Using Roald Dahl's *Matilda* to develop reader identities and student-teacher rapport

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Abstract

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* **(**1988**)** is a popular and engaging narrative about how a gifted child uses her wits and talents to overcome challenges at home and at school. It is appropriate for readers from late elementary school age onwards, and has many charms that might appeal to older readers as well. For learners of English, especially young adults and university freshmen, who are still negotiating their identities as students and readers, it can be an accessible gateway text for those who are getting ready to transition from graded readers to more authentic texts. The themes, characters, and plot of this story are relevant and appropriate for promoting a positive attitude towards reading for pleasure, as well as exploring teacher-student dynamics; two factors that can have a dramatic impact on students' motivation and participation in courses with a reading component (Ro & Chen, 2014). This article will outline the author's experience of using *Matilda* as a class novel, including teaching context, the rationale for using an authentic novel in the EFL classroom, the rationale for using *Matilda* in particular, and some practical points for making the most out of the novel in terms of content-based, and language-practice activities.

Keywords: authentic texts, children's literature, class novel, motivation, reader identity, reading skills

Teaching context

Matilda has been the class book in the second semester of the author's Freshman Foundational Literacies: Reading & Writing courses for the past two years. This amounts to four Advanced-track level classes of 19-20 students in total.

In this course, extensive reading is a major component (10% participation grade), and students are encouraged to develop a habit of reading for pleasure. To this end, they are loosely required to read an average of one graded reader book every two weeks and, in the case of the authors' classes, work towards or beyond a modest word-count target of 75,000 words in the first

semester, and 100,000 words in the second semester. To develop reading fluency, students are advised to read graded reader books at, or preferably below, their reading comfort level, following the headword, or "basic word" principle (Nation, 2009, p. 52). These can be self-selected from the teacher's class library, or from the university's library or Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC).

As the extensive reading grade is based on participation rather than attainment, students are assessed holistically according to how frequently they are working towards their target, as opposed to the exact number of books or words they read. As such, the number of books a student reads may vary depending on their reading proficiency, book choice, and effort. Participation was monitored initially by using paper Reading Records, in which students recorded the book titles, reading dates, level of difficulty, etc, in tabular form. In 2017, the electronic platform MReader (mreader.org) was adopted, with similar data being logged digitally when students pass short reading comprehension quizzes.

Through this monitoring of Reading Records, classroom observations, and conversations with individuals, it was evident that some students were becoming avid readers, keen to move on to the "next step" (i.e., authentic texts). However, some individuals started to lose motivation to read as the semester progressed, either not fully participating, or only doing the minimum requirement to meet the extensive reading target. Aside from the usual time-constraints and workload issues which are faced by many students towards the end of the semester (Ro & Chen, 2014, p. 59), hindering their ability and motivation to practice reading outside class, one of the main challenges students reported was comprehension of detailed narratives.

Despite having access to graded reader texts that were adjusted to a variety of levels, students talked about struggling to follow complex plots, and stories with multiple and secondary characters. In addition, they also complained that unknown vocabulary was frustrating their reading fluency. A low tolerance for ambiguity may be anticipated when unknown words are encountered in any context, and some dictionary use may be inevitable, since "learning [in extensive reading programmes] may at times be incidental and at times deliberate" (Webb & Chang, 2015). However, some students were still resorting to *consistently* using dictionaries while reading, and this was impeding their reading fluency. Although students were reminded of the extensive reading principle of selecting easy books, it seemed that they maintained ambitions to read books at a higher level than their fluency competency.

In the second semester of 2016, *Matilda* was introduced as a class novel, to be read in addition to the regular extensive reading requirement. It was hoped that this would not only provide the "level-up" to an authentic text, as desired by keen readers, but also allow for more scaffolded

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input for those students who were still learning how to appreciate longer and more detailed narrative texts. It was also hoped that the choice of book would provide plentiful stimulus for in-class discussion, and reflection on, the themes of reader identities and teacher-student models.

Using an authentic narrative text (*Matilda*) in the EFL classroom

Hall (2005) summarizes the broad benefits of using authentic literature in the language classroom into three categories: affective, cultural, and psycholinguistic (i.e., linguistic processing, p. 48). These three factors seem to be symbiotic, since learners' access to the cultural and linguistic benefits of reading may only be truly accessed when the affective filter is lowered. When reading is meaningful and interesting, students develop intrinsic motivation and enjoyment in the activity of reading, and this can have a profound effect on language and literacy development (Lao & Krashen, 2000, p. 262). Meanwhile, raising learners' awareness of the cultural and linguistic advantages of reading can help them to appreciate and enjoy the reading process, and feel encouraged and motivated to participate in reading activities.

In order to make the most of the advantages of using authentic literary texts, it is important to select a text that is accessible in terms of learners' skill levels, schematic understanding, and interest. It should also have sufficiently challenging material to develop learners' growth, and to stimulate creative, critical, and reflective responses. *Matilda* satisfies these requirements effectively, offering a rich resource of cultural, social, and personal themes for learners to discuss, as well as plentiful examples of interesting and creative language use, and implicit encouragement for learners to be ambitious and resilient learners and readers.

Cultural benefits

Authentic narratives provide exposure to new cultural and social contexts through texts situated *within* the culture itself, as opposed to ones created specifically for language learners looking in from *outside*, thus helping to develop students' personal L2 identities. Part of the appeal of *Matilda* is no doubt due to the entertaining and accessible presentation of relatable cultural, social, and personal themes. A child's journey through the first year of school, including encounters with other children, teachers, new rules, expectations, and activities, should be familiar and sympathetic to anyone who has experienced formal education. Meanwhile, Dahl's narrative is firmly situated within the generic cultural context of a small English village, in a time before internet and smartphones, thereby providing cultural insights and points of comparison to explore in the EFL classroom. The content of the novel therefore provides stimulating themes that can be

explored in discussions about family life, school experiences, and personal relationships, as well as in creative and critical responses (including writing projects, role plays, and debates), and individual personal reflections.

Authentic texts also build learners' cultural capital by accessing genuine and verifiable cultural artefacts available in the target culture. As Cook (2000) explains, "literary texts have the advantage of being attested instances of communication [which] do not lose authenticity in the classroom." (p. 195) In the thirty years since its publication, *Matilda* has proved hugely popular with a wide audience. In 1996 it was adapted into an award-winning movie (Devito, et al). A musical adaptation (Kelly & Minchin), also award-winning, has toured internationally since it premiered in 2010, and is due to be released as a motion picture sometime after 2019 (Gilbert, 2013). In 2016 Matilda was voted second (below Harry Potter) in a list of the UK's favourite children's book heroes, with the antagonist Miss Trunchbull being voted the fifth most "evil villain" (World Book Day). Offering *Matilda* as a text to explore in class offers learners an opportunity to enhance their cultural capital by reading a famous and celebrated narrative, one which they may already have heard of and be interested in.

Psycholinguistic benefits

The psycholinguistic benefits of using authentic narrative texts are as varied as the language features available in literary works. Widdowson (1975) argues that exposure to the lexico-grammatical forms, idiomatic language and creative deviations of literature helps to expand not only learners' linguistic awareness, but also their productive ability, while Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) offer an extensive list of common literary devices (including metaphor, simile, imagery) which could prompt engaging and enriching in-class focus (p. 246). Cook argues that language play, or "the fascination with the manipulation of linguistic form," is the "single underlying phenomenon" relevant to all individuals and societies (2000, p. 4). This key difference between authentic and graded narratives is what readers of all ages and backgrounds often find engaging in Roald Dahl's work. Dahl was renowned for being a master of wordplay (Roald Dahl's Wordplay), and *Matilda* is densely packed with nonsense words, creative metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, idioms, and slang, for readers to explore.

Longer authentic texts, such as novels, provide immersive linguistic exposure, and reading for pleasure offers substantial gains in both reading speed and vocabulary growth (Lao & Krashen, 2000, p.265). Through practising extensive reading skills, readers develop the ability to "make inferences from linguistic clues, and to deduce meaning from context" (Collie and Slater, 1987, p.

5). Developing more nuanced interpretive skills while reading authentic texts can encourage a wider-reaching tolerance of ambiguity, which can have additional benefits not only in learners' academic studies in other classes, but also in linguistic and cultural literacy beyond the classroom (Hullah, 2012, p. 33). *Matilda* provides an accessible transition from smaller, graded reader texts to longer, authentic novels. As Day and Bamford explain, while children's novels (at over 100 pages) may be longer than learners have read before, "the print is large, the margins generous, and – very important – the chapters short" (1998, p. 104). The chapters of *Matilda* range between 4 and 18 pages, with an average of 11 pages. This is not an unreasonable amount of text for learners to approach in one sitting. In addition, Rennie (2016) argues that Dahl's "joyfully inventive use of language" was Dahl's way of ensuring that his readers didn't get bored and stop reading, and that learning to appreciate the whimsical and nonsensical features of his work prevents the reader from taking language too seriously (para. 11). In the EFL classroom, such language can raise students' awareness of the malleability of linguistic forms, and encourage them to experiment and play with language in their own speaking and writing, while also reinforcing skills of inference and understanding the meaning from context.

Affective benefits

Day and Bamford (1998) cite a number of influencing factors that can affect learners' motivation and self-efficacy towards reading, including the appropriacy of materials, their current reading level, attitudes towards reading, and socio-cultural factors (p. 28). Although many authentic texts may offer a lexicogrammatical challenge to learners' current reading levels, the fact of their authenticity can attract students to rise to this challenge, offering a sense of personal satisfaction that is reinforced by the cultural and linguistic benefits cited above. Engaging with stimulating and culturally situated narratives develops confidence and personal growth, as well as key skills for reading and understanding texts and contexts (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 247-254). Providing students have enough vocabulary and grammar to get started, as they become involved in reading for pleasure over time, the affective filter of unknown or challenging lexicogrammar may become sublimated by "pursuing the development of the story" (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 6). This, in turn, helps learners to appreciate that "the contingency that foreign language use in the real world is often likely to involve the need to deal with unpredictable situations and events beyond the current level of linguistic proficiency," and to develop strategies for dealing with challenging and authentic materials (Hall, 2005, p. 51).

Meaningful and interesting reading for pleasure also has a generally positive effect on

students' feelings towards reading novels (Lao & Krashen, 2000, p. 267). In addition to the general sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that comes with reading an authentic text, readers' affective filters may also be lowered by exploring some of the key themes of the narrative, and through observing attitudinal and behavioural models of readers, education, and student-teacher relationships. Since attention is focalised through the protagonist, the reader's perspective adapts to the values and ideology presented by the author, and this can have a potentially powerful effect on reader identity (Stephens, 1992, p. 68). For example, the characterisation and narrative events of *Matilda* highlight the values of intellect, creativity, and kindness, which a reader may hope to emulate. Matilda is identified by her precociousness, with her frustrated and superabundant intelligence eventually finding a telekinetic outlet. This is an exciting and perhaps enviable gift. However, it is her natural curiosity, her sense of fairness, and her appetite for literature, which make her a compelling role model. In contrast with her vociferously anti-intellectual parents and the belligerent Miss Trunchbull, Matilda presents an attractive alternative.

Matilda also provides some interesting models of students, teachers, and classroom behaviour. As a student in class, Matilda is diligent and curious, eager to challenge her own intellect. In her own time, she actively pursues her supernatural talent, honing it to reach a self-directed goal. Meanwhile, Dahl's depiction of students who do not engage with their learning is far less generous. In the opening pages of the novel, the narrator muses on writing reports for unpleasant students, who lack potential or ambition ("won't get a job anywhere"), don't pay attention ("has no hearing organs at all"), or show no character ("still waiting for him to emerge from the chrysalis") or humanity ("unlike the iceberg, she has absolutely nothing below the surface") (p. 8-9). Matilda's teacher, Miss Honey, is considerate and thoughtful, showing genuine interest in her students, and finding creative solutions to support their learning. The traditionalist, dictatorial educational philosophy of her counterpart, Miss Trunchbull, seems antiquated and counterintuitive by comparison. By ridiculing or scorning the anti-intellectual mindset, *Matilda* may encourage readers to not only sympathise with positive teacher-student models, but also to reflect on their own identities as readers and students.

Pedagogy

Despite the many advantages of extensive reading, and/or using authentic narrative texts such as *Matilda*, there is still a risk that introducing it to learners in the wrong way can be counterproductive, and actually raise their the affective filter. As Hall (2005) explains, language learners can remain "relatively unconvinced of the point or value of literature in second or foreign

language learning" and literature should be incorporated into the class with sensitivity, "its relative advantages demonstrated rather than asserted, assumed, or left implicit" (p. 114-115). While devising materials to introduce *Matilda* to advanced-level Freshman Foundational Literacies students, it was important to offer scaffolded learning that would elicit understanding of the narrative content, themes, and language of the novel, rather than explicitly telling students what the book is about.

In order to establish a comfortable reading routine, while also offering stimulating and varied ways for students to engage with and respond to the text, the semester followed a standard, basic weekly format which was usually followed by supplementary focus on literary forms and devices, narrative content, and/or creative and critical production. The basic weekly format was for students to read 1-2 chapters of the book as homework, and come to class ready to summarise and discuss their understanding of the events in those chapters, before working on a handout of comprehension and discussion questions. The purpose of the oral summaries is for students to refresh their memories, check any points of confusion with their peers, and encourage a sense of being part of a reading community, in which peers discuss their reading experiences.

The comprehension and discussion questions on the weekly handout were devised to draw students' attention to significant details of the narrative, character and plot development, which will inform their understanding of future events in the book. The handout for the first chapter "The Reader of Books" (Appendix A), for example, aims to establish characterising features of Matilda and her family as well as the key themes of intelligence, learning, and bibliophilia. Some questions on the handouts require students to practice note-taking, summarising, and paraphrasing skills, since the relevant information in the text is long, and the space for answers on the handout is limited. Other questions ask students to speculate on what might have happened in the past, or what might happen next, or to read between the lines to understand the subtext. In the handout for the second chapter, "Mr Wormwood, the Great Car Dealer," students are asked why it is ironic that Matilda's father tells Matilda "Supper is a family gathering, and no one leaves the table till it's over!" (p. 28) Students can then appreciate the hypocrisy of Mr Wormwood, a model of bad parenting, espousing family values and table manners when they are actually eating TV dinners while sitting on the sofa. Learning to understand irony through concrete examples such as this helps students to pay attention to the importance of reading critically.

In addition to the comprehension and discussion questions described above, supplementary activities were also incorporated to provide a variety of exposure to literary and creative language use, scaffolded understanding of narrative features and devices, and opportunities for creative,

critical, and reflective practice. A supplementary linguistic focus, for example, might include short extracts with highlighted vocabulary, asking students to glean the meaning of the words from the context, and cloze review activities of idiomatic language discussed in the previous week (Appendix B). Students can find it useful to have a focused explanation and examples of wordplay in context, as it helps them to visualise abstract expressions and appreciate how they might be amusing to a fluent reader. In one lesson, a discussion of the creative use of language to characterise Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull segues into a focus on similes (Appendix C), while in another lesson, students are asked to discuss (and perhaps look up) what Roald Dahl suggests to his readers about characters through the playful use of names (e.g., Mrs Phelps the librarian "helps" Matilda), before moving on to a more in-depth character analysis (Appendix D).

To help build students' confidence in reading stories with complex plots and multiple characters, focused narrative analysis activities were also incorporated to demystify this process. Students deconstructed the narrative features of the novel, including characters, setting, plot (using a Plot Mountain diagram, with rising action, climax, and falling action/resolution), conflict, and themes. This helped them to check their understanding of *Matilda* specifically, and also develop their schematic understanding of narrative patterns more generally. Character and dialogue studies included Readers' Theatre, and Role Play activities. In Readers' Theatre, students first parsed the dialogue and narration of a scene (from the ninth chapter "The Parents," when Miss Honey visits Mr and Mrs Wormwood at their home), colour coding the speech of different characters and focusing on the attitudes and emotions expressed by different characters during this confrontation. Students practiced the scene in small groups before participating in a whole class 'tag team' performance, in which individuals took turns to perform different characters. For the Role Play activity, students speculated on what might happen after a dramatic scene, when Bruce Bogtrotter defeats Miss Trunchbull by eating an enormous cake. Students then scripted and performed an extra scene (Appendix E) with original characters and dialogue, of the dinner conversation in the Bogtrotter family later that day. These collaborative and immersive activities help to bring the text off the page, deepening understanding of characterisation and plot as well as providing a breadth of interactive language skills practice.

Other critical and reflective production activities include writing book reviews, writing a comparative evaluation of a scene as depicted in the book and in the movie adaptation, and writing an essay on the role of one of the key characters in the narrative. Students tend to approach these written tasks willingly, since they are keen to express their thoughts about a text which they have

been meaningfully engaged in. Their evaluations tend to be enthusiastic, and their reflections thoughtful and insightful.

Conclusion

The above activities were used with the intention of providing students with scaffolded support for reading a longer, authentic narrative text, helping them to develop their reading skills and lexicogrammatical awareness, as well as an appreciation of the rich potential for language play. *Matilda* was chosen for its reputation as an entertaining and engaging narrative, with pertinent and accessible themes and creative use of language. It also serves to promote reading as a joyful and beneficial pursuit, and explores the role of teachers and learners, and how methods and rapport affect learning progress. Through reading *Matilda*, students gain an appreciation of reading for pleasure as a positive and rewarding pursuit, and are able to engage in a dialogue with their classmates and teacher about learning, behaviour, relationships, and education. *Matilda* is therefore an ideal text to incorporate into the EFL classroom, engaging students in the process of reading, enjoying, and talking about books.

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Chapter 1: The Reader of Books

1. According to the narrator, do parents usually believe their children are *more*, or *less*, intelligent than they really are?

2. The narrator fantasises about writing school reports for bad students. He makes some very honest suggestions about some children.
   - i. Which child….
     - a. doesn't pay attention in class?
     - b. will never get a job?
     - c. has no personality?

3. What skills has Matilda developed by the following ages?:
   - a. 1 ½
   - b. 3
   - c. 4

4. How do the following characters usually spend their day?
   - a. Mr Wormwood
   - b. Mrs Wormwood
   - c. Matilda

5. What is Matilda's favourite children's book?

6. What type of book does she want to read now?

7. What does Mrs Phelps the librarian think about Matilda's parents?

8. Have you heard of, or read any of, the books or authors mentioned on page 18?

9. What advice does Mrs Phelps give about reading difficult books?

10. What effect does reading books have on Matilda?

Chapter 5: Arithmetic

1. Matilda has to follow the family rules. What helps her to keep sane?

2. Why is Mr Wormwood in a good mood?

3. What skill does Mr Wormwood want to teach Mike, and why?

4. Why does Mr Wormwood sell a car for £999.50, rather than £1000?

5. Mr Wormwood tells Matilda to "Stop guessing and trying to be clever." Why is this ironic?

6. How does Mr Wormwood think Matilda got the correct answer to the sum?

Chapter 6: The Platinum Blonde Man

7. Who does the hair dye belong to?

8. What does Mr Wormwood think his healthy hair says about him? How does Matilda show this to be nonsense?

9. What does Matilda do with the bleach?

10.When Mr Wormwood comes for breakfast, why does Matilda keep her head down?

11.What does Mr Wormwood have to do to fix his hair?

Vocabulary Focus: Understanding Meaning from Context

Without using a dictionary, can you explain what the words in bold mean, in context?

A. "But the new game she had invented of punishing one or both of [her parents] each time they were **beastly** to her made her life more or less **bearable**." (p49)

B. "For **sheer** cleverness she could **run rings around** them all." (p49)

C. "Her **safety-valve**, the thing that prevented her from **going round the bend**, was the fun of **devising** and **dishing out** these **splendid** punishments." (p49)

Vocabulary Review

1. The lock on my desk drawer had been _____ with, and some of my papers were missing.

2. I haven't the _____ idea what you're talking about.

3. I'm worried about my little brother. He spends all weekend with his eyes _____ to the _____, and never does any exercise.

4. The poor child was in _____ of _____ when he couldn't find his favourite teddy bear.

5. Where the _____ have you been? We were supposed to meet half an hour ago!

6. I was having a miserable day before you _____ it _____ with your good news.

7. When she heard the shocking news, she _____out crying.

8. My cousin made a _____ on the stock market.

9. The teacher _____ to us about the importance of independent study.

10. The two boys threw stones because the other children had _____ them _____.

11. He's very angry right now. I won't talk to him until he has _____ _____.

12. I have to visit my grandmother, because she's a bit _____ the _____ at the moment.

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foggiest	**mint**	**tears**	**glued**	**down**
heck	**floods**	**up**	**weather**	
burst	**preached**	**under**	**on**	**brightened**
egged	**simmered**	**tampered**	**telly**	

Chapter 7: Miss Honey

1. What advice does Miss Honey give to the children about Miss Trunchbull?

2. Why does Miss Honey want to help the children to learn?

3. Why, do you think, does Miss Honey take care not to show her surprise at Matilda's mathematical ability?

4. In what ways does Matilda demonstrate her literacy skills?

5. Do you agree, that "all children's books should be funny?" Why?

6. Throughout this chapter, what different emotions do you think Miss Honey feels?

Chapter 8: The Trunchbull

7. Why does Miss Honey go to see Miss Trunchbull?

8. What are the typical qualities of a head teacher? Which of these qualities does Miss Trunchbull have?

9. How does Miss Trunchbull know Matilda's father?
   What is her opinion of:
   a) Mr Wormwood
   b) Matilda?

10. What is Miss Trunchbull's view about little girls?

11. What is Miss Honey's opinion about Miss Trunchbull?

12. Why, according to Miss Trunchbull, does Miss Honey want Matilda to move to another class? Why is this ironic?

Character Focus: Thematic Associations

What words do you associate with the following characters?

Miss Honey	Miss Trunchbull

Language Focus: Using Language creatively

Without using a dictionary, can you explain what ideas the following sentences are trying to communicate?

A. "She had a lovely pale oval **Madonna face**." (p66)

B. "She always marched **like a storm-trooper**." (67)

C. "If you **get on the wrong side of** Miss Trunchbull, she can **liquidise you like a carrot in a blender**." (p69)

Similes

Complete the following common similes using the words in the box (NB: you will need to use one word twice):

1. The presentation went well. It was **as smooth as _____**.
2. I slept really well last night, so now I feel **as fresh as a _____**.
3. My brother has terrible manners. He **eats like a _____**.
4. My brother has a very low appetite. He **eats like a _____**.
5. Carol has a beautiful voice. She can **sing like an _____**.
6. I don't mind carrying your bag for you. It's **as light as a _____**.
7. This homework is _____**hard**.
8. Time **flies like an _____**.
9. This cake is old and stale. It is **as hard as a _____**.
10. Your hands are **as cold as _____**.
11. I don't get on well with my brother. We always **fight like _____**.
12. My uncle has a terrible cough. It's because he **smokes like a _____**.

chimney	rock	silk	angel	pig	arrow
cats and dogs		bird	daisy	feather	ice

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Chapter 18: The Names

1. What did Miss Trunchbull use to do to Miss Honey in the Bath?

2. Why does Miss Honey want to change the subject, do you think?

3. Why does Matilda want to go home?

4. What does Miss Honey ask Matilda to do? Does she agree?

5. What three pieces of information does Matilda ask from Miss Honey? What do you think Matilda might do with this information?

Chapter 19: The Practice

6. Where are Matilda's family when she gets home? How do you think she feels about this?

7. What does Matilda use to practice her powers on? Why does she choose this object?

8. After she manages to *push* the object, how does she feel?

9. What is her next goal? How successful is she, after an hour of practice?

10. How long does it take for Matilda to fully develop her ability? What can she do now?

11. What do you think she is planning to do?

The Characters of *Matilda*

Parents put a lot of thought into naming their children, and so do authors when they name their characters. What do you think the following names tell us about their owners?

- Matilda
- Miss Honey
- The Trunchbull

- Mr & Mrs Wormwood
- Lavender

- Mrs Phelps
- Hortensia
- Bruce Bogtrotter

Character Analysis

Choose one of the characters above, and complete the character analysis below:

Appearance:

Role in the narrative:

Personality:

Draw your character here:

Actions:

How other characters feel about them:

Thoughts/ feelings:

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Chapter 10: Throwing the Hammer

1. How do Matilda's friends know that she is clever?

2. Why do Matilda and Lavender like each other?

3. What is The Chokey? Give two reasons why Hortensia has been put in The Chokey.

4. What do Matilda and Lavender think about Hortensia and her tricks?

5. Why is Miss Trunchbull good at throwing children?

6. Why does Miss Trunchbull punish Amanda?

7. According to Hortensia, why don't parents complain about Miss Trunchbull?

Chapter 11: Bruce Bogtrotter and the Cake

8. According to Matilda, how does Miss Trunchbull get away with behaving badly?

9. What is Matilda's opinion of Miss Trunchbull?

10. Why is Bruce Bogtrotter in trouble?

11. What is Bruce Bogtrotter's punishment? What, do you think, does Miss Trunchbull hope will happen?

12. Make a list of three things the children guess will be wrong with the cake.

13. What does Miss Trunchbull threaten will happen if Bruce doesn't finish the cake?

14. How does the atmosphere in the audience change throughout this scene? Make a note of three feelings they might experience at different moments.

15. How do Miss Trunchbull and Bruce feel at the end of the chapter?

16. Who do you think is meaner, Miss Trunchbull or Mr Wormwood? Why?

Readers' Theatre: Role Play

Imagine what happens when Bruce Bogtrotter goes home for dinner after school. With a partner, write a script for the dinner conversation between Bruce and his parents.

Roald Dahl. MATILDA. Illustrations by Quentin Blake. Â During the first week of Matilda's visits Mrs Phelps had said to her, "Does your mother walk you down here every day and then take you home?" "My mother goes to Aylesbury every afternoon to play bingo," Matilda had said. "She doesn't know I come here."Â His speech was never very delicate but Matilda was used to it. She also knew that he liked to boast and she would egg him on shamelessly. "You must be very clever to find a use for something that costs nothing," she said. "I wish I could do it." "You couldn't," the father said. "You're too stupid. But I don't mind telling young Mike here about it seeing he'll be joining me in the business one day."