

George's Marvelous Medicine Study Guide

George's Marvelous Medicine by Roald Dahl

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Dahl, Roald. *The BFG*. Puffin Paperback Edition, 2013.

George's *Marvelous Medicine* is a children's novel by Roald Dahl that follows the misadventures of George in attempting to make a medicine to make his Grandma a nicer person. When the novel begins, George's mom, Mary, is going shopping in town while George's father, Killy, is out working on the farm. Mary tells George to behave and to remember to give Grandma her medicine at 11 o'clock. George is then left with cranky, mean, and selfish Grandma. Nothing George does for her is good enough, so he decides to make her a new medicine that will change her.

George sets to work on the medicine at once, adding everything from jujube fruit juice to spices, shoe polish, engine oil, and toothpaste. George brings the marvelous medicine to a boil, then pours some into Grandma's medicine bottle. George then gives Grandma the medicine. It causes her to grow enormous, leading her to believe she is magical. George says this is not true, and demonstrates how the medicine works on a chicken. The chicken grows gigantic. It is at this time that both Mary and Killy get home. They are amazed by what they see. Killy is especially amazed because this means that large animals will ensure no one ever goes hungry again. He decides the medicine must be mass produced for farmers, which will make Killy and the family rich while making George famous.

Unfortunately, George's second test batch of the medicine does not turn out well like the first. Tested out on a chicken, all it does is to grow the legs of the chicken because it is missing flea powder and shoe polish. The third batch of the medicine turns out only to grow the neck of a chicken, as the medicine is missing engine oil and antifreeze. The fourth batch of medicine has the opposite effect. It causes chickens to shrink. Grandma, angry and mistaking the medicine for tea, drinks it. She rapidly shrinks until she disappears altogether. George's father is delighted, while George's mother is sad at first. Ultimately, George's mother believes Grandma disappearing has been for the best. George himself comes to feel trembly, as he knows he has been able to touch the world of magic with his medicine.



Grandma - George Begins to Make the Medicine

Summary

Grandma – Eight year-old George's mother goes out shopping on Saturday morning. She reminds George to behave, and to give Grandma her medicine at 11 o'clock. George is very bored, as his family lives on a farm and there is nothing to do. He wonders what kind of trouble he can get into. He does not like Grandma because she is selfish and grumpy. Grandma only ever treats George badly when his mother and father are not around.

George makes Grandma some tea, but Grandma is not happy with how George makes it. Grandma tells George he is growing too fast, and will become stupid and lazy. Grandma tells George to grow down, not up. She also tells George to eat lots of cabbage, with caterpillars and slugs in them. Grandma explains cabbage tastes best this way, and explains she also likes to eat beetles and earwigs. Grandma tells George that some people know of magic, darkness, and dark things. This scares George, who runs into the kitchen. She calls after him, saying it does not matter how far he runs, he will never get away.

The Marvelous Plan – George hates Grandma, and decides to take her on. He contemplates putting a snake in her dress or locking her in a room with six black rats, but he does not have any of these things. Instead, he decides to make her a magic and marvelous medicine that will either cure her, or blow her head off. George sings a song about the medicine and what it will include, from bugs and jumping fleas to bumblebees and juice from a jujube fruit. George has an hour before 11 o'clock to make the medicine.

George Begins to Make the Medicine – George pulls out a giant pot, which Grandma hears and questions him about. George says he is just tidying the kitchen. He decides that no matter what he finds that is runny, powdery, or gooey, it will go in the medicine. He begins working his way from room to room in the house. For example, he puts in Goldengloss Hair Shampoo, believing it will wash Grandma's tummy clean, while toothpaste will help to whiten up Grandma's teeth as well as things like Pink Powder, lipstick, laundry detergent powder, floor polish, flea powder, and canary seed. He also adds in things like curry powder, extra hot chili sauce, and horseradish sauce. Grandma calls out and asks if it is time for her medicine. George tells her it is not yet time.

Analysis

Family can be a good thing and a bad thing, as readers see from the very start of Roald Dahl's novel *George's Marvelous Medicine*. It is clear that George loves his mother very



much, but does not like Grandma at all. This is because Grandma is mean, cranky, and selfish. George has a very hard time dealing with her, but does his best because Grandma, though bad, is still family. The illustrations included in the novel (black-and-white pen-and-ink illustrations by Quentin Blake) reveal a visual image of Grandma as an angry, ugly, scary-looking woman who looks angrily and expectantly at George for things like a cup of tea. But even something as simple as a cup of tea (which itself comes to symbolically represent the impossibility of pleasing Grandma) cannot meet Grandma's approval, so George decides to "fix her" by making her a batch of marvelous medicine.

When George begins to make the medicine, he mixes in all sorts of ingredients that he believes will have an effect on his grandmother. Right away, George begins to notice the medicine that he is making seems magical. The reader should especially note that these common ingredients become magical. This underscores the point that Dahl makes in all of his novels in which even ordinary situations can become magical. And George's plan is quite good as well as magical. George does not wish to harm his grandmother with his magical potion, but instead wants to make her better. If her head blows off, it will be because she is that bad, but it is not George's intention to hurt her. However, as often happens in Dahl novels, the best plans can turn out bad. What the outcome of George's plan is remains to be seen, but for the time being, it is clear his intentions are only good.

Discussion Question 1

Why does George not get along well with Grandma? What is Grandma like toward George?

Discussion Question 2

Why does George decide to brew a marvelous medicine for Grandma? What does he hope this will mean for himself in the future, especially with respect to family?

Discussion Question 3

What sort of recipe does George follow when he begins to make his medicine for Grandma? Why do you think George chooses to work this way?

Vocabulary

grizzly, grunion, mischief, disobedience, beckoning, longingly, dreaded, solemn



Animal Pills - Grandma Gets the Medicine

Summary

Animal Pills – While George stays away from things that could be very dangerous, he realizes no one has ever told him to stay away from the animal medicines. He decides to use all of the animal medicines, such as the chicken medicine meant for chickens with foul pest, hen gripe, sore beaks, broodiness, and so on. George then begins stirring the mixture, which becomes thick like cream. For extra measure, he adds in things like engine oil, to keep Grandma running smoothly, and grease for her creaking joints.

The Cook-up – Grandma tells George it is time for her medicine, but George must remind her she cannot have her medicine for another 21 minutes. George boils his medicine, which gives off a rich blue smoke. The mixture smells magical and compels George to sing about the medicine he has made.

Brown Paint – When the medicine is finished, it has turned a deep, brilliant blue. George realizes the potion must be more brown, or Grandma will be suspicious. He decides to add a can of dark brown gloss paint. Grandma screeches for her medicine once more. George dumps out Grandma's real medicine and pours his marvelous medicine into the bottle. George then announces it is time for the medicine.

Grandma Gets the Medicine – George brings in the medicine to Grandma. She tells him he is late and demands a full spoonful of the medicine. George gives her a spoonful, and it causes her to leap off her chair and float in midair. She then returns to the chair, saying her insides are on fire. She begins smoking at the mouth, so George puts out the fire by giving Grandma some water. Grandma then bloats and expands like a balloon, then shrinks and grows taller and taller. Grandma is thrilled by this and demands more medicine. George gives her more medicine, and Grandma grows straight through the attic. As Grandma appears set to go through the roof, George realizes his father will be furious for all the damage done to the house.

Analysis

Family can be a good thing and a bad thing, Dahl continues to explain in his novel. Each step of the way, as George prepares the medicine for Grandma, Grandma yells at him. It is clear that family is bad as far as Grandma is concerned, which means that George's medicine is all the more important. The reader should note that, as George continues to make his medicine, he continues to add ingredients he thinks will help his grandmother – such as engine oil. Like earlier, he does not do this to hurt Grandma, but does it in order to help her. Each ingredient has a special purpose in the medicine as far



as George is concerned – and this demonstrates that George only intends good by his plans. The reader should also note that Dahl's famous and much-loved imagination is to be found in the song George sings as he mixes the medicine.

However, even good plans can sometimes turn out bad, as Roald Dahl demonstrates. When Grandma takes the medicine, it appears as if she may blow up at first – but instead, she grows very tall very fast. The plan continues to turn bad as Grandma shoots up through the floors of the house, into the attic, and through the roof where she becomes stuck. Grandma's magical growth demonstrates that magic is possible even in the most ordinary situations and settings – such as in George's life on a simple, everyday farm. However, that Grandma has now grown through the house, George is presented with the bad effects of a good magical plan – and what he will do next remains to be seen. Dahl's use of cliffhangers at the ends of his chapters is clear in George's reservations about what his father will have to say. At the same time, the reader is given a clear visual understanding of what has happened as illustrations of Grandma's head poking through the roof are presented.

Discussion Question 1

As George continues to make his marvelous medicine, what does Grandma do? Why? How does this affect George's perception of Grandma, and his desire to make a medicine?

Discussion Question 2

When does George believe his medicine is complete? Why does he not choose to add any more ingredients?

Discussion Question 3

What happens when Grandma takes George's marvelous medicine? Why does George fear his father getting angry because of this?

Vocabulary

splendid, bullocks, bewitching, staggering, frenzied



The Brown - The Pig, the Bullocks, the Sheep, the Pony and the Nanny Goat

Summary

The Brown Hen – George runs outside in time to see Grandma’s head come through the roof. Grandma declares this is proof she is magical, but George tells her she had nothing to do with it. George explains he has made her a new medicine, but Grandma does not believe him. George knows he will have to prove it, so he gives some of the medicine to a brown hen. The hen’s insides catch on fire, then the hen expands, and then the hen grows and grows. Grandma is stunned by this, but declares she is still taller.

The Pig, the Bullocks, the Sheep, the Pony and the Nanny Goat – George’s mother, Mary, returns from shopping. Mary is stunned by the giant hen and giant Grandma. Grandma gives George’s medicine the credit. George’s father, Killy Kranky, arrives a moment later. He is also stunned by what he sees. He does not care about Grandma so much as he is excited by the giant hen. Killy explains he has been trying to breed larger animals for years for better foods, so he tells George to bring the medicine along. George gives the medicine to the pig, the bullocks, the sheep, the gray pony, and the nanny goat, and all of these animals grow enormous.

Analysis

Dahl's message to readers is that magic is possible even in ordinary situations. This is clearly the case as Grandma’s head now sticks out through the roof of the Kranky farmhouse. Grandma herself claims that this is proof of her magical abilities, but George must explain it is because of the marvelous medicine he has made. He demonstrates this by feeding a hen some of the medicine, which magically causes the hen to grow enormous. When George’s father sees what George has done, rather than being angry as George first feared, his father is very happy. His father sees a good use that can come out of the medicine, which is to cure hunger around the world. The reader is treated to whimsical illustrations of giant farm animals being wondrously regarded by George and his father -a very magical illustration of a very magical and marvelous idea of the potential for feeding the hungry.

That George’s father should be happy and should see something positive with respect to the medicine is proof that family can very much be a good thing. Likewise, it also demonstrates that George’s good plan, which turned out to be bad because of Grandma’s crazy growth, is now tending toward doing good again by making large animals to bring about more and better food. However, the side effects of the medicine on Grandma serve as a bad omen for future batches of the medicine and how the medicine may affect other animals and other people in the future. Once again, Dahl



resorts to his cliffhanger endings, as the reader is anxious to see what comes of the plan and what even becomes of Grandma.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grandma take credit for the magic that made her grow? How does George respond to her?

Discussion Question 2

Why does George feed medicine to a hen? What happens to the hen? What does George's father think of the hen? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Instead of being angry about Grandma sticking out through the roof, how does George's father feel about the situation? Why?

Vocabulary

wurzel, gurgling, shrieked, gaped, colossal



A Crane for Grandma - Marvelous Medicine Number Two

Summary

A Crane for Grandma – Grandma becomes upset when she realizes she is no longer the center of attention. She begins demanding George bring her tea, but George's father tells him it is a good thing Grandma is stuck where she is. George's mom insists Grandma be helped, so Killy calls a crane company to send over a large crane to pull her out. Although the medicine has not cured Grandma's crankiness, it has cured her aches and pains. Grandma goes galloping around on Jack Frost, the now-giant pony. She demands everyone get out of her way. As the day ends, Grandma must sleep in the barn because she can no longer fit in the house.

Mr. Kranky's Great Idea – Killy tells George his new plan: he wants to produce the marvelous medicine to sell it to other farmers while becoming rich in the process. The invention means no one will ever go hungry again. George tries to explain he does not believe he can remember everything he put into the medicine in the first place. Killy says they will create a test batch, and that the empty bottles and containers in the house will tell them what George used the first time around. Killy then runs out and buys everything that is needed, then brings them back to the house for mixing.

Marvelous Medicine Number Two – George begins mixing the second batch of medicine. His father is excited the whole time. When it is finished, it is tested out on a chicken in the yard. The medicine has a different effect on the chicken, whose legs only grow rather than all of it. George then realizes the mixture is missing flea powder and brown shoe polish. Killy then rushes off to town to grab these ingredients.

Analysis

Family continues to be both a good thing and a bad thing as the novel continues. Only because of Mary's goodness does Grandma get lifted out of the house by a crane. The crane itself comes to represent just how powerful the medicine itself can be, and what lengths will have to be gone to in order to either help someone such as in Grandma's situation, or the amount of work butchering a farm animal to feed hundreds will take. Despite the experience and despite her joints hurting less, Grandma continues to be mean and to make family seem like a bad thing. Meanwhile, George's father encourages and supports George in the making of more medicine, just like a good family member should. George's father encourages George to make more medicine with two good goals in mind: to help grow larger animals to feed more people, and to make the Kranky family rich while George is made famous.



However, even good plans can sometimes turn out bad. This is true of the second batch of the marvelous medicine. George forgets to add flea powder and shoe polish. This, in turn, leads to the chicken being experimented on only growing in its legs. George's father is not worried by this, for he dashes off to town to grab the ingredients that are still missing. He has clearly become a firm believer in the idea that magic is possible even in the most ordinary settings – and with the most ordinary ingredients. The reader should note Blake's illustrations of the second mixture going wrong, which clearly demonstrate the chicken's leg's growing in tremendous proportions to the rest of its body. This further reflects the magical creativity and imagination of Dahl, in which great-legged chickens are possible from a marvelous medicine mishap.

Discussion Question 1

What is George's father's great plan for George's medicine? Is this a good plan or a bad plan? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What happens with the second batch of George's marvelous medicine? Why does this happen?

Discussion Question 3

Why does George's father encourage George to make up another batch of the medicine? What happens as a result?

Vocabulary

ancient, trample, tremendous, sainted, ordinary



Marvelous Medicine Number Three - Goodbye Grandma

Summary

Marvelous Medicine Number Three – George’s father returns home with the flea powder and shoe polish. George adds them into the medicine and mixes it up. He and his dad then try it out on another chicken, but this time, the chicken’s neck grows very long. George then remembers the medicine is missing engine oil and antifreeze.

Marvelous Medicine Number Four – George returns to mixing the medicine up. His mother and father then watch as it is tested on another chicken. This time, the chicken shrinks and becomes very small.

Goodbye, Grandma – George cannot imagine what else he has left out of the medicine at this point. Grandma, once again feeling grumpy and angry, grabs the medicine from George believing it to be a cup of tea. Steam begins pouring out of Grandma. Killy is thrilled with this, while Mary is panicked. George does not know what will happen. Grandma shrinks and shrinks until she disappears altogether. Killy says this is what happens when someone is cranky and bad-tempered. He then congratulates George on the medicine. At first, Mary is stunned at what has happened, but by noon, calms down. She believes Grandma disappearing is for the best, as Grandma was a bit of a nuisance. George remains trembly throughout the day, knowing he has touched the edge of a magic world with his medicine.

Analysis

Family can be a good thing and a bad thing. George’s father continues to encourage and support George’s efforts at making a workable potion. It is possible that the reasons the potions are not working is because George does not have the same intent these times around, or that he does not repeat the songs he sang when first making the potion. However, Grandma continues to be rude and grumpy, proving that family can be a bad thing as well as a good thing. In fact, Grandma’s badness turns out to work against her in the end. When she selfishly takes away what she believes to be tea from George, she ends up mistakenly drinking the latest batch of medicine. This ends up leading to her shrinking and ultimately disappearing. Blake provides a series of illustrations which demonstrate Grandma shrinking into nothingness.

Grand’s disappearance also demonstrates that good plans can turn out bad. Medicine Number Four has the exact opposite effect of the original batch of Marvelous Medicine, the reader will note. This is a clear example of irony, in which something has the other effect than what is intended. While nobody wanted Grandma to disappear, no one is very sad by her disappearance either, though her disappearance is not seen as good at



first by anyone other than George's dad. Ultimately, George's mother even comes around to say that Grandma's disappearance may have been for the best. But by this time, George has come to feel excited and is trembling, for he knows he has touched the world of magic through his marvelous medicine. This demonstrates that magic is possible in even the most ordinary of places. Grandma's disappearance also speaks to the idea of not all endings being happy. While a happy ending may have included Grandma coming around and becoming nice, this ending proves a timeless Dahl theme – that not all endings are happy.

Discussion Question 1

Who is to blame for Grandma shrinking into disappearance? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How do George and his parents feel about family in general, and about Grandma disappearing in particular? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What kind of ending does George's *Marvelous Medicine* have? What do you believe would have been a happy ending for the novel?

Vocabulary

magnificent, extraordinary, eureka, vital, brute, beanpole, trembly



Characters

George

George is the eight year-old main character of the novel. Kind, thoughtful, and disliking of his grandmother, George is left at home on Saturday morning by his mother in order to give Grandma her medicine at eleven o'clock. George decides to brew a medicine that will make Grandma a better person. Instead, the magical medicine that George brews causes Grandma to grow very tall, and farm animals to grow very large. George is encouraged by his father to make more medicine, but no succeeding batch is as good as the first. When Grandma mistakenly drinks the latest batch, George is not very troubled by this. Instead, he trembles with excitement because he has touched the magical world with the marvelous medicine he has made.

Grandma

Grandma is the grandmother of George, the mother of Mary, and the mother-in-law of Killy. Grandma is old, thin, angry, grumpy, selfish, and likes to boss George around. Nothing George does is ever good enough for Grandma, who demands to be given tea and medicine on schedule. Grandma is given some of George's marvelous medicine, and so grows right through the roof. Grandma spends the rest of the novel riding around on a horse and yelling at her family because they are more excited about the medicine than about Grandma being so tall. Grandma then brings about her own downfall when she mistakenly drinks a batch of the new marvelous medicine, which causes her to rapidly shrink into disappearance.

George's mother (Mary)

George's mother, Mary, is a sweet and gentle woman who is married to Killy, and whose mother is Grandmother. Mary heads into town Saturday morning, leaving George behind to give Grandma her medicine. Mary is stunned to find Grandma has grown to such heights, and is later deeply troubled when Grandma disappears. However, Mary comes to accept that it is for the best, as her mother really was a nuisance around the house.

George's father (Killy)

George's father, Killy Kranky, is a kind and insightful man. He is married to Mary and is the son-in-law of Grandma. Killy is proud of, and impressed by his son's medicine. Killy sees the medicine as a way not only to make the family rich and George famous, but to end world hunger through farmers having larger, healthier animals. Killy encourages George to make more medicine, and is later undisturbed by Grandma's disappearance, having always found her a problem around the house.



Symbols and Symbolism

Grandma's medicine

Grandma's medicine is to be given to Grandma at eleven o'clock while George's mom is in town. Although the kind of medicine Grandma takes is never mentioned, and although why Grandma is taking the medicine is never known, it is brown in color and it is understood that she must take the medicine regularly. George decides to replace her regular medicine with a marvelous medicine, instead.

Tea

Tea represents Grandma's impossible expectations. Grandma demands tea from George very early in the novel. She is unhappy with how sweet the tea is, that George has stirred the tea himself, and that George has forgotten to bring out a saucer with it. George must deal with all kinds of situations like making Grandma tea, which in turn make Grandma cranky and angry.

George's Marvelous Medicine

George's Marvelous Medicine symbolizes both George's desire to make his Grandma better, and that magic is possible even in normal settings. The medicine is a mixture of ordinary ingredients which range from toothpaste, shoe polish, engine oil and spices. Each ingredient has a special purpose. The toothpaste, for example, is designed to whiten Grandma's teeth while the engine oil is intended to help out her joints. Taken together, they become magical and make a marvelous, deep-colored medicine.

Brown paint

Brown paint is added to the marvelous medicine in order to disguise it from Grandma. The brown paint eliminates the blue color, and fools Grandma. Because of this, George is able to give Grandma the marvelous medicine without her being too suspicious.

Crane

A crane and crew represent how powerful the marvelous medicine is. A crane and crew are rented by Killy to pull Grandma out of the house after she has grown to a tremendous height. The crane and crew must hoist Grandma up into the air before setting her down on the ground. It is the only way Grandma can be freed given her height, which is in turn due to the powerful medicine George has made.



Marvelous Medicine Number Two

Marvelous Medicine Number Two is a second batch of marvelous medicine made by George at his father's insistence. The second batch has been designed in order to learn the process of making the medicine, as well as what ingredients go on. George forgets to add shoe polish and flea polish to this batch, meaning that when it is tested out on a chicken, only the chicken's legs grow.

Marvelous Medicine Number Three

Marvelous Medicine Number Three is a third batch of marvelous medicine made by George at his father's insistence. The third batch is designed to correct the problems of the second. It includes the flea powder and the shoe polish, but forgets the engine oil and antifreeze. When tested out on a cockerel, this causes the cockerel's neck to grow, but nothing else.

Marvelous Medicine Number Four

Marvelous Medicine Number Four is a fourth batch of marvelous medicine made by George at his father's insistence, and represents irony. The fourth batch is designed to correct the problems of the third. Grandma mistakes the fourth batch for tea and drinks it. This leads to her rapidly shrinking into disappearance. What the fourth batch is missing is not known. The medicine has the opposite effect of what is intended, as it makes the drinker shrink rather than grow. As such, it is ironic.



Settings

The Kranky farm

The Kranky farm serves as the main setting for the novel. Located miles away from town, the Kranky farm has a house, a barn, and many crop and animal fields. It is where George lives with his mother, father, and grandmother, and is where his father also works. The Kranky farm seems to be a very beautiful place. Apart from there being no other kids around for George to play with, he seems to have no issues with living on a farm. The only thing that troubles George on the farm is Grandma.

The house

The house is where the Kranky family lives. It is where George, his father, his mother, and Grandma spend their time when Killy is not working on the farm and Mary is not in town. The house is dreaded by George because of Grandma's presence in it, and he hates to be left home alone with her. The house is where George begins to make his marvelous medicine, going room by room to gather ingredients. It is through the floors of the house that Grandma grows after taking the medicine, and it is from the house that Grandma must be removed by crane because she is too big to get out of the house herself.

The barn

The barn is where many of the Kranky family's animals are kept. It is where Grandma comes to sleep and stay because it is the only building big enough on the farm for her to stay in now that she is gigantic. It is a relief to have Grandma in the barn instead of in the house, for as George's mom admits later on, Grandma has been a nuisance around the house.

The kitchen

The kitchen is located in the Kranky house. It is where George mixes, boils, and makes his marvelous medicine. It is also where he prepares it to serve it to Grandma. The kitchen is later where George makes three more batches of the medicine for testing out on the chickens of the farm.



Themes and Motifs

Family can be a good thing and a bad thing

Family can be a good thing and a bad thing, explains Roald Dahl in his novel *George's Marvelous Medicine*. This is especially true for George's family. Each one of his family members brings something good or bad to George's life.

George's mother is a sweet and kind woman. She is dedicated to her family and even does her best to get along with Grandma. George's mother clearly trusts her son, for she leaves him in charge of giving Grandma her medicine. George's mother also proves to be a blessing for Grandma, for without her insistence, Grandma would still be stuck between the floors of the attic with her head sticking out of the roof.

George's father is a hardworking and very insightful man. George's father loves and respects his son, and is both proud of and impressed by George's medicine. George's father encourages George to make more medicine not only to benefit the family, but to help end world hunger. George's father is a good role model for George, and as family, is a good thing for George.

George's grandmother, however, represents bad family. She is unkind, selfish, and grumpy. Nothing George ever does is good enough for her, and she seems to take delight in scaring George. Grandma continues to yell at and speak down to George for the entire novel, and her selfishness leads her to grabbing away the last batch of medicine from George, believing it to be tea. When she drinks the medicine, she shrinks into disappearance.

Even good plans can sometimes turn out bad

Even good plans can sometimes turn out bad, explains Roald Dahl in his novel *George's Marvelous Medicine*. There are two main sets of plans in the novel. Both start out good, and both end up having good and bad outcomes.

The first plan is George's idea to make a magical, marvelous medicine that will either cure Grandma or blow her head off. George hopes the medicine will help Grandma, and does not actually intend it to hurt her. However, the medicine causes Grandma to grow to a very large size, and so become a very large problem rather than stopping her from being a problem at all. While it is good that George's medicine works, it is bad that Grandma has not gotten any better. While the medicine has caused Grandma to ruin the roof, it does not make George's father unhappy.

When George's father finds out about the medicine, he wants to mass-produce it. His plan is that the medicine will make the family wealthy while making George famous and curing world hunger. However, George cannot make a batch of medicine exactly like the first batch. It causes all kinds of strange growth in the chickens it is tested on, such as



giving them very long legs or very long necks rather than causing them to grow altogether. The plan has a better ending, however, when Grandma mistakes the latest trial batch of medicine for tea, drinks it, and shrinks into disappearance.

Magic is possible even in ordinary settings

Magic is possible even in ordinary settings, explains Roald Dahl in his novel *George's Marvelous Medicine*. No matter how ordinary things may seem –the people, the place, and the things involved –magic is still possible. This is very true of George and his marvelous medicine.

George lives on a farm in the countryside with his mother, father, and grandmother. George is a normal eight year-old boy who can get into trouble sometimes but is deeply loved by his mother and father. However, George's relationship with his grandmother is much different. Grandma is mean, selfish, and grumpy. Because of this, George decides to make a special medicine that will either cure Grandma, or blow her head off.

George uses only simple things –normal ingredients –for his marvelous medicine. These things range from toothpaste to shoe polish to engine oil to spices. None of these things are magical themselves, but blended together and turned into a medicine, they become magical. The medicine itself becomes magical, as it causes people and animals to both grow and shrink. Grandma tries to take credit for her growth, but George demonstrates that it was the medicine that made such a magical thing possible. That very same magic, in a later batch of medicine, makes Grandma disappear. As the novel ends, George is thrilled and trembling because he knows he has touched the magical world through his medicine made from ordinary things in an ordinary place.

Not all endings are happy endings

Not all endings are happy endings, explains Roald Dahl in his novel *George's Marvelous Medicine*. The idea that not all endings are happy is a common theme in Dahl's books, teaching children in turn that life itself will not always be happy. That is certainly the case here. The unhappy ending comes by way of Grandma's disappearance.

Early in the novel, George wants to create a medicine that will either cure Grandma, or blow her head off. George does not actually intend to hurt his Grandma, but actually wants to help her despite what the side effects of the medicine might be. George commits to brewing that medicine, wanting to see what effect it might have on Grandma. He hopes that Grandma will become a nicer, better person, and that this will be a happy ending to his problems.

The only real effect the medicine has on Grandma is to cause her to grow to a tremendous height. This is not the happy ending that George had in mind, yet at the same time, this itself is not the real ending. The real ending comes when George mixes up several more batches of the medicine, and Grandma mistakenly drinks some of it.



This causes her to shrink into disappearance. A happy ending might have included Grandma coming around and becoming a nice person, but the ending of the novel is not happy.

Styles

Point of View

Roald Dahl tells his novel *George's Marvelous Medicine* in the third-person omniscient perspective. The narrator recounts the events of the story in which George makes a marvelous medicine to cure Grandma. The narrator knows everything going at any one time –from the things George is thinking and feeling to the things that George does. This provides a clear view to the reader of everything going on, and helps the reader to anticipate things the characters themselves do not know –and this creates humorous situations. For example, when Grandma mistakes the fourth batch of marvelous medicine for tea, the reader already knows it will cause her to shrink, while Grandma does not.

Language and Meaning

Roald Dahl tells his novel in language that is simple, inventive, and straightforward, while artist Quentin Blake provides black-and-white pen-and-ink illustrations to visually bring to life Dahl's words. The language is simple and straightforward given the target audience of the novel –children –and the language itself is inventive and whimsical given not only Dahl's talent at writing literature for children, but because he actively seeks to engage the imagination of readers. Words like *swizzle*, *squiggler*, and *spissing* are used as George crafts his medicine. At the same time, Blake's lively illustrations help young readers to form a picture of the things they are reading about, which in turn makes the book more accessible and understandable to them.

Structure

Roald Dahl divides his novel *George's Marvelous* into fifteen unnumbered, titled chapters. Each chapter deals with a specific part of the story as it unfolds. Each chapter's title references something which will occur in that chapter in relation to the overall story. This helps readers to stay focused and to move, step by step, through the novel. For example, the chapter "Grandma Gets the Medicine" involves George giving Grandma the marvelous medicine, and her rapid growth as a result, while the chapter "Mr. Kranky's Great Idea" involves George's dad's desire to mass-produce the medicine.



Quotes

Don't forget my medicine.
-- Grandma (Grandma)

Importance: When George's mother goes out shopping, she and Grandma both remind George to remember to give Grandma her medicine at eleven o'clock. George does not get along well with Grandma, and the reminder to give her medicine will ultimately lead George to creating his own medicine. Grandma's reminder helps to set the stage for the rest of the novel.

Most grandmothers are lovely, kind, helpful old ladies, not this one.
-- Narrator (Grandma)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains why George does not get along well with his grandmother. Grandma, it turns out, is not a sweet old woman, but someone very bossy, grumpy, and selfish. At the same time, Grandma is only ever unkind to George when his mother and father are not around.

A magic medicine it shall be!
-- George (The Marvelous Plan)

Importance: George hates Grandma, and decides he is going to take her on. He decides he is going to make a marvelous and magical medicine that Grandma will be defeated by, one way or another. It will either cure her completely, or it will blow her head off, he decides.

I'll use them all," George said. "Grandma needs them. Boy, does she need them!
-- George (Animal Pills)

Importance: As George begins making his marvelous medicine, he comes across the farm's animal medicines. The animal medicines cover an array of issues Grandma has. For example, the chicken medicine deals with foul pest, hen gripe and broodiness – things which Grandma has. George believes the animal medicine will help give his medicine an extra punch.

Medicine time, Grandma!
-- George (Brown Paint)

Importance: When George finishes the marvelous medicine, the color is a deep blue. He must add brown paint to the mixture to make it appear as though it is Grandma's real medicine. The medicine that George has prepared is finally ready, and he announces to Grandma that it is time to take her medicine.

By golly, she is going through the roof!
-- George (Grandma Gets the Medicine)



Importance: After George gives Grandma a dose of the medicine, she gets taller and taller. After a second dose of the medicine, Grandma grows right through the roof. George is stunned by what is happening, and by all the damage Grandma is doing to the house. He realizes his father will be furious.

A new medicine? You? What rubbish!
-- Grandma (The Brown Hen)

Importance: When Grandma breaks through the roof, she declares this is proof that she has magical powers. George explains it was the medicine he gave her. Grandma does not believe him, and calls his explanation rubbish. Grandma does not believe George could possibly have made such a medicine. George will now have to prove it.

It's colossal! It's gigantic! It's tremendous! It's a miracle! How did you do it, George?
-- Killy Kranky (The Pig, the Bullocks, the Sheep, the Pony and the Nanny Goat)

Importance: Killy Kranky is amazed by his son's medicine. He is thrilled because it means bigger and better animals, which in turn means bigger and better food. It also means Grandma is temporarily stuck in the house and so cannot be too bothersome to everyone else.

About your marvelous medicine, of course! We can't stop now, my boy! We must start making more of it at once! More and more and more!
-- Killy Kranky (Mr. Kranky's Great Idea)

Importance: George's father reveals his great idea. He wants to mass-produce the medicine George has concocted so that no one will ever go hungry again. The medicine will also make the family rich, and will make George famous. George, however, worries that he will not be able to make the medicine exactly the same a second time around.

Ah well, I suppose it's all for the best, really. She was a bit of a nuisance around the house, wasn't she?
-- Mary Kranky (Goodbye Grandma)

Importance: When Grandma grabs the fourth batch of medicine from George, she drinks it, believing it to be tea. Instead, it causes her to shrink and then disappear. At first, Mary is upset her mother has gone, but then comes to accept it is better this way. George feels a little sad about all this, but also very excited to have touched the world of magic with his medicine.