

ROALD DAHL

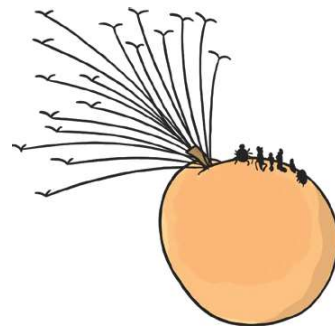
Roald Dahl was born on 13th September 1916 in Llandaff, Wales. His parents were from Norway. He had an older sister called Astri, but in 1920, she sadly died when she was only 7 years old. Roald's father was so distraught that he fell ill from pneumonia and a few weeks later, he also died. At this time, Roald's mother was pregnant with her third child, who was born in the autumn. She was called Asta. His mother was a great story teller and had a fabulous memory. Roald remembered many tales that she told about trolls and other mythical Norwegian characters. His father had been a wonderful woodcarver despite only having one arm. He had an interest in "lovely paintings and fine furniture". He was very intelligent and knew a lot about many different things.



Despite having a happy home life, Roald had an unhappy time at his school in Wales and was often 'caned' for bad behaviour. As a result, his mother sent him to boarding school in Weston-Super-Mare. He was just nine years old when he arrived at St. Peters School and met the 'twitching' Latin teacher Captain Hardcastle, the all-powerful Matron – certainly inspiration for Miss Trunchball in 'Matilda', who "disliked small boys very much indeed" - and the cane-wielding Headmaster.

At the age of 13, Roald attended Repton Public School in Derbyshire. He was happier here. He was brilliant at sports. However, his English master said Roald was "quite incapable of marshalling his thoughts on paper". The boys at the school were sometimes asked to be chocolate testers for a famous chocolate company, and this experience later inspired the book 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'.

After he left school, he wanted adventure so he got a job with Shell Oil Company. He was sent to Africa for three years, but after only one year, the Second World War broke out, so he enlisted with the Royal Air Force (RAF) and became a pilot.





In 1940, Roald Dahl was posted to Libya where he flew a Gloster Gladiator plane. He crashed in the Western Desert in North Africa and suffered such severe injuries to his head and back that he had to stay in hospital in Egypt for six months. He returned to the RAF, but after a while, he began suffering terrible headaches from his accident. This meant that he had to return to the UK and could not fly planes anymore.

In 1942, Roald was posted to Washington in the USA to work as an assistant air attaché. He met the author C.S. Forester, who suggested that Roald should write about his experiences flying planes in the desert. This led to Roald being paid for the first time for writing, which was in the Sunday Evening Post newspaper.

In 1951, Roald had a collection of stories published in a book called *Someone Like You*. During this year, he also married the actress Patricia Neal. They lived in Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire, England. He wrote many of his famous stories there.

Roald Dahl and Patricia Neal had five children: Olivia, Tessa, Theo, Ophelia and Lucy. Olivia tragically died at the age of 7 from measles encephalitis. A year before that, Theo was involved in an accident. His pram was hit by a New York cab and he suffered a brain injury. Roald became very involved with the care that Theo now needed, and he even helped invent a piece of equipment that people with Theo's injury would need. During this time, 'James and the Giant Peach' was published, which was Dahl's first book for children. Roald Dahl started telling his fantastical stories to his children at bedtime. He realised how much his own children enjoyed his stories and decided to write them down for all children to enjoy.

Roald Dahl had a great talent for seeing the world through children's eyes. He said, "If you want to remember what it's like to live in a child's world, you've got to get down on your hands and knees and live like that for a week. You'll find you have to look up at all these giants around you who are always telling you what to do and what not to do."

He had a passion for encouraging children to read. He believed that children should be "comfortable with a book, not daunted. Books shouldn't be daunting, they should be funny, exciting and wonderful; and learning to be a reader gives a terrific advantage."



Questions About Roald Dahl

1. What do you think inspired Roald's love of stories?

2. What does 'all-powerful Matron' mean? What characteristics might she have had?

3. Use the text to explain how a young boy might have felt about the Headmaster at this school.

4. In your own words, explain what "quite incapable of marshalling his thoughts on paper" means.

5. How do you think the chocolate testing experience inspired 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'?

6. Explain why he had to leave the RAF.

7. How did Roald start writing children's stories?

8. In your own words, explain what Dahl thought a writer needed to do if they were going to write books for children.

9. What does "books shouldn't be daunting" mean?

10. Why do you think learning to be a reader could give someone a "terrific advantage"?
