

# **The Twits Study Guide**

## **The Twits by Roald Dahl**

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# Plot Summary

NOTE: The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Dahl, Roald. *The Twits*. Paperback edition. Puffin Books, 2013.

*The Twits* is a children's novel by Roald Dahl in which Muggle-Wump and his monkey family work with local birds to escape from, and seek revenge on the nasty Mr. and Mrs. Twit. Mr. and Mrs. Twit are horrible people. Mr. Twit has a large, nasty, dirty beard that he has not cleaned in years while Mrs. Twit is hideously ugly because of all the mean and ugly thoughts she has inside. The Twits take delight not in loving each other, but in playing cruel tricks on each other. For example, Mr. Twit puts a frog in Mrs. Twit's bed and convinces her she is shrinking by adding height to her walking stick, while Mrs. Twit serves Mr. Twit spaghetti full of worms, telling him about the worms only afterward.

Each week, Mr. Twit covers the Big Dead tree with Hughtight Sticky Glue to capture birds for Bird Pie. The birds are always warned by Muggle-Wump and his African monkey family not to land on the tree, but the birds do not speak African and cannot understand them. Muggle-wump and his family are kept by the Twits and made to spend hours standing on their heads in training to be a part of an upside-down circus the Twits are planning. One day, a Roly-Poly Bird from Africa vacationing in England meets the monkeys in their cage. They warn Roly-Poly about the tree, and Roly-Poly communicates this to the local birds, keeping them safe.

The Twits are enraged by the fact that they have not been able to capture any birds, and are even angrier when all the birds laugh at them. They decide to go and buy large shotguns. While they are gone, Roly-Poly grabs the cage key to free Muggle-Wump and his family. Together with the birds, Muggle-Wump leads a plot of revenge against the Twits. Using Hughtight Glue, they turn the Twits' living room upside-down by gluing everything to the ceiling. When the Twits return, two ravens drop glue on their heads before they make it inside.

The Twits are stunned to find their house upside-down. Mr. Twit encourages Mrs. Twit to stand on their heads to make things right. However, the Twits end up stuck to the floor upside-down. No matter what they do, they cannot get unstuck. Meanwhile, Muggle-Wump and his family build a cozy house in the woods where they celebrate with the birds. Muggle-Wump and his family will return to Africa in the winter when Roly-Poly flies south. A week later, Fred, the gas meter man, discovers the Twits have disappeared, having shrunk into themselves, leaving only their smelly clothing behind.



# Hairy Faces – The Frog

## Summary

**Hairy Faces** – There are lots of men who now wear beards. The narrator wonders whether it is done to hide what they really look like, and wonders how difficult it is to keep beards clean. The narrator does not know, but believes the reader may now study bearded men more closely.

**Mr. Twit** – Sixty-year-old Mr. Twit is a hairy-faced man, with a large wild beard and hair growing out of his nose and ears. Mr. Twit has a beard because he believes it makes him wise and grand. The narrator explains that Mr. Twit is actually only a twit who has not washed his beard in years.

**Dirty Beards** – The narrator directly addresses the reader, saying that uncleaned beards are very dirty, for they collect everything from bits of food to mold. Because of this, Mr. Twit is never hungry. All he has to do is eat old bits of bad food from his beard.

**Mrs. Twit** – The narrator introduces Mrs. Twit, wife of Mr. Twit, who is no better than him. She is dirty, smelly, and ugly, all of which happened because of the ugly thoughts she has about everything and everyone. The narrator explains that Mrs. Twit was once quite beautiful, but has been changed by her horrible thoughts. Mrs. Twit always carries a walking stick to hit small animals and children, and has a cross-eyed glass eye.

**The Glass Eye** – Mrs. Twit can remove her glass eye, and uses it to play tricks – such as putting it into Mr. Twit's mug of beer. Mrs. Twit tells Mr. Twit she has eyes everywhere, so she is always watching him and he had better be careful.

**The Frog** – Mr. Twit puts a frog in Mrs. Twit's bed to get her back for the glass eye trick. When Mrs. Twit feels the frog, Mr. Twit tells her that a horrible creature is in her bed. It causes Mrs. Twit to faint. Mr. Twit pours water on Mrs. Twit to wake her up, after which she spends the night on the couch while the frog spends the night in the wet bed.

## Analysis

Bearded men are not to be trusted, Roald Dahl argues very early on in his novel *The Twits*. He begins by speaking about how bearded men may have beards to hide what they look like underneath. This cannot be for good reasons, so bearded men cannot be trusted. He directly addresses the reader in this instant. His argument is given more proof by the character of Mr. Twit, who is a nasty, dirty, and bearded man. Mr. Twit believes his beard is a mask to his meanness, making him a wise and good person, but the beard, like the narrator has already said, merely hides the truth about who Mr. Twit really is. However, Mr. Twit's meanness is also ultimately symbolized by his nasty, dirty beard, which is as nasty and dirty as his soul. Mr. Twit takes more joy in playing mean



tricks on his wife than in loving her. He never cleans his beard, and cares only for himself.

Mrs. Twit, though she does not have a beard, is the same way. Instead of loving Mr. Twit, she takes joy in playing mean jokes on him. Dahl will use his novel to also argue the point that doing nice things for others is better than doing mean things to others. Nothing good comes of the Twits doing mean things to each other. The only thing that happens, as the narrator points out, is yet another mean thing in a long line of mean things. Dahl writes with a humorous brevity, choosing to cut his chapters at cliffhangers to keep the reader's attention - such as in the chapter "The Glass Eye" where Mrs. Twit tells Mr. Twit she is always watching him, and so he had better be careful. For what, Mr. Twit cannot be entirely sure, but the reader is encouraged to continue on and find out.

Mrs. Twit's meanness is reflected in her ugly appearance, the narrator notes. As a young woman, Mrs. Twit was gorgeous, but her mean thoughts came to physically change her appearance. This is another reason why doing good is better than doing bad. The same is true of Mr. Twit. His appearance matches his ugliness inside. Ugly thoughts always end up showing on the outside, Dahl explains through his narrator. At the same time, the utter ugliness of the Twits is demonstrated by Quentin Blake's illustrations, which in great detail sketch out their hideous appearances.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the narrator warn the reader about watching out for men with beards? Is Mr. Twit such a man readers should watch out for? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Although the narrator warns readers about watching out for men with beards, do his warnings also apply to women without beards like Mrs. Twit? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do Mr. and Mrs. Twit play such mean jokes on one another? Why do they not stop playing such mean jokes on each other? How does this affect them personally and physically?

## Vocabulary

twit, ugliness, fearful, lovely, plotting, revive



# Wormy Spaghetti – Mrs. Twit Goes Ballooning Down

## Summary

**Wormy Spaghetti** – To get Mr. Twit back for the frog, Mrs. Twit mixes long worms into Mr. Twit's spaghetti lunch. Mrs. Twit tells him it is a new kind of spaghetti. Mr. Twit cannot understand why it tastes so bad, at which time Mrs. Twit tells him the spaghetti was full of worms.

**The Funny Walking Stick** – To get Mrs. Twit back for the wormy spaghetti, Mr. Twit begins to add tiny pieces of wood to the bottom of Mrs. Twit's walking stick to make it look like she is shrinking day by day. Mrs. Twit is trembly because of this, and must sit down.

**Mrs. Twit Has the Shrinks** – Mr. Twit points out that Mrs. Twit's feet are not touching the ground when she sits down. This is because Mr. Twit has also slowly been increasing the height of Mrs. Twit's chair as well. He tells her she has a case of the Shrinks, in which Mrs. Twit will shrink into nothingness. He believes she has ten or 11 days left to live. The only cure, he says, is to be stretched.

**Mrs. Twit Gets a Stretching** – Mr. Twit ties Mrs. Twit's feet to the ground, while he ties a hundred helium-filled balloons around her hands and arms, causing her to be pulled in two different directions. Mrs. Twit asks Mr. Twit if her feet are tied down properly, which gives Mr. Twit a second bad idea.

**Mrs. Twit Goes Ballooning Up** – Mrs. Twit worries enough balloons are tied to her so that she would float up to the moon. Mr. Twit then cuts her loose and Mrs. Twit flies up into the sky. Mr. Twit is thrilled to be rid of Mrs. Twit.

**Mrs. Twit Goes Ballooning Down** – Mrs. Twit bites through the strings of some of the balloons, allowing her to slowly descend back down to the ground.

## Analysis

Bearded men are not to be trusted, Roald Dahl continues to argue. This is certainly true of Mr. Twit, who does very cruel things not only to his wife, but to others as well. It is clear by now that Mr. Twit's beard is reflective of his cruel nature, and the cruel and mean things he does to his wife. The reader should note that each mean thing Mr. Twit does to Mrs. Twit, Mrs. Twit does one mean thing back. However, Mr. Twit tries to take things up a notch by being especially cruel to Mrs. Twit by cutting her free from the ground when she is tied up with helium balloons. Dahl's trademark cliffhangers are again on display, as one prank in one chapter leads to another prank in the following chapter. Readers - and the Twits - do not know what is coming next until it happens.



Doing nice things is better than doing mean things, Dahl continues to argue – and the shrinking, stretching, and ballooning prank is evidence of this. Mrs. Twit could have become seriously hurt by the balloon flight, but does not. Mr. Twit only thinks of getting rid of Mrs. Twit, and does not seem to value her much at all for being his wife. She is not there to love, like a wife should be, but to Mr. Twit, is only there to play mean tricks on. At the same time, Mrs. Twit does not love Mr. Twit like a husband, but continues to take great joy in playing mean tricks back on him.

## Discussion Question 1

Despite being married to each other, why do Mr. and Mrs. Twit continue to play such mean tricks on one another instead of loving each other. Do you think it is even possible for them to stop being mean to each other? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Mr. Twit hopes to get rid of Mrs. Twit by sending her away with helium-filled balloons. Why does he do such a dangerous thing?

## Discussion Question 3

Based on the way the Twits treat each other, do you think there was ever a time at which they loved one another? If so, what do you think happened that made them so mean? If not, why do you believe they even got married to begin with?

## Vocabulary

trembly, golly, hag, glorious, extraordinary



# Mr. Twit Gets a Horrid Shock – Still No Bird Pie for Mr. Twit

## Summary

**Mr. Twit Gets a Horrid Shock** – Mr. Twit is stunned to see his wife coming back down from the sky. She shouts and calls him names, and vows to have revenge. Before Mr. Twit can run away, Mrs. Twit lands on him and whacks him with her stick.

**The House, the Tree, & the Monkey Cage** – The narrator explains the story must now move beyond two nasty people doing nasty things to one another. The narrator explains the house in which Mr. and Mrs. Twit live looks like a prison because it has no windows. The garden, full of thistles and stinging-nettles, is the work of Mrs. Twit. Not far from the house is the Big Dead Tree, Mr. Twit's workshop, and the monkey cage, full of four monkeys, all of whom belong to Mr. Twit. The narrator says more will be heard about the monkeys later.

**Hugtight Sticky Glue** – Once a week, the Twits have Bird Pie for dinner. Mr. Twit catches the birds needed by covering the Big Dead Tree with Hugtight Sticky Glue, the stickiest glue in the world. The birds are then unstuck by Mr. Twit and baked into Bird Pie by Mrs. Twit.

**Four Sticky Little Boys** – Four local boys venture onto the Twit property to look at the monkeys. They climb a ladder to the Big Dead Tree for fun, and get stuck because of the glue. Mr. Twit is angry, and tells them they will be dinner. The boys escape by scrambling out of their pants and running away, leaving the pants stuck to the tree.

**The Great Upside-Down Monkey Circus** – The narrator says it is now time for the four monkeys. The monkeys are a family consisting of Muggle-Wump, his wife, and their two children. The Twits, the narrator explains, worked for the circus as monkey trainers in the old days. Mr. Twit hopes to one day now have the world's first ever upside-down monkey circus. This means every trick the monkeys do must be done upside down. The Twits force them to practice for six hours each day, which is miserable for the monkeys and sounds silly to the narrator and the reader.

**The Roly-Poly Bird to the Rescue** – Muggle-Wump and his family desperately want to escape and go home to Africa. They not only hate the circus, but hate what the Twits do to the birds. Because the birds do not speak African, they cannot understand the monkeys' warnings not to sit on the Big Dead Tree. One day, a beautiful and magnificent Roly-Poly Bird sets down on the monkey cage. Muggle-Wump and his family are stunned to see an African bird in England. The Roly-Poly explains he is on vacation. When the monkeys inform Roly-Poly of the dangers of the Big Dead Tree, Roly-Poly, who can speak English, flies around the tree warning the other birds.





No Bird Pie for Mr. Twit – Mr. Twit is stunned there are no birds stuck to the Big Dead Tree the next morning. All of the birds are sitting on the monkey cage.

Still No Bird Pie for Mr. Twit – Mr. Twit coats the monkey cage with Hugtight Glue. That night, the monkeys warn Roly-Poly about the cage, who in turn warns the other birds.

## Analysis

As the birds in the area learn the hard way, bearded men are not to be trusted. From the sky, Mr. Twit looks like any bearded man. But from below, Mr. Twit glues the Big Dead Tree in order to trap hundreds of birds to be used in Bird Pie. Even local kids, such as the four boys, learn the hard way when they climb the tree just for fun and get stuck. Muggle-Wump and his monkey family have also learned the hard way not to trust Mr. Twit, or Mrs. Twit for that matter. Both are hideously cruel to the monkeys, forcing them to stand on their heads for hours on end each day. The monkeys and birds add a new dimension to the novel, which has before now been focused entirely on the combative relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Twit. Now, the novel expands beyond them.

Between the boys, the birds, and the monkeys, it becomes clear to the reader that the Twits are not horrible only to one another, but to others as well. Their meanness continues to be reflected in their ugly appearances. This is yet more proof that it is better to do good things than bad things in life. Ugly thoughts always show on the outside. And the recipient of their ugly actions – the monkeys and the birds – desperately want to be free. Each time birds are stuck, they panic and cannot get away.

The monkeys themselves wish to escape their cage and the cruel feats they are forced to perform, but they do not know how to get away. What they do know is that they do want to get away, and that freedom is worth fighting for. This becomes a central theme – that freedom is worth fighting for – as the novel moves into its second half. Muggle-Wump, through Roly-Poly, is able to warn the birds to keep their freedom and their lives by not landing in the Big Dead Tree, or on the top of the cage. Because of this, the birds are saved. Although Muggle-Wump is not free, he knows it is right and good to warn others from getting into a dangerous situation. As Dahl argues, it is better to do good things just for the sake of doing good things. The Twits are incapable of doing good things, because their lives are based on doing mean things. But the lives of others, such as the birds and the monkeys, are not. This will dramatically alter the course of the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do the birds not realize they cannot trust the Twits until it is too late for them? What finally changes to make the birds recognize the Twits are dangerous before it is too late?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Muggle-Wump try to warn the birds against the Twits even though it does not help him and his family? Which themes in Dahl's novel does this reflect?

## Discussion Question 3

With the warning from Muggle-Wump, Roly-Poly is safe even though the other birds are not. Why do you think Roly-Poly agrees to help Muggle-Wump warn the other birds even though he himself is now safe because of Muggle-Wump's warning?

## Vocabulary

horrid, grizzly, grunion, frumpet, fury, ghastly, magnificent



# Mr. & Mrs. Twit Go Off to Buy Guns – The Furniture Goes Up

## Summary

**Mr. & Mrs. Twit Go Off to Buy Guns** – In the morning, Mr. Twit is angered to see the roof of the house covered with birds laughing at him. He and Mrs. Twit decide to buy shotguns that spray out 50 or more bullets with each bang. Mr. Twit orders all the monkeys to stand on their heads stacked one on top of another until he gets back. The monkeys are forced to obey.

**Muggle-Wump Has an Idea** – Muggle-Wump asks Roly-Poly to get the key to the cage, hanging in Mr. Twit's workshed. Roly-Poly does so at once. Muggle-Wump declares the Twits are going to be turned upside-down. He declares that the Twits will be forced to stand on their own heads for hours on end. Muggle-Wump then leads his family and Roly-Poly to the shed where they grab the Hughtight Glue, then bring it into the Twits' house.

**The Great Glue Painting Begins** – Muggle-Wump instructs his family and Roly-Poly to cover the ceilings with Hughtight Sticky Glue. All of the birds outside even help out, knowing there is no time to lose.

**The Carpet Goes on the Ceiling** - Together, the birds, the monkeys, Muggle-Wump, and Roly-Poly pull the red and gold carpet from the floor and stick it to the ceiling.

**The Furniture Goes Up** – With the carpet attached to the ceiling, Muggle-Wump calls for the furniture to be stuck to the ceiling as well. Everyone begins to glue the bottoms of the furniture to the ceiling. It is hard, difficult work, but working together, everyone is able to accomplish it. Roly-Poly is assigned to be the lookout for the return of the Twits.

## Analysis

The birds are thrilled to have not fallen for the gluey trap set by Mr. Twit, but their escape and laughter only angers Mr. Twit. He and his wife set off to buy massive shotguns to kill all the birds outright. It appears as if Mr. Twit will have the last laugh since everyone has underestimated him. However, Mr. Twit makes the mistake of letting all the birds and monkeys know what his plans are, which gives the monkeys and the birds the chance to try to do something about it. By way of the monkeys and the birds, good things are coming into the novel. The Twits have no idea what to expect because they have never dealt with a situation where good has been done against them, as they are only used to doing bad against one another.

The lives and freedom of the monkeys and the birds are now on the line like never before. They all realize that their freedom, and their lives, are worth fighting for. It is why



the monkeys and the birds all begin to work together, from Roly-Poly freeing Muggle-Wump and his family from the cage to Roly-Poly and the birds following Muggle-Wump into the Twits' house to begin the great plan which Muggle-Wump believes will finally defeat the Twits and secure freedom for all. It is very important that the monkeys and birds work together, for they would not have otherwise been able to put the plan into action.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Although the birds are able to escape the glue situation, what happens when they laugh at Mr. Twit? Why does Mr. Twit respond in the way that he does?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Even once Muggle-Wump is free from the Twits' cage, he decides to stick around and help the birds defeat the Twits. Why does he decide to do this even though he is already free and can simply escape?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Would it have been possible for Muggle-Wump to carry out his plan without the help of Roly-Poly and the other birds? Why or why not?

## **Vocabulary**

wring, obediently, balmy, batty, beastly



# The Ravens Swoop Over - The Twits Get the Shrinks

## Summary

The Ravens Swoop Over – Just as the rest of the furniture is finished, Roly-Poly returns to sound the alarm that the Twits are coming with massive shotguns. Two ravens then swoop over the Twits, dropping glue on their heads. The Twits are now even angrier, and go into their house.

The Twits are Turned Upside Down – The Twits are stunned to see their house upside-down inside. Mrs. Twit wants to know why everything is on the ceiling, but Mr. Twit believes it is they who are upside-down. The Twits try to make things right by standing on their heads, but glue themselves to the floor. The monkeys, Roly-Poly, and the birds all sweep in to catch sight of the stuck Twits.

The Monkeys Escape – Muggle-Wump and his family build a lovely house in a tree at the woods on top of the hill and celebrate with the birds. They decide they will journey back to Africa for the winter with Roly-Poly, flying on his back.

The Twits Get the Shrinks – Mr. and Mrs. Twit blame each other for their current situation. No matter what they do, they cannot unstick themselves. All of the weight on their heads begins to push their heads into their bodies, meaning they are now shrinking into themselves. They realize they both have the Shrinks. A week later, Fred comes to read the gas meter, he discovers two piles of clothes where the Twits had been. He, and everyone else, are very happy the Twits are no more.

## Analysis

When the Twits return to their farm, it is clear that bearded men – and their wives – are not to be trusted. True as they have promised, they have returned with massive shotguns. They plan to do horrible things with these shotguns, and so cannot be trusted. However, they are in for a surprise. The reader should pay careful attention to the two ravens who swoop in to drop glue on the heads of the Twits. This is not just to annoy them or to make them think the birds are taunting them, but has a much more important purpose.

The Twits do not realize what has gone on inside their house, and do not understand that freedom is worth fighting for because they are the ones who have kept the monkeys captive and threatened the lives of so many birds. It has not been the other way around. Freedom is worth fighting for, and the monkeys and the birds have done everything they can not only to be free, but to make sure the Twits are defeated and can never again do anything to hurt or harm anyone or anything. This is because of the goodness that has come to exist between the monkeys and the birds, who have chosen



to work together to prevent bad things from happening in the future -bad things caused by the Twits. The Twits become victims of their own cruelty when they get stuck upside-down, and shrink into nothingness. Dahl concludes his argument that it is always better to do good than bad, because justice will always be done to the bad and the good will be victorious.

## **Discussion Question 1**

When the Twits return to their place, two ravens drop glue on their heads. What is the purpose of this? What do the Twits think the purpose is? Why are they unable to guess the truth?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why is Fred so happy to discover that the Twits have disappeared at the very end of the novel? Why does the narrator say that all who have discovered the Twits have disappeared to be happy?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What argument does Dahl make with respect to doing good and the Twits disappearing? Why is this argument so important in the lives of young readers?

## **Vocabulary**

stupid, brutes, giddy, cemented, squiggled, dreaded



# Characters

## Mr. Twit

Mr. Twit is a nasty, horrible man of 60 years of age who is married to Mrs. Twit. Mr. Twit has a large, hideous, and filthy beard which reflects his cruel inner nature. Mr. Twit spends his days playing cruel tricks on Mrs. Twit, using glue to catch birds to eat, and forcing his pet monkeys to do upside-down tricks. Mr. Twit becomes enraged when the monkeys help the birds to avoid the glue traps, so he heads out with Mrs. Twit to purchase shotguns to shoot them all out of spite. Upon their return, the Twits have their heads doused with glue, and find their home inside upside-down. They stand on their heads to make things right but end up gluing themselves to the floor, after which they contract the Shrinks and disappear.

## Mrs. Twit

Mrs. Twit is a nasty, horrible woman who is married to Mr. Twit. Originally a beautiful girl, Mrs. Twit's angry, cruel, and ugly thoughts came to be reflected in her ugly appearance. Mrs. Twit spends her days playing cruel tricks on Mr. Twit, such as putting live worms into his spaghetti. Mrs. Twit, along with Mr. Twit, becomes enraged when the monkeys help the birds to avoid the glue traps, so they go to town to purchase shotguns to shoot everyone. When they return, the Twits have their heads glopped with glue and find their home inside upside-down. Standing on their heads to make things right, they end up gluing themselves to the floor, contract the Shrinks, and disappear.

## Muggle-Wump

Muggle-Wump is an African monkey who has a wife and two children. Having been captured by the Twits, Muggle-Wump and his family are made to stand on their heads for hours at a time to do tricks to be a part of the Twits' planned upside-down circus. Muggle-Wump desperately wants freedom for himself and his family, so he works together with Roly-Poly to be freed and to help the other birds who have been targeted by the Twits.

Muggle-Wump is a good monkey with a good heart who does good things simply for the virtue of doing good, and not for thoughts of rewards. Muggle-Wump is also incredibly clever and courageous, as it is Muggle-Wump who leads his family and the birds to glue everything in the Twits' living room to the ceiling. After defeating the Twits, Muggle-Wump and his family build a house in the woods and live there until the winter.



## Roly-Poly

Roly-Poly Bird is a magnificent African bird on vacation in England when he meets Muggle-Wump and his monkey family. Roly-Poly is horrified by what he learns about the Twits, and so works with Muggle-Wump not only to free Muggle-Wump and his family, but to defeat the Twits as well. Roly-Poly serves as an interpreter between Muggle-Wump and the local birds, and helps to defeat the Twits with Muggle-Wump's plan. It is decided that when the winter comes, Roly-Poly will fly the monkey family home.

## Local birds

Local birds, including crows, robins, magpies, rooks, song thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, and little jenny wrens are routinely trapped with glue by Mr. Twit for Bird Pie. The local birds come to be warned by Muggle-Wump through Roly-Poly about landing in certain places to avoid Mr. Twit's traps of glue. The local birds laugh at Mr. Twit, and come to help Muggle-Wump set a trap for the Twits.

## Fred

Fred is the local gas meter reader man. He shows up at the very end of the novel to read the Twits' gas meter, but discovers they have disappeared of the Shrinks. Fred is thrilled to discover this, and shares the good news with everyone.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Beards

Beards symbolize cruelty. Mr. Twit's hideous, dirty, and ugly beard is a physical manifestation of his inner cruelty and ugliness. This demonstrates that bearded men cannot be trusted, and are attempting to hide who they truly are as Mr. Twit believes his beard makes him seem wise and grand rather than ugly and tiny.

## Ugly looks

Ugly looks symbolize ugly feelings and thoughts. Mrs. Twit is very ugly, which is a physical manifestation of her inner ugliness. This demonstrates that being mean wears down someone, and also demonstrates that it is better to do good than bad.

## Cruel tricks

Cruel tricks are reflective of the cruel, ugly, and mean natures of both Mr. and Mrs. Twit. The Twits play horrible, cruel tricks on one another every day. These tricks include everything from worms in spaghetti to frogs in bed to sending Mrs. Twit flying away while tied to helium-filled balloons.

## Hugtight Sticky Glue

Hugtight Sticky Glue symbolizes both justice and injustice. Hugtight Sticky Glue is the stickiest, strongest glue on Earth. Mr. Twit unjustly uses the glue to trap countless birds to put into Bird Pie. Muggle-Wump uses the sticky glue justly to turn the Twit's living room upside-down, and to glue the Twits head-down to the floor.

## Bird Pie

Bird Pie symbolizes the cruelty of both Twits. Bird Pie is made from crows, robins, magpies, rooks, song thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, and little jenny wrens that are routinely trapped with glue by Mr. Twit for Bird Pie. The Bird Pie is made from birds not typically meant for eating, and is always made with birds that have been trapped by being glued rather than being outright killed.

## Red-and-gold carpet

A hideous red-and-gold carpet that covers the floor of the living room of the Twit household is a symbol of karma. The carpet is pulled up by the monkeys and the birds



before being glue to the ceiling. With the carpet on the ceiling, the rest of the plan to turn the room upside-down with furniture is possible. This also means that when the Twits get their heads stuck to the floor, they cannot cut themselves free by cutting the carpet.

## Furniture

Furniture of all kinds – including tables, chairs, and sofas – is the final part of Muggle-Wump's plan to defeat the Twits. With the carpet already glued to the ceiling, the furniture is glued, piece by piece, to the carpet. When the Twits get home, they see their furniture on the ceiling, and believe themselves to be upside-down. As such, they stand on their heads to right themselves – and get stuck.

## The Shrinks

The Shrinks is used in the novel to portray irony. It is a medical condition where the body shrinks into disappearance. Mr. Twit plays a joke on Mrs. Twit early in the novel by increasing the height of her cane and chair to make her think she has the Shrinks. Later in the novel, when the Twits have their heads glued to the floor, the unnatural weight on their heads causes their heads to shrink into their bodies, and their bodies to ultimately disappear due to the Shrinks.



# Settings

## The Twit house

The Twit house is where the Twits live. It is a solid-brick house with no windows and resembles a prison. Little is said about the inside of the house apart from the living room. The living room is full of furniture, and features an ugly red-and-gold carpet. The Twit House is where the Twits play many of their cruel pranks on one another, such as when Mr. Twit puts a frog in Mrs. Twit's bed, and Mrs. Twit feeds Mr. Twit wormy spaghetti. The Twit house is also invaded by Muggle-Wump and the birds, who make the living room-upside down to cause the Twits to stand on their heads and get the Shrinks.

## The monkey cage

The monkey cage is where the Twits keep Muggle-Wump and his family imprisoned. The Monkey Cage symbolizes cruelty and slavery, as the Twits force Muggle-Wump and his family to stand on their heads for hours each day to learn tricks for their planned upside-down circus. Muggle-Wump desperately wants freedom for his family and for himself, and when Roly-Poly arrives, is able to gain that freedom when Roly-Poly finds the key to unlock the cage.

## The Big Dead Tree

The Big Dead Tree is located near the monkey cage, and it reflects the cruel nature of the Twits. The tree is probably dead due to the amount of glue that Mr. Twit cruelly places on it to trap birds for Bird Pie. Muggle-Wump has Roly-Poly warn local birds from landing on the tree after Twit's latest round of glue. Because of this, the birds gather on the monkey cage instead.



# Themes and Motifs

## Bearded men cannot be trusted

Bearded men cannot be trusted, argues Roald Dahl in *The Twits*. The narrator stresses this early on. The narrator directly addresses the reader early in the novel, and states that there are many bearded men around these days and so must be taken carefully.

The narrator wonders why so many men have grown these beards. The narrator believes it is either because they are trying to hide something, and also wonders how often these beards are cleaned. The narrator directly tells the reader to be cautious around bearded men. The narrator goes on to reveal Mr. Twit is one such bearded man who cannot be trusted.

Mr. Twit, it is revealed, has grown his beard to hide his true nature. He hopes that the beard will make him look wise and grand, when in reality, he is cruel and small. This directly proves the point of the narrator. Mr. Twit's beard itself is horribly smelly, unclean, and moldy, which is a physical manifestation of his inner cruelty and the horrible things he does. As such, he is not to be trusted.

## It is better to do nice things than bad things

It is better to do nice things than bad things, argues Roald Dahl in *The Twits*. There are lots of good and bad things done through the course of the novel. Dahl makes the point that it is better to do good than bad for several different reasons, many of which he directly addresses to readers.

First, when people think or do ugly things, it becomes reflected in their appearances. Mrs. Twit used to be a beautiful young girl, but her inner ugliness came to be reflected in her outward physical appearance. She is now described as a very ugly, dirty, and disgusting woman. Mr. Twit's own inner meanness is reflected in his ugly beard and hairiness. No one wants to look ugly, Dahl argues, so it is best not to do ugly things.

Second, only bad things will come from bad things. Doing bad things means other people will do more bad things. Each mean trick that Mr. Twit plays on Mrs. Twit brings about an even meaner trick. Each mean trick that Mrs. Twit plays on Mr. Twit also brings about an even meaner trick. Instead of love and good things, the Twits only receive cruel jokes and pranks from each other. Therefore, they have a miserable life together.

Third, good things bring about good things. Muggle-Wump, though he is not free, warns away the birds from falling into Mr. Twit's glue traps and losing their own freedom as well as their lives. Muggle-Wump does this because it is the right thing to do, and does good for others. The good is repaid to Muggle-Wump later when Roly-Poly helps Muggle-Wump to escape the cage, and then when he and the birds help Muggle-Wump to stop the Twits. The Twits themselves are outsmarted by those they have been mean



to, and become victims of their own love of mean tricks, for they are tricked into getting the Shrinks.

## Ugly thoughts become ugly looks

Ugly thoughts become ugly looks, argues Roald Dahl in *The Twits*. Dahl argues that the cruel and ugly things people do become apparent in their looks, appearances, and physical nature. To make his point, Dahl uses the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Twit.

Mr. Twit is a very ugly, very dirty, very smelly, very hairy, bearded man. Mr. Twit has grown his beard because he thinks it will make him look wise and grand, but in reality, makes him look ugly and small. The beard itself is extremely dirty and ugly, and is reflective of the ugliness and cruel nature of Mr. Twit. The more bad energy he puts out into the world, the uglier he gets.

Mrs. Twit herself used to be a very beautiful young woman. However, her mean inner thoughts slowly became reflected in her ugly physical appearance. The more negative thoughts she had, and the uglier the thoughts themselves became, the less attractive Mrs. Twit got. The ugliness of Mrs. Twit is therefore symbolic of her inner ugliness, and taken together with Mr. Twit, are Dahl's warnings to readers not to do mean things.

## Freedom is worth fighting for

Freedom is worth fighting for, argues Roald Dahl in *The Twits*. Freedom is very important to Muggle-Wump, his family, and the birds, for their freedom is either in danger or has already been taken away by the Twits. While the Twits have their own freedom, they deny it to others – and the others are determined to fight to get their freedom back.

The lives and freedom of birds are threatened once a week. Mr. Twit coats the Big Dead Tree with Hugtight Glue to trap them. Mr. Twit then collects the trapped birds to have Mrs. Twit turn them into Bird Pie. Muggle-Wump uses Roly-Poly to warn the latest flocks of birds against landing on the tree, helping them to keep their freedom.

Because Muggle-Wump has helped the birds keep their freedom, the birds decide to help Muggle-Wump fight for the freedom of him and his family, and for the freedom of all future flocks of birds who come across the Twits' tree. Muggle-Wump is freed from his cage, along with his family, and everyone works together to trick and defeat the Twits. With their freedom in hand, the monkeys build a house in the woods, celebrate with the birds, and plan to journey south to Africa for the winter.

# Styles

## Point of View

Roald Dahl tells his novel *The Twits* in the first-person narrative mode from the point of an unknown narrator (most likely himself) who not only narrates the story, but directly addresses readers a number of times through the course of the novel. The use of “I” and “you” creates a very personal, very intimate relationship between reader and narrator. On page 3 of the chapter “Hairy Faces,” the narrator directly talks about wanting to know why so many men have hairy faces, and warning readers to wonder about men with beards. This also directly engages the reader to consider the things that the narrator speaks about, such as doing good things. When it comes to the bulk of the story itself, however, the narrator does not address himself, but directly addresses the reader, breaking the fourth wall to do so, and again directly engaging the reader to consider the moral themes and messages of the story. This is especially important given the target audience of the novel – children – in whom Dahl hopes to instill not only imagination, but good thoughts and good values.

## Language and Meaning

Roald Dahl tells his novel *The Twits* in language that is inventive, personal, and simple. This is done for several reasons. First, Dahl has a number of moral messages he wants to communicate to young readers – messages such as always doing good – that are communicated easily through direct, simple language. Second, the target audience of the novel – children – need to be addressed in simple, straightforward language to understand the moral messages of the story. Third, the personal nature of the language – the use of direct references such as “I” and “you” – creates a very personal and engaging relationship between the reader and the narrator. This makes the reader feel as if the reader is being directly addressed by the writer. Fourth, Dahl is known as a creative genius, so the use of inventive and creative words such as *frumptious*, *gnazzle*, and *swazzle* are reflective of Dahl’s creativity.

## Structure

Roald Dahl divides his novel *The Twits* into 29 unnumbered, titled chapters that are interspersed with numerous black-and-white pen-and-ink illustrations by Quentin Blake. Each chapter is given a title directly referring to the events of that chapter. For example, the chapter “Hairy Faces” deals with the narrator’s thoughts on bearded men and things readers should look out for in hairy men, while the chapter “The Great Upside-Down Monkey Circus” reveals the reason why the Twits are keeping Muggle-Wump and his monkey family as prisoners, and that is to force them to perform in the upside-down circus the Twits are planning to begin. The illustrations by Blake that perforate the novel provide visual representations of the events being written about to give the reader a

better mental picture of things going on. For example, the chapter “Muggle-Wump Has an Idea” contains illustrations of Muggle-Wump, his family, and Roly-Poly gathering together glue in buckets so that they can turn the Twits’ living room upside-down.



## Quotes

So what I want to know is this. How often do all these hairy-faced men wash their faces?"

-- Narrator (Hairy Faces paragraph 3)

**Importance:** The narrator explains early on that beards on men are in style. The narrator does not know why so many men wear beards, unless it is to hide what they really look like underneath. The narrator also wonders how frequently beards are cleaned – and this leads the narrator to introduce the horrible Mr. Twit.

Mr. Twit felt that this hairiness made him look terrifically wise and grand. But in truth he was neither of these things. Mr. Twit was a twit.

-- Narrator (Mr. Twit)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator introduces Mr. Twit. At age 60, Mr. Twit has a massive beard and is very hairy, and believes this makes him look good. In reality, he does not look good, and is actually a twit. The narrator explains this is in part because Mr. Twit has not washed his beard in years.

Mrs. Twit was no better than her husband.

-- Narrator (Mrs. Twit)

**Importance:** After introducing the reader to the horrible Mr. Twit, the narrator introduces the reader to his wife, Mrs. Twit. She is dirty and ugly, and has become this way because of the ugly thoughts she has on the inside, which have changed her on the outside over the years.

But Mr. Twit, remembering the worms in his spaghetti, didn't feel sorry for her at all.

-- Narrator (Mrs. Twit Has the Shrinks)

**Importance:** Mr. Twit and Mrs. Twit commence playing cruel tricks on one another. Mr. Twit plays a trick where Mrs. Twit believes she is shrinking to death. Mr. Twit, because he is so horrible, does not feel sorry for her at all, and merely wants to get her back for the wormy spaghetti trick she played on him.

And not far from the tree, you can see the monkey cage. There are four monkeys in it. They belong to Mr. Twit. You will hear about them later.

-- Narrator ( The House, the Tree, & the Monkey Cage)

**Importance:** The narrator interrupts the endless parade of tricks the Twits play on each other to describe the place in which the Twits live. Of particular note, besides the house with no windows and the thorny garden, is the money cage in which four monkeys live. The narrator explains more will be said about the monkeys later, indicating the monkeys will have a very important part to play coming up.





All this sounds pretty silly to you and me. It sounded pretty silly to the monkey, too. They absolutely hated having to do this upside-down nonsense day after day.

-- Narrator (The Great Upside-Down Monkey Circus)

**Importance:** The narrator reveals that the Twits used to train monkeys for the circus, and now wish to have their own circus with upside-down monkey performances. The narrator explains the monkeys hate this, and that such a circus seems downright silly. This underscores how unhappy the monkeys are with their current situation, and how ready they are for change.

Muggle-Wump and his family longed to escape from the cage in Mr. Twit's garden and go back to the African jungle where they came from.

-- Narrator (The Roly-Poly Bird to the Rescue)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator reveals the desperation of the monkeys, and their unhappiness without their freedom. They long to return to freedom in the jungle, but they are unable to do so because they are being held against their will by the Twits. Their desperation will seal their determination to fight for the freedom by tricking the Twits with their living room. They will do what they must to gain their freedom.

We're going to turn those terrible Twits UPSIDE-DOWN!

-- Muggle-Wump (Muggle-Wump Has an Idea)

**Importance:** Here, Muggle-Wump reveals his plan to his family and to the birds. Everything in the Twits' living room will be glued to the ceiling to make it seem like the Twits are upside-down when they enter the house. The monkeys and the birds then work together to glue everything from the carpet to the furniture to the ceiling with Hugtight Glue.

What's happened?

-- Mrs. Twit (The Twits are Turned Upside Down)

**Importance:** When Mr. and Mrs. Twit return home, they are stunned by what they find in their living room. Everything is on the ceiling. Mrs. Twit's reaction says it all about her stun and her husband's surprise. They believe they are the ones upside-down, so they decide to stand on their heads in order to be right-side up, but end up glued to the floor upside-down instead.