

Matilda Study Guide

Matilda by Roald Dahl

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Plot Summary

Matilda is the whimsical story of a brilliant young girl whose senseless and ridiculous parents do not notice or care that their daughter is a genius. Things do not get much better for Matilda once she goes to school because the school Headmistress is even more cruel and absurd than her parents. Fortunately, Matilda's teacher proves herself to be an ally and when Matilda hears the charming Miss Honey's terrible life story, she uses her unique abilities to help in a way that only Matilda can.

Matilda's parents are the exact opposite of normal parents. Instead of thinking too highly of their child, they find her to be dull and inconvenient. In reality, Matilda is anything but these things, teaching herself to read by the age of three and possessing a mind like a calculator. When she discovers the library down the road, a whole new world opens up to her and the librarian begins to supply her with classic adult literature. She plays pranks on her father to punish him whenever he has an outburst of temper directed at her.

When Matilda is five-and-a-half years old, she finally meets an adult who is interested in and impressed by her extraordinary abilities. This person is her teacher, Miss Honey, a young and kind woman who loves her job and her students. Miss Honey is unable to convince the Headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, that Matilda is anything other than a problem child.

It soon becomes clear that Miss Trunchbull is a terrible person. She regularly punishes students by throwing them out of windows or across the playground, yelling at them while picking them up by their hair or ears. The students play tricks on her, enacting revenge in any way they can.

One day when Miss Trunchbull is visiting Matilda's class, she accuses Matilda of putting a newt in her water. Matilda is innocent and becomes very angry. As she glares at the cup of water, she realizes that she is able to knock it over simply with the power of her mind and her eyes. She is shocked and elated by this discovery and decides that the only adult she can tell is her teacher. Miss Honey has her repeat the performance, and then invites Matilda to her cottage for tea.

On arriving at the tiny and sparsely furnished cottage, Matilda realizes that her teacher is very poor. Miss Honey shares the heart-breaking story of her life. She was orphaned at a young age and raised by a cruel and manipulative aunt who treated her like a slave and continued to take nearly all of her wages when she started working. It is only recently that Miss Honey has been able to escape this terrible aunt, who is none other than the Headmistress, Miss Trunchbull.

Matilda comes up with a plan to bring justice to Miss Trunchbull and to give Miss Honey back what belongs to her. She trains herself to lift objects with her mind and move them around in the air. She uses this skill in school to pick up a piece of chalk and write a note to Miss Trunchbull. The chalk appears to be moving all on its own and it tells Miss



Trunchbull to give her niece back her house and her money. When she recovers from the shock, Miss Trunchbull leaves the school and is never seen again.

A few weeks later, Miss Honey is no longer poor and Matilda is no longer able to use her mind to move objects, probably because her great mind is finally being challenged. The novel ends with Matilda's father taking his family and fleeing the country and Matilda staying behind to live with her beloved teacher, Miss Honey.

Chapter 1: The Reader of Books

Chapter 1: The Reader of Books Summary

Matilda by Roald Dahl is a classic work of children's literature from a well-loved author of children's fiction. It tells the whimsical and magical story of Matilda, a brilliant child who is ignored and mistreated by her terrible parents. However, Matilda soon discovers that she is able to outsmart her parents and her evil Headmistress with a little help from her kind-hearted teacher and just a bit of magic.

There are many parents in the world who have the wrong idea about what their child is like. They go on about all of their child's good qualities, oblivious to the flaws that are very obvious to everyone else. Matilda's parents, however, suffer from the rare and opposite affliction where they think that their daughter is always in the way and cannot have anything valuable to say. The truth is, however, that Matilda is not only sensitive and insightful, she is absolutely brilliant. Her older brother, Michael, does not have the same brilliant mind, but their parents do not seem to notice a difference between the two. If anything, they are kinder to Michael because he is not able to question them as well as his younger sister is. Even though she has parents who ignore her, Matilda manages to teach herself to read by the age of three. By the time she is four, Matilda is left home alone every day while her father goes to work and her mother plays bingo, so Matilda finds the public library down the road. There she meets the kind librarian, Mrs. Phelps, and begins to read. She soon has finished all of the books in the children's section and is directed by the librarian to begin to read difficult books for adults. She begins with *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, and soon has read a large collection of classics. When she learns she can check books out of the library, four-year-old Matilda is soon able to make her bedroom at home a haven, losing herself in her reading every day.

Chapter 1: The Reader of Books Analysis

The first section of this chapter is written from the first-person point of view, which means that the narrator uses the pronoun "I" when telling the story. Although it is only used for the first few pages of the book, and not at all after the story's protagonist is introduced, this writing style makes the book seem very personal. Instead of being impersonal and formal, it is instead simply a story being told directly to the reader by a specific person. The tone is casual, using comical descriptions and exaggeration, making use of conversational language. Despite potentially heavy subject matter of a child who is neglected by her parents, the first section of the novel sets up the rest of the story to be lighthearted and humorous. We are meant to enjoy the story as though we are being told it by a friend. When we meet Matilda, the first person narration ends, but the light-hearted tone continues.



Matilda is the dominant character in this chapter and the reader cannot help but like her. She is obviously an intellectual prodigy, a genius of the sort that is born and not trained. However, she is still humble and polite to the librarian and seems to be unaware that she is in any way out of the ordinary. She is neglected by her parents, but resourceful enough to do something about it on her own without whining and complaining about being bored in her home. The narrator tells us that she is both brilliant and sensitive and Matilda's behaviour so far proves that this is true.



Chapter 2: Mr. Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer

Chapter 2: Mr. Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer Summary

Mr. Wormwood is Matilda's father, and he is obviously not the positive role model a father should be. Instead, he loves to tell his son Michael and Matilda if she happens to be listening, how it is easy to cheat your customers when you are a used car salesman like he is. The first tip he shares is that you can get free sawdust from the sawmill and then you can mix it with the oil in the gear box of an old and noisy car and the gears will sound smooth and new. Hearing this, Matilda points out that this is dishonest, but her father ignores her. Next, he explains how it is possible to use an electric drill on the speedometer cable to run the mileage on the car backward. This way, a very old car with lots of miles on it can be sold as though it has hardly been driven at all. This time when Matilda protests, her father angrily tells her that if she doesn't like the way he does business, she should just stop eating the food he buys for her. He calls her an ignorant little squirt. Matilda's mother overhears this conversation and takes her husband's side, telling Matilda to keep her mouth shut.

At suppertime in the Wormwood household, everyone in the family sits around the television with TV dinners on their laps. One night, Matilda asks if she could please eat in the dining-room so she can read her book while she eats. When her father again yells at her, five-year-old Matilda does not cry or whine or throw a fit. She does feel anger and resentment boiling up inside her, but instead of getting angry then, she decides that ever time her parents mistreat her, she will somehow get revenge.

Chapter 2: Mr. Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer Analysis

In this chapter, we are given a more complete picture of Matilda's parents and we see that they are not the complicated and flawed characters of adult literary fiction. Readers of this novel know who they are to root for and it is clearly not Matilda's parents. They are nasty and crude people, with never a kind word to say to their young daughter. However, we also see in this chapter that Matilda is not as vulnerable you might expect a child her age to be. She does not seem to be damaged by her parents' insults and crudeness, but rather can articulate to them and herself why they are wrong. She is clearly already smarter than they are and the world of books and stories in which she lives protects her from cruelty in the real world. As Matilda decides to take revenge at the end of this chapter, we already feel like her father deserves any mistreatment that he gets from his daughter. We may even begin to hope that things do turn out badly for him in the end.



Chapter 3: The Hat and the Superglue; Chapter 4: The Ghost

Chapter 3: The Hat and the Superglue; Chapter 4: The Ghost Summary

Matilda's revenge on her father begins the very next morning before he leaves for work. Just as he is getting up from his breakfast, Matilda spreads superglue around the inside edge of his favorite work hat. When he gets to work and cannot take it off, he is forced to wear it all day, pretending that he is simply choosing to keep it on during all his indoor activities. When he gets home and it still will not come off, his wife figures that he somehow caused this to happen himself, but he suspects that Matilda had something to do with the problem. However, she acts friendly and innocent, so he can not think of any reason to accuse her. Eventually, he is forced to cut the hat from his head, leaving his hair a mess and pieces of unattractive brown leather still stuck to his scalp.

Matilda's father is kinder for a while after the hat incident because it seems to humble him into being less of a bully. However, this humility does not last, and it is not too long before he comes home from work in a foul mood, looking for someone to boss around. Matilda is too absorbed in her book to notice that she should stay out of his way, so she ends up in a discussion with him about the novel she is reading. She insists that it is a wonderful book that he would enjoy, and he insists that it is a waste of time. He takes the book from her and rips the pages out, despite her insistence that you are not allowed to destroy a library book. After this explosion, Matilda decides that it is time for another one of her punishments.

This time, Matilda borrows a parrot from a neighborhood friend and shoves the parrot's cage up the chimney. That night while the family is eating their TV dinners, the parrot begins to talk. Matilda's mother thinks it is an intruder and tells her husband to go to search the house, but he is too scared to go on his own. Instead, the entire family searches for the intruder together. When they find no one but continue to hear a human-like voice, they conclude that it must be a ghost and run from the house, terrified.

Chapter 3: The Hat and the Superglue; Chapter 4: The Ghost Analysis

These two chapters do not do much to advance the plot, but they do continue to illustrate Matilda's ability to outsmart the adults in her life. They are also fun chapters, adding to the novels overall appeal to its target audience: children. Her parents are ridiculous and horrible people and Matilda is too young to escape them. However, she is not too young to pull pranks on them and make their lives more difficult, and she certainly does that. This adds to the reader's appreciation of Matilda because it



demonstrates that her intelligence does not prevent her from having a great sense of humor. Like her readers, she enjoys experiencing the humorous and mostly harmless suffering of someone who deserves it.

The pranks Matilda plays on her parents foreshadow the future. Matilda is doing minor and harmless pranks now, but it is not long before she will use the same skills on a larger scale elsewhere.



Chapter 5: Arithmetic; Chapter 6: The Platinum-Blond Man

Chapter 5: Arithmetic; Chapter 6: The Platinum-Blond Man Summary

The punishments Matilda has begun to dish out are working well to keep her sane. A five-year-old is never allowed to be in charge of her own life, even if she is clever enough to do so. This means that Matilda must listen to her parents and live in their house even though they are not loving and understanding and good like she wishes they were. The tricks she plays on her parents help to keep them in line because they are always kinder to her and more humble afterward. However, the effects do not last, as Matilda experiences again one day when her father comes home from work, this time in a cheerful and arrogant mood.

Insisting that ten-year-old Michael get a pen and paper, Matilda's father begins to brag about the sales he made that day. He lists off the purchase price and the sale price for each of the five cars that he sold and tells Michael to do the arithmetic required to figure out how much money he earned that day. When Michael complains that there are too many sums, his father brags that he himself did it in only ten minutes. As soon as he is done reading of the numbers, Matilda says the answer from the corner. She is at first ignored and told to shut up, but she is heard clearly when she repeats her answer. Flabbergasted, Matilda's father is extremely angry with her, insisting that she must have cheated and seen the answer he had written down, despite the fact that she is sitting across the room from him. He calls her a liar and a cheat and shows no admiration for the obviously amazing mind of his daughter.

Following this event, Matilda decides to punish her father yet again. This time, she puts her mother's hair dye into the bottle for her father's hair tonic. When he goes through his daily ritual of rubbing his head with oil the next morning, he inadvertently dyes it a dirty-looking blond color. Matilda suggests to her mother that he must have grabbed the wrong bottle by mistake, and Matilda's mother agrees, saying that "men are not always quite as clever as they think they are" (pg. 65.) Matilda's father is forced to make a hair appointment with his wife's hairdresser to have his hair dyed back to black.

Chapter 5: Arithmetic; Chapter 6: The Platinum-Blond Man Analysis

In this section we delve deeper into Matilda's mind and learn that she is not only a genius when it comes to reading and language, but also when it comes to math. She has never been to school, and yet she is able to do complicated addition and subtraction with no calculator or paper, and come up with the correct answer almost



instantly. We also get a glimpse of her confidence level, as she does not question whether or not she should share her answer with her family, or even if that answer is correct. In fact, what she says to her father is that "if you've done it right" (pg. 54), this is the answer, implying that if the answers are different, he is the one who has made the mistake. We also see that her father is extremely hypocritical. He is livid with his daughter for being a cheat, when he brags about being one himself. If his children do grow up to be cheaters and liars, it will only be because he showed them how to live that way.

In this section, we can also see the difference between the way the parents treat Michael and the way they treat Matilda. Their father is pleased about sharing his business knowledge with his son, and encourages him to practice with the arithmetic. He still calls his son names, but he seems much less impatient with Michael than Matilda. This shows that the parents are threatened by Matilda more than they are by Michael. They may not notice that Matilda is a genius, but they do notice that she talks back and corrects them when they are wrong. Michael does not question them because he is not smart enough to do so. For this reason, he is treated better than his sister.

Matilda again enacts revenge on her father by playing a prank on him, utilizing the only power she has over the bigger and more powerful adults in her life. Her continued pattern of punishing those who mistreat her foreshadows what is to come in the rest of the novel. From now on, instead of hearing of a small crime leading to minor revenge, we will hear about a major offence and the punishment Matilda comes up with to suit it.



Chapter 7: Miss Honey

Chapter 7: Miss Honey Summary

Eventually it is time for Matilda to leave her home and her world of books to go to school. She is put in the lowest class of primary school with a lovely young teacher named Miss Honey. The Headmistress at the school is named Miss Trunchbull, and she is "a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster" (pg. 67.) Fortunately, Matilda does not have to meet Miss Trunchbull right away but is introduced to the school by Miss Honey.

It is early on in her first class that Miss Honey discovers that one of her students is unlike any other child she has ever encountered. When asking the class if any of them are prepared for school by knowing their two times table, she learns that Matilda's mind works like a calculator and she knows far, far beyond the two times table. Then she moves on to reading comprehension, and finds out that Matilda can read adult novels and write poetry. Matilda says that her parents didn't teach her any of this, but that she just knows how to do it. Miss Honey is blown away by the skills that this small child possesses, as well as the insights into life and literature that are well beyond her years. Miss Honey struggles to resist the urge to neglect all the other children and focus just on Matilda, but she manages to keep her emotions and excitement under control until the first bell rings, ending the morning class.

Chapter 7: Miss Honey Analysis

This is the first chapter in which Matilda encounters people outside her family who will investigate and observe her incredible mind. Miss Phelps, the librarian, was able to do so in an earlier chapter, but she resisted meddling or commenting on the fact that Matilda was in any way unusual. The fact that Matilda has come this far with no one commenting on her intelligence means that Matilda herself doesn't realize how exceptional she is. She does not brag about her abilities, and doesn't even have the words to describe how her mind works. In this chapter, we are also introduced to other five-year-old children and we can thus compare Matilda to them. Her class is full of silly and enjoyable children, and we hope that Matilda is able to befriend them despite their differences.

Miss Honey is the first character we are introduced to that the reader will truly relate to. It is unlikely that anyone reading this book would relate to someone as brilliant as Matilda or as cruel as her father, but we can fully understand and appreciate what it would be like to discover that a child like Matilda exists and to be unable to resist testing her abilities. The fact that Miss Honey is able to remain calm and that she does not make the other students feel insignificant or Matilda feel uncomfortable is a true testament to Miss Honey's character. We know that no matter what happens in the rest of the book, we like Miss Honey and hope that she is able to help Matilda.



Chapter 8: The Trunchbull; Chapter 9: The Parents

Chapter 8: The Trunchbull; Chapter 9: The Parents Summary

Miss Honey is excited about her unbelievable new student and she cannot wait to share the news with the Headmistress. She believes that it is ridiculous for such a brilliant child to be in the bottom class, and wants her to immediately move to the highest class with the eleven-year-olds. She feels so strongly about this that she is even willing to go to visit Miss Trunchbull, whom she usually works hard to avoid. However, the meeting does not go well. Miss Trunchbull is an extremely large, strong and stubborn woman who has just bought a car from Matilda's father. She thinks that the car was a bargain and so she believes Matilda's father's story that his daughter is a difficult girl and a trouble-maker who will soon need to be punished. Miss Trunchbull accuses Miss Honey of wanting to get rid of Matilda and refuses to consider moving her to a higher class. Disappointed and frustrated, Miss Honey returns to the classroom and has Matilda study textbooks from the higher classes so she does not become bored with school. She is impressed by Matilda's good-natured attitude and ability to focus on her reading.

Next, Miss Honey decides to visit Matilda's parents herself to see if she can convince them that their daughter is a genius. This meeting does not go well either. Matilda's parents are extremely annoyed at Miss Honey for interrupting their television show, and then not interested in the news that their daughter is a genius. Matilda's mother says that Matilda should be focusing on her looks and on marrying well instead of on reading, and her father wonders why it matters if you can do math when you can just buy a calculator to do the work for you. Miss Honey leaves, extremely surprised and frustrated that people like this actually exist.

Chapter 8: The Trunchbull; Chapter 9: The Parents Analysis

In this section we are introduced to the character who is to be the antagonist of the rest of the novel, Miss Trunchbull. The ridiculous cruelty of Matilda's parents is nothing compared to what is to come from Miss Trunchbull. However, in meeting the parents first, we are already familiar with this type of antagonist. Both the parents and Miss Trunchbull are incredibly self-centered people, unable to listen to logic or reason and unwilling to compromise their own perspectives. Matilda's parents don't want to hear about their daughter's abilities because it would mean admitting their own shortcomings. Their goal is to be rich and comfortable, and they pretend - even to themselves - that nothing else is important. Miss Trunchbull's response to Miss Honey's opinion about Matilda is very similar to the response from Matilda's parents. This foreshadows the

future for Matilda and Miss Honey. Miss Trunchbull will be at least as unreasonable and self-centered as her counterparts, the parents.

This section also serves to further improve the character of Miss Honey in the reader's mind. She is a quiet, ambitious, and determined person, and her positive qualities are even more prevalent when contrasted with the negative qualities of characters we can only despise.



Chapter 10: Throwing the Hammer; Chapter 11: Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake; Chapter 12: Lavender

Chapter 10: Throwing the Hammer; Chapter 11: Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake; Chapter 12: Lavender Summary

As the first week of school progresses, Matilda has no trouble making friends, and her first and best friend is a small, spunky girl named Lavender. They very quickly begin to hear stories about their Headmistress, "The Trunchbull" (pg. 102), starting with the fact that she detests the youngest children the most. However, in addition to hearing about the Trunchbull's behavior, they also hear about how students can get back at her by planning tricks and pranks. The students are often punished for their behavior, but it is all a part of the ongoing battle between them and Trunchbull.

Just as the girls finish hearing about how the Trunchbull was an Olympic Hammer Throw champion and that she likes to throw children to keep her arm in shape, they witness just such an event. Annoyed by a young girl's pigtails, the Headmistress picks her up by them and throws her across a field. Matilda and Lavender are told that the parents of the mistreated children are likewise scared of Miss Trunchbull and that's why they do not confront her. Matilda theorizes that it is also because the stories and events are so extreme that the children are not believed by the parents.

In a school assembly later in the week, the Trunchbull strikes again, this time accusing a boy named Bruce of stealing a piece of chocolate cake. Her unusual punishment is that he is called to the front of the assembly and given an enormous chocolate cake of his own to eat. He is at first confused, but soon realizes that she is going to force him to eat the entire cake before anyone is able to leave the hall. Much to the delight of the students and the frustration of Miss Trunchbull, he actually succeeds at this task, earning a morale point for the students and angering the Headmistress.

Inspired by the brilliant tales of revenge she has heard, Lavender longs to come up with a plot of her own. When Miss Honey begins to warn the class about the weekly class visit from Miss Trunchbull, Lavender sees an opportunity. She volunteers to be in charge of bringing a jug of water and a glass into the class for Miss Trunchbull. When the day arrives, Lavender is prepared, dropping a carefully selected and transported newt into the jug, ready to give the Trunchbull a nasty surprise.



Chapter 10: Throwing the Hammer; Chapter 11: Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake; Chapter 12: Lavender Analysis

These chapters illustrate the power that the Headmistress has over everyone, and gives concrete examples of her out-of-control behavior. Before this section, readers have been told that the Trunchbull is terrible, but now readers have the opportunity to see it for themselves. Her actions are bizarre and terrifying, and she has power over everyone, including adults. This is described to us by Hortensia who claims that even the parents are scared of the Headmistress, and it is illustrated to us in the behavior of the cook throughout Bruce Bogtrotter's punishment. This cook is an adult who should be able to stand up to Miss Trunchbull or, at the very least, ignore her. Instead, the cook participates in the ruse with Bruce, baking a huge cake and reciting her lines. An interesting result of the overwhelming power held by Miss Trunchbull is that it sets her up as the enemy of everybody. All the students in the school rally together in the battle against Miss Trunchbull, standing up for one another and rooting for each other to succeed against her. When Bruce finally takes his last bite of cake, the entire school breaks into wild cheering, thrilled that he was able to defeat the Headmistress' plan and evade further punishment.

Throughout the novel so far, the narrative style has made use of extreme language and exaggeration. In this chapter, this is taken one step further into fantasy. In reality, no child could be thrown out a window or across a field and survive, but in the world of this novel, they simply bounce a few times and walk away. This fantasy makes the novel fun and surprising and it foreshadows events that are to come and that are even more magical.



Chapter 13: The Weekly Test

Chapter 13: The Weekly Test Summary

It is time for Miss Trunchbull to take over Matilda's class for a lesson, and Lavender's newt is secretly waiting in the water jug. Before Miss Trunchbull takes a drink, however, she has some questions for the students. She begins by inspecting each of their hands to make sure that they are clean enough, and when she discovers a boy with dirty hands, she chooses to direct her first line of questioning at him. The boy's name is Nigel and he tries his best to answer correctly and politely, even volunteering information about things he has learned from Miss Honey. Miss Trunchbull finds nothing in his answers to be satisfactory. When she gets an incorrect answer to a multiplication problem, Miss Trunchbull picks the offending child up by his hair until he answers correctly. Later, she picks a small boy up by his ears when he gets a spelling question incorrect. The children watching this are simultaneously terrified and fascinated by this mad woman who could explode on any one of them at any minute.

When Miss Trunchbull begins to talk about Charles Dickens, Matilda finally pipes up to say that she has read the book Miss Trunchbull is referring to. Miss Trunchbull, of course, does not believe Matilda and calls her a liar. Miss Trunchbull asks Matilda for her name, and when she hears it, also accuses her of being a crook; her sawdust-filled engine fell out of her car that very morning. She warns Matilda that she will be keeping a close eye on her from now on.

Chapter 13: The Weekly Test Analysis

This is another chapter in which we see the Trunchbull at work. Her questions to the children and her responses to their answers are comical in their absurdity. What makes this chapter work is the appealing secondary characters. While Miss Trunchbull is marching around the class, interrogating the children and yelling at them, they are responding in genuine and humorous ways. We like the kids in Matilda's class because they try their best to be polite and authentic, and we dislike Miss Trunchbull even more because she shows no sign of appreciating this effort.

Previous chapters have ended with Matilda being ridiculed, and the next chapter is about Matilda getting her revenge. This chapter ends the same way, and we can expect that the next chapter will involve Matilda's reaction to Miss Trunchbull's insults. We have read this novel enough to know that Matilda will respond in some way to being insulted.



Chapter 14: The First Miracle

Chapter 14: The First Miracle Summary

Having thoroughly berated Matilda and the class, Miss Trunchbull takes a break to pour herself a glass of water from the blue pitcher carefully placed on her desk by Lavender. She first takes a minute to continue to rave about the problems with children, and then picks up the jug and pours herself a glass of water. Into her class falls the newt, and a terrified Miss Trunchbull jumps out of her chair. As soon as she has recovered, she has Matilda stand up and accuses her of putting the creature into the water. Matilda does her best to stand up for herself, even going so far as to shout at the Headmistress, but it does not matter. Miss Trunchbull calls her names and threatens to expel her from school and forces her to sit back down. Matilda is innocent and she is furious with the injustice of the situation. In anger she glares at Miss Trunchbull and then at the newt squirming around in the glass on the desk.

Soon, a curious thing begins to happen in Matilda's mind. She is staring angrily at the glass, wishing it would tip over onto Miss Trunchbull, who is seated at the desk, when she begins to feel a sort of electric build-up taking place behind her eyes. This electricity soon begins to feel like tiny invisible arms shooting from her eyes toward the glass on the desk. She quietly whispers for the glass to tip over, and soon enough, it does! The newt and the water cover Miss Trunchbull, who panics and throws the newt across the room. She again tries to accuse Matilda of knocking the glass over, but because everyone saw that Matilda stayed in her seat, she has no choice but to storm out of the classroom. In the silence that follows her departure, Miss Honey regains control of her young students and dismisses them for the day.

Chapter 14: The First Miracle Analysis

In this chapter, the magic of the novel truly begins. Matilda's abilities go beyond intelligence and she is able to do something that her readers can only dream of doing - move something with the power of her mind. The novel is now truly a fantasy. The magic that takes place in this chapter is described in such a way that the reader can still imagine that it is true. Perhaps there are people in the world who can use their anger to knock over a glass of water. Matilda's revenge on Miss Trunchbull is more spontaneous than the pranks she has pulled on her father, but it is still very satisfying and foreshadows similar events in the future. The title of the chapter, "The First Miracle," also tells the reader what they are to expect from the future. Matilda will strike again.

This chapter also provides an interesting look into the character of Miss Honey. She is a quiet and somewhat timid person, but she is not afraid to stand up to Miss Trunchbull in defense of her students. She does her best to convince Miss Trunchbull to let go of the boys' hair or ears, and then does not waver in her opinion that the glass must have

been knocked over my Miss Trunchbull herself. There is more to Miss Honey than we see on the surface, and we are getting to know her more and more.



Chapter 15: The Second Miracle

Chapter 15: The Second Miracle Summary

As the class leaves the room after their exciting day, Matilda stays behind to talk to Miss Honey. She does not think she can keep her experience with a water glass a secret, but she knows that telling either her or her parents would be a mistake. Instead, she decides to tell her teacher. Matilda begins by repeating that she was not the one to put the water in the glass, which Miss Honey says she knows. Matilda continues to say that she was the one who knocked the glass over, even though she did not get out of her seat. She says, "I was so angry at being accused of something I hadn't done that I made it happen...I made the glass tip over" (pg. 172.) Miss Honey is amused by this wonderful child's imagination and decides to put the matter to rest by having her repeat her performance. When Matilda is actually able to do so, she is flabbergasted and amazed. When she is finally able to speak to the remarkable child in front of her, it is to invite Matilda over to her house for tea.

Chapter 15: The Second Miracle Analysis

As we have seen throughout the novel, Matilda is an open and honest child without pride. Still humble despite her extraordinary abilities, she is insightful enough to realize that she can trust Miss Honey even if she can't trust others. Miss Honey is trustworthy, and even when she sees with her own eyes a miracle taking place, she does not consider the wealth and fame that she or Matilda could achieve. She is appropriately awestruck and respectful, as one should be in the presence of a miracle. The wonder of Matilda's ability is reinforced to the reader through Miss Honey's reaction to it.



Chapter 16: Miss Honey's Cottage; Chapter 17: Miss Honey's story

Chapter 16: Miss Honey's Cottage; Chapter 17: Miss Honey's story Summary

Matilda and Miss Honey walk to Miss Honey's cottage through the town, discussing Matilda's ability on the way. Matilda is very chatty and excited, talking about how she really believes she can move just about anything with her eyes if she wants to. Miss Honey is insistent that they need to be careful with Matilda's gift, because they are dealing with mysterious forces. Matilda doesn't think much about where they are going until they arrive at Miss Honey's cottage. It is absolutely tiny without heat, electricity, or running water, and hardly any furniture at all. She is very surprised and has lots of questions, but manages to keep them to herself while Miss Honey prepares tea and a modest snack. When they are sitting down on the upturned boxes that are the only chairs in the house, Matilda cannot resist any longer, and starts to ask questions about Miss Honey's salary and whether she enjoys living simply. Miss Honey thinks about it for a minute, and then decides to share her story with this remarkable child.

When she was young, she lived in a big house near the cottage. Her father was a doctor and they were happy. Then her mother died, and her father asked her mother's sister, Miss Honey's aunt, to come to live with them to help. This aunt treated the little girl terribly, but acted differently around the father, who was almost never home anyway. A few years later, Miss Honey's father died as well. He had apparently committed suicide, but the circumstances were mysterious and this seemed very out of character for a successful and sane man to do. Telling the story, Miss Honey is careful not to accuse the aunt of any wrong-doing, but Matilda jumps to this conclusion on her own. Soon, the aunt treated the little girl as a slave, forcing her to do all the housework. Even when Miss Honey became an adult, she was terrified of her aunt and unable to stand up to her. She became a teacher by attending a college that was close enough to home that she could continue to act as a slave to her aunt, but when she graduated, she was still not free. The aunt insisted on taking all of Miss Honey's working salary, apparently in repayment for years of care. Miss Honey received only a pound a week in pocket money.

Miss Honey tries to stop the sad story there, but Matilda insists that the story cannot be finished because Miss Honey is now independent and living in this cottage. Miss Honey explains that it took all of her courage to leave, but when she found the little cottage and the farmer who would rent it to her for 40 pence a week, she knew she had to take the opportunity to be on her own. It has now been two years that she has been living in the cottage. She does not have heat or a bed and cannot continue to live this way. She needs help. Matilda asks about Miss Honey's father's will, because the house Miss Honey grew up in should belong to her. Miss Honey says that a will was never found



and that her aunt produced a piece of paper on which the father supposedly leaves the house to his sister-in-law in exchange for her kindness. This aunt is a person of influence in the community and would be difficult to deal with legally. Matilda finally asks who Miss Honey's aunt is and Miss Honey tells her. Miss Honey's aunt is none other than Miss Trunchbull.

Chapter 16: Miss Honey's Cottage; Chapter 17: Miss Honey's story Analysis

In this section, we get all the background information on Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey necessary to know that Matilda is going to do something for her beloved teacher. Just like Matilda fails to think about where her teacher lives and what her life is like outside of school, so does the reader fail to question Miss Honey's background until it is revealed. Once we learn the extraordinary circumstances of her upbringing and current existence, we are even more impressed with Miss Honey's kindness and the love she has for her students.

Miss Honey refuses to elaborate on what a childhood with Miss Trunchbull as her guardian was like, but that allows the reader to imagine what life must have been like for Miss Honey as a little girl. We know how Miss Trunchbull treats her students and how she feels about children in general, so we do not need to hear more details about the abuse Miss Honey must have faced as a little girl. Instead, we are simply pleased that she managed to escape and in we are in awe of the cost of her freedom.

Matilda hears Miss Honey's story, and reacts more like a respectful adult than a five-year-old girl. She asks intelligent questions, and understands all the emotional implications of being raised by a tyrant. She is so proud of Miss Honey for escaping, and so worried about her future that it is obvious that she will help Miss Honey get the ultimate revenge on Miss Trunchbull in the end. However, what this section also shows is Matilda acting more like a little girl than ever before. On their way to the cottage, she is rambling and trotting and skipping, just like any other little girl would. This makes her response to the cottage and to the story more believable, because she may seem grown-up at times, but we have seen that she is also just a child.



Chapter 18: The Names; Chapter 19: The Practice

Chapter 18: The Names; Chapter 19: The Practice Summary

Matilda is shocked by the revelation that Miss Honey's aunt is Miss Trunchbull, but Miss Honey steers the conversation back to Matilda and to her ability. She is ready to start experimenting with Matilda's ability by testing it across a longer distance, but Matilda asks if she could maybe just go home instead. They walk home in silence, and by the time they get there, Matilda admits that she has been thinking of a plan. Miss Honey protests, but is willing to answer a few of Matilda's final questions about her life story. Matilda asks what Miss Honey was called by her father and Miss Trunchbull when she was a child, and also what her father called her aunt and what her aunt called her father. Miss Honey responds that they were called Jenny, Magnus, and Agatha, and then she asks that Matilda not do anything silly with that information. Matilda laughs, thanks her teacher for a lovely tea, and goes home.

Inside, Matilda is home alone as usual. She takes one of her father's cigars to her bedroom and begins to practice moving it. When pushing it is even easier than before, she proceeds to lift the cigar instead. After a week of exhausting and exhilarating practice, she is able to use just the power of her mind and her eyes to lift the cigar and move it around in the air at will. It is the day before Miss Trunchbull visits Matilda's class again and this time Matilda is ready.

Chapter 18: The Names; Chapter 19: The Practice Analysis

These two chapters are about Matilda gathering the information and ability needed to get her revenge on Miss Trunchbull for Miss Honey's sake. We may not know her plan, but this section gives clues as to what Matilda's plan is, and that it will be life-changing for Miss Honey. Matilda is a very determined little girl, and she is confident that she will be able to achieve her final goal even before she begins to practice. However, with this confidence comes the ability to practice hard and she works to accomplish her goal. The novel is building toward its climax and the reader and Matilda are both very excited about her next day at school.



Chapter 20: The Third Miracle

Chapter 20: The Third Miracle Summary

This time, when Miss Trunchbull arrives in Matilda's classroom after lunch, the class knows what to expect and is more prepared to answer Miss Trunchbull's questions exactly as they should. However, Miss Trunchbull is still not satisfied, asking them to recite their spelling words backwards and phrasing the three times table in a confusing manner. She is holding a small boy upside down by one leg when he suddenly shouts and points to the chalkboard. A piece of chalk is moving all by itself and writing on the board. The whole class is transfixed by the chalk, but Miss Trunchbull is the most shaken, as the chalk is writing her first name. Only Miss Honey is able to look away from the chalkboard; she is watching Matilda, knowing that the little girl is really in control of the mystery that is taking place.

As Miss Trunchbull continues to scream and shout, the invisible force writing a message on the board continues its message. When it is complete, the message reads, "Agatha, this is Magnus...It is Magnus and you better believe it...Agatha, give my Jenny back her house. Give my Jenny her wages. Give my Jenny the house. Then get out of here. If you don't, I will come and get you. I will come and get you like you got me. I am watching you Agatha" (pg. 221-223.) The chalk falls to the ground and breaks in two, but before anyone can say anything about what has happened, they notice that Miss Trunchbull has fallen to the ground. Miss Honey sends a few children to get help, and Nigel dumps the jug of water onto Miss Trunchbull's head, but she is still unconscious when she is dragged out of the room. The teachers taking her out are pleased to see that she is knocked out, and even more pleased to see that someone has doused her in water as well. Miss Honey sends the class outside to play until the next lesson. Matilda joins the rest of her class, but not before getting an enormous hug from her delighted teacher.

Chapter 20: The Third Miracle Analysis

This chapter is the climax of the book and it represents all the planning and preparation Matilda has done up to this point. She has always enjoyed giving people who mistreat her a taste of what they deserve, but this is the first time that her actions could result in actual changes for the better. She is not standing up for herself this time, but for someone else who needs help. There is more at stake this time, and the subject of her vengeance is more deserving of her punishment. Matilda shows great confidence in writing a note from Magnus to Agatha, because if she had had one detail incorrect, it would not have made sense to Miss Trunchbull and she would have been suspicious. However, Matilda trusted her instincts that Miss Honey's father was murdered by Miss Trunchbull, and her instincts were obviously correct. This is what the novel has been building toward, and the payoff is fun and exciting for the reader, as well as for Matilda.

herself. In the aftermath of the message, Matilda feels pleased and satisfied and cannot believe how simple the whole thing really was for her to do.



Chapter 21: A New Home

Chapter 21: A New Home Summary

When she recovers from her fainting fit, Miss Trunchbull leaves the school and marches home. When she doesn't appear at school the next day, the Deputy Head of the school, Mr. Trilby, goes to her home to look for her. The door is unlocked, and all her clothes are missing; she has left for good without a word to anybody. The next day, Miss Honey receives a phone call informing her that her father's will has finally been found, and the house she grew up in and all of her father's savings in the bank belong to her. Mr. Trilby becomes the new Head Teacher, and soon Matilda is moved up to the highest grade in school.

All of these changes mean that in a few weeks, when Matilda is visiting with Miss Honey after school, they are sitting in the big kitchen in the red house, they are eating jam with their bread instead of just margarine, and Matilda has a lot of new things to talk about that she is learning in school. Miss Honey is delighted with her company, and the two speak to each other easily and happily. This particular day, Matilda shares with Miss Honey that she tried to move something with her eyes the other day, just to see if she still could, and discovered that she was not able to do so anymore. Miss Honey admits that she is not surprised to hear this. Her theory is that Matilda's mind is now being challenged enough in school, and there is no longer all that pent up, frustrated energy looking for a way out. It may seem odd, but it really is a good thing. Matilda agrees with her teacher, saying that she is relieved to not have to go through life as a miracle worker.

When she arrives home from Miss Honey's that evening, Matilda finds her house and her family in an uproar, and her father informs her that they are moving to Spain in half an hour, so she had better get ready. Frantic, Matilda runs back to Miss Honey's house and shares the news with her. Miss Honey is not surprised and tells Matilda that everyone in town knows that Matilda's father is a crook who sells stolen vehicles. The police must have finally caught up with him, and he has to leave in a hurry. Matilda wants to stay with Miss Honey, and Miss Honey agrees that it would be "heaven" (pg. 236) to have Matilda stay with her. However, Matilda's parents have a right to take her to Spain if they want to. Matilda is insistent that her parents won't even care if she goes with them, and drags Miss Honey all the way home to ask them. Sure enough, Matilda's parents say they do not care what Matilda does and if she stays behind it will be less work for them anyway. Matilda jumps happily into Miss Honey's arms. Matilda's parents drive away, not even turning around to wave goodbye.

Chapter 21: A New Home Analysis

This is the final chapter of the novel, and it acts as a conclusion to the rest. It answers all remaining questions and informs the reader of what happens after the story's main



events have unfolded. This novel was written for children, and so one would expect it to have a happy ending, and it certainly does. Everything works out perfectly for the lovely Miss Honey, as well as for Matilda. Things are even looking better for all Matilda's charming friends at school with the Headmistress gone and with a new Head Teacher who seems to be a kind and reasonable man. Things do not work out so well for the characters we do not like, which is also what one would expect from a work of children's fiction. Matilda's father is forced to flee the country in a hurry. The parents remain true to their personalities, showing no sign of character growth or maturity. Only truly terrible people wouldn't mind leaving their daughter behind without a second thought.

There are multiple meanings to the title of this final chapter. At first, it refers to Miss Honey and the fact that she is able to leave her tiny cottage and return to the home of her childhood. However, we soon realize that Matilda's family is also leaving to find a new home as her father's crimes have finally caught up with him and he is on the run. Ultimately, however, the title refers to Matilda, our story's protagonist. She will be able to have a new home in every sense of the word from a new house to a new family, school, life, and dreams. In this novel in which everyone gets what they deserve, Matilda gets everything she could ever dream of.



Characters

Matilda Wormwood

Matilda is the story's protagonist and she is five-and-half years old for the main events of the novel. She has a mother, a father, and an older brother named Michael, and when meeting her for the first time, a person might not notice that there is anything unusual about her. In fact, even her family doesn't think that she is anything special, treating her instead like she is a nuisance and a brat who talks back. The truth, however, is that Matilda is anything but ordinary. By the age of three, she had taught herself to read, and she is only four when she walks to the library in search of better reading material. She is soon able to enjoy classic literature intended for adults. In addition to being a genius with language, Matilda is a brilliant mathematician, able to do multiplication problems in her head like a calculator.

Since Matilda's intelligence has gone unnoticed for her childhood, when she begins school she is completely unaware of the fact that she is different from other children her age. This means that she is not arrogant or prideful about her differences. She is well-liked by other students, and her best friend admires her adventurous side and not her intelligence. Matilda has all the good qualities of a child of a sense of fun, lots of energy, admiration for others, and fearlessness, but also has an abundance of adult qualities such as wisdom, insight, sensitivity, knowledge. This combination makes her an incredibly likable character and one you cannot help but root for.

Miss Agatha Trunchbull

Miss Trunchbull is the novel's antagonist and she is certainly a force to be reckoned with. Physically, she is very imposing as she is tall and wide and has the build of an Olympic Hammer Throw champion because she was one. Her clothing is masculine and distinctively military in appearance. She wears a brown-belted smock and green breeches that stop just below the knees. She dresses for function and intimidation, and not for style.

Miss Trunchbull is the Headmistress at Crunchem Hall Primary School, which is interesting considering how much she detests children. She does seem to enjoy punishing them, however, and often doesn't bother investigating whether or not the person she is punishing is actually guilty. She cultivates fear in all those around her, and people have good reason to be scared of her. She picks up children by their hair or ears, threatens to murder them, and is constantly calling them names.

The reader is not given insight into Miss Trunchbull's childhood and there is no indication of what motivates her to be such a formidable opponent to every student and teacher in the school she leads. Instead, her purpose in the novel is to be the obstacle that Matilda must overcome, the evil force that must be dealt with before the good



characters in the story can be happy. In this way, she is more of a symbolic "bad guy" character than a truly well-rounded human being.

Miss Jennifer Honey

Miss Honey is Matilda's teacher. Matilda likes her immediately and it is obvious why. She is a quiet person and not overly emotive about her affection, but her students all love her. In fact, "she possessed that rare gift of being adored by every small child under her care" (pg. 67.) Matilda is so taken with her that she creates a limerick dedicated to her that she eventually shares with the class. The entire class loves it and agrees that Miss Honey deserves all the praise Matilda bestows.

Miss Honey was orphaned at a young age and raised by her maternal aunt, who is none other than the terrifying Miss Trunchbull. Needless to say, she was mistreated and abused throughout her formative years, but does not share too many details with Matilda about the specifics of her experiences. These experiences still have an impact on her life, as she is still scared to confront Miss Trunchbull with any legal action and she remained in Miss Trunchbull's home, basically as a slave, into her adulthood.

Despite her timidity and tender nature, Miss Honey does prove herself to be strong when it is important to be. She tells Matilda how she eventually mustered enough courage to leave her childhood home and be free of her dictatorial guardian, even if the cost of that freedom was a life of loneliness and poverty. We also see her strength in her willingness to stand up for her students in the face of Miss Trunchbull. She does not ever convince Miss Trunchbull to actually listen to her, but that does not mean she is willing to sit idly by while her students are being abused.

Miss Honey's true moral character is proven through her relationship with Matilda. She realizes that this exceptional child has no one to fight for her, and she is willing to do anything in her power to help. She is even willing to take Matilda into her own home, and is not too proud to admit that she wants Matilda in her life as much as Matilda wants Miss Honey in hers. They are kindred spirits despite the age difference, and she will be an advocate for Matilda for the rest of Matilda's childhood.

Mr. Wormwood

Mr. Wormwood is Matilda's father. He is a second-hand car dealer, and he has no moral dilemmas about taking advantage of his customers. He doesn't simply mislead them or leave out important, relevant information. He tells bold-face lies to his customers and has various techniques to back up these lies. As a father, he is not concerned about these tricks from his children. Instead, he comes home and brags to his son Michael about the success of his lies and about how much money he has made.

Mr. Wormwood does not admire his daughter's extraordinary abilities. He does not pay any attention to Matilda, so he scarcely notices her brilliance, but when the evidence is right in front of him, he continues to ignore it or treat it as a character flaw. When Matilda



asks for more books, he tells her that books are a waste of time and she should just watch television. When Matilda is able to solve a complicated math problem in her head, he accuses her of cheating and berates her for it.

Like Miss Trunchbull, Mr. Wormwood is not a well-rounded and sympathetic character. Instead, he is more of a caricature, presented as an opponent for Matilda to overcome. We do not know Mr. Wormwood's background, but we do know his future. He will flee to Spain when his crimes finally have caught up with him.

Mrs. Wormwood

Mrs. Wormwood is Matilda's mother. She is a large woman who wears lots of makeup and who dyes her hair platinum blond. Her attitude toward her daughter is similar to her husband's. When she isn't ignoring Matilda, she is misunderstanding her and thinking she is a nuisance. Her two main interests are bingo and television and she devotes very little time or energy to anything else. She is so interested in Bingo that she sees no problem with leaving her four-year-old home alone all day while she leaves to play.

Mrs. Wormwood's insights on life are most clearly articulated when Miss Honey comes to visit to explain to Mrs. Wormwood and her husband about Matilda's abilities and to encourage them to have Matilda moved to a higher class in school. Mrs. Wormwood is at first annoyed about her television show being interrupted, and then indignant that anyone would come and try to convince her that her daughter should have goals beyond marrying well. She thinks that, "A girl should think about making herself attractive so she can get a good husband later on. Looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky" (pg. 97.)

The most surprising thing about Mrs. Wormwood is that her selfishness is so extreme that she does not even care when her daughter does not want to go with the family to Spain. She is so uninterested in her daughter that she barely looks up from her packing when she says that it would be less work for her if Matilda were to stay in England with Miss Honey. When they drive away, neither she nor her husband turn around to wave.

Michael Wormwood

Matilda's brother Michael is very different than his sister. Like his father, he is interested in the business of cheating people out of their money and he does not question the morality of what his father is teaching him. However, it would be unfair to expect anything else from him considering who his parents are and what he has been taught. He is a minor character in the story, so there is not too much information about him, but he does not ever mistreat Matilda, even though his parents would probably allow him to. When the family moves to Spain without Matilda, he is the only one to turn around to say goodbye.



Mrs. Phelps

Mrs. Phelps is the local librarian. She is the first person in the world who notices Matilda's unusual abilities, but she is wise enough to avoid drawing attention to them. Instead, she calmly shows Matilda the section of children's books, and then creates a reading list of classics for her. Matilda's family may not encourage her development, but meeting Mrs. Phelps at a young age did much to shape her future.

Lavender

Matilda's best friend at school is Lavender. She is a tiny little girl, but full of bravery and spunk. She and Matilda hear about Miss Trunchbull together and both are very enthusiastic and willing to take up the fight against her. Lavender takes this enthusiasm to the next level, planning a successful prank against Miss Trunchbull.

Hortensia

Hortensia is present in only one scene in the novel, which takes place on Matilda's third day of school in the playground. She and Lavender are approached by "a rugged ten-year-old girl with a boil on her nose" (pg. 102.) This is Hortensia, and she tells Matilda and Lavender all about Miss Trunchbull and the battle between the Headmistress and the students. She also talks about her own efforts in the battle, which involve syrup on a chair and itching powder in knickers. Matilda and Lavender are impressed and inspired by the older girl and promise to help in any way they can.

Amanda Thripp

The first time Matilda witnesses a punishment from Miss Trunchbull, Amanda is the child is in trouble. Amanda is around ten years old, and she has long hair braided into pigtails. Miss Trunchbull hates pigtails, so she picks Amanda up by them and throws her over the playground fence and into the next field. Amanda simply bounces along the ground and then sits up, dazed but unharmed.

Bruce Bogtrotter

Bruce Bogtrotter is a robust ten-year-old who apparently stole a piece of chocolate cake from Miss Trunchbull. The entire school is called to a special gathering in the Assembly Hall to witness his punishment, which is to eat an entire cake in one sitting. At first it seems impossible, but as Bruce nears the end, the entire school is energized with hope. When he takes his final bite and the whole school bursts in to wild cheering, it cements the school together in the battle against the Headmistress and proves that she can be defeated.



Nigel Hicks

Nigel is a spunky little boy in Matilda's class. He is the first to be questioned and subsequently punished by Miss Trunchbull. He is smart and brave, and actually does very well on the questions he is asked. The fact that he is punished proves that Miss Trunchbull's victims are mostly random and arbitrary.

Magnus

Although Miss Honey's father has been dead a long time when the events of this story take place, he is a significant character nonetheless. When Matilda writes a message for Miss Trunchbull on the chalkboard, she pretends to be Magnus writing from beyond the grave. As a result of this message, Miss Trunchbull vanishes, Magnus' will is found, and Miss Honey has everything she deserves returned to her.

Mr. Trilby

Mr. Trilby is the Deputy Head of Crunchem Primary School and he takes over the position of Head Teacher when Miss Trunchbull runs away.



Objects/Places

England

The novel is set in England in an unnamed village.

The Library

Matilda first walks to the library by herself when she is only four year old and it is there that she develops her love of reading and establishes a reading list of classic literature.

TV Dinners

TV Dinners are frozen meals prepared by simply cooking them in the microwave. They are intended to be quick and convenient, easy to eat in front of the television. This is what the Wormwood family has for dinner nearly every night, and the whole family really does eat in front of the TV.

Oil of Violets Hair Tonic

Oil of Violets Hair Tonic is the purple lotion Mr. Wormwood massages into his scalp every morning, thinking it makes his hair look luscious and strong. Matilda takes advantage of this ritual by sneaking her mother's hair dye into the bottle instead.

Platinum-Blond Hair Dye Extra Strong

Platinum Blonde Hair-Dye Extra Strong is used by Mrs. Wormwood every month to color the roots of her hair and keep her salon dye-job looking fresh. It is made of peroxide and it is very strong. When Mr. Wormwood accidentally puts it in his hair, it makes his hair turn a dirty silver color.

Crunchem Hall Primary School

Crunchem Hall Primary School is the school Matilda begins to attend when she is five and a half years old. It is for students up to the age of eleven and the Headmistress is Miss Trunchbull.

The Chokey

The Chokey is a tall and narrow cupboard with a floor of ten square inches. The inside walls are covered in broken glass and the door has nails hammered through it. Miss



Trunchbull punishes students by making them stand in the Chokey for a given number of hours, often most of the day. If the student tries to sit or lean against the walls, she is cut by the glass or nails.

The Newt

A newt is a lizard-like animal that appears to be scarier and more dangerous than it really is. Lavender carefully catches a newt and transports it to school in her pencil case. She puts the newt into Miss Trunchbull's water jug. When Miss Trunchbull pours water into her water glass, the newt is poured with it, frightening Miss Trunchbull.

The Cottage

The Cottage is the home of Miss Honey. It is not accessible by car, but only by a narrow lane. Intended to be a farm laborer's cottage, it is made of old bricks and has no running water, electricity, or heat. There is hardly any furniture, and it is very small.

The Red House

The Red House is where Miss Honey grew up and the House Miss Trunchbull has taken over since Miss Honey's father's death. When Matilda scares Miss Trunchbull into running away and Miss Honey's father's will is found, the Red House is given back to Miss Honey and she returns to live in it.

Spain

Spain is a country in Southwestern Europe. One day when Matilda arrives home, her father announces that they will be moving to Spain in half an hour. He has probably been sending money to a Spanish bank for years and is fleeing from the English police. At the end of the novel, Matilda watches her family drive away, heading to the airport and their flight to Spain.



Themes

Adult-Child Relationships

Every child has relationships with the adults in their lives. In these relationships, it is always the adult who is in control. Adults can use the innate power they have over children in positive ways, or they can abuse it, and both cases are seen in this novel. While Matilda is the clear protagonist in this story, nearly all of the other main characters are adults. Since Matilda is a brilliant and insightful person, she is able to understand the grown-ups in her life better than most other children would.

The most significant adults in her early life are, of course, her parents. Even though she is clearly more sensitive and intelligent than either of them, the very fact that she is young makes her opinions and perspectives less valuable than theirs. This is apparent when Dahl writes, "The fact remained that any five-year-old girl in any family was always obliged to do as she was told, however asinine the orders might be" (pg. 49.) Parents have power over their children, whether or not they deserve it. Matilda's parents are aware of this power and seem to relish it. They do not want to hear Matilda's opinions, especially if they contradict their own. However, the fact that they are close-minded and selfish people means that they tend to neglect poor Matilda. They do not care much about her existence either way, which means that if she stays out of their way, they tend to allow her to do whatever she wants.

Miss Trunchbull, on the other hand, is not the kind of person who is willing to ignore anybody. She has power over Matilda and also over every other student in the school. She is an extreme example of the kind of adult who puts herself in a position of power, and then abuses that power. Her size and confidence mean that she maintains her powerful position even in the face of other adults. She has no respect for the children in her care, and doesn't even listen to them or care about what they did or did not do. An adult has power over a child, and Miss Trunchbull abuses this power in any way she can imagine. We also see that she abused her power as guardian when Miss Honey was a child. She was an evil and terrifying presence in Miss Honey's life, and remains that way into Miss Honey's adulthood.

The opposite end of the spectrum is the lovely Miss Honey. Her class is always under control and the children are well-behaved and obedient, which proves that she, too, has power over the children in her care. However, she does not get this power with strength and threats, but instead earns it by being kind and smart and loving toward all of her students. She knows that the children look up to her, and she takes it seriously by being a good example and by teaching them the best that she can. Miss Honey does not abuse her innate power, but instead uses it to encourage the children, appreciating them for who and what they are and helping them to become better people.



The adults in Matilda's life respond to the control they have over in a variety of ways. Fortunately, it is the kindest and gentlest of them who loves her the most and who will be there for her in the future.

Justice and Revenge

The notion that a person should get what they deserve is a common one, although in real life it does not always happen. Immoral behaviour often does lead to success, and good people who work hard lose their jobs. The most popular students in school are often the meanest, and cars who speed down the highway and cut people off usually do not crash. However, in a work of children's fiction like Matilda, it is possible for justice to be done. This is very satisfying for a reader, and it does teach the moral lesson that long-term success does often depend on making good choices. This novel explores the notion of justice and revenge in a light-hearted way, using Matilda's practical jokes to do so.

The only power Matilda has over her parents is her superior mind. She cannot force them to come home on time, and she certainly cannot insist that her father change careers and stop his illegal and immoral activity with his used cars. What she does do, however, is punish them for being mean to her. When her father yells at her for something she didn't do, Matilda plays a practical joke on him. This is unconventional punishment because it does not at all fit the crime. Also, he does not even realize that he is being punished, or what for. However, Matilda and her readers still feel as though justice is being done. He is mean to Matilda, so he deserves to have a hat glued to his head.

In the end, however, he does eventually experience a punishment that does suit his crime. It is just not a punishment Matilda is able to dispense. He has been an immoral businessman for years, selling stolen vehicles as if they were new, and now the police are after him and he is forced to flee. Maybe it does not happen all the time in the real world, but in the world of Matilda, bad things do happen to bad people. In the real world, it happens enough to know that making good choices is the best thing to do.

Friendship

Friendship is important to everyone, and Matilda's brilliance does not exclude her from that basic human need. However, often people with exceptional intelligence have a hard time relating to other people and therefore alienate themselves from others. This does not happen with Matilda, who seems to be perfectly capable of making friends.

The first reason for this is that she is mostly unaware of her own intelligence, and therefore she is very humble. People do not mind being friends with her. She has a lot to offer because she has great ideas and likes to have fun, but none of these things would matter if she were unbearably arrogant. Her humility and kindness make her a great friend to have. She is able to seem like a regular little girl, as she "displayed no outward signs of her brilliance and she never showed off" (pg. 101.)



Another reason Matilda has no trouble making friends is that she admires good qualities in others, even if those qualities are not intelligence. When she met her friend Lavender, "Matilda liked her because she was gutsy and adventurous. She liked Matilda for the same reasons" (pg. 102.) They are friends because they have a lot in common and admire each other. Matilda's superior brainpower isn't a factor for either of them.

Finally, Matilda has enough friends because she doesn't mind who her friends are. Miss Honey becomes a great friend of Matilda, and even feels comfortable enough to open up to her about her past. This friendship is unconventional, as one is an adult and the other a small child. Miss Honey says to Matilda, "You really are so much wiser than your years, my dear... You are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean" (pg. 195.) Their friendship will obviously be different than Matilda's friendship with Lavender, but that does not make it less valuable.

Matilda is a person with exceptional intelligence, but she is also an exceptionally insightful listener and protective to those she loves. She is a great friend who does not allow her brilliance to get in the way of her friendships.



Style

Point of View

For the majority of the novel, the author uses a third-person and omniscient point of view to tell the story. The narrator focuses mainly on Matilda and her thoughts and feelings, but frequently includes the perspective of other characters as well. This is effective in the characterization of Matilda as we can understand her motivations and ideas, but we can also gain insight about what she is like by other characters' perceptions of her. We know that Mrs. Phelps and Miss Honey, for example, are impressed and amazed by this young girl's abilities, which allows us to know just how exceptional she is without Matilda herself even knowing it.

The exception to the third-person and omniscient point of view is found in the first chapter. Here, the narrator uses the first person, giving his personal perspective on the topic of children. For example, the narrator says, "If I were a teacher I would cook up some real scorchers for the children of doting parents" (pg. 8.) This use of the first-person pronoun does not occur again after the first few pages, but the tone of the novel remains the same, implying that the narrator could again give his personal opinion at any moment. This allows for the whole novel to maintain a lighthearted and casual feel. The story feels as though it is being told to us by a friend, and that makes the hyperbole and the elements of fantasy easier to understand.

Setting

Matilda takes place in an unnamed village in England. The world of a child is usually very small and Matilda's world is no exception to this. The first six chapters of the novel take place only in Matilda's home and then in the library, although Mr. Wormwood's workplace and Mrs. Wormwood's bingo hall are mentioned. These are the only places Matilda ever gets to see as a small child. However, her reading saves her from boredom, as she can travel the world through her reading. When Matilda is five-and-a-half, she begins to attend Crunchem Hall Primary School, a private school for children aged five through eleven. There are classrooms, an Assembly Hall, a playground, and an office for the Headmistress.

The only other places Matilda goes throughout the course of the novel are Miss Honey's homes. First, this is a tiny brick cottage with no heat and only a well for water where Miss Honey lives to avoid living with her cruel aunt, Miss Trunchbull. Finally, at the end of the novel, Matilda visits Miss Honey at the Red House. This is the nice and big house where Miss Honey grew up and where Matilda will live with her in the future.



Language and Meaning

Matilda is written at an elementary student's reading level and therefore uses simple sentence structure and a basic vocabulary. It is written with a casual tone and this is very prevalent in its descriptions of characters. The antagonists of the novel, Matilda's parents and Miss Trunchbull, are constantly calling other people names. These names include twit, midget, ignorant little squirt, witch, rat, blackhead, foul carbuncle, poisonous pustule, pirate, blister, nauseating little warts, ignorant little slug, empty-headed hamster, and witless weed, to name just a few. As you can see, while these names are rather cruel, they are quite clever and comical. The personal tone of the narration allows for the descriptions of the characters to be equally humorous and descriptive. Miss Trunchbull, for example, is described by the narrator as a gorgon, a giant, an enormous human bomb, a pillar of doom, and a tyrannical monster.

This use of creative and humorous language is typical of Dahl's style, and it is what makes the simple structure and plot work so well. This novel is touching and the plot is interesting, but what makes the book stand out is its use of exaggerated and comical language.

For an American reader, the vocabulary of the book may be more difficult than for a British reader. This is a thoroughly English book in its word choice, so an American audience may find certain things difficult to understand. However, most of the British terminology can be easily figured out based on context, and a dictionary can help anyone who is still confused. This is a book set in England and written by a British author, so it is to be expected that it will sound different than a novel written by an American for American children.

Structure

This is a work of children's fiction, so again it is important that it be simple to understand. The story is written in chronological order, with the only look back in time being the story of Miss Honey's past, which is told in the final third of the novel. The use of dialogue makes it very clear that this is a memory and not something happening in the present, so even young readers will have no difficulty following the storyline.

The novel is 240 pages long and divided into 21 chapters. These chapters are not numbered but simply separated by title. The chapters are all relatively short, varying from four to 18 pages. In most cases, chapters are not based on length of time, but rather on a specific occurrence. For example, every prank that is played on Matilda's parents has its own chapter heading ("The Hat and the Superglue," "The Ghost," "The Platinum-Blond Man"), as do the specific instances of punishment given out by Miss Trunchbull ("Throwing the Hammer," "Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake.") These chapters are crucial to characterization and the telling about interesting events, but they do not serve to move the plot forward. Other chapters do include specific events, but these events are integral to the overall storyline.



The main events in the story's plot from the time Matilda enters school to the time when Miss Trunchbull disappears take place in just a few weeks. Prior to that, we learn about Matilda's past. It is presented in chronological order, but is mostly a series of unrelated events. After the climax, the story jumps ahead a few weeks. In this way, the last chapter acts almost as an epilogue, explaining how everything turned out well for the protagonists.



Quotes

"Occasionally one comes across parents... who show no interest at all in their children, and these of course are far worse than the doting ones. Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood were two such parents. They had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab" (The Reader of Books, pg. 10.)

"It was a formidable list [of books] and by now Mrs. Phelps was filled with wonder and excitement, but it was probably a good thing that she did not allow herself to be completely carried away by it all...She was someone who minded her own business and had long since discovered it was seldom worth while to interfere with other people's children" (The Reader of Books, pg. 18.)

"'But that's dishonest, daddy,' Matilda said. 'It's cheating.' 'No one ever got rich being honest,' the father said. 'Customers are there to be diddled'" Mr. Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer, pg. 23.)

"All the reading she had done had given her a view of life that they had never seen. If only they would read a little Dickens or Kipling they would soon discover there was more to life than cheating people and watching television" (Mr. Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer, pg. 29.)

"All in all it was a satisfactory exercise. But it was surely too much to hope that it had taught her father a permanent lesson" (The Hat and the Superglue, pg. 37.)

"In came Mr. Wormwood in a loud check suit and a yellow tie. The appalling broad orange-and-green check of the jacket and trousers almost blinded the onlooker. He looked like a low-grade bookmaker dressed up for his daughter's wedding, and he was clearly very pleased with himself this evening" (Arithmetic, pg. 50.)

"'You're darn right it's like a war,' Hortensia cried. 'And the casualties are terrific. We are the crusaders, the gallant army fighting for our lives with hardly any weapons at all, and the Trunchbull is the Prince of Darkness, the Foul Serpant, the Fiery Dragon with all the weapons at her command. It's a tough life. We all try to support each other.' 'You can count on us,' Lavender said" (Throwing the Hammer, pg. 109.)

"The boy was slowing down now. There was no doubt about that. But he kept pushing the stuff into his mouth with the dogged perseverance of a long-distance runner who has sighted the finishing-line and knows he must keep going. As the very last mouthful disappeared, a tremendous cheer rose up from the audience and children were leaping on to their chairs and yelling and clapping and shouting, 'Well done, Brucie! Good for you, Brucie!'" (Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake, pg. 131.)



"Already Lavender's scheming mind was going over the possibilities that this water-jug job had opened up for her. She longed to do something truly heroic" (Lavender, pg. 136.)

"A sense of power was brewing in those eyes of hers, a feeling of great strength was settling itself deep inside her eyes. But there was also another feeling which was something else altogether, and which she could not understand.... Little waves of lightning seemed to be flashing out of her eyes. Her eyeballs were beginning to get hot, as though vast energy was building up somewhere inside them..It felt as though millions of tiny little invisible arms with hands on them were shooting out of her eyes" (The First Miracle, pg. 165.)

"Matilda had never once stopped to think about where Miss Honey might be living. She had always regarded her purely as a teacher, a person who turned up out of nowhere and taught at school and then went away again. Do any of us children, she wondered, ever stop to ask ourselves where our teachers go when school is over for the day?" (Miss Honey's Cottage, pg. 182.)

"This was the most sensational news of all and the entire class jumped up out of their seats to have a really good look. And there she was, the huge figure of the Headmistress, stretched full-length on her back across the floor, out for the count" (The Third Miracle, pg. 223.)

"Matilda leapt into Miss Honey's arms and hugged her, and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave out the back window, but the other two didn't even look back" (A New Home pg. 240.)



Topics for Discussion

Hyperbole is a common device used in literature, including in this novel. What is hyperbole and how is it used in *Matilda*? Do you find the hyperbole to be effective or would the novel be better if it were more believable?

How is Matilda treated differently than her brother? Do either of them deserve to be treated the way they are? How will Matilda's life be different from Michael's in the future?

In what ways are the characters in this novel realistic and in what ways are they simply meant to tell an interesting story? What is the difference between a well-rounded character and a caricature?

What could Matilda have done to help Miss Honey if she hadn't been able to lift the chalk with her mind?

Is Miss Trunchbull funny, or is she too cruel to be amusing?

What would it have been like for Miss Honey to be raised by a person like Miss Trunchbull? What might the long-term effects of a childhood like that be?

What is the motivation for Matilda's "pranks" on her parents? How about on Miss Trunchbull? Are her actions justified?

We meet the novel's protagonist when she is four years old and most of the events of the novel take place when she is only five-and-a-half. How would the novel be different if Matilda were an average child? How is Matilda different than other children her age?

How does the fact that Roald Dahl is British affect his writing? Would this novel be different if it was written by an American for an American audience? If so, how?