd said 'What if I sink on the way over? What if I meet pirates? What if I never come back?' He wouldn't even have started! We want no what-iffers around here, right Charlie? Off we go, then!

-- Wonka (chapter 3)

Importance: Grandma Georgina and the Buckets are worried about going on board the space hotel. Wonka tells them that there is no point in getting too worried about things. He assures them that they will be safe and that the adventure will be fun.

Now let's for heaven's sake stop this nonsense once and for all.

-- Willy Wonka (chapter 10)

Importance: Wonka has an interesting definition of nonsense. In this particular case, he is chastising Grandma Josephine for being scared of the giant Knid flying alongside the Great Glass Elevator. He has already assured her that his elevator is Knid-proof, so there should be nothing to worry about. Truly, a normal person would still be terrified. It is a logical reaction to have. However, Wonka feels that her terror is nonsense because a Knid-proof space-faring elevator is realistic to him.

Inside his study in the White House sat Lancelot R. Gilligrass, President of the United States of America, the most powerful man on Earth.

-- Narration (chapter 4)

Importance: This is how Gilligrass is introduced in person. He is built up as being big and important, and as the next few pages showed, he is a big and important buffoon.

The door of the one on the left was sliding slowly open and the watchers could clearly see that there was something...something thick...something brown...something not exactly brown, but greenish-brown...something with slimy skin and large eyes...squatting inside the elevator!

-- Narration (chapter 6)



Importance: This is how Dahl introduces the first Knid to the reader. Note how he drags the experience out with ellipses in order to produce a sense of time and suspense.

We've got to do something! There are a hundred and fifty people inside that thing!"
-- Charlie (10)

Importance: In the battle between the heroes and the Knids, the heroes have a chance to leave. They could return to the Chocolate Factory and be safe. After all, the Great Glass Elevator is Knid-proof, as Wonka claims. Charlie sees things differently. He sees that there are innocent people in the Commuter Capsule who need their rescue. This quote is proof of how Charlie always tries to do the right thing.

You be quiet, Josie. There's someone over there needs a helping hand and it's our job to give it. If you're frightened, you'd better just close your eyes tight and stick your fingers in your ears.
-- Grandpa Joe (chapter 10)

Importance: Grandpa Joe admonishes his wife, who is scared of the Vermicious Knids. The Great Glass Elevator have come close to the Space Hotel, and the Knids are attacking the Commuter Capsule. Grandma Josephine wants her family to flee. Grandpa Joe wants to help the people in the Commuter Capsule because it is the right thing to do.

A little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men."
-- Willy Wonka (chapter 12)

Importance: This is another example of Dahl speaking through Wonka. Obviously, Dahl is a fan of a little nonsense now and then. In this particular case, Grandma Georgina is complaining about how she had never met a man who had spoken so much nonsense. Prior to this, Mrs. Bucket notes that they took the long way around to re-enter into the Chocolate Factory. Wonka replies that he had to, to avoid the traffic. The fact that this little phrase rhymed gives it a quotable quality. This sentence is spoken in the movie version of "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

I never joke.
-- Willy Wonka (chapter 12)

Importance: Grandma Georgina thinks that Wonka must be joking when he says that he can get the three "old ones" out of bed to help work the Chocolate Factory. He replies that he never jokes. Perhaps this is true. Everything he says does have a ring of truth to it.

Go on, Josie. Give it a try. I did. It was easy."
-- Grandpa Joe (chapter 13)

Importance: Grandpa Joe is encouraging his wife to step foot out of bed once they are



all back in the Chocolate Factory. He is much different than the “old ones,” in that he actually tries to do things.

It was an unhappy truth, he told himself, that nearly all people in the world behave badly when there is something really big at stake.

-- Narration (chapter 15)

Importance: The narration takes a rare look into Wonka's mind here, showing the reader his thoughts. At the moment, the three old ones are fighting over the age-reducing Wonka-Vite. Wonka has no appetite for watching people fight, and he has wandered off.

Charlie, I can see that the factory is going to be in good hands when I retire. You learn very fast. I am so pleased I chose you, my dear boy, so very pleased.

-- Wonka (chapter 19)

Importance: Wonka says this to Charlie as Charlie is trying to convince his family to give the aging medicine to his grandparents, who are babies. The rest of the family members are untrusting of Wonka, but Charlie figures out the rules of all of Wonka's weird science, and he knows what is safe and what is not.