

The Witches Study Guide

The Witches

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Plot Summary

“The Witches” is a children’s horror novel by Roald Dahl in which an unnamed seven-year-old boy and his grandmother seek to bring down all the witches of the world before the witches kill all the children around the globe. When the novel begins, the boy – who serves as narrator – explains that witches are real, and are not the silly characters seen on Halloween and in movies. Instead, real witches are evil demons in human form that seek to kill all children. The narrator explains that witches are so dangerous because they are difficult to distinguish from regular women, but may be given away by a few telltale signs. Some of these include blue spit, baldness, wigs, a strong sense of smell, and a lack of toes. All of these things, the narrator explains, have been taught to him by his grandmother.

Following the death of his parents, the narrator goes to live with his grandmother, Grandmamma, in Norway. Upon their decision to relocate to England, the narrator narrowly avoids dealing with a witch thanks to the signs pointed out by his grandmother. As the school year ends, the narrator and Grandmamma decide to vacation in Norway, but Grandmamma contracts pneumonia. Instead of going abroad, the narrator and Grandmamma decide to go to the beach in southern England. They take a room at the Hotel Magnificent in the coastal town of Bournemouth, where the narrator looks forward to spending days on the beach, spending time with his grandmother, and spending time to teach his two pet mice to do tricks.

The narrator seeks out a quiet, unused room in the hotel to train his mice, but selects a room where an organization calling itself the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is due to meet. When the women enter, the narrator decides to hide rather than disrupt the meeting. As it turns out, the 85 members of the RSPCC are actually England’s witches in disguise, attending their annual meeting with the Grand High Witch. The Grand High Witch unveils a secret plan to buy candy shops, and to lace candy with Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker, which will turn anyone who eats the candy into mice. The candy will be given away free to children. A test is performed on another boy staying at the hotel named Bruno Jenkins. The witches are thrilled to see Bruno turn into a mouse. It is then that the Grand High Witch and the other witches discover the narrator. They force him to drink Formula 86, which turns him into a mouse.

The narrator and Bruno go to see Grandmamma, who is saddened to see what has become of the narrator and Bruno. The narrator, however, has a plan to stop the witches. He sneaks into the Grand High Witch’s room, where he steals a vial of Formula 86. From there, the narrator pours it into a basin of soup intended for all the witches at dinner. The witches eat the soup, and within minutes, transform into mice. The mice are then chased down and killed by the hotel staff and the men staying at the hotel. Bruno is reunited with his family, while the narrator and his grandmother decide to move to Norway. In Norway, the narrator and his grandmother decide they cannot rest for long, as they have many more children around the world to save, and many more witches to kill.



A Note About Witches – Summer Holidays

Summary

A Note About Witches – The seven-year-old, never-named English narrator explains at the outset of the story he is about to relate that witches are real, that they are evil, that they hate children and spend their lives plotting to get rid of them, that they blend in easily, and that they could be any woman anywhere. This, the narrator explains, is part of what makes them so dangerous to children, as well as the fact that witches don't ordinarily look dangerous. The narrator asks the reader to observe a drawing of two women, and asks which is the witch. The narrator says there is no way to know.

My Grandmother – The narrator explains to the reader that he has had two close encounters with witches in his life, and that only because of his Norwegian grandmother was he able to escape. The narrator explains to the reader that Norway is where witches first came from. The narrator also reveals his parents were killed in a tragic car accident while visiting Norway. The narrator then went to Oslo to live with his grandmother, Grandmamma, who taught him all he now knows about witches. At the time, Grandmamma explained she knew five children who disappeared or changed because of witches, and that in every case, a strange lady was seen outside the child's home before the child disappeared. One little girl, Solveg Christiansen, was found to be trapped in an oil painting, while another, Birgit Svenson, was turned into a chicken.

How to Recognize a Witch – This chapter returns the plot of the novel to the past. Grandmamma sits the narrator down to help him recognize a witch when he sees one. She explains that witches are demons in human-shape. Witches always wear gloves, even in the house, and only take them off when they go to sleep. Witches are bald, and always wear wigs to hide their baldness. This makes their heads itchy. Witches also have larger nostrils than normal people, and amazing powers of smell. Clean children always smell worse to witches than dirty children. Witches also have pupils that constantly change color, blue spit, and don't have any toes. Grandmamma also explains she once had an encounter with a witch, but says it is too scary to relate.

The Grand High Witch – The narrator and Grandmamma move to England to comply with the last will of the narrator's father. Grandmamma explains that there are not as many witches in England as there are in Norway, but English witches are the nastiest in the world. They enjoy turning children into things like slugs so parents will step on them not knowing the slug is actually a child. Each country has a Secret Society of Witches, and each year, the Society members gather together for a lecture from the Grand High Witch of All the World. No one in the world knows where the Grand High Witch lives, including the witchophiles – people who study witches. Back home in England, the narrator reunites with his best friend, Timmy. They decide to build a treehouse. When Timmy is down with the flu, the narrator continues. He discovers he is being watched by



a strange woman wearing gloves who says she has a green snake to give as a present to him. Thankfully, Grandmamma calls the narrator in for dinner, at which time the narrator relates what has happened.

Summer Holidays – For summer vacation, Grandmamma and the narrator plan to head to Arendal, Norway, where Grandmamma had spent her own childhood. Unfortunately, Grandmamma gets pneumonia. The doctors advise only a short trip, so the narrator and Grandmamma go to the south coast of England instead, to the Hotel Magnificent in Bournemouth. Hoping to make things better for the narrator, Grandmamma buys him two pet white mice named William and Mary. Mr. Stringer, the hotel manager, allows the white mice in the hotel only as long as they remain caged. While looking for a secret place to train his mice, the narrator comes across an empty room reserved for a group called the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. There, he begins to teach his mice to walk a tightrope behind a folding screen. A short time later, Mr. Stringer guides the society of ladies into the room.

Analysis

“The Witches” is a children’s horror novel by Roald Dahl in which an unnamed seven-year-old boy and his grandmother seek to bring down all the witches of the world before the witches kill all the children around the globe. These witches, the narrator explains early in the novel, are actually real. They are not the exaggerated cartoons or silly depictions one sees in pop culture, but are truly evil beings. As the reader learns through Grandmamma, witches are actually not people, but demons in human form. The narrator explains that the most dangerous thing about witches is that they cannot be easily distinguished from real people. Here, the author alludes to one of his primary themes, in which he uses horror as a way to warn about trusting strangers. Just because someone looks harmless, does not mean that person is harmless. This is a strong warning for all children reading the novel.

At the same time that the author uses horror as a way to inform children, he also uses horror as a way to scare readers and put them on the edge of their seats, considering it a normal part of childhood to want a good thrill. Part of the way that the author goes about creating such a sense of horror is to explain to readers that witches are real. While the adult reader may recognize the author’s sly sense of suspense, the young reader will think twice about the reality of witches. This is especially telling when the writer reveals through his narrator that fictionalized witches – with their silly hats and black cloaks – are not what real witches are like, and that real witches are good at being in disguise.

The concerns about children not trusting strangers expressed through the author’s warnings, as well as the idea that witches may be ordinary looking women in disguise, both help to inform a recurring theme in the novel in which the writer argues that appearances do not mean everything. The aged and heavy Grandmamma might be dismissed by most as a mere old woman, but despite her grandmotherly appearances, Grandmamma is fiercely intelligent and courageous. She becomes a wellspring of



important knowledge for the narrator, who uses this information in his own struggle against witches later in the novel. What little the narrator knows so far about witches saves him from a witch in the garden.

The appearance of the witch in the garden is not only horrific in and of itself, but supports another important theme the author uses in his work. This is the idea that endings are not always happy. While Grandmamma intervenes at just the right time to call the narrator in for dinner, the horror of, and incomplete ending to the encounter is that what becomes of the witch in the garden is not known. In other words, this particular witch is still lurking about somewhere, which adds to the narrator's horror because he never knows when this witch may pop up again.

Discussion Question 1

What is a real witch, according to Gramamma? How can someone spot a real witch?

Discussion Question 2

What do witches do? Why are they so dangerous?

Discussion Question 3

How do the lessons of Grandmamma regarding witches help the narrator to spot, and avoid a real witch in the garden?

Vocabulary

scheming, bloodthirsty, devilry, squelched, enthralled, contentedly, consolation



The Meeting – The Recipe

Summary

The Meeting – The narrator decides to remain where he is so the 85 friendly-sounding ladies of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children may conduct their meeting in peace. The narrator looks through the folding screen at the ladies, and notices they all appear to be scratching their heads while wearing gloves. The narrator is terrified and faints, believing the women all to be witches.

Frizzled like a Fritter – When the narrator awakens, he discovers that all the women are now quiet and looking toward another beautiful woman in her mid-twenties, with long dark hair and wearing a long black dress and gloves. The woman removes a mask to reveal a hideous, monstrous face. It is the Grand High Witch. She tells everyone to remove their gloves, which reveals long brown claws. She tells everyone to remove their shoes, which reveal feet with no toes. She tells everyone to remove their wigs, which reveals bald heads. The Grand High Witch then lectures the English witches about not killing more children. As she yells at the witches, blue spit comes out of the Grand High Witch's mouth. She demands all children in England be wiped out within a year, or else. One witch in the audience says this isn't possible, so the Grand High Witch shoots white sparks out of her eyes to burn the protesting witch into nothing.

Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker – The Grand High Witch says that children are revolting, and must be wiped out. The Grand High Witch declares she has a "giganticus plan" to kill all the children in all of England. The Grand High Witch tells the witches that when they return home, they will quit their cover jobs and all buy candy shops using counterfeit money. Each shop will then announce a Great Gala Opening, with free chocolate and sweets for all children. The chocolate and sweets will contain the newest magical formula known as "Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker." By school time the next morning, the children will turn into mice, at which time mousetraps will be set out to kill them all. The Grand High Witch then performs a terrifying dance and sings a scary song about killing all the mouse-children.

The Recipe – The Grand High Witch announces she will instruct the witches on the brewing of Formula 86, but is suddenly interrupted by two white mice running around. The narrator realizes William and Mary have escaped. The Grand High Witch realizes that the mice must be pets, and must belong to a boy. She announces she will find the boy and kill him. The Grand High Witch then kicks William and Mary, after which they run away. The Grand High Witch then explains the recipe: The melted-down, wrong end of a telescope; 45 brown mice tails boiled in hair oil; frog juice; alarm clocks set for school time; a gruntle's egg; a crabcruncher claw; a blabbersnitch beak; a grobblesquirt snout; and the tongue of a catspringer. This will produce a green formula, of which one drop must be added to each chocolate or sweet.



Analysis

The narrator, who has been training his mice in a room he believed was being unused, finds himself in the presence of 80-some women of varying ages. These women are, ironically, not a concerned group dedicated to opposing child cruelty, but are witches in disguise with intents to harm children. Here, the theme of not being able to rely on appearances is very important, as the women appear to be sweet and kind, but are in reality murderous witches. The discovery of these women as witches causes the narrator to faint for a few minutes.

At the same time, the theme of horror working to warn children against trusting strangers also reemerges. The narrator at first believes he is safe in the company of so many women, but as he quickly learns, this is not so. His fainting is a physical manifestation of the horror that he experiences – a horror so strong and a situation so terrifying, it causes him to lose consciousness. When the narrator regains consciousness, he observes a gorgeous young woman whose appearance, like the other witches, does not match reality. She is, in reality, the horrifying Grand High Witch. Her disguise is that of a literal mask that hides her grotesque features.

Interestingly enough, though the other witches may be bald and may have some bizarre features – such as having no toes and blue spit – it is the true evil of the Grand High Witch which can be seen in her ugly and monstrous features. Here, again, appearances do not matter so much as the evil which someone commits. The Grand High Witch unveils a truly horrifying plan in which the children of the world will all be turned into mice – and killed by their parents, their teachers, and other adults in their communities. The appearance of the children as mice won't mean everything, as the reader knows – though the adults who the witches believe will kill the mice will have no idea that the mice are actually children, and take the mice for what they appear to be – mice.

Through the Formula 86 plan of the witches, the author is able to provide the substance for horror for children. The author drives right to the heart of childhood by frightening children with that which is unknown – such as witches – and that which is known – such as chocolates and friendly-looking adults. Here, children will continue to be on edge as they have already been warned that witches are real, and that the witches are planning to put Formula 86 in candy. The author continues to invest his work with such thrills and horrors, believing they are essential to childhood.

Discussion Question 1

What is the Grand High Witch's plan to kill all the children in England? Why does she believe this plan will be effective?



Discussion Question 2

What is the appearance of the Royal Society to Prevent Cruelty to Children? What is the truth behind the organization? Why do you believe they pretend to be protecting the welfare of children?

Discussion Question 3

What happens to the narrator when he discovers he is in a room of witches? Why?

Vocabulary

frizzled, mesmerized, transfixed, guttural, revolting, chanted, fiendish, leer, culprit, blithering



Bruno Jenkins Disappears – Hello Grandmamma

Summary

Bruno Jenkins Disappears – The Grand High Witch then reveals to the assembled witches that her formula works by inviting a little boy named Bruno Jenkins to the room. The previous day, the Grand High Witch reveals, she had given him a laced chocolate bar, and has promised him six more in exchange for his showing up. Bruno Jenkins, a rich, chubby, and greedy boy, then arrives and demands his chocolate. Right on schedule, an alarm clock is heard and Bruno shrinks into a mouse. The audience cheers.

The Ancient Ones – The oldest witches among the group, the Ancient Ones, will be unable to find the rarer ingredients because of the hard physical activity it will require, so the Grand High Witch will give them pre-brewed formula in her room, No. 454. Suddenly, an older witch stands up and announces she smells dog droppings – what a clean child smells like to a witch. The Grand High Witch then orders the witches to find the source of the smell.

Metamorphosis – The witches then discover the narrator, who runs. The Grand High Witch orders the witches to catch the narrator. The narrator screams for help, but is captured. An entire bottle of Formula 86 is forced down the narrator's throat, accelerating the process. The narrator is transformed into a mouse. The narrator runs off while the Grand High Witch orders the witches to prepare for tea with Mr. Stringer on Sunshine Terrace outside the Hotel.

Bruno – The narrator, now a mouse, convinces himself that life as a mouse may be better, or at least no worse than life as a boy. The narrator then comes across Bruno Jenkins, who is eating the remains of a fishpaste sandwich. Bruno is angered at being turned into a mouse, and demands to know which witch is responsible. The narrator explains it is the woman who gave him the candy bar the day before. The narrator and Bruno decide to consult Grandmamma about what to do next.

Hello Grandmamma – The narrator and Bruno startle a chambermaid who screeches, causing Grandmamma to open her door to find out what is going on. The narrator and Bruno then dart inside, and reveal themselves to Grandmamma. Grandmamma is horrified, and begins to cry. The narrator tells her not to worry, and explains everything that has happened to him and Bruno. The narrator wonders, however, how he and Bruno can still think and speak like people. Grandmamma explains that it is clear the witches haven't been able to brew a formula that will turn someone into a 100% percent mouse. The narrator then realizes that the Grand High Witch's room is 454, one floor and one balcony directly below his own room, 554. The narrator devises a plan to be lowered onto the Grand High Witch's balcony, sneak in, steal formula, and have it given



to all the witches. Grandmamma agrees this is a good plan, and decides to lower the narrator down in a sock.

Analysis

The idea that appearances cannot be trusted continues to be an important theme in this section of the novel. This occurs by way of the use of Formula 86 on not only Bruno Jenkins, but the narrator as well. Both Bruno and the narrator are transformed into mice. While they may now appear to be mice, they are really human boys. To the rest of the world, however, they appear only to be mice. This is true of the chambermaid who screeches and panics when she sees the narrator and Bruno scampering along the hallway. At first, Grandmamma doesn't recognize the narrator until the narrator speaks to her. She is terrified to learn of the plan of the witches.

However, the plan of the witches to ruin the lives of the narrator and Bruno by turning them into mice backfires. The narrator will be able to use his appearance as a mouse to his own advantage. He plans to sneak into the Grand High Witch's hotel room to steal a vial of Formula 86, and then find a way to use it on the witches themselves. Not even the witches will be expecting the plan, as they believe that transforming children into mice will take away all of their human qualities – such as speech and intelligence. Just as human children should not trust the appearance of strangers, the witches should not trust the appearance of all mice they encounter.

At the same time, another important theme begins to emerge. This is the author's contention that all lives matter – both human and animal. The author could easily have had the narrator and Bruno killed or turned into something less appealing than mice, but he has chosen not to. The lives of even mice are worth something to him. This is in keeping with the theme of appearances, as even though the narrator and Bruno are mice, this doesn't mean that their lives are worthless. Likewise, the lives of real mice like William and Mary are not worthless either because they only happen to be mice.

Interestingly enough, to the ordinary reader – young or adult – the thought of becoming a mouse against their will, will seem horrific and distressing. But to the narrator, nothing could be further from the truth. The narrator is not troubled by his current situation at all. His appearance as a mouse, to him, means he can swiftly and sneakily move about – and also provides the perfect way to commit an act of revenge against the witches. That the narrator is not troubled by his appearance is something the reader should bear in mind through the remainder of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What plan does the narrator hatch against the witches? How does he intend to make this plan possible?



Discussion Question 2

The narrator – and Bruno Jenkins – are surprisingly calm about being turned into mice against their will. Why?

Discussion Question 3

How would you feel about being transformed into a mouse against your will? Why?

Vocabulary

bewildered, sheer, metamorphosis, instantaneous, terrifically, petrified



The Mouse-Burglar – In the Kitchen

Summary

The Mouse-Burglar – The narrator is lowered down to Room 454's balcony in a sock by Grandmamma. The narrator then slips into the room, which smells musty, like old witches. In the bed's mattress, the narrator discovers numerous vials of Formula 86, one of which he cuts out with his teeth. While trying to get out, the narrator must hide behind a bedpost as the Grand High Witch suddenly returns. The narrator discovers three frogs which the narrator learns the Grand High Witch does not need for her Formula anymore, so she intends to throw them to the seagulls to eat. It is then that the Grand High Witch hears Grandmamma yelling for the narrator to hurry up. The Grand High Witch then yells up to Grandmamma, asking what is going on. Grandmamma explains she merely dropped the sock she was knitting, and that her grandson has been in the bathtub too long. The narrator believes it is only a matter of time before he is found, but the arrival of the Ancient Ones for their vials of formula allows the narrator to escape through the door. He then returns to his Grandmamma's room, where Grandmamma is thrilled the narrator is okay.

Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins Meet Bruno – There is now a little less than two hours until the witches eat dinner. Grandmamma decides that Bruno should return to his parents, so she puts Bruno and the narrator into her purse and heads toward the Lounge. Grandmamma attempts to explain to the Jenkinses what has happened with Bruno, but Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins call her a madwoman. Mr. Jenkins orders Grandmamma to stop frightening his wife. Grandmamma shrugs, says she did her best, and leaves.

The Plan – Back in her room, Grandmamma asks Bruno why he didn't speak up to reveal his identity. Bruno says he was too busy eating. The narrator then reveals he intends to sneak into the kitchen with Formula 86, and to await the chance to sprinkle it into the food being prepared for the witches. He explains that, as a mouse, he can now go places where human beings cannot. Grandmamma explains she will carry the narrator and the vial down to the dining room in her purse, where she will set them on the floor to depart for the kitchens. Bruno agrees to come along and remain quiet so long as he is fed.

In the Kitchen – With purse in hand, Grandmamma heads down to the dining room for dinner. She reminds the narrator to keep his tail in mind, for it can be used for hanging and swinging, among other things. In the dining room, two long tables have been set aside for the use of the members of the RSPCC. William the waiter asks Grandmamma where the narrator is, to which Grandmamma explains the narrator is in bed, not feeling well. When William goes to get Grandmamma a glass of sherry, she lowers the narrator and the bottle to the floor under a napkin. The narrator then dashes into the kitchen with the bottle of Formula 86 just as he sees the witches begin to enter the dining room. Using his tail, the narrator grabs hold of a trashcan as cooks and waiters move about.



The narrator learns a large silver basin of soup is being prepared for the entire table of witches, so he decides this is where the vial must be poured.

Working his way from shelf to shelf, the narrator begins to enjoy using his tail to swing and hang. He successfully pours the formula into the soup, but is then spotted by a cook. The cook shouts that he has seen a mouse. He then throws a knife at the narrator, cutting off the tip of his tail. The narrator dashes away, as everyone in the kitchen scrambles to kill him. The narrator hides in a sack of potatoes, then makes a dash for Grandmamma, who bandages up his tail. The narrator then hides in the purse and points out the Grand High Witch to Grandmamma. Mr. Jenkins then approaches.

Analysis

The cruelty of the Grand High Witch is demonstrated in this section of the novel through the narrator's encountering of the frogs. No longer needed for frog juice, these poor frogs are to be thrown out to the seagulls. The idea that all life has merit is referenced here once more, as the narrator is noted to feel badly for these frogs, though he is not directly able to help them. At the same time, many people do not believe all life has merit, as the cook who encounters the narrator in the kitchen tries to kill the narrator by throwing a knife at him. The knife only cuts off part of the tail of the narrator, but it is enough to demonstrate to the narrator that he must be very careful, else he will lose his life to people who care nothing about appearance.

The theme that all endings are not happy emerges subtly here. The reader will recall once more that the narrator is nearly killed in the kitchen, and has part of his tail cut off by a thrown knife. In many cases, main characters escape unharmed from numerous close calls – but the fact that the narrator of “The Witches” shall now be forced to spend the rest of his mouse life without part of his tail is an ending that is not entirely happy. This is certainly true given the fact that the narrator has come to depend on his tail so much for getting around.

While Grandmamma recognizes the narrator as her human grandson trapped in the body of a mouse, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins have no such acceptance for their son. They both believe Grandmamma is playing a trick on them on behalf of their son and the narrator. Mr. Jenkins, who knows nothing of witches and magic, cannot possibly comprehend at this point in time that his son is indeed a mouse – but this will change later on. Appearances matter to Mr. Jenkins now, but they will not matter to him later on.

At the same time, the reader will recall the scene where the narrator has been lowered down to the Grand High Witch's room. The narrator is nearly caught when Grandmamma calls for him, which is overheard by the Grand High Witch, herself. However, the Grand High Witch takes it at face value that Grandmamma is merely calling for her grandson to get out of the bathtub. In other words, the Grand High Witch who relies on false appearances to hide her true nature is herself fooled by the false appearance – the false story – spun by Grandmamma.



Discussion Question 1

Although the Grand High Witch relies on deception to disguise her true appearance, she falls for Grandmamma's story on the balcony. Why do you believe this is?

Discussion Question 2

While Grandmamma fairly quickly accepts the fact that her grandson has been transformed into a mouse, Mr. Jenkins does not. Why not? Can he be blamed for this? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Is the narrator successful in delivering Formula 86 to the food being eaten by the witches? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

clumsily, immensely, blighter, coarse, mishap, drastically, altered, dotty, desperation



Mr. Jenkins and His Son – It's Off to Work We Go

Summary

Mr. Jenkins and His Son – Mr. Jenkins demands to know where his son is, believing Bruno and the narrator are off causing trouble somewhere. Mr. Jenkins then says he believes Grandmamma is a part of things too, for her joke about the mouse. Grandmamma explains it is no joke. Bruno then appears from the purse to say hello. Mr. Jenkins is stunned, but vows to care for Bruno. He wants to know how such a thing could happen. Grandmamma then explains what has happened. Mr. Jenkins is enraged, and storms over toward the Grand High Witch.

The Triumph – Before Mr. Jenkins reaches the table, the witches begin to shout and scream as they begin to transform into mice. The narrator is thrilled that his plan is working. All the normal people in the dining room stop and watch as the witches continue to yell and scream. As the witches transform fully into mice, the diners shout and flee. Bruno is reunited with his parents, while the narrator and Grandmamma head outside for a taxi to the train station. Meanwhile, the mice-witches are smashed and hacked apart.

The Heart of a Mouse – The narrator and Grandmamma return to Norway. There, Grandmamma begins to build gadgets, furniture, and other odds and ends that will make life easier for the narrator's life as a mouse, such as buttons to turn on the lights located on the floor. One night, the narrator asks Grandmamma how long mice live. Grandmamma explains that the ordinary mouse lives about three years, but an extraordinary mouse like the narrator could live nine years. The narrator explains this is great news because he doesn't want to live any longer than Grandmamma, who is 86. Grandmamma reveals that the heart of a mouse beats 500 times each minute. Grandmamma asks the narrator if he minds being a mouse. The narrator responds that it does not matter what someone looks like or who someone is, so long as that someone is loved.

It's Off to Work We Go! – The narrator asks Grandmamma what will become of the rest of the world's witches without the Grand High Witch. Grandmamma explains that a new Grand High Witch will take her place. Grandmamma goes on to explain that she has learned the address and real name of the Grand High Witch-turned-mouse, where she was known as a charitable Baroness living in a Norwegian castle. All the members of her inner-circle must be done away with. After those witches are turned into mice, Grandmamma says she will let cats loose after them. After this, she will collect the castle's records of the names and addresses of all the witches worldwide. Then, she and the narrator will travel the globe, eliminating all the witches in the world.



Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, the narrator watches with glee as his plan works. The witches – including the Grand High Witch – have all consumed the soup, thereby transforming them into mice which are quickly killed. The witches have changed appearance and cannot be recognized as what they really are. Meanwhile, Mr. Jenkins comes to accept his son, Bruno, for his newly-acquired appearance. Bruno is now a mouse which Mr. Jenkins vows to care for. To Mr. Jenkins, it is not the appearance of his son that counts, but it is that his son is his son that counts.

The same is true later for the narrator, and for Grandmamma. The narrator, although now a mouse, tells his grandmother that he'll be okay as a mouse because he does not wish to live longer than she does. Grandmamma still worries about the narrator being a mouse, to which the narrator wisely responds that it doesn't matter what one looks like, so long as one is loved. Here is the summation of the author's contention regarding appearance and acceptance in the novel. It is not what is on the outside that counts, but what is on the inside – love. The narrator is perfectly content as a mouse because he knows he is loved by his grandmother.

For the narrator, life has not turned out exactly as planned. Beyond the death of his own parents, the narrator himself will now have a very short life – perhaps no more than nine years. This is certainly not a typical happy ending for a children's novel, where resolutions are reached and everything returns to as normal as possible. The author makes it very clear that life does not always work out the way it is expected to, and that people must make the best of even difficult situations. It is a dose of realism for young readers to understand that they may not end up with everything they want, or think they should.

And to help make this point, the author has used horror to do it. Indeed, the entire horrific story of murderous witches can be seen as a way for the author to reveal important ideas and important points to children. He isn't merely giving them thrills and shocks, but preparing them for the real world. Yet, despite the harsh realities that life can bring, the author reminds his young readers that this does not make life worth living, but that every life has worth. This is certainly the case of the narrator and Bruno, who, though they may be mice now, are still important.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mr. Jenkins ultimately come to accept his son? What does Mr. Jenkins vow to do for Bruno?

Discussion Question 2

The narrator argues that what matters is not what someone looks like, but that someone is loved. Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Even though the narrator may live for only nine more years as a mouse, he is not troubled by this. Why not? How would you feel if you were in the narrator's place? Why?

Vocabulary

asinine, stammered, mischievous, prim, feats, marvelous, gadgets, ingenious, baroness, colossal



Characters

Narrator

The narrator is a never-named, seven-year-old boy who is bright, kindhearted, and adventurous. The narrator is devastated by the death of his parents due to a car accident, but is grateful to have his grandmother, Grandmamma, as a guardian.

The narrator learns all about witches from Grandmamma, which helps him to avoid being entrapped by a witch in the garden. The narrator and Grandmamma later go to the sea for vacation, where the narrator stumbles upon a meeting of all the witches in England. He learns of their plan to turn all children in England into mice, but before he can do anything about it, he is turned into a mouse himself.

The narrator then works with Grandmamma to steal the mouse formula, after which time he sneaks it into the soup the witches are eating. With those witches taken care of, the narrator and Grandmamma decide they will travel the world to stop the witches in every country they can travel to.

Grandmamma

Grandmamma is the 86-year-old grandmother of the narrator, and the narrator's mother's mother. Grandmamma becomes the sole guardian of the narrator after the death of his parents in a tragic car accident. Grandmamma is a gentle, sweet, old soul who is good at telling stories, and who is a witch expert. It is Grandmamma who teaches the narrator all he comes to know about witches. It is also later Grandmamma who helps to ensure that the narrator's plot to turn all the English witches into mice is successful. Grandmamma helps to reunite Bruno Jenkins with his family immediately after the transformation of the witches, and ultimately decides to travel the world with the narrator to wipe out the witches of the globe.

The Grand High Witch

The Grand High Witch is the leader of all the witches in the world. The Grand High Witch is especially evil, cruel, and violent. She is disgustingly ugly, though wears a mask to disguise her true features. Each year, she travels the globe to visit an a gathering of witches in each of their home countries, where she speaks on topics relating to witchery. It is on her current visit to England that she reveals her "Giganticus Plan" to eliminate all the children of the country through Formula 86. In a great occurrence of irony, the Grand High Witch is herself eliminated because of Formula 86.



Bruno Jenkins

Bruno Jenkins is a young boy of about seven who is staying at the Hotel Magnificent with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. Bruno is a chubby child, who is very greedy and loves to eat. The Grand High Witch gives him a chocolate bar laced with Formula 86, and promises him some more if he meets her in the gathering room for the witches the following day. Bruno agrees to this, only for the formula to kick in and turn him into a mouse. Bruno could not care less about being turned into a mouse, just so long as he can continue to eat. Bruno is later reunited with his father, who lovingly accepts him for the mouse he has become.

Mr. Stringer

Mr. Stringer is the manager of the Hotel Magnificent in Bournemouth. He is a kind but very professional man who runs his hotel in a very precise manner. He makes brief appearances in the novel, helping to see to the needs of guests or to help move along the hotel's schedule. He allows the narrator to bring his pet mice to the hotel so long as the mice remain in their cage.

Mr. Jenkins

Mr. Jenkins is the husband of Mrs. Jenkins, and the father of Bruno Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins is a very successful businessman who has no time for games or silliness, so when Grandmamma first tells him that Bruno has been transformed into a mouse, Mr. Jenkins writes her off as a madwoman. It is only later when Mr. Jenkins speaks with his mouse-son that he realizes Grandmamma is telling the truth. He vows to continue to care for Bruno as though Bruno were not a mouse.

Mrs. Jenkins

Mrs. Jenkins is the wife of Mr. Jenkins, and the mother of Bruno Jenkins. She is very loving of her son, but a very cold woman to other people. She panics and screeches when Grandmamma first attempts to tell her that Bruno is now a mouse. The novel ends without the reader knowing what her reaction is when Mr. Jenkins is reunited with Bruno, and decides to tell Mrs. Jenkins what has happened.

The chambermaid

The chambermaid is an employee of the Hotel Magnificent in Bournemouth. A young woman, the chambermaid is terrified and screams when she notices two mice – the narrator and Bruno Jenkins – scampering along the hallway. It is the chambermaid's scream that alerts Grandmamma, who opens the door to her room which allows the narrator and Bruno to scamper inside.



Garden witch

A witch appears in the garden to the narrator while he is building a treehouse. She urges the narrator to come down and see her, so that she can give him the gift of a snake. The narrator takes note of her appearance and demeanor – noting that she is wearing a wig and gloves – and refuses to come down to see her. The witch disappears when Grandmamma calls to the narrator for dinner.

The witches of England

The witches of England, totaling 85 in number, have all come to the southern English coastal town of Bournemouth for their annual meeting. The witches pretend to be members of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The witches themselves may be identified by the wearing of gloves which hide their clawed hands, shoes which hide their toeless feet, itchy wigs which hide their bald scalps, and blue spit among other things. The witches are not women gone bad, but are demons in disguise as human women. The narrator manages to successfully destroy all these witches by turning them into mice.



Symbols and Symbolism

Giganticus Plan

This plan symbolizes evil and the author's main message that things/places/people cannot be trusted solely on appearance. The Giganticus Plan is the Grand High Witch's plan to eliminate all children in the world, beginning with a trial in England. The Giganticus Plan involves the witches quitting their day jobs, purchasing sweet shops, and having a day of grand openings where free candy will be given to children. The candy will be laced with Formula 86, which will turn the children into mice after which time the adults of the world will kill the children. The Giganticus Plan is to be enacted upon the conclusion of the annual English witches' retreat.

Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker

Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker symbolizes evil in the novel. Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker is the formula by which the Grand High Witch hopes to turn the children of the world into mice, and which she hopes to enact her Giganticus Plan. Formula 86 is a combination of strange and vile ingredients, such as alarm clocks, 45 brown mice tails boiled in hair oil, frog juice, and the tongue of a catspringer among other things. When brewed to perfection, the formula achieves a yellowy-green color and slimy texture.

Vials of Formula 86

Vials of Formula 86 are brewed and brought along to the annual English witches' gathering by the Grand High Witch. These vials are to be given to the older witches so that they might participate in the Giganticus Plan even though they are very old. One vial is also used to demonstrate to the gathering of witches at large what Formula 86 is, and what it can do. A vial of Formula 86 is later stolen by the narrator, who empties its contents into the soup the witches eat.

Sock

The sock represents hope, as it is a pivotal part of Grandmamma and the narrator's plan to kill the witches. A sock is knitted by Grandmamma, and used as a way to transport the narrator down from his hotel balcony to the Grand High Witch's hotel balcony. The sock is discovered by the Grand High Witch, who questions just what Grandmamma is doing. Grandmamma explains she is merely knitting, and lost hold of what she was working on completing.



Mask

The masks are a symbol of deception, and part of the author's warning about not trusting just a person's appearance. A mask resembling a girl in her mid-twenties is worn by the Grand High Witch. The mask is designed to hide the Witch's true, horrific facial features. The mask is removed by the Grand High Witch during the private meeting of the witches at the hotel. This is seen by the narrator, confirming to him that he is indeed surrounded by witches, and that he is indeed looking at the Grand High Witch herself.

Wigs

Wigs are a symbol of deception in the novel. Wigs are always worn by witches, and are one of the telltale signs that one is looking at a witch. Wigs are worn by witches in order to hide their bald heads, which is also a sign of a witch. Because witches wear wigs to hide their bald heads, their bald heads always itch under the wigs. The narrator is able to identify the witch in his garden, and the witches in the hotel, by the fact that they all wear wigs.

Blue spit

Blue spit may symbolize irony, as blue is typically associated with things like water and gentleness, yet it is a tell-tale sign of a purely evil witch in this novel. Blue saliva is one of the telltale signs of a witch. Because witches are not human beings, and are in fact demons in disguise, their spit is not like the spit of ordinary humans. Instead, witches have blue spit, which is difficult to see unless one pays close attention. It is one of the ways that the narrator is able to determine the Grand High Witch is indeed a witch, when she screams and blue spit flies out of her mouth.

Toelessness

A lack of toes is one of the telltale signs of a witch. Witches do not have any toes, and have only squared feet. These squared feet are always hidden by shoes. When at the retreat at the hotel, the Grand High Witch encourages all witches to remove their shoes so that they might revel in their witchiness. This is one of the ways that the narrator is able to determine the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is actually a group of witches.

Knife

A knife is used by the cook in the hotel kitchen to prepare food, and is symbolic of unhappy endings. When the cook discovers the narrator scampering about as a mouse, the cook throws a knife at the narrator, severing the very end of his tail. This causes



great pain and bleeding for the narrator, and instead of escaping a close call, the narrator is actually wounded. This reinforces the author's point that not everything in life goes according to plan, and that no one will be able to make it flawlessly through life.

Soup

Soup symbolizes hope in this novel. Soup is prepared as one of the course for the witches in the dining room of the Hotel Magnificent. It is served in a large, silver bowl which the narrator drops Formula 86 into. The soup is then doled out to, and consumed by the witches. This is the means by which they are then transformed into mice, and killed.



Settings

Norway

Norway is the home country of Grandmamma, and the country to which the narrator can trace his family roots. The narrator's parents are both killed in a tragic car accident while visiting Norway, and the narrator later goes to live with his Grandmamma in Norway. It is revealed that Norway is the origin of witches in the world, and is where the Grand High Witch and her inner circle have a secret castle where they rule the witches of the world. It is to this castle that the narrator and Grandmamma decide to head at the end of the novel.

Hotel Magnificent

Hotel Magnificent is a beautiful, multi-story hotel in the coastal town of Bournemouth. It is at Hotel Magnificent that the bulk of the novel occurs, as the narrator and Grandmamma travel to stay at the hotel during their summer holidays. The Hotel Magnificent has hundreds of rooms, a dining room, a kitchen, a lounge, a ball room, conference rooms, an outdoor terrace for eating and socializing, and other amenities. The Hotel Magnificent becomes the location for the annual gathering of England's witches as well, where they pretend to be the Royal Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Bournemouth

Bournemouth is a beautiful southern, coastal town in England where lovely beaches and the Hotel Magnificent are located. Bournemouth is where the narrator and Grandmamma decide to spend their summer holidays. This is because Grandmamma has only recently recovered from pneumonia, and is not strong enough for a trip to Norway. The time in Bournemouth, however, does good for Grandmamma, for she is able to better recover. It is also in Bournemouth that the narrator discovers the annual meeting of English witches, and their secret Giganticus Plan.

Kitchens

The kitchens are located adjacent to the dining room at the Hotel Magnificent. The kitchens are serviced by a large staff of cooks, a head chef, and numerous waiters, for food must be prepared for hundreds of diners. It is into the kitchens that the narrator sneaks with a small vial of Formula 86. Leaping from shelf to shelf in the kitchen, the narrator is able to empty the contents of the vial into the basin of soup being prepared for the witches. It is also in the kitchen that the narrator is seen by a member of the kitchen staff, who throws a knife at the narrator, cutting off his tail.



Room 454

Room 454 is the room directly below the narrator's, and is where the Grand High Witch is staying. The narrator sneaks into Room 454 by being lowered in a sock to the room's balcony, where he scampers inside the room. Inside the room, the narrator notes the room smells old and musty, just like a witch. The narrator also discovers three frogs who the Grand High Witch plans to feed to the birds, since she no longer needs frog juice for her potions. In the mattress in Room 454, the narrator discovers vials of Formula 86, one of which he steals to use against the witches.



Themes and Motifs

Horror as a way to warn about strangers

Roald Dahl uses horror as a way to warn young readers about strangers in his novel "The Witches". Roald Dahl, who has noted that writing children's books is especially important because of the messages and wisdom they impart on young readers, spares no such expense to do so in this novel. In order to make his points, however, Dahl uses examples in horror.

The narrator explains to the reader early on in the novel that witches are real, and they are not the silly, cartoon-like versions people always expect - they are evil demons in disguise. The narrator contends that witches may be any woman, anywhere, and that witches are nearly indistinguishable from real women. The same is true of criminals, for which the witches stand in. Criminals may appear to be absolutely normal people on the outside, but just because someone looks normal does not mean they can be trusted.

When the narrator moves back to England with his grandmother, the narrator sets to work on a treehouse in the garden. It is then that a kind looking woman shows up and offers him the gift of a snake if he will come down from the tree. However, the narrator, having been warned about witches, is able avoid being stolen by the witch by refusing to come down the tree. Though the woman appears to be a friendly stranger, the narrator does not trust her because he has learned to determine the woman is probably a witch. It is a terrifying ordeal for the narrator.

Bruno Jenkins is not so lucky. While Bruno Jenkins is at the Hotel Magnificent, he is approached by a gorgeous woman in her twenties, who gives him a candy bar. She promises him more candy if he will come to the RSPCC meeting the following day. Bruno, careless and greedy, agrees and eats the candy bar he has already been given. As the reader knows, the gorgeous woman is actually the Grand High Witch. Bruno's trust of strangers works against him, as he is transformed into a mouse.

Horror as a normal part of childhood

Roald Dahl contends that horror as a normal part of childhood in his novel "The Witches." Thrills are all a part of growing up, and the fact that Dahl's main character should be seven, while his target audience in general should be children, provides evidence to this point. In addition to making points through the use of horror, Dahl also provides entertainment through horror.

Early in the novel, the author goes about creating such a sense of horror by explaining to readers in no uncertain terms that witches are real. While the adult reader will recognize the author's clever sense of suspense, the young reader will think twice about whether witches exist or not, especially because Dahl's witches are nothing like witches in pop culture. His witches are truly terrifying, truly evil, and bloodthirsty.



One of the thrilling parts of Dahl's witches is also the fact that his witches are difficult to tell apart from regular women. This means that any woman around the child reader could potentially be a witch. This creates an air of horror and suspense for the reader, and taken in conjunction with the argument that witches are real, the child reader will certainly be looking twice at the women around.

Horror is, in a large part, a figment of a child's imagination. Dahl's stories are so well-detailed – consider, for example, his ways of telling a witch from a regular woman which include baldness, gloved, clawed hands, and blue spit – that Dahl's writing will remain with a child long after it has been read. Likewise, the horror of imagination isn't the only kind of horror that a child will experience in life.

Other forms of horror are less monstrous, and more real – such as the untimely death of parents, such as that experienced by the narrator just before he goes to live with his grandmother. Horror should not be avoided in children's literature because it cannot be avoided in real life.

Endings aren't always happy

Roald Dahl uses his novel "The Witches" to explain to readers, especially young readers, that endings aren't always happy. No life is lived without some kind of horrific experience, and no life ever goes exactly according to plan. Apart from wanting to entertain and thrill readers, Dahl also reminds them that life is not a fantasy that is found in literature. He does this through his fiction.

Life does not go according to the narrator's plans. Early in the novel, his parents are tragically killed in a car accident. He then goes to live with his Grandmamma in Norway. The narrator, though saddened by the deaths of his parents, is still happy to be living with his grandmother. It is because of Grandmamma that the narrator is able to handle things so well. The narrator even comes to love living in Norway, and is a little stunned at first to learn that he will be moving to England. It is an unexpected blow to the narrator.

Back in England, the narrator comes to work on a treehouse. While working alone, he encounters a strange woman who tries to tempt him down from the tree by offering him a pet snake. Fortunately, Grandmamma intervenes by calling the narrator to dinner, and causing the strange woman to disappear. This terrifies the narrator, because he does not know what becomes of the woman, if she has gone away, or if she is still lurking around. It is an unhappy ending to an unsettling experience.

It is terrifying when the narrator is later turned into a mouse at the hands of the Grand High Witch. As the narrator struggles against, and finally defeats the witches, the reader anticipates that the narrator will be turned back into a boy. This does not happen. The narrator is to remain a mouse after all. Not only that, but his life span will be shortened from many decades to only nine years. This is certainly not the happy ending that many readers will have expected, but that is Dahl's very point. Life does not turn out as



expected, and one must do the best with what one may have. For example, the narrator decides to spend what time he has left bringing down as many witches in the world as he can.

Appearances do not matter

The idea that appearances do not matter is explored in great detail in Roald Dahl's novel "The Witches." Appearances, to Dahl, are either accidental and say nothing about a person, or intentionally designed to confuse. This idea is explored through the witches, as well as the narrator's time as a mouse.

When the novel begins, the narrator contends that witches are difficult to distinguish from regular women. This, the reader explains, is because witches are actually demons in disguise. They pose as regular women, and thus their appearances cannot be trusted. The narrator explains that there are a number of telltale signs which have to be taken together in order to determine whether or not is actually a witch in disguise. These include everything from bald heads and the wearing of wigs to blue spit and toeless feet.

The narrator has a close encounter with a witch while he is working on his treehouse in the garden. This witch in disguise attempts to call down the narrator from the tree. While it is strange this woman has shown up out of nowhere, the woman at first appears normal. But this is an appearance which the narrator is able to see through. Bruno Jenkins is, later, unable to see through the Grand High Witch's own disguise. The Grand High Witch appears as a stunningly gorgeous woman in her twenties, but as the narrator later learns, beauty is only skin deep. What matters is what is underneath. The woman's good looks are revealed to be nothing more than a mask to her true, horrible nature.

The narrator and Bruno Jenkins, as mice, are not the sum of their appearance. As Grandmamma notes, they still have the intellectual and speaking abilities of human beings. Mr. Jenkins at first cannot believe that his son is a mouse, but later comes around to accept things as they are. Even if his son now resembles a mouse, Bruno is still the son of Mr. Jenkins, and Mr. Jenkins will take care of Bruno. Grandmamma later asks the narrator if he is happy being a mouse, and if he minds being a mouse. The narrator explains very clearly that what matters is not what someone looks like, but that they are loved.

No genuine life is worthless

Roald Dahl argues that no genuine life is worthless in his novel "The Witches." Life takes on many different shapes and forms in the novel, and each has merit. It should be noted that the witches are excluded from this contention because witches are not real people, but merely demons in disguise. As a result, they are not alive in the way that human beings and living creatures are alive.



The narrator comes to have a respect for life following the untimely death of his parents in a tragic car accident. He comes to value his grandmother all the more because she is the one part of his family that still remains alive. Even though Grandmamma is very old and the narrator is very young, their lives are still very valuable, especially to each other. While some may write Grandmamma off as merely an old woman, she means the world to the narrator.

The narrator's appreciation for life can also be seen in the gentle way he takes care of William and Mary, two little mice absolutely powerless against him. The gentle way that the narrator takes care of William and Mary should be contrasted with the way that the Grand High Witch treats them, cruelly kicking them into the wall across the room. When the narrator is a mouse and moving through the Grand High Witch's hotel room, he looks with sadness upon the frogs that have been used for frog juice, and will now be thrown from the balcony for the seagulls. Even though these frogs are real frogs, the narrator still feels badly for them, putting worth in their lives even though they are only frogs.

When the narrator and Bruno Jenkins are transformed into mice, the feelings of their guardians are very similar. Grandmamma knows that, although her grandson now appears to be a mouse, his life is no less important. In fact, his life is even more important to protect as the narrator is largely powerless now compared to his life as a person. Mr. Jenkins comes to feel the same way about his son, Bruno. Even though Bruno is now a mouse, Bruno is still his son and must be taken good care of. His life is worth no less because he now happens to be a mouse.



Styles

Point of View

Roald Dahl tells his novel “The Witches” in the first-person reflective narrative mode, from the point of view of the main character, the untitled narrator. Early in the novel, the narrator notes that he will now be relating a story to the reader about witches being real, and about two experiences he had with witches in his life. By noting he will be speaking about the past, the narrator’s reflective tone is clear in the way he speaks. For example, in the chapter “My Grandmother,” the narrator notes, “I myself had two separate encounters with witches before I was eight years old. From the first I escaped unharmed, but on the second occasion I was not so lucky.” Additionally, the novel assumes the first-person narrative mode because the narrator explains he is about to relate his own personal story, and so it is only natural the narrator tells his own story. This gives the reader a unique vantage point to the experiences of the narrator, especially once he is transformed into a mouse. This allows the reader not only a firsthand glimpse at the events, but gives the reader a firsthand look at the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the narrator.

Language and Meaning

Roald Dahl tells his novel “The Witches” in simple, casual, and straightforward language. This is done for at least three reasons. First, the novel is a children’s novel, and geared toward an audience of children. It is only fitting that the language used be easily understood by those intended as the primary audience. Larger words are often done away with for their more casual forms. For example, instead of saying that witches have blue saliva, witches are noted as having blue spit. Second, the novel is being told by a seven-year-old boy, so it is only natural the language used be fitting of his level of education and age. This adds a level of realism and believability to the novel. Third, Dahl has important points to make in the telling of his novel (see the themes section of this study guide for an exploration of these points). The simple and straightforward language allows Dahl to make his points clearly and succinctly, such as that it doesn’t matter what someone looks like so long as that someone is loved.

Structure

Roald Dahl divides his novel “The Witches” into 24 unnumbered, consecutive, titled chapters. The simple and straightforward approach to the structure of the novel complements the simple and straightforward language, and allows readers to remain focused on the plot rather than the way the chapters are arranged. Each chapter is given a title based on the contents of that chapter. For example, “Summer Holidays” involves the travel of the narrator and Grandmamma to Bournemouth, while “The Recipe” involves the ingredients required to make Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-



Maker. The first two chapters, “A Note About Witches” and “My Grandmother” are the narrator’s introduction to the story he is about to tell, wherein he lays the groundwork for the rest of the story – including that witches are real, and why he has come to live with Grandmamma. The chapters of the novel are interspersed with little drawings and illustrations by Quentin Blake, which in turn depict events in the book. For example, the chapter “Frizzled Like a Fritter” contains a drawing of the Grand High Witch shooting fire and sparks from her eyes, frying and frizzling a doubting witch like a fritter.



Quotes

In fairy-tales, witches always wear silly black hats and black cloaks, and they ride on broomsticks. But this is not a fairy-tale. This is about REAL WITCHES.

-- Narrator (A Note About Witches paragraph 1)

Importance: When the narrator begins his story, he explains to the reader that witches are real. He reveals that witches look nothing like they do in Halloween decorations and movies, but blend in easily and are difficult to find. He explains that witches are not silly, but evil, and hate children.

My darling, you won't last long in this world if you don't know how to spot a witch when you see one.

-- Grandmamma (My Grandmother paragraph 11)

Importance: The narrator's grandmother is the first to reveal to the narrator that witches are real. She explains that his life depends on his ability to determine who is, and who is not, a witch. This is especially important because witches kill children. This will later come to help save the narrator's life.

I am going to tell you how to recognize a witch when you see one.

-- Grandmamma (How to Recognize a Witch paragraph 2)

Importance: Here, Grandmamma explains to the narrator that his life will not only depend on recognizing a witch, but she herself will help him to learn to recognize a witch when he sees one. Such clues include a woman always wearing gloves, even in the house; baldness; wig-wearing; and itchy heads.

It gives the English witches great pleasure to stand back and watch the grown-ups doing away with their own children.

-- Grandmamma (The Grand High Witch paragraph 28)

Importance: As Grandmamma and the narrator prepare to return to England, Grandmamma reveals some more important things to the narrator about witches. These things include that English witches are the nastiest in the world because they enjoy turning children into creatures like slugs. Parents then unknowingly kill their children because they think they are stepping on a slug instead of a child. This is a terrifying practice that is a danger to all children.

So now I am having a plan! I am having a gigantic plan for getting rrrrid of every single child in the whole of Inkland!

-- The Grand High Witch (Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker paragraph 13)

Importance: The Grand High Witch unveils her plan for wiping out all the children in England. The witches of England are all instructed to quit their cover jobs, and to purchase candy shops. These shops will all have a grand opening, at which time free



chocolate and candy will be given to children that contains the magic formula, Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker. This will turn the children into mice, which the adults will then kill to get rid of.

Don't cry, Grandmamma. Things could be a lot worse. I did get away from them. I'm still alive. So is Bruno.

-- Narrator (Hello Grandmamma paragraph 10)

Importance: After the narrator and Bruno Jenkins are turned into mice, they go to see Grandmamma for help. Grandmamma is beside herself with sadness at what has happened to the narrator, and to Bruno. The narrator explains that things could have been worse, and that at least they are alive. However, they are still mice, something which needs to be dealt with.

I hope I can manage this. I'm only a little mouse."

-- Narrator (The Mouse-Burglar paragraph 2)

Importance: The narrator decides to sneak into the Grand High Witch's hotel room in order to steal a vial of Formula 86 from her. This will be used in all the witches' food in order to turn them into mice. The narrator is excited about his plan, but worries if he'll be able to pull it off because he is only a mouse. Grandmamma assures the narrator that he will be good.

A mouse can go places human beings can't.

-- Narrator (The Plan paragraph 8)

Importance: The narrator explains to his grandmother that he'll be able to put a plan into motion to turn the witches into mice because he has the ability to go where a human being can't. The narrator, who at first believed being a mouse would be scary or depressing, has begun to enjoy being able to get around as needed. This will prove very beneficial as the narrator seeks to get into the kitchen, where the witches' food is being prepared.

I ran. Oh, how I ran.

-- Narrator (In the Kitchen paragraph 23)

Importance: When Grandmamma brings the narrator and the vial of Formula 86 to the dining room in her purse, she sets them down on the floor. At this point, everything is up to the narrator. With the bottle in hand, he bolts across the dining room floor to the kitchen. Everything depends on him being quick and moving unseen. He makes it successfully.

The heart of a mouse, and that means your heart, is beating at the rate of five hundred times a minute! Isn't that amazing?

-- Grandmamma (The Heart of a Mouse paragraph 42)

Importance: After the witches are transformed into mice and the narrator and



Grandmamma move back to Norway, Grandmamma reveals that the average mouse lives for three years. But because the narrator is not an average mouse, he may live as much as nine years. This makes the narrator happy. He also learns that a mouse's heart beats 500 times a minute, or nine times a second. In effect, the narrator has a courageous little heart, and must fill a human lifetime into the short lifespan of a mouse.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you.
-- Narrator (The Heart of a Mouse paragraph 52)

Importance: Grandmamma asks the narrator if he minds being a mouse, now. The narrator explains that he has learned that it does not matter what someone looks like or who someone is, so long as that someone is loved. For the narrator, the love of family is enough to understand that it doesn't matter who he is or what he looks like: he is accepted with his grandmother.

So we have work to do, you and I!
-- Grandmamma (It's Off to Work We Go! paragraph 45)

Importance: As the novel concludes, Grandmamma and the narrator realize there are still hundreds, perhaps thousands of other witches in the world, and that countless children are still in danger. They decide they cannot sit around and do nothing, but must do all they can to stop these witches. Grandmamma says they still have work to do, and the narrator agrees that they still have important work ahead.