

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973)

Stage A

Part 1

Have you read "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings"? Are you a fan of Tolkien, like many other people in different countries? Read the text to find out about the author. While reading, put down the notes about the most important events in his life.

In 1998 several hundred English and American people were asked to name the best books of the 20th century. The list of 100 books was made, at the head of which was **"The Lord of the Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien**. The author's other book **"The Hobbit, or There and Back Again"** was also at the top of the list.

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in Orange Free State (now South Africa). When he was three, his mother took him and his brother to England. She was a well-educated woman: she knew Latin, German and French, she could draw and paint, and she could play the piano. Ronald inherited her talents: he fell in love with languages from the moment he met them (Latin and French) and he could draw and paint so well that many years later he illustrated his own books. The boy was an avid reader, especially of the myths and tales of American Indians and fairy tales. It seems another talent of his mother was teaching because under her guidance he was well prepared to pass exams and study at the best grammar school in Birmingham.

When Ronald was 12, the brothers were orphaned and went into care of their mother's confessor Father Morgan. He was a faithful friend and carefully managed the little fortune the boys' mother had left them, often adding something from his own small income.

Tolkien wanted to study at Oxford, but the only way for a poor young man to get admitted was to win a scholarship. With his talent, determination and hard work he managed to do it. At Oxford he studied linguistics, Anglo-Saxon, Middle English dialects, Old Norse, Spanish, Gothic and other languages. He didn't just like languages as certain systems, he loved words of which these languages were made, and he deeply felt the meaning of each word. As the linguist Waclaw Lednicki said: "Each language represents centuries of tragic efforts on the part of human beings to find an adequate expression of their feelings and thoughts about the universe. Indeed, every language is a unique mirror of the landscape, of the air, of the sky — of all the natural surroundings in which it has developed." That's why Tolkien loved to read the most important texts in each language — its epics. When he discovered

Finnish with the epics of Kalevala and Sampo, he invented his own new language based on it, which eventually appeared in the "Lord of the Rings" as "high-elven".

Wherever Tolkien studied, he always formed clubs of like-minded friends who shared their intellectual and creative enthusiasms: they recited from the Old and Middle English poems "Beowulf", "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and others; later the Old Norse heroic tales — sagas; and by all means they read and discussed each other's unpublished works. In the friendly, supportive, beer- and tobacco-filled atmosphere of these gatherings Tolkien absorbed the environment which would convey his sense of good in his fantasies.

In 1915, after Tolkien took a First Class degree in English, he entered the Army. He participated in the battle of Somme, one of the bloodiest tragedies of World War I, which took away the lives of 60,000 Englishmen. He himself was wounded and returned home with "trench fever".

In 1918 Tolkien joined the staff of the Oxford English Dictionary, which was an honour. At the age of 37 he was named Professor of English Language at Oxford. To be named to a professorship at any British university is a great honour, for there is usually only a single professor in each subject, other teachers are readers and lecturers. To be a professor at Oxford is an honour compounded. Besides, he was the youngest professor there.

Tolkien had three sons and a daughter. Like many orphans, he was a loving and dedicated family man creating for his children the deep sense of home, which had been denied to him. He enjoyed taking his children for walks through his beloved midlands countryside, willingly helped them with homework, entertained by making up stories. "The Hobbit" was one of those stories, first told to his children and never meant for publishing. The only existing manuscript was read by lots of his friends and his friends' friends, till at last it got into the hands of a publisher. When in 1937 "The Hobbit" was brought out, it was an immediate success and Tolkien was asked to continue writing. That's how he started thinking of the work which would be later called "The Lord of the Rings".

He finished it in 1948 — three thick volumes, which he wanted to publish without any cuts. However, it was very expensive, and the publisher made Tolkien an unusual offer: he said he wouldn't pay him anything till all the expenses were met, but after the book had paid for itself, they would share in the profits equally. This deal turned out a wonderful bit of luck for Tolkien as the book was a tremendous success and made him financially free. It was immediately translated into Dutch, Polish and Swedish, and later into many other languages, including Russian.

In 1972 Tolkien was awarded a Commander of the British Empire.

When he died, one of his students said: "He belonged to that very rare class of linguists, now becoming extinct, who could understand and recapture the glamour of the word."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Part 2

Do you remember what "quest" means? Who went on quests in mediaeval books?

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.

Tolkien's Two Most Famous Books

"The Hobbit" is a tale of high adventure, undertaken by a company of dwarves, in search of dragon-guarded gold. The reluctant partner in this perilous quest is Bilbo Baggins, a comfort-loving, unambitious hobbit. Encounters with trolls, goblins, elves and giant spiders, conversations with the dragon, and a rather unwilling presence at the battle of the Five Armies are some of the adventures that befall Bilbo. But there are lighter moments as well: good fellowship, welcome meals, laughter and song.

The theme of the book is increasing maturity. Bilbo changes from a frightened, passive lover of domestic comfort to a brave, active planner of events willing to take responsibility for himself and others.

Bilbo is not a legendary, mythical hero capable of great deeds, he is the hero who is no better than we are. A very important idea of the book is that not everything is destined. Both God and man have a hand in shaping all that happens: God through His grace, which Tolkien calls "luck", and man through his physical and intellectual excellencies, bravery and sense, which, at their best, represent the God-like in man.

Like traditional fairy tales, "The Hobbit" is less concerned with the broad conflict between good and evil than with the personal growth of the hero.

"The Lord of the Rings" is long but it does not sprawl; the number of characters is large but each one has a vivid and memorable existence for the reader. The book's theme is the unending struggle of good and evil, but it is different from "The Hobbit" in many ways.

The first difference is its far more serious tone. The whole life of man is a quest, marked for all men by two great events: the

coming of adulthood, with all its rights and privileges, and the coming of death. "The Hobbit" is about the first event, "The Lord of the Rings" is about both.

Tolkien's three great themes are the hero, the nature of good and evil, and the function of the language.

Tolkien's heroes are only in part traditionally conquering heroes. They are, above all, suffering heroes who persevere.

They have mercy, that is the ability to feel and understand the pain and suffering of others.

They are selfless in their love for their companions, they care for the health, safety and happiness of others.

The evil in the book is enduring and insidious. It is a hydra-headed monster that takes whatever form the time requires. If something is born of evil, it cannot be made good, even by good. The ultimate defeat then, according to Tolkien, is not simply to lose the battle with evil, but to become incorporated into it.

Tolkien is extremely linguistically creative in the book. He delights in names and naming (Samwise, Ferny, Merry, Strider, Fatty Lump-kin, etc.). This reaffirms the existence of the good, and continually recreates it. There is a tendency not to name evil at all, if it can be helped, for to name is to create.

The proverbs used in the book refer to Anglo-Saxon and Middle English sources.

Tolkien creates a variety of languages. Hobbits speak the Common Speech. The vocabulary of the elves is the most musical of the languages in Middle Earth, with a high proportion of l's, r's and front vowels. The Rohans' language and culture resemble those of old Anglo-Saxon. The language of Ores and other forces of evil looks and sounds dark and horrid, we can feel its physical ugliness.

Discussion.

1. What is "high adventure"?
2. What is "The Hobbit" about?
3. Why do we say that the theme of the book is increasing maturity?
Do you know any other books with the same theme?
4. Is Bilbo an ordinary fairy-tale hero? What is the difference between the two?
5. Do you agree that not everything in our life is destined?
6. It must be difficult to read such a long book with so many characters? Why is "The Lord of the Rings" so popular?
7. What kind of quiz does every person take in his\ her life?
8. Why do we say that tone of "The Lord of the Rings" is far more serious than that of "The Hobbit"?
9. What are Tolkien's three great themes?

10. What is characteristic of Tolkien's heroes?
11. How does Tolkien see evil?
12. When does evil win, according to Tolkien? Do you agree with that?
13. What was peculiar to Tolkien's naming people and objects? What do you think about it?
14. Do you think it's easy to create a new language?
15. What does it tell you of Tolkien's talent?

Stage B

The ideal reader of "The Hobbit" must have imagination and intelligence. Read the beginning of the book and find out if language is really one of its important themes. How does it add to the charm of the story? Use a dictionary when needed.

The Hobbit or There and Back Again

Chapter 1

An Unexpected Party

(Abridged)

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with panelled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats — the hobbit was fond of visitors. Bedrooms, bathrooms, cellars, pantries (lots of these), wardrobes (he had whole rooms devoted to clothes), kitchens, dining-rooms, all were on the same floor.

This-hobbit was a very well-to-do hobbit, and his name was Baggins. The Bagginses have lived in the neighbourhood of the Hill for time out of mind, and people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected: you could tell what Baggins would say on any question without the bother of asking him. This is a story of how a Baggins had an adventure, and found himself doing and saying things altogether unexpected. He may have lost the neighbours' respect, but he gained —

well, you will see whether he gained anything in the end.

The mother of our particular hobbit — what is a hobbit? I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large and stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). Now you know enough to go on with. As I was saying, the mother of this hobbit — Bilbo Baggins, that is — was the famous Beladonna Took, one of the three remarkable daughters of the Old Took, head of the Hobbits who lived across the Water, the small river that ran at the foot of the Hill. It was often said (among other families) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife. That was, of course, absurd, but certainly there was still something not entirely hobbitlike about them, and once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discretely disappeared, and the family hushed it up; but the fact remained that the Tookes were not as respectable as the Bagginses, though they were undoubtedly richer.

It is probable that Beladonna Took's only son Bilbo, although he looked and behaved exactly like a second edition of his solid and comfortable father, got something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out. The chance never arrived, until Bilbo Baggins was grown up, being about fifty years old or so, and living in the beautiful hobbit-hole built by his father, which I have just described for you.

By some curious chance one morning long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green, and the hobbits were still numerous and prosperous, and Bilbo Baggins was standing at his door after breakfast, smoking an enormous long wooden pipe that reached nearly down to his woolly toes (neatly brushed) — Gandalf came by. Gandalf! If you have heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have only heard very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale.

All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was an old man with a staff. He had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots.

"Good morning!" said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat.

"What do you mean?" he said. "Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?"

"All of them at once", said Bilbo. "And a very fine morning for a pipe of tobacco out of doors, into the bargain. If you have a pipe about you, sit down and have a fill of mine! There's no hurry, we have all the day before us!" Then Bilbo sat down on the seat by his door, crossed his legs, and blew out a beautiful grey ring of smoke that sailed up into the air without breaking and floated away over the Hill.

"Very pretty!" said Gandalf. "But I have no time to blow smoke-rings this morning. I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone."

"I should think so — in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and I have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them," said our Mr. Baggins, and stuck one thumb behind his braces, and blew out another even bigger smoke-ring. Then he took out his morning letters and began to read, pretending to take no notice of the old man. He had decided that he was not his sort, and wanted him to go away. But the old man did not move. He stood leaning on his stick and gazing at the hobbit without saying anything, till Bilbo got quite uncomfortable and even a little cross.

"Good morning!" he said at last. "We don't want any adventures here, thank you! You might try over the Hill or across the Water." By this he meant that the conversation was at an end.

"What a lot of things you use Good morning for!" said Gandalf. "Now you mean that you want to get rid of me and that it won't be good till I move off." "Not at all, not at all, my dear sir! Let me see, I don't think I know your name?"

"Yes, yes, my dear sir — and I do know your name, Mr. Bilbo Baggins. And you do know my name, though you don't remember that I belong to it. I am Gandalf, and Gandalf means me! To think that I should have lived to be good-morninged by Beladonna Took's son, as if I was selling buttons at the door!"

"Gandalf, Gandalf! Good gracious me! Not the wandering wizard that gave Old Took a pair of magic diamond studs that fastened themselves and never came undone till ordered? Not the fellow who

used to tell such wonderful tales at parties, about dragons and goblins and giants and the rescue of princesses? Not the Gandalf who was responsible for so many quiet lads and lasses going off into the Blue for mad adventures? I beg your pardon, but I had no idea you were still in business."

"Where else should I be?" said the Wizard. "All the same I am very pleased to find you remember something about me. Indeed, for your old grandfather Took's sake, and for the sake of poor Beladonna, I will give you what you asked for."

"I beg your pardon, I haven't asked for anything."

"Yes, you have! Twice now. My pardon. I give it to you. In fact I will go so far as to send you to this adventure. Very amusing for me, very good for you — and profitable too, very likely, if you ever get over it."

"Sorry! I don't want any adventures, thank you. Not today. Good morning! But please come to tea — any time you like! Why not tomorrow! Come tomorrow! Goodbye!" With that the hobbit turned and scuttled inside his round green door, and shut it as quickly as he dared, not to seem rude. Wizards after all are wizards.

"What on earth did I ask him to tea for!" he said to himself, as he went to the pantry. He had only just had breakfast, but he thought a cake or two and a drink of something would do him good after his fright.

Gandalf in the meantime was still standing outside the door, and laughing long but quietly. After a while he stepped up, and with the spike on his staff scratched a queer sign on the hobbit's beautiful green front door. Then he strode away, just about the time when Bilbo was finishing his second cake and beginning to think that he had escaped adventures very well.

Stage C

Read the extract from "The Lord of the Rings ". Use a dictionary when needed.

The Lord of the Rings

Volume I. The Fellowship of the Ring

Book I. Chapter XI A KNIFE IN THE DARK

(Extract)

...The hobbits moved and stretched. "Look!" said Merry. "The Moon is rising: it must be getting late."

Sam and Merry got up and walked away from the fire. Frodo and Pippin remained seated in silence. Strider was watching the moonlight on the hill intently. All seemed quiet and still, but Frodo felt a cold dread creeping over his heart, now that Strider was no longer speaking. He huddled closer to the fire. At that moment Sam came running back from the edge of the dell.

"I don't know what it is," he said, "but I suddenly felt afraid. I dare not go

outside this dell for any money; I felt that something was creeping up the slope."

"Did you see anything?" asked Frodo, springing to his feet.

"No, sir. I saw nothing, but I didn't stop to look."

"I saw something," said Merry; "or I thought I did — away westwards where the moonlight was falling on the flats beyond the shadow of the hilltops, I thought there were two or three black shapes. They seemed to be moving this way."

"Keep close to the fire, with your faces outward!" cried Strider. "Get some of the longer sticks ready in your hands!"

For a breathless time they sat there, silent and alert, with their backs turned to the wood-fire, each gazing into the shadows that encircled them. Nothing happened. There was no sound or movement in the night. Frodo stirred, feeling that he must break the silence: he longed to shout out aloud.

"Hush!" whispered Strider. "What's that?" gasped Pippin at the same moment. Over the lip of the little dell, on the side away from the hill, they felt rather than saw a shadow rise, one shadow or more than one. They strained their eyes, and the shadows seemed to grow. Soon there could be no doubt: three or four tall black figures were standing there on the slope, looking down on them. So black were they that they seemed like black holes in the deep shade behind them. Frodo thought that he heard a faint hiss as of venomous breath and felt a thin piercing chill. Then the shapes slowly advanced.

Terror overcame Pippin and Merry, and they threw themselves flat on the ground. Sam shrank to Frodo's side. Frodo was hardly less terrified than his companions; he was quaking as if he was bitter cold, but his terror was swallowed up in a sudden temptation to put on the Ring. The desire to do this laid hold of him, and he could think of nothing else. He did not forget the Barrow, nor the message of Gandalf; but something seemed to be compelling him to disregard all warnings, and he longed to yield. Not with the hope of escape, or of doing anything, either good or bad: he simply felt that he must take the Ring and put it on his finger. He could not speak. He felt Sam looking at him, as if he knew that his master was in some great trouble, but he could not turn towards him. He shut his eyes and struggled for a while; but resistance became unbearable, and at last he slowly drew out the chain, and slipped the Ring on the forefinger of his left hand.

Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes became terribly clear. He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burnt keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him. Desperate, he drew his own sword, and it seemed to him that it flickered red, as if it were a firebrand. Two of the figures halted. The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helm was a crown. In one hand he held a long sword, and in the other a knife; both the knife and the hand that held it glowed

with a pale light. He sprang forward and bore down on Frodo.

At that moment Frodo threw himself forward on the ground, and he heard himself crying aloud: O Elbert! Gilthoniel! At the same time he struck at the feet of his enemy. A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierces his left shoulder. Even as he swooned he caught, as though a swirling mist, a glimpse of Strider leaping out of the darkness with a flaming brand of wood in either hand. With a last effort Frodo, dropping his sword, slipped the Ring from his finger and closed his right hand tight upon it.

Chapter XII FLIGHT TO THE FORD

(Extract)

When Frodo came to himself he was still clutching the Ring desperately. He was lying by the fire, which was now piled-high and burning brightly. His three companions were bending over him.

"What has happened? Where is the pale king?" he asked wildly.

They were too overjoyed to hear him speak to answer for a while; nor did they understand his question. At length he gathered from Sam that they had seen nothing but the vague shadowy shapes coming towards them. Suddenly to his horror Sam found that his master had vanished; and at that moment a black shadow rushed past him, and he fell. He heard Frodo's voice, but it seemed to come from a great distance, or from under the earth, crying out strange words. They saw nothing more, until they stumbled over the body of Frodo, lying as if dead, face downwards on the grass with his sword beneath him. Strider ordered them to pick him up and lay him near the fire, and then he disappeared. That was now a good while ago.

Sam plainly was beginning to have doubts again about Strider, but while they were talking he returned, appearing suddenly out of the shadows. They started, and Sam drew his sword and stood over Frodo; but Strider knelt down swiftly at his side.

"I am not a Black Rider, Sam," he said gently, "nor in league with them. I have been trying to discover something of their movements; but I have found nothing. I cannot think why they have gone and do not attack again. But there is no feeling of their presence anywhere at hand."

When he heard what Frodo had to tell, he became full of concern, and shook his head and sighed. Then he ordered Pippin and Merry to heat as much water as they could in their small kettles, and to bathe the wound with it. "Keep the fire going well, and keep Frodo warm!" he said. Then he got up and walked away, and called Sam to him. "I think I understand things better now," he said in a low voice. "There seem only to have been five of the enemy. Why they were not all here, I don't know; but I don't think they expected to be resisted. They have drawn off for the time being. But not far, I fear. They will come again the other night, if we cannot escape. They are only waiting, because they think that their purpose is almost accomplished, and that the Ring cannot fly much further, I fear, Sam, that they believe your master has a deadly wound that will subdue him to their will. We shall see!"

Sam choked with tears. "Don't despair!" said Strider. »You must trust me now. Your Frodo is made of sterner stuff than I had guessed, though Gandalf hinted that it might prove so. He is not slain, and I think he will resist the evil power of the wound longer than his enemies expect. I will do all I can to help and heal him. Guard him well, while I am away!" He hurried off and disappeared again into the darkness.

Frodo dozed, though the pain of his wound was slowly growing, and the deadly chill was spreading from his shoulder to his arm and side. His friends watched over him, warming him, and bathing his wound. Dawn was growing in the sky, when Strider at last returned.

"Look!" he cried: and stooping he lifted from the ground a black cloak that had lain there hidden by the darkness. A foot above the lower hem there was a slash. "This was the stroke of Frodo's sword," he said. »The only hurt it did to his enemy, I fear; for it is unharmed, but all blades perish that pierce that dreadful King. More deadly to him was the name of Elbert."

"And more deadly to Frodo was this!" He stooped again and lifted up a long thin knife. There was a cold gleam in it. As Strider raised it they saw that the point was broken off. But even as he held it up in the glowing light, they gazed in astonishment, for the blade seemed to melt, and vanished like a smoke in the air, leaving only the hilt in Strider's hand. "Alas!" he cried. "It was this accursed knife that gave the wound. Few now have the skill in healing to match such evil weapons. But I will do what I can."

He sat down on the ground, and taking the dagger-hilt laid it in his knees, and he sang over it a slow song in a strange tongue. Then setting it aside, he turned to Frodo and in a soft tone spoke words the others could not catch. From the pouch at his belt he drew out the long leaves of a plant. "These leaves," he said, "I have walked far to find. It is a healing plant that the Men of the West brought to Middle-earth. Athelas they named it, and it grows now sparsely. It has great virtues, but over such a wound as this its healing powers may be small."

He threw the leaves into boiling water and bathed Frodo's shoulder. The fragrance of the steam was refreshing, and those that were unhurt felt their minds calmed and cleared. The herb had also some power over the wound, for Frodo felt the pain and also the sense of frozen cold' lessen in his side; but the life did not return to his arm, and he could not raise or use his hand. He bitterly regretted his foolishness, and reproached himself for weakness of will; for he now perceived that in putting on the Ring' he obeyed not his own desire but the commanding wish of his enemies. He wondered if he would remain maimed for life, and how they would now manage to continue their journey. He felt too weak to stand.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Translate these extracts into Russian, then explain what they mean.

1 "No, sir. I saw nothing, but I didn't stop to look."

2 "I saw something," said Merry; "or I thought I did."

- 3 For a breathless time they sat there.
- 4 Even as he swooned he caught, as though a swirling mist, a glimpse of Strider leaping out of the darkness with a flaming brand of wood in either hand.
- 5 They were too overjoyed to hear him speak to answer for a while; nor did they understand his question.
- 6 But there is no feeling of their presence anywhere at hand.
- 7 They have drawn off for the time being.
- 8 Your Frodo is made of sterner stuff than I had guessed, though Gandalf hinted that it might prove so.
- 9 Few now have the skill in healing to match such evil weapons.

DISCUSSION

- 1 What made the hobbit and Strider feel terrified as soon as the moon rose?
- 2 How does Tolkien paint the mortal fear the friends felt? Look for the words and phrases conveying the oncoming terror.
- 3 Why do you think Frodo put on the Ring? What kind of "temptation" did he feel? Why did he try to resist the temptation?
- 4 What was the magic of the Ring?
- 5 Describe the Black Riders.
- 6 Was Frodo fully overtaken by the evil power? Why do you think Frodo was able to take off the Ring? .
- 7 Do you think the Black Riders wanted to kill Frodo? In your opinion, what forces ruled the Ring?
- 8 What does the name 'Strider' mean? Why did Sam suspect Strider of being one of the Black Riders?
- 9 Did Frodo manage to harm the Pale King?
- 10 What kind of wound did Frodo have? Where did the point of the Pale King's knife disappear? Why do you think Strider was so worried when he picked up the knife?
- 11 What do you think was the meaning of the song Strider sang over the dagger-hilt?
- 12 How did Strider heal Frodo? What were the powers of Athelas? Can we say that Athelas healed those unhurt too?
- 13 How did different characters — Frodo, the other hobbits, including his servant Sam, and Strider — behave in this incident? Give a short character-sketch of each of them.
- 14 How does the extract you have read reveal the three themes Tolkien explores?

15 Where does the magic of Tolkien lie?

16 Would you like to read the whole book in the original?

INCREASING VOCABULARY

Without looking into the text, say in which contexts the following words and phrases are used:

Subdue to their will, the lower hem, regretted his foolishness, maimed for life, bathe the wound, clutching desperately, stumbled over, creep, spring to his feet, encircle, unbearable.

READER'S THEATRE

Select a scene and do a dramatic reading of it.

Roald Dahl(1916-1990).

Read the text to find out as many details about the author as possible. While reading, put down the notes about the most important events in his life.

Roald Dahl was born on September, 13 1916 in Cardiff, Wales. He was the third of four children and the only son of Harold and Sophie Dahl. Harold was a prosperous ship-broker. In January 1920 Roald's sister Astri died of appendicitis at the age of seven. Two months later, Harold died of pneumonia. Many people around him believed that he died of a broken heart.

Who would suspected that a man whose teacher wrote on his end-of-term report in 1930, of his work in English Composition, » I have never met a boy who so persistently writes the exact opposite of what he means.” would become one of the most popular and best-selling authors of all time?

After finishing high school in 1934, Roald went to work for the Shell Oil Company. He underwent training in England for 3 years, after which he was sent to East Africa. Dahl relished his time in Africa. He was in his mid twenties and in the mood for an adventure. He went to Kenya where he was to be based. He would later recount his adventures at Shell and his subsequent experiences as an RAF pilot in his 1986 book, *Going Solo*.

In 1939, as the war with Germany was beginning, Dahl left Shell Oil and drove to Nairobi, in Kenya, to join the RAF. For six months he trained in small airplanes called Tiger Moths. After that he was sent to an air base in Iraq where he completed his training. He was sent to the Western desert in Libya where he joined the 80 squadron. Dahl's small

plane crashed in the middle of the desert. He suffered burns and a fractured skull, and was sent to a hospital in Egypt where he recuperated for six months. The spine and hip injuries he suffered would plague him for the rest of his life.

When his recuperation was over in 1941, he was given a bigger, more powerful airplane called a Hurricane, to rejoin his squadron in Greece. Several months later, the headaches caused by the head injuries forced him to stop flying. Dahl was sent to Washington D. C. as an assistant air attaché for the British Embassy in January, 1942. Three days after he began his work, the writer C. S. Forester came into his office. Forester asked Dahl if he would mind being interviewed about his experiences as a pilot. Dahl agreed and the two went to lunch at a restaurant to talk. It was hard for Forester to take notes while he ate. Roald volunteered to jot down some notes and send them to Forester. Instead of notes, he wrote an entire story. He called it "A piece of cake", had the embassy secretary type it up, and sent it to Forester. Forester loved it, and had it published anonymously in the August 1942 Saturday Evening Post. Forester told Dahl that he was a gifted writer and the Post asked for more stories. With that, without really trying, and never having considered it before, Roald Dahl made writing his career.

After "A piece of cake" Dahl began work on a novel titled *The Gremlins*, enlarging the myth of the gremlins and creating a mystical story about RAF. When *The Gremlins* was finished, Dahl showed the manuscript to Sidney Bernstein, the head of the British Information Service, who sent it to Walt Disney. Soon after receiving the manuscript in July 1942, Disney decided to make the story into a film, and Dahl went to Hollywood to help with the screenplay. Disney had the story published in *Cosmopolitan* to create some interest in the film. Dahl used the pseudonym Pegasus in the magazine. About six months after that, Random House published a revised picture book version of *The Gremlins* by Flight Lieutenant Roald Dahl. Shortly after that, Walt Disney lost interest in the project and stopped production on the film.

Dahl got some positive reaction to *The Gremlins*. Eleanor Roosevelt said she read it to her grandchildren. She even invited Roald to the White House to have dinner with her and the President. Despite this limited, positive reaction no one really took notice of the new writer.

By the end of 1945, Dahl had sold sixteen stories to various American magazines without a rejection. It was then that he decided to become a full time writer. The first thing he did was put together ten of his flying stories for a collection titled *Over to you: ten stories of flyers and flying*. The stories in *Over to you* mostly center on life in the RAF. Some of the stories include events that actually happened to the author with added

drama to make them interesting, while others are pure fantasy.

One story from that collection is called Katina, about a young Greek girl whose parents are killed when the town she lives in is bombed by the Germans. She is found by a squadron of the RAF, who nurse her back to health and take care of her. She seems to serve as a symbol of what the soldiers are fighting for. She is like a bit of hope, even though the pilots are surrounded by war and death.

Most of the reviews for *Over to you* were good. Nona Balakian commented on Dahl's truthful depiction of the pilots' inner experiences, and praised his acute awareness of the narrow margin separating shadow and substance. Michael Straight wrote: Dahl is an author of great promise and he has written a fine and memorable book.

Despite the good press, *Over to you* was a modest seller. The small publishing company was not able to afford a big promotional campaign. Also perhaps people did not want to read stories about a war they had just lived through.

His next novel, *Some time never: A tale of a superman* was published in the United States in 1948, and in England a year later. It is a story about a nuclear war. Dahl was apprehensive about writing a novel. He felt more comfortable writing short stories. According to Dahl, he just expanded his story about the Gremlins and wrote a rather prophetic story about the end of the world.

The Gremlins in *Some time never*, who have been living underground since the beginning of time, want to rid the world of humans so they can come up and inhabit the world. After a while the head Gremlin realizes that there is no reason for them to worry about getting rid of the humans because they will destroy themselves in time.

The head Gremlin is right. World War III breaks out and the war takes a big human toll, but the human race is not destroyed completely. Three blocs remain, one is controlled by the United States, another by Russia, and the third by India and China. These countries don't learn anything from the toll of World War III and continue building up their nuclear arsenals for another war. Inevitably, World War IV comes along and wipes out the human race. However, when the Gremlins finally do emerge, they found that the world is not hospitable enough for any of them.

The reviews of *Some time never* were not completely positive. It is, for the most part, a forgotten book. Dahl said he saw the book as a "practice session" for the books that would follow. His initial feeling, that he was primarily a short story writer, seemed to have been confirmed. Dahl wanted to forget *Some time never* so much that many of his later biographies didn't include the book.

Having moved to New York, Dahl met a young actress Patricia Neal

at a dinner party at playwright Lillian Hellman's house. She had won a Tony in 1946, at the age of twenty, then went off to Hollywood with hopes of movie stardom. Her voluptuous body made her a rising star immediately after she signed a lucrative deal with Warner Brothers. She made several movies, the first being *The Hasty Heart*, with future president, Ronald Reagan. During one of the films, Patricia Neal and the twenty-five-years-older-and-married Gary Cooper began an affair that lasted nearly three years. When the gossip columnists got wind of the affair, they branded Neal as "the other woman" who was trying to destroy Cooper's seventeen year marriage. Neal also had an abortion. When the affair ended in 1951 Neal suffered a nervous breakdown. After spending several months in her sister's house in Atlanta to recover, she decided to go back to New York and Broadway, disenchanted with Hollywood.

Lillian Hellman sat Roald Dahl across from Neal at the dinner table. Pat assumed that Dahl would spend the entire evening trying to enchant her. He didn't. He didn't talk to her very much at all. Instead, he engaged in conversation with another guest, Leonard Bernstein. Pat said that she had left that dinner "loathing Roald".

Several days later, Dahl called her and asked out for a date. (He had asked Lillian for her number.) She declined his invitation. He called a couple of days later and Pat relented. After that first date, Roald would pick Pat up from her rehearsals with a "consistent but dispassionate interest" that she found intriguing. Pat says that she didn't love Dahl as one might a husband, but saw him as strong, and in her late twenties, she wanted children.

One night after a performance, Roald came backstage to visit Pat. It was there that he said, "I would like to know how you think it would work if we got married." "Oh no!" she said. "Roald, let's just continue the way we are. I mean, let's not talk about that now. All right?" She told herself that she didn't love him and didn't want to get married. However, beneath that denial was a strong desire for marriage and children.

Without formally accepting his proposal, Pat and Roald were married on July 2, 1953, in a small church in New York. Pat wrote in her 1998 autobiography of their wedding night. "I love you" he said softly and touched me. I felt tears come to my eyes. They rolled down my cheeks in the dark silence. I could feel my heart breaking. I so wanted to be married, but to another man".

Dahl's next book was an anthology of short stories titled *Someone like you*. The eighteen stories in the anthology are about people who at first appear to be completely normal but turn out to have some sort of "dark side" or mental deficiency. Included in the anthology was "Lamb to the Slaughter", one of Dahl's best-known short stories. Mary Maloney is a

seemingly normal housewife. Her husband is a policeman. Their life seems boring and monotonous (they have drinks every night before she prepares dinner) until one day the husband comes home and announces he is having an affair and wants a divorce. Mary ends up killing him by hitting him over the head with the frozen leg of lamb she was going to prepare for dinner that night.

The disturbing part of this story is the fact that Mary goes out and buys some potatoes and a cheesecake, calmly cooks the murder weapon, the leg of lamb, and serves it to the investigating detectives. All of this may cause some people to question just how stable Mary had been before the murder.

The reviews for *Someone like you* were great. In The New York Times Book Review, James Kelly said That Dahl had “a masterful hand with nuance and an ability to keep the reader off balance through sheer astonishment.” William Penden, who reviewed the book for the Saturday Review, liked Dahl’s use of the “principle of contrast”. He said, “These bizarre stories are heightened by the matter-of-fact and realistic method with which the author approaches his surprise endings.”

In 1954 *Someone like you* won Dahl his first major writing award. The Mystery Writers of America gave him the Edgar Allen Poe award. As a result of the award and accompanying publicity, *Someone like you* became a best-seller.

In 1955, Neal became pregnant with their first child and gave birth to Olivia Twenty, on April 20, 1955. Chantal Maria (they later changed her name to Tessa), followed on April 11, 1957. Pat was pregnant again in February 1960, when Knopf published *Kiss Kiss*. The title had come from a story Patricia Neal told him about an actress friend who, when on tour, used to say “kiss, kiss” to her husband over and over again on the phone. The book contains 11 stories, four of which hadn’t been published before; the others had previously appeared in magazines.

Some reviewers who took a closer look at the stories commented on the unique intricacies of his characters. The Time critic praised Dahl for his “gallery of females”. The reviewer was intrigued “by the deceptiveness of these characters’ gentle demeanors. He described them as lovely ladies, indeed, but heaven help the poor man who falls into their clutches.” A review by Malcolm Bradbury in the New York Times Book Review stated, “His characters are usually ignoble: he knows the dog beneath the skin, or works hard to find it.” The stories in *Kiss Kiss* were later published in several repackaged anthologies.

Pat gave birth to their only son, Theo Matthew Roald, on July 30, 1960. It was at this time that Roald decided to write for children. The success of *Kiss Kiss* made his publishers anxious for more stories, but

Dahl had no ideas. As a result, he decided to try writing a children's story based on one he had told Olivia and Tessa. The story, eventually titled *James and the Giant Peach* was about a young boy named James Henry Trotter, who, at first, is a healthy, happy boy. However, at the age of four he is sent to live with his cruel aunts after his parents were killed by a rhinoceros that escaped from London Zoo. The aunts regularly beat James, which causes to become him severely depressed. One day, while James is hiding behind some bushes crying, a strange old man comes up to him and gives him a bag of green objects. The man tells James that there is more "magic and power" in those green objects than anything else in the world, and that if he puts the contents of the bag into a glass of water and drinks it, "he will never be miserable again». Accidentally, James spills the bag near a small dying tree. James is distraught, thinking he will never get out of his miserable situation. However, soon after that, a peach begins to grow on a tree. In a matter of minutes the peach is bigger than the tree it is growing on. The greedy aunts decide to profit from the big peach by charging people to come to see it. One day, when James is ordered outside to pick up trash left by the visitors, he finds a hole in the bottom of the peach big enough for him to climb into. He gets in and climbs to the pit, where he finds a door, and inside seven insects. These insects, four in particular, have distinct personalities: the Ladybug is very maternal, the Green-Grasshopper is a father-like figure, (the two of them provide the love and praise James's aunts never gave him) the Centipede is a wise-cracking trouble-maker, and the Earth worm is whiny and convinced that nothing is going to go right. James is unsure of them at first, but soon they become friends. The main plot of the story begins when, with James inside, the peach falls off the tree, rolls over and kills the nasty aunts. James and the insects begin a journey inside the peach. As the peach tumbles down the hill and they all are being tossed around, James wraps himself around the Earth Worm. Finally the peach lands in the Atlantic Ocean. At this point, James unfurls himself from the Earth Worm and ventures outside to ride on top of the peach. He encounters many misadventures, but he cleverly solves each one of them and the Ladybug and Green- Grasshopper congratulate them each time, which builds his self-confidence. By the time James and his friends land in New York, James has, for the most time, recovered from his depression. He is once again the confident, happy boy he was before his parents died.

Reviews for *James and the Giant Peach* were extremely positive. Reviewers tended to focus on the fantasy elements of the book, rather than the deeper bonding process James goes through with the insects. The reviewer for *The San Francisco Chronicle* called the book "the most original fantasy that has been published for a long time" and predicted

that it “may well become a classic”. By October, 1962 the book had sold 6500 hardcover copies. By 1968 266435 copies had been sold.

Shortly after *James* was published in 1961, Roald Dahl started work on a book that took place in a chocolate factory, tentatively titled *Charlie’s Chocolate Boy*. The book eventually titled *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* wasn’t published until late 1964 because Dahl put the manuscript aside when in December, 1960, his son Theo was hit by a taxicab while riding in his stroller. The stroller slammed into the side of a bus. He suffered serious brain injuries, was temporarily blinded, and developed a condition, hydrocephalus, more commonly known as “water on the brain”. “water on the brain” (Cameron XI).

Just as Theo was beginning to recover, on November 17, 1962, Dahl's daughter Olivia died as a result of rare complications from measles at the age of seven . Roald began to come out of his immense sadness when his daughter, Ophelia Magdalena Dahl, was born on May 12, 1964.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is about a young boy named Charlie Bucket who lives in poverty with his parents and grandparents. The family doesn't have enough to eat and their diet, for the most part, consists of boiled cabbage. Charlie is obsessed with chocolate and everyday on his way to school, he has to go past a chocolate factory owned by an eccentric "candy man" named Willy Wonka. The chocolate factory is a very mysterious place and no one knows what goes on inside.

One day, Charlie's father comes home with a newspaper the headline of which reads: WONKA FACTORY TO BE OPENED AT LAST TO LUCKY FEW. Willy Wonka has decided to let five children visit the factory. The winners, those who find one of the five "golden tickets" wrapped in wonka bars will be shown the secrets of the factory and given a lifetime supply of chocolate. The tickets are found by: Augustus Gloop, a fat boy who loves to eat; Veruca Salt, a rich girl spoiled rotten by her parents; Violet Beauregard, who chews gum constantly; and Mike Teevee, who watches television all the time. Charlie, (who was only able to get two of the bars) finds the fifth one.

Charlie and his Grandpa Joe go on the factory tour together. When the gates of the factory are opened, Willy Wonka, a small man with a big top hat, greets them all. He introduces them to his helpers called 'Oompa-Loompas', described as pygmies imported from Africa. The Oompa-Loompas are small people who are machine-like in their work and sing repetitiously. A series of accidents begin to happen. Augustus Gloop is sucked into a pipe on a chocolate riverbank; while gobbling a stick of gum that contains the flavors of a three course meal, Violet Beauregard turns blue and begins to blow up like a balloon because the formula for the gum hasn't been perfected yet. (The Oompa-Loompas take her to the juicing room to squeeze her.) Veruca Salt is pushed into a hole by squirrels who think she is a bad nut; and while in the television chocolate room, Mike TeeVee jumps into a television screen after a chocolate bar is transported into it, and comes out only one inch tall.

Charlie is the only one left. Wonka takes Charlie and Grandpa Joe into a large glass elevator that moves from side to side as well as up and down. When Wonka pushes a button, the elevator goes up and up and crashes right through the

roof. At that point, Willy Wonka tells Charlie that he will be the new owner of the chocolate factory. He and his family will move there, so they can help run it.

Some critics were not particularly impressed by the book. Children's author Eleanor Cameron objected to the book's "hypocrisy, which is epitomized in its moral...that TV is horrible and hateful and time-wasting and that children should read good books instead, when in fact the book itself is like nothing so much as one of the more specious television shows" (Warren 69). However, when the book was first published most of the reviews were positive. Charlotte Jackson of the *Atlantic Monthly* wrote that the book was, "full of magical nonsense and uproarious situations with a tiny germ of a moral artfully inserted in each chapter." Aileen Pippett wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that Dahl had, "proved in *James and the Giant Peach* that he knew how to appeal to children. He has done it again, gloriously. Fertile in invention, rich in humor, acutely observant, he depicts fantastic characters ...and situations...and lets his imagination rip (West 70).

In September, 1964, Charlie was released in the United States and was a best seller. Within a month, the first printing of 10,000 copies was sold out. The *New York Times* was impressed enough to ask him to write an article for them about writing children's books. In it, he wrote that, "five out of seven children's books published today are a cheat" (Treglown 156-157). Dahl felt that most children's authors felt as though they could dash off a simple children's book in a couple of weeks for quick money. Dahl believed that it took nearly a year to write a good book, even though it was a strain on his wallet. Undoubtedly, that was Dahl's well-documented arrogance coming to the surface because of the success he so desperately wanted and was finally beginning to have.

In 1970, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* become controversial and was even banned in some places, when a few critics claimed that the book was racist. Eleanor Cameron was among those critics. Most didn't accuse Dahl of being overtly racist, but claimed he was contributing to the stereotypes of race, particularly regarding the portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas as African Pygmies who work in a machine-like fashion for the white Willy Wonka. They always obey him, ask no questions and always sing joyfully while doing their job.

Dahl said that it had never occurred to him that the Oompa-Loompas might result in charges of racism. He hadn't thought about the fact that all the workers were black. He said after thinking about it for a time he found himself, "sympathizing with them" (the critics who cried racism) (West 71). Because of the controversy, Dahl agreed to change the appearance of the Oompa-Loompas. In the 1973 revised edition, the Oompa-Loompas aren't black. They have long, wavy hair and come from a place called Loompa Land (West 71).

After the change in the revised edition, the controversy began to die down, but Eleanor Cameron, who hadn't like the book in the first place, wrote a series of articles for different journals in which she castigated the book for many things, phoniness and tastelessness among them, and said that the book had, "no literary value," and was popular only because it was "wish fulfilling" (West 72).

That may be precisely the reason why children love the book so much. While the portrayal of the Oompa-Loompas may have been politically incorrect and changing them was the right thing to do, the story is a real honest-to-goodness fantasy that many children would love to indulge in. The book warns that over-indulgence can have serious and grave consequences. Some may argue that there is too much violence in the book because of the way the children are treated. This may be somewhat true. However that may also be part of the fantasy element that children like so much. The fact is, not every thought a child has is of lollipops and teddy bears. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* has sold millions of copies around the world, is one of the best-selling books ever, was chosen by the readers of *The London Times* as the most popular children's book of all time (Warren 67), and was adapted into a hit movie (by Dahl himself, though he didn't like the final product), *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, in 1971. Dahl didn't write another book for several years because Patricia Neal suffered three successive strokes, while pregnant with their fifth child, on February 17, 1965. Dahl spent most of the rest of the sixties helping to rehabilitate his wife. As a result, his writing was restricted to a couple of short stories that he had started beforehand and a few articles about his family for several magazines. To bring in needed money during this time, he wrote the script for the James Bond film, *You Only Live Twice*, and wrote the screenplay for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, adapted from an Ian Fleming story.

On August 4, 1965, Lucy Neal Dahl was born without complications, 169 days after Pat's stroke. The press dubbed her, "the miracle baby."

In 1972, a sequel to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* titled *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* was published. Roald had some major reservations about the book and put his publishers off for a few years before writing it. He finally relented but said the book wasn't any fun to write. The story involves a large, indestructible glass elevator that is controlled by a series of multicolored buttons on the wall. The book basically has two plots that don't really go together. In the first part of the story, Charlie, his parents, four grandparents and Willy Wonka are aboard the elevator for a ride to the chocolate factory. One of the grandmothers interrupts Wonka while he is controlling the elevator which causes it to be shot into outer space in a matter of seconds. They encounter a luxury space hotel. There are several things that happen involving the President of the United States, astronauts (they are on a space mission and see the elevator as it whizzes by and notify the President) aliens from another solar system called Vermicious Knids, and some strange pills that make one of the grandparents twenty years younger.

The second part of the book deals with the strange pills and takes place in the chocolate factory. Willy Wonka announces that he has invented a pill called Wonka-Vite, and tells the grandparents that swallowing one of the pills will make each of them twenty years younger and make it possible for them to get out of their beds. Predictably, the grandparents become so excited about the prospect of being twenty years younger that they end up overdosing on the pills. The overdose causes two of the seventy-eight- year-old grandparents to become eighty years

younger, making them minus two years old. As a result, they will be sent to a place called Minus Land unless Wonka can rescue them. The scenes in Minus Land are very strange and don't seem to fit into the first part of the book.

Reviews of the book were not particularly good. Julia Whedon wrote in the New York Times Book Review that the book was "a string of random jokes and adventures held together by that enviable British glibness of style—punning and colloquial—that sounds as if it must be good, even though it's all manner, without substance (West 77). After the reviews of the book came out, Dahl vowed never to write a sequel again.

In 1974, for the first time since 1960's *Kiss Kiss*, a new anthology of stories, *Switch Bitch*, was published. The book contains four stories, all of which deal with sex and sexuality: "The Visitor," "The Great Switcheroo," "The Last Act" and "Bitch." "The Visitor" starts with a narrator explaining how he came to have the diaries of his late Uncle Oswald. The rest of the story is told from Oswald's point of view. On a trip through the Sinai desert his car breaks down and he has to stay overnight at a gas station. A wealthy Arab businessman named Mr. Abdul Aziz comes along and offers him a place to stay for the night. Oswald accepts and they go to his castle-like home.

The Arab introduces Oswald to his wife and eighteen-year-old daughter, Diana. Right from the start it's obvious that this man is controlled by his libido. He says that the perfume the girls wear makes them smell like an "animal, bitchy and brazen." Oswald seems to believe that he knows what a woman wants sexually.

Oswald tries to seduce both women at the dinner table, but other than a bit of flirting, the women leave the dinner table for bed without even talking to him. When Oswald gets to his room, he thinks about going to one of the women's rooms but decides that would be personal suicide. Oswald hears footsteps and moments later one of the women, he's not sure which one, is in his bed. Four hours of what he calls "intense passion" ensue. At the end of it all he still can't decide which woman it is. He goes to bed peacefully thinking that he'll be able to tell the next day at breakfast. In the morning, much to his surprise, he can tell nothing.

On the way back to the filling station, Abdul Aziz tells Oswald about a third daughter Oswald never met. She lives on the third floor in her own apartment and never comes down when there are guests, because she has leprosy. Oswald is extremely concerned. Abdul tries to console his fears by telling him that it's not very contagious and one would have to have the "most intimate contact" with her to have any chance of contracting the disease. At that point they reach the filling station, Oswald gets out of the car and is left standing there, stunned. Oswald is a man who believes he can have sex with whomever he chooses, whenever he chooses. The Lesson of "The Visitor" may be that people who are egotistical enough to believe that they deserve everything they want, may be a pawn in someone else's game without knowing it.

"The Great Switcheroo," like "The Visitor," is about voracious sexual appetites. Vic and Jerry are best friends, next-door neighbors and normal suburbanites. Each of them wants to sleep with the other's wife. Vic and Jerry hatch a plan so that they can switch wives. They decide to do it all in the dark

so that the women won't know they aren't having sex with their husbands. They set a date and work out every detail they think necessary to avoid detection.

The plan works and each of them has sex with the other's husband, but in the end it backfires. The next morning Vic's wife comes downstairs and for the first time in their marriage, she wants to talk about their sex life. She tells Vic that she never particularly enjoyed sex until last night. Vic looks out the windows and sees Jerry walking across his lawn with a happy skip in his gait.

"Bitch" is similar to the other two stories. It is about a worldly playboy (Oswald, again) and his various sexual exploits. Oswald meets a chemist named Henri Biottle who concocts perfumes. Biottle is looking for a rich man to help finance his dream to make a perfume that "will have the same effect upon a man as the scent of a bitch in heat has upon a dog!" (Dahl, Switch, 117) Oswald agrees to finance the project. After a couple of years, Henri invents a scent called Bitch. The scent is to be sprayed on a woman. When a man smells the scent he becomes an animal and must have sex with the woman. Toward the end of the story, Henri's assistant, Simone, soaks herself in Bitch and sneaks up on him. Henri, who has a heart condition, becomes so crazy he has a heart attack and dies instantly.

"The Last Act" is similar to the three other stories but has a different twist. Anna is a new widow dealing with the death of her husband, Ed, who's been killed in a car accident after twenty-three years of marriage. Just months later, all three of her children have moved away to start their own lives. She ponders suicide. Then, in desperation, a friend asks her to come work at an adoption agency. Anna is hooked by the end of the first day.

On a business trip to Dallas, Anna meets up with Conrad Kreuger, an old boyfriend from high school and now a successful gynecologist. The two of them go out and drink a bit. Afterward, they go up to Anna's hotel room, where she is more than willing to have sex. At first Anna is very passionate, but Conrad is strangely distant and analytical. In the end he begins to squeeze her and says there is something that is making it impossible for them to have sex. He keeps insisting that she knows what it is but won't tell him. At first she ignores him, but after a while he squeezes her as though he is trying to kill her. She pleads with him to let her go. He refuses, tells her that the problem is she is frigid. Anna crawls to the bathroom screaming, "Ed! Ed!" Conrad listens at the door for a minute and then calmly but quickly, dresses and leaves the room after combing his hair. Anna is left in the bathroom. She is undoubtedly going to commit suicide. Switch Bitch is a book ripe with sex. Some might call it semi-pornographic. Dahl was aware of the sex-based themes that were popping up in his stories. He remarked to an interviewer, "For twenty-five years I was able to write stories that were untarnished by sexual undertones of any kind. But, now, in my late middle age, they're riddled with sex and copulation. What, I wonder, is the reason for this?" (West 50)

Dahl's use of sex as a theme in his stories may have been a result of his personal life. By the mid-seventies, his marriage to Patricia Neal was crumbling and, according to his daughter Tessa, he was seeing what she describes as an "endless slew of rich old bags who suddenly wanted to do nice things for me" (Treglown 208). New Republic reviewer J.D. O'Hara

surmised, "like so many writers, he feels that the public demands coarseness now." Coincidentally, the four stories in *Switch Bitch* were originally published in *Playboy* (Warren 53).

Because of the nature of the book, the reviews of *Switch Bitch* were a mixed bag. The reviewer for *New Republic* also talked about "the relationship between sexuality and evilness in Dahl's stories." He contended that the characters didn't seem to have any sense of morality or any concern for the consequences of their actions. He wrote: "Dahl substitutes for real and dangerous evil a cartoon version of it, safely incredible or at least safely removed from our everyday lives...Since we can't believe in these things, the evilness in the story is presumably neutralized for us. As *Playboy* neutralizes pornography with an airbrush, so Dahl sweetens nastiness into mild amusement." Richard P. Brickner, writing for *The New York Times Book Review*, saw it differently. He said that this type of book was, "for fun," but Brickner didn't like the few serious elements of the book, as in "The Last Act." Brickner said, "those elements of the story spoiled the pleasure of reading it. (West 54).

Reviewers seemed to be saying that the stories had conflicting messages. People should be free to indulge in their own passions and desires, but—and I agree with the reviewer who said many of Dahl's characters don't seem to have any sense of morality—there are some consequences. In "The Visitor," Oswald has to deal with the fact that he may have contracted leprosy; In "The Great Switcheroo," Vic has to deal with the fact that his wife has never enjoyed sex with him but did with Jerry; in "Bitch," Henri Biottle dies without leaving the formula, and in "The Last Act" Conrad Krueger will have to deal with the fact that his comments put Anna over the edge. Dahl's next book, *Danny, Champion of the World*, published in 1975, was a continuation (embellishment) of his earlier adult story in *Kiss Kiss*, "Champion of the World." For the children's book he changed the main characters to a father and son, made some changes to the language and had an illustrator add pictures before it was published.

Danny narrates the story of his life with his father at a filling station. They have a simple life and live behind the station in an old caravan. One night Danny wakes up and finds his father gone, and when he returns, he tells Danny a secret. He is a poacher and loves to hunt the pheasants on the land of Victor Hazel, a wealthy land owner he dislikes. He tells Danny he wants to figure out a way to get rid of all the pheasants on the land. Danny is morally opposed to poaching at first, but his father convinces him that it's okay because rich people won't miss the birds. Danny catches his father's love of poaching and suggests using sleeping pills to get all the pheasants. The story brings up a series of ethical questions. Is the illegal killing of animals acceptable? Is it okay to go onto someone else's land and take what isn't yours, because the owner is rich? The story tends to glorify poaching by using the premise that it's okay because the people they are poaching from have too much 'stuff' anyway. The theme really is about the differences between rich and poor. It shows the extent to which people will go to feed their families, be they humans or animals. I believe the story also forces the reader to question why some are allowed to have so much, while others have so

little.

The other point that Dahl seemed to be trying to make was that adults aren't always everything that children are brought up to think they are. As Danny tells readers, "you will learn as you get older, just as I learned that autumn, that no father is perfect...grownups are complicated creatures, full of quirks and secrets..."(Dahl, Danny, 26). Most reviewers did not look at the ethical issues of the story. Instead, they focused on the loving father-son relationship or the fact that father and son were proud poachers. Critic Alasdair Campbell wrote that some people might find the book, "unacceptable because the hero and his father are triumphant poachers; and if poaching can be presented as a heroic activity, what about shoplifting or any other kind of theft?" But Campbell also felt that the book had enough fantasy elements for it not to be considered encouraging crime. However, he also felt that Dahl was promoting a "critical attitude toward land-owning and game-shooting" (West 80).

It is possible to draw some parallels between Danny and his father and Dahl's own life. At one time, nocturnal poaching was a hobby of his. The relationship between Danny and his father could be seen as a fantasy of the relationship Dahl didn't have a chance to have with his own father. The relationship between Danny and his father may have been reflective of the kind of relationship he had with his own son. Theo was his only son, the only person to whom he could be what he never had, a father. Whomever else Dahl was critical of (including his other children), it was never Theo. He was unconditionally devoted to his son. After his accident, Theo developed hydrocephalus or "water on the brain" which required a shunt in his head, the device often clogged. When the shunt clogged, he ran a fever and was temporarily blinded. The only way to relieve the symptoms, was surgery to unclog the valve. Dahl found out through tireless research that thousands of other children had the same problem. He resolved to come up with a device that wouldn't clog. Together with an old friend and airplane engine builder named Stanley Wade, and neurosurgeon Kenneth Till, he developed the Dahl-Wade-Till Valve, which was introduced in June of 1962. As it turned out, Theo didn't need the valve because he was able to live without one before the DWT Valve was ready. However, Kenneth Till estimates that the valve was put into the heads of 2000-3000 children. Some still have it in their heads today (Treglown 144). As a young man, Dahl's first job was working at a gas station and the old Gypsy caravan the two characters live in, could be modeled after the old Gypsy caravan that still sits in the backyard of the Dahl family home.

Danny, the Champion of the World bears some similarities to Dahl's 1970 book, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, written for very young children and, like Danny, concerned with the relationship between people and animals. The story revolves around three nasty farmers named Boggis, Bunce and Bean, who want to kill Mr. Fox because he steals their poultry to feed his family. The farmers devise several plans: they try to shoot Mr. Fox as he comes out of his hole, they try to dig out the foxes; they also try to surround the hole so the foxes are unable to get out for food. Mr. Fox figures out a way to get around each of these plans. As each plan fails, the farmers become

more angry and more determined to get rid of Mr. Fox. When another character asks Mr. Fox if he feels guilty about stealing the farmers' poultry, he says no, because he just doing what is necessary for his family to survive. It seems like the message of Fantastic Mr. Fox is similar to the one presented in Danny Champion of the World. An individual is sometimes forced to do something that is considered wrong in order to sustain his family. Dahl seems to feel that anyone worth his salt would do what was necessary if their backs were against the wall. Dahl makes this clear when Mr. Fox says to the badger in the story, "Do you know anyone in this world who wouldn't steal a few chickens if their children were starving to death?" (Fox 45) In my opinion, Dahl doesn't say that stealing is right or wrong, but puts it in the context of the desperate situation.

The 1980's were professionally productive for Roald Dahl, despite the fact that his health was often questionable, and that he and Patricia Neal divorced on November 17, 1983 after thirty years of marriage. (Coincidentally, that was twenty one years to the day after their daughter, Olivia, died.) Many people around Dahl at that time say that the reason he was able to be so productive was that he had found personal happiness. In the early 1970's he began having an affair with a woman named Felicity Crossland. He met her through Pat, who was doing a commercial for Maxim coffee. Felicity was working for the advertising agency making the commercial, and was responsible for selecting her wardrobe. Pat took a liking to the younger Felicity and brought her home for dinner.

A journalist described the situation this way: "Imagine the scene. You meet at work, get on with her rather well and invite her to come home to meet your husband. She and he take one look at each other and wham-you're out of the picture" (Treglown 209). Roald and Felicity married at the end of 1983, right after his divorce from Pat was final.

In 1980, Dahl wrote what was considered his first full-length novel, titled *My Uncle Oswald*. The book was a continuation of Oswald Cornelius, first introduced in the *Switch Bitch* stories, and is similar to the earlier stories. It takes place between 1912 and 1919 and chronicles Oswald's adventures with women as he tries to make his fortune. In the first half of the book, Oswald discovers a rare insect called the Sudanese Blister Beetle and finds out that it is a powerful aphrodisiac. He goes to the Sudan, where he purchases five pounds of powder made out of the beetles. He makes the powder into pills and sells them for a big profit. In the second part of the book he meets a young woman named Yasmin Howcomely and the two of them travel around Europe collecting sperm from several Kings and geniuses. He hopes to sell the sperm to rich women who wish to have these powerful geniuses' babies.

Of course, there are a lot of misadventures in the book, particularly concerning how the sperm is collected from these men. This is where the aphrodisiac comes in. As a result of all of this, Oswald does reach his goal of becoming a millionaire.

My Uncle Oswald is fairly farcical. Dahl himself called it a,

"jokey...send-up" (West 58). The book received fairly mixed reviews. Sylvia Clayton wrote in the Times Literary Supplement that Dahl's novel was, "a joke of short story length, spun out by repetition...Even a farce needs some grounding in human reality and, while plenty of women might be flattered at the idea of a romance with a king, there is little glamour in producing a royal bastard." She went on to say that it was a shame that such a talented story writer had spent so much time on, "this lumbering comedy." Rhonda Koenig writing for New Republic saw the book differently. "[A] view of copulation as undignified and absurd is the theme of Roald Dahl's novel. A snappy, burlesque of sex novels and sex...Though there is, naturally, a good deal of messing around, Dahl's novel is not erotic although or, rather because it is extravagantly funny" (H.W. Wilson Co. 277). Dahl decided not to write another novel and instead, concentrate on children's books. Most of the books were directed at children of elementary school age. George's Marvelous Medicine is a story about an eight-year old boy named George and his mean grandmother. George is an average boy, but his grandmother is mean and described as physically repulsive. She is described as "always complaining, grouching, grumbling, griping, about something or other...She didn't seem to care about other people, only herself. She was a miserable old grouch" (2). Like the aunts in James, Grandma orders her grandson around constantly.

George finds a way to get even with his grandma for treating him so badly. He creates a mixture of things including car fluid, cleaning products, and several other chemicals he finds around the house, and puts some into Grandma's bottle of medicine. After she takes a spoonful of the stuff, she starts going through some strange changes. Though George tells his grandmother not to continue taking the medicine, she doesn't listen. Eventually she dies, after several humorous incidents.

Controversy, similar to that about James and the Giant Peach, started shortly after the book was published. There were cries that the book was encouraging kids to kill relatives they didn't get along with. The reviewer for The Economist wrote that, "Dahl's desire to be excruciating and so terribly odd and inventive seems actually to advocate murdering the more irritating members of the family and to make it sound acceptable." Despite the controversy, Nicholas Tucker, writing for the Times Literary Supplement, conceded that children might enjoy the book: "I am sure that most children will read the whole of this otherwise wildly-inventive story as something purely fantastic...And yet, as with the marvelous medicine itself, a slightly nasty taste does persist after consumption, despite much else in the tale that is both fast and funny" (H.W. Wilson Co. 298). Dahl scoffed at the criticism, saying, "Children know that the violence in my stories is only make-believe. It's much like the violence in the old fairy tales...These tales are pretty rough, but the violence is confined to a magical time and place. When violence is tied to fantasy and humor, children find it...amusing" (West 81).

Dahl's book, The BFG, has a kinder, more humorous tone than that of earlier books. The story is about The Big Friendly Giant, referred to as the BFG, who lives in a community of ten other giants who regularly eat human beings. The BFG is a kind creature who disagrees with

this practice (the other giants hate him for it and constantly trying to hurt and intimidate him) and prefers to eat a foul vegetable called a snozzcumber that grows where he lives. The other major character is an eight-year-old orphan named Sophie who lives in an orphanage somewhere in England. Sophie has thick glasses and seems to be shy and quiet. One night she sees the BFG making his nightly rounds through the village, and The BFG takes her back to his home because he's afraid she will tell others of his existence. At this point it becomes obvious that Sophie is a strong girl and not easily intimidated, and when Sophie becomes comfortable that the BFG means her no harm, the two form a close friendship. They hatch a plan to prevent the other giants from eating any more children, which forms the plot of the story. The book is filled with humorous scenes, many involving the people in power being humiliated and the BFG and Sophie coming out on top. The more important element of the story may be the familial bond formed between the orphaned Sophie and the ostracized BFG. The BFG burps and "whizzpops" often. Dahl said he added this element to the story because, "Children regard bodily functions as being both mysterious and funny and that's why they often joke about these things. There is nothing that makes a child laugh more than an adult suddenly farting in a room" (West 84).

As in the case of Danny, parallels between The BFG and Roald Dahl's own life could be drawn. The close relationship between Sophie and The BFG could be a drawing together and fantasizing about the relationships with his children and Tessa's child, Sophie, after whom the heroine is named.

Reviews for The BFG were positive and focused heavily on the humor in the book. Judith Elkin, writing in the Times Literary Supplement, called The BFG "the funniest and most appealing book that Dahl has written for a long time." She went on to say that the book's "nonsensical wordplay and deliciously witty use of language will undoubtedly appeal to the child's crude sense of fun and delight in jokey phrases" (West 84). The reviewer for the Spectator thought the book was "funny and exciting, and moves at a crackling pace. There are also some satisfyingly rude jokes" (West 84-85). The BFG was an immediate best seller.

Dahl's book, The Witches, created controversy once again. The book is similar to The BFG in several ways. In both books, an orphan has to defeat an enemy. The Witches is about a seven year old boy, whose name is not known and who often visits Norway to see his grandmother. (Dahl's own grandmother was Norwegian, and he used to visit there every summer.) When his parents are killed in a car accident, he is left in the care of his grandmother, and the two of them move to his home in England.

Unlike many of the adult characters in Dahl's books, the boy's eccentric 86-year-old grandmother seems to adore her grandson. Grandmother has many eccentricities but the most unusual one is her claim to be a witchophile—a person who studies witches. She describes witches as women who are bald, have clawed fingers, toeless feet, large nostrils, and blue saliva. Witches, she says, work hard to hide these things from regular people and all witches are under the command of the Grand High Witch whose goal is to rid the world of all children. In order to do this, they turn children into ugly slugs and rodents.

The story begins when the boy and his grandmother are vacationing at the same hotel where the witches of England are having their annual convention. The boy overhears their plan to turn all the children in England into mice, but the witches see him and turn him into a mouse. The boy finds that he enjoys being a mouse, and his grandmother has no objections. The two of them come up with a plan to stop the witches from implementing their plan.

Dahl received several angry letters from women who belonged to witch societies and claimed that the book perpetuated the negative characteristics associated with witches. Reviews for the book were mixed. Nancy C. Hammond wrote in *Horn Book*, "Marred by a slow beginning and occasionally sexist statements, the book does not match *The BFG* in inventive word play or character; yet it is an appealing, fanciful tale of devotion" (*H.W. Wilson Co.* 355-356). Other reviewers said that adults might find the 'bathroom humor' offensive but children would enjoy the story's fast pace. *The Witches* was made into a successful film starring Anjelica Houston in 1990.

Roald Dahl always said he would never write his autobiography because he saw it as, "the height of egotism." However, he did write two books filled with anecdotes and events from his life he thought both young readers and adults would find interesting. His 1984 book, *Boy: Tales of Childhood* is filled with stories of his school years. Though most of Dahl's experiences at school were negative—being bullied by the older boys, paddled by the Headmaster of the school—one of the more positive experiences occurred while he was in school at Repton. Occasionally, students were asked to test chocolates for the famous Cadbury chocolate Company. Chocolates were a lifelong passion for Dahl. He said that these Cadbury tasting sessions were the inspiration for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Boy: Tales of Childhood shows how close Dahl was to his Norwegian mother, Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg. His nickname around the family was "apple," because he was the apple of his mother's eye. She expected a lot of him and he was encouraged and appreciated, but his mother wasn't very physically affectionate. Perhaps his was a larger burden because he was the only son in a large family. Dahl was often the center of attention, but according to some who knew him, was also lonely (Treglown 15). The characters in Dahl's children's books, with the exception of Matilda, are orphans or only children. *Boy* revolves around the letters Dahl wrote to his mother after he was sent to boarding school at the age of nine. Pieces of his letters to his mom are included in the book. He always signed his letters, "Boy." He wrote to his mother at least once a week every time he was away from home, even when he was in Africa at Shell. Dahl's mother kept every one of the letters carefully bound in green tape. Roald wasn't aware of this until, when she died in 1967, he was given every letter he had written her (including the envelopes with original stamps) between 1925 and 1945.

It is evident that Roald Dahl loved and admired his mother for the way she kept him and his sisters happy and content under difficult circumstances. Sophie was seven months pregnant with Roald's sister, Asta, when her daughter Astri died. Within weeks her husband was dead as well. Dahl wrote, "a less courageous woman would almost certainly have sold the house and headed

straight back to Norway with her children" (Boy 21). However, Harald wanted his children to be educated in English schools because he felt they were better than Norwegian ones. Mormor, as she was affectionately called, was determined to carry out her husband's wishes. Dahl wrote of his mother that she, "was undoubtedly the absolute primary influence in my own life. She had a crystal-clear intellect and a deep interest in almost everything under the sun ..She was the matriarch, the paterfamilias, and her children radiated around her like the sun" (Treglown 16).

Sofie decided that she had to get some things in order, so when he was seven, she sent Roald to Llandaff Cathedral school in Wales. One of the events that happened at the school and recounted in *Boy*, points out how protective Sofie was of her children. As was then a regular practice, Roald was paddled four times on the bottom for playing a practical joke. That night, while Roald was getting in the bath, his mother noticed the red and blue streaks on his bottom and was alarmed. She made Roald tell her what had happened. With that she left the house without a word and with a sense of purpose. Roald knew where she was headed. When she returned, Roald asked her what the headmaster said, "He told me I was a foreigner and didn't understand how British schools were run. He told me that if I didn't like his methods I could take you away. I said I would as soon as the school year is finished. I shall find you an English school this time" (51). In September 1925, Sofie sent Roald to St. Peter's boarding school in England. She chose a school that was as close as possible to the family home in South Wales. By 1929, when Roald started school at Repton, his mother had moved the family to Kent, England. In 1933, the last year of Dahl's time at Repton, his mother offered to send him to Cambridge or Oxford. He declined, and decided to work at Shell Oil so he could travel. He lived in Kent with his mother and sisters for two years while he received training at Shell's main office in London. After that, he was sent to Africa. *Going Solo*, the second book of stories from Dahl's life was published in 1986. The book concerned his years at Shell Oil and his experiences in World War II as a pilot in the RAF, particularly his recollections of having been shot down over Libya. Reviews for both books were generally favorable. Reviewing *Boy* for *Horn Book*, Ann A. Flowers wrote that Dahl, "presents a frequently funny and even more frequently grim recital of some events of his childhood...It is impossible not to wonder if the grim, almost Dickensian, school experiences have not been important in forging the dark humor and grotesque characters so often found in Dahl's books." She went on to say that it was unclear whether the remembrances were really meant for children. She wondered whether the judgmental view of the schools was really adult in nature. As a result of that she concluded that the book had, "perhaps as much appeal to those interested in children's literature as to children themselves." Michael Rosen wrote in *New Statesman*: "The book is superbly written. He is one of the few authors who can talk to a reader" (H.W. Wilson Co. 371).

There were some negative reviews of the book. Anne L. Oakley wrote in the *School Library Journal*, "Most of the episodes Dahl recounts are

grotesque;... more sickening are his descriptions of canings and other acts of cruelty commonplace in the English boarding schools he attended. Dahl's inability to extract himself from these memories gives children only a limited view of what could have been a fascinating glimpse of the past" (H.W. Wilson Co. 1985). Horn Book reviewer Ann A. Flowers called *Going Solo* a "book that rivets the attention." Time reviewer R.Z. Shepard wrote, "Dahl tells of his wartime adventures with an ordinariness of tone that contrasts with the ghastliness of his experiences. This, of course, is the preferred method for a successful horror story. *Going Solo* is much more: a brief masterly remembrance of the gifts of youth and good luck" (H.W. Wilson Co. 417-418).

Roald Dahl's 1988 book, *Matilda*, was a national best-seller and is considered almost as popular as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. *Matilda* is perhaps one of Dahl's least fantasy-driven stories. It's not set in a factory; there are no giants or fantasy lands. There's just a young girl named Matilda who is extremely hungry for knowledge about the things and people in the world around her. Matilda, like other characters in Dahl books, is not easily intimidated by adults. She is a child prodigy. She loves to read anything, even *War and Peace*. Despite her obvious genius, Matilda is not conceited. She is not really able to be, because her parents don't realize her talent and are portrayed as arrogant, unethical and not interested in anything intellectual. They spend their time watching television and constantly criticize Matilda for reading. Her headmistress at school is worse. Rather than neglecting children, Miss Trunchbull enjoys physically abusing them.

The only person in the story who is kind to Matilda is her quiet teacher, Miss Honey, who understands Matilda's 'special' abilities and does everything she can to help her take advantage of them. The first part of the book deals with Matilda's refusal to be a victim of her parents' and Headmistress's tyranny.

Miss Honey tries to stand up to the tyrannical behavior of her aunt, Miss Trunchbull, with whom she was forced to live, after her parents died. Miss Honey is incredibly shy, but Matilda gives her the courage to stand up to her aunt and in the end, Matilda and Miss Honey form a kind of mother-daughter relationship. Matilda happily goes to live with her teacher after she is abandoned by her parents.

The reviews for *Matilda* were very good. The New York Times Book Review said that Dahl book would, "surely go straight to children's hearts...More than any living writer for children, Mr. Dahl has the world at his fingertips...In his stories the child is tops...Miraculously he creates a world where being a child does not have to be justified, but is justification in its self, where marvelous things will start happening to you" (H.W. Wilson Co. 362). Linda Tatlor wrote in the Times Literary Supplement, "Once again he has created a safe moral story in which children are given inventive powers...and revenge themselves humorously against their oppressors" (H.W. Wilson Co. 363), *Matilda* was a best-seller from the first day it appeared in stores in April of 1988. It achieved best-seller status in France, West Germany, Italy, Spain and Holland. In less than two years, over 120,000 hardcover copies of the book were sold in Holland alone. Dahl

wrote three more children's books during the last years of his life. They had a kinder tone than many of his earlier books. *Esio Trot*, written for very young children, was the last story to be published while he was still alive. The book is a simple story about Mr. Hoppy and a widow named Mrs. Stiver, who owns a tortoise named Alfie. The plot revolves around Mr. Hoppy's attempts to tell Mrs. Silver fciite he is in love with her.

Roald Dahl died of leukemia on November 23, 1990, at the age of 74 (Treglown 274). In a letter written in the last months of his life, Dahl referred to his last book, *The Minipins* as a "fairy tale" (West 109). *The Minipins* is a serious book and, unusual in Dahl's work, there isn't much humor involved^ The main character is Little Billy, a character who first appeared in an earlier Dahl book, *The Giraffe, the Pelly and Me*. Billy lives with his mother on the edge of the Forest of Sin. He wants to explore the forest but his mother won't let him because it's dangerous. One day Billy's curiosity gets the best of him and he wanders into **the** forest. While there, Billy is chased into a tree by a creature called The-Red-Hot-Smoke-Belching-Gruncher. While in the tree he meets the leader of creatures called Minipins, named Don-Mini. Don-Mini tells Little Billy that, like him, the Minipins have to stay in the trees until the monster is extinguished because he will eat them. The plot revolves around Billy's plan to rid the forest of the monster. The story is about bravery and gaining the courage to overcome adversity.

Reviews for Dahl's final book were mixed. Dennis Woychuk wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*, "In 'The Minipins' [Dahl's] evocative spell has worked its macabre magic once again, and for readers as well as Little Billy, the nightmare is real. But even Roald Dahl has his imperfections and there are a couple in 'The Minipins'. Critic Joanne **Schott wrote**, "The final book from one of the most popular children's writers of the last 30 years, displays some characteristic weaknesses and few of his usual strengths (H.W. Wilson Co. 453). Roald Dahl wrote more than twenty children's books in the course of his career, and several short stories. While some of his adult stories are well-known, it is his children's books that will always give him a place in literary circles, despite the controversial nature of some of them. There are several connections between the characters in Dahl's books and his life. He has. stated several times that his happiest times were those spent with his family. In Dahl's short stories, there are a lot of couples, but few of them have children. The absence of children seems to be a common thread that makes his characters lives so empty and predictable. The characters in *Danny Champion of the World* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox* are similar to the kind of family Dahl had. Though he was lonely, his mother and sisters idolized him and provided him with a sense of security.

Dahl often questioned authority in his books, as he seemed to in his own life. The nasty headmistress, Miss Trunchbull is no doubt a composite of his own headmistress and a couple of headmasters that he had to deal with in his school years, as recounted in *Boy*. In the story, he makes it clear that he felt schools in his day were more concerned with controlling and bullying their students than with educating them.

Chocolate is a constant theme in Dahl's books. He wrote that he loved chocolate and the taste tests Cadbury used to have at his

school was the event that helped give birth to the idea for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. While Dahl was munching on the chocolate, he would often dream of ways to concoct new kinds of chocolate in a factory. Chocolate always has a magical quality in his stories. In *My Uncle Oswald*, a powerful aphrodisiac is given to unsuspecting men in a chocolate; The witches in *The Witches*, plan to put a poison inside chocolates to turn all the children in England into mice.

Despite his loving family, Roald Dahl never had a male figure to look up to while he was growing up. That no doubt accounts for the orphaned or rejected children, in *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach* and *The BFG*. Dahl wrote as though he was cheated out of a father I'm sure this feeling was stronger because his father, Harald, had given up on life after his favorite daughter died. Roald may have felt doubly rejected because his father didn't see his only son as worth fighting for.

The death of Dahl's father may have also helped to shape his belief that everyone can overcome adversity. He seemed to decide that he, unlike his father, would not give up when tragedy occurred. When his son was hit by a taxi, he channeled his sadness into making a valve that would help his son and others; when his beloved daughter Olivia died, he researched susceptibility factors for the rare measles until a cure became available in England; when his wife was struck with strokes that many thought would leave her in a vegetative state, he refused the notion and through hard work and tenacious dedication developed a program that brought her back both personally and professionally. The program he developed, The Patricia Neal Therapy Extension Program, is still in use at several stroke centers around the world. While many people don't like Dahl and or his writing, it would be hard to deny that he has had a significant impact on the world of literature, particularly literature for children. He used parts of events from his own life to create some of the characters we know so well. Dahl always said he would never write a straight autobiography. He didn't have to; he was to some extent, doing so every time he sat down to write.

Roald Dahl is one of the few writers...whose work can accurately be described as addictive. He is the absolute master of twist-in-the-tale. Read the story by Roald Dahl and answer the questions below.

Lamb to the slaughter.

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight - hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whisky. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without

anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of the head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin - for this was her sixth month with child - had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger, darker than before.

When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the lyres on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

«Hullo, darling,» she said.

«Hullo, » he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both his hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel - almost as a sunbather feels the sun - that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whisky had taken some of it away.

«Tired, darling? »

«Yes, » he said. «I'm tired. » And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it, left. She wasn't really watching him but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

«I'll get it! » she died, jumping up.

«Sit down, » he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whisky in it.

«Darling, shall I get your slippers? »

«No. »

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

«I think it's a shame, » she said, «that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long. »

He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

«Darling, » she said. «Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday.»

«No. » he said.

«If you're too tired to eat out, » she went on, «it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair. »

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

«Anyway, » she went on, «I'll get you some cheese and crackers first.»

«I don't want it, » he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. «But you *must* have supper. I can easily do it here. I'd like to do it. We can have lamb chops. Or pork. Anything you want. Everything's in the freezer. »

«Forget it, » he said.

«But, darling, you *must* eat! I'll Ox it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like. »

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

«Sit down, » he said. «Just for a minute, sit down. »

It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

«Go on, » he said. «Sit down. »

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass frowning.

«Listen, » he said, «I've got something to tell you. »

«What is it, darling? What's the matter? »

He had become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head

down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

«This is going to be a bit of a shock to you. I'm afraid, » he said. «But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much. »

And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

«So there it is, » he added. «And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other, way. Of course I'll give you money and; see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job. »

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

«I'll get the supper, » she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all — except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now — down the stairs to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

«For God's sake, » he said, hearing her, but not turning round. «Don't make supper for me. I'm going" out.»

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock.

She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both — mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her face, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

«Hullo Sam, » she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

«I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas. »

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coal, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

«Hullo Sam, » she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

«Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How are *you*? »

«I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas. »

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

"Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight, » she told him. «We usually go out Thursdays, you know,

and now he's caught me with out any vegetables in the house. »

«Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney? »

«No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb, from the freezer. »

«Oh. »

«I don't much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right? »

«Personally, » the grocer said, «I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?*"

«Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those. »

"Anything else? » The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. «How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards? »

«Well —what would you suggest, Sam? »

The man glanced around his shop. «How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that. »

"Perfect, » she said. «He loves it.»

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid she' put on her brightest smile and said. ■Thank you, Sam. Good night. »

«Good night, Mrs. Maloney. And thank you. »

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't *expecting* to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

•Patrick!" she called. «How are you darling? »

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living-room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting

was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, «Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead! »

«Who's speaking? »

«Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney. »

«You mean Patrick Maloney's dead? »

«I think so, » she sobbed. «He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead. »

«Be right over, » the man said.

The car came over quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policemen walked in. She knew them both — she knew nearly all the men at that precinct —and she fell right into Jack Noonan's arms, weeping hysterically. He put her gently into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

«Is he dead?* she cried.

«I'm afraid he is. What happened?"

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven — «it's there now, cooking» — and how she'd slipped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

« Which grocer? » one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases—«...acted quite normal... very cheerful...

wanted to give him a good supper... peas... cheesecake... impossible that she...»

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just where she was until she felt better? She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said, she'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke to her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may've thrown it away or hidden it' some where on the premises.

«It's the old story, » he said. «Get the weapon, and you've got the man. »

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing — a very big spanner for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

•Or a big spanner?*

She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw the flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantel. The four men searching

the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

«Jack, » she said, the next time Sergeant Noonan went by. «Would you mind giving me a drink?*

«Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whisky?»

«Yes, please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.*

He handed her the glass.

«Why don't you have one yourself,' she said.' You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me. »

«Well, » he answered. «It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going. »

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whisky. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, came out quickly and said, «Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meal still inside. »

«Oh dear me, » she cried. «So it is! »

«I better turn it off for you, hadn't I? »

«Will you do that. Jack. Thank you so much."

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark, tearful eyes. «Jack Noonan,» she said.

«Yes? »

«Would you do me a small favor — you and these others?*

«We can try, Mrs. Maloney. »

«Well, » she said. «Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it's long past your supper time, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven? It'll be cooked just right by now. »

«Wouldn't dream of it, » Sergeant Noonan said.

«Please, » she begged. «Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favor to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards. »

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them through the open door, and she could hear them speaking among 'themselves, their voices thick

and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

«Have some more, Charlie?*

«No. Better not finish it. »

«She *wants* us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favor.»

«Okay then. Give me some more.»

"That's the hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick," one of them was saying. «The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge-hammer. »

"That's why it ought to be easy to find. »

"Exactly what I say. »

"Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need. »

One of them belched.

"Personally, I think it's right here on the premises. »

"Probably right under our very noses. What you think. Jack? »

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

Discussion

1. Give a summary of the story.
2. Discuss Mary's state of mind as she was waiting for her husband to come from work.
3. Was Mary a doting wife? How did she treat her husband? Why? Would you call her manner servile? Prove your point.
4. How did Patrick break the news? What did he tell her? Was his timing good?
5. What was Mary's reaction to Patrick's words? Did she fly into a rage? Did she act on impulse? Did she kill him in cold blood? Was it temporary insanity? What would you do if you were in Mary's shoes?
6. Discuss the change in Mary's behavior. Account for it. Why did she put the lamb's leg in the oven? Why did she go out to the grocer's? What does it suggest about her? Did she display presence of mind? Find proof in the text. What did she do to keep her composure?
7. How did the policeman treat Mary? Was she under suspicion? Why? How did she trick them into eating the "weapon"? When did she hit on this idea? How does the story end?
8. Give a character sketch of Mary Maloney.
9. Can you justify Mary's cruelty?
10. What was the motive for the murder?
11. What is the message of the story?
12. Explain the title of the story.

The following passage is from *Boy* by Roald Dahl. It is about childhood and

school experiences. Do a pre-reading exercise.

Match a word in A column with a definition in B	
A	B
1. form (<i>noun</i>)	a. to shout loudly, often in anger or pain
2. mutter (<i>verb</i>)	b. to stay in one place
3. hideous (<i>adjective</i>) of words	c. to speak with difficulty, hesitating at the beginning
4. yell (<i>verb</i>)	d. very ugly
5. stutter (<i>verb</i>)	e. a school class
6. flick (<i>verb</i>)	f. clever at deceiving people
7. settle (<i>verb</i>)	g. to produce a gentle, unsteady light
8. sly (<i>adjective</i>) pointed object	h. to push into something violently, usually with a
9. glimmer (<i>verb</i>)	i. to speak very quietly, usually complaining
10. venom (<i>noun</i>)	j. a feeling of bitterness and hatred
11. stab (<i>verb</i>)	k. to move with a short, sudden movement

Read the extract and decide which of the following titles best summarizes it. Give reasons for your choice.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1 Crime | 4 Innocence |
| 2 Punishment | 5 Guilt |
| 3 Capture | 6 Repentance |

EVERY BOY in our form was watching Mr Coombes and Mrs Pratchett as they came walking down the line towards us.

'Nasty cheeky lot, these little 'uns!' I heard Mrs Pratchett muttering.

'They comes into my shop and they thinks they can do what they damn well likes!' 5 Mr Coombes made no reply to this.

'They nick things when I ain't lookin',' she went on. 'They put their grubby 'ands all over everything and they've got no manners. I don't mind girls. I never 'ave no trouble with girls, but boys is

'ideous and 'orrible!

I don't 'ave to tell you that, 'Eadmaster, do I?' w

'These are the smaller ones,' Mr Coombes said.

I could see Mrs Pratchett's piggy little eyes staring hard at the face of each boy she passed.

Suddenly she let out a high-pitched yell and pointed a dirty finger straight at Thwaites. 'That's 'im!' she yelled. 'That's one of 'em! I'd know ?5 Mm a mile away, the scummy little bounder!'

The entire school turned to look at Thwaites. 'W-what have I done?' he stuttered, appealing to Mr Coombes.

'Shut up,' Mr Coombes said.

Mrs Pratchett's eyes flicked over and settled on my own face. I looked down and studied the black asphalt surface of the playground.

"Ere's another of 'em!' I heard her yelling. 'That one there!' She was pointing at me now.

'You're quite sure?' Mr Coombes said.

'Of course I'm sure!' she cried. 'I never forgets a face, least of all when it's as sly as that! 'Ee's one of 'em all right! There was five altogether! Now Where's them other three?'

The other three, as I knew very well, were coming up next.

Mrs Pratchett's face was glimmering with venom as her eyes travelled beyond me down the line.

'There they are!' she cried out, stabbing the air with her finger. "*Im...* and '*im...* and m! That's the five of 'em all right! We don't need to look no farther than this, 'Eadmaster! They're all 'ere, the nasty dirty little pigs! You've got their names, 'ave you?'

'I've got their names, Mrs Pratchett,' Mr Coombes told her. 'I'm much obliged to you.'

'And I'm much obliged to *you*, 'Eadmaster,' she answered.

As Mr Coombes led her away across the playground, we heard her saying, 'Right in the jar of Gobstoppers* it was! A stinkin' dead mouse which I will never forget as long as I live!'

Here arc some questions about the passage. You can't answer all of them. First, read the passage again. Then, work with a partner. Cross out all the questions you can't answer and answer the questions you don't cross out. Give reasons for your answers.

1 Who is Mr Coombes?

2 Who is Mrs Pratchett?

3 Who is Thwaites?

4 Who is the narrator?

5 What kind of shop does Mrs Pratchett have?

- 6 Do Mr Coombes and Mrs Pratchett like each other?
- 7 How old is the narrator in the story?
- 8 What did the narrator and his four friends do?
- 9 Why did Mr Coombes take the boys' names?
- 10 What is going to happen to the boys?
- 11 What does Mrs Pratchett look like?
- 12 Where does the scene take place?
- 13 When does the scene take place?
- 14 What kind of school is it?
- 15 Why are all the boys lined up?

Kazuo Ishiguro.

Read about Kazuo Ishiguro, one of the most promising modern British writers. Work in pairs. Study the items, tell each other what you have learnt about this writer and make notes, discuss what he seems to have in common with other British writers of any previous century and in what way he differs from them, what new topics he has started developing in his novels and how he does it, write an imaginary interview with him and role-play it.

Kazuo Ishiguro

British writer, TV playwright

Born in 1954 in Japan

Came to Britain in 1960

*Works: A pale view of hills, An artist of the floating world,
The remains of the Day.*

Item A.

I am a writer who wishes to write international novels. What is an international novel? I believe it to be one, quite simply, that contains a vision of life that is of importance to people of varied backgrounds around the world. It may concern characters who jet across continents but may just as easily be set firmly in one small locality.

There are numerous implications for a novelist wishing to write internationally. One must not make foolish assumption concerning the reader's knowledge: one does not, for instance, attempt to describe characters by listing the brand names of clothes they wear or commodities they utilize- a ploy not only meaningless to all but a narrow group of readers, but also one quite redundant for future generations. Nor does one depend on clever linguistic devices- especially puns- that cannot hope to survive translation. (In my opinion, any writer who assumes his or her language to be the only one in the world fully deserves a limited readership!) Most crucial of all, one must be able to distinguish those themes that are of genuine international concern.

It is a truism that the world is becoming ever more internationalized. We have already long passed the stage when any discussion of politics, commerce, patterns of social change or the arts can be conducted intelligently without reference to the international context. If the novel survives as an important form into the next century it will be because writers have succeeded in creating a body of literature that is convincingly international. It is my ambition to contribute to it.

Kazuo Ishiguro

Ishiguro writes with humour and delicacy. We are seeing here the emergence of one of the masters of contemporary English writing.

Paul Barker Financial

Times

Item B.

Although Mr. Ishiguro has spent most of his life in England his novel is typically Japanese in its compression, its reticence and its exclusion of all details not absolutely essential to its theme...

It is a memorable and moving work, its elements of past and present, of Japan and England held together by a shimmering, all but invisible net of images, linked to each other by filaments at once tenuous and immensely str.....

Francis King

The Spectator

Kazuo Ishiguro

By Wendy Brandmark

Although Ishiguro's fiction has always been described as Japanese; the understated prose, the concern with appearances, the consideration of moral and political questions are also characteristic of certain British and American writers; one thinks of Jane Austin and Henry James.

Both of his novels are about the country of his childhood, a Japan emerging from the physical and spiritual desolation of the Second World War. Beneath the calm surface of his prose, hidden in the exquisite rituals, formal conversation, the gracious manners, what he has called his "caricature of Japanese subtlety" are the memories of Japan's imperialism, the brutality of the war, the dropping of the atom bomb.

In his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), the suicide of her eldest daughter stirs up the past for Etsuko, a Japanese widow living in England. She remembers one summer during the early days of reconstruction in Nagasaki when she befriended Sachiko, a proud but impoverished woman, and her daughter Mariko who live in abandoned house across a wasteland from her apartment building. The terrible events of the war are

revealed gradually: Etsuko's loss of her family, a vision of a young woman drowning her child. Etsuko is disturbed by Sachiko : by her relationship with an American, her plans to leave Japan, her indifference to her daughter. Yet she seeks her out and we see that Sachiko is in a sense acting out Etsuko's fears and desires: her entrapment in an unhappy marriage, her estrangement from the other women in the community, her uneasiness about becoming a mother; that aspects of their lives are similar. For Etsuko eventually marries a foreigner, leaves Japan and ends up living in comparative isolation in a country house. Both women have daughters who are withdrawn, incapable of love, who never recover from the wrenching effects of the war and its aftermath, who are in a sense their shadow-selves.

There is an air of mystery about the novel. We are never certain what led Sachiko to live in poverty nor are we told how Etsuko came to marry a foreigner and live in England or the events leading up to her daughter's suicide. By leaving so much in shadow Ishiguro deepens the dread of the story, a sense of guilt, of innocence betrayed, of a childhood violated and destroyed.

Read the article about Ishiguro's book *The Remains of the Day* (The Booker Prize 1989). Use a dictionary when needed.

The Remains of the Day (1989), Kazuo Ishiguro

What history is to a nation, memory is to the individual. Both serve to locate us, to tell us who we are by reminding us of what we have been and done. And both, as Kazuo Ishiguro suggests, are open to selection, repression and revision.

The Remains of the Day, Ishiguro's third novel, examines the intersections of individual memory and national history through the mind of Stevens, a model English butler who believes that he has served humanity by devoting his life to the service of a "great" man, Lord Darlington. The time is 1956; Darlington has died, and Darlington Hall has been let by an American businessman. As Stevens begins a solitary motor trip to the west country, traveling farther and farther from familiar surroundings, he also embarks on a harrowing journey through his own memory. What he discovers there causes him to question not only Lord Darlington's greatness, but also the meaning of his own insular life.

The journey motif is a deceptively simple structural device; the farther

Stevens travels from Darlington Hall, it seems, the closer he comes to understanding his life there. But in Stevens's travel journal Ishiguro shapes an ironic, elliptical narrative that reveals far more to the reader than it does to Stevens. The butler believes, for instance, that he makes his trip for "professional" reasons, to persuade a former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, to return to Darlington Hall. But through deftly managed flashbacks and Stevens's naive admissions, the reader sees instead that the matter is highly personal: Stevens had loved Miss Kenton but let her marry another man; he now wishes to make up for lost time, to correct the mistakes of his past.

More important than that veiled love story--but intimately connected with it--is the matter of Lord Darlington, and the degree to which Stevens's sense of self is founded upon his belief in Darlington's greatness. It becomes clear enough to the reader, though Stevens is long in admitting it to himself, that Darlington had been a political pawn of fascism and the Nazis--unwitting perhaps, misguided no doubt, but hardly the "great man" that Stevens had deceived himself into believing he served. These revelations are made through a delicate and powerful process: as Stevens's journal shifts between travelogue, personal memoir and reflections on his profession, his memory slides continually between Darlington Hall in the ruined, empty present, the height of Darlington's influence (and Stevens's pride) in the 1920s, and the tense, disturbing pre-war 1930s. Carefully elided from consideration, repressed and hidden, are the war years themselves and their immediate aftermath. We know they are there, of course, and we may guess what they meant at Darlington Hall, but Stevens's memorial archaeology leaves that particular tomb unexcavated.

In the end, Stevens must come to some sense of resignation and resolution, both about Darlington and about himself. The source of Stevens's pride is also, after all, potentially the source of his shame. He was willing enough to shine in the light of Darlington's greatness, and now must either share in his disgrace, or--what is perhaps more difficult--admit that his own dedicated and deeply considered "professionalism" has had no real part to play on the stage of world history.

Like all great novels, *The Remains of the Day* is an organic work, its parts perfectly integrated, every scene imaging the whole. In his carefully controlled prose, so perfectly suited to his narrator, in his effortless movement among several different time settings, in his almost magical evocation of simultaneous humor and pathos, Ishiguro proves himself a masterful artist in full command of his elements. And in this novel, those

elements combine to form a profound psychological and cultural portrait that reveals the author's great abiding theme: the art and artifice of memory.

kazuo ishiguro was born in Japan in 1954, and came to Britain in 1960. He was educated at the universities of Kent and East Anglia. In 1980, he began publishing short stories and articles in magazines. Since then, he has written several novels and TV play scripts. An Artist of the Floating World, published in 1986, won the Whitbread Book of the Year award. A later novel, The Remains of the Day, won the Booker Prize in 1989. Kazuo Ishiguro is generally regarded as one of the most talented writers in Britain today.

Work in pairs. First find out if your partner is still a student, or already has a job. Then interview your partner using the following questions.

- a. What job did you want to do when you were a young child?
- b. What job do you intend to go into when you leave school/university/college?

or

What job did you go into when you left school/university/college?

- c. What job do/did your parents want you to do? Are/ were they happy with your choice of career?

Report your interviews to other student pairs.

The words in the box all occur in the texts you are going to read. Use a dictionary to check what they mean.

deliberation (n)	depraved (adj)	eavesdrop (v)
kindle (v)	lap (n)	■ ... nod (v)
perplexed (adj)	pitfall (n)	resolve (n)
squalor (n)	whim (n)	

Read the following sentences. Replace each underlined word with one of the nouns, verbs, or adjectives from the box. (Don't forget to put the nouns and verbs into the correct form.)

- a. We verbed on the conversation from outside the door.
- b. The cat sat on my noun all evening.
- c. I asked if he wanted a coffee, and he verbed.
- d. She lives in one small room, with her six children, in total noun.
- e. I was adjective when I couldn't find my key. I was sure it was in my pocket.
- f. The boy verbed a fire by rubbing two sticks together.
- g. He soon forgot all about painting his room purple. It was only a passing noun.
- h. He takes drugs, drinks a lot, and has a different girlfriend every night. He really is adjective.

i. They have invaded our country and killed our people, but our noun to win the war is stronger than before.

j. I don't think this plan will work. It has too many nouns.

k. It was not easy to decide on the winner, but, after some noun we agreed on Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves*.

Kazuo Ishiguro's book *An Artist of the Floating World* is about Masuji, an old Japanese artist. In the extract you are going to read, Masuji remembers the time when, as a young man, he was asked to go to the formal reception room of the family house, to discuss his future career plans with his mother and father.

1 Before you read Extract 1, work in pairs and try to guess the answers to these questions.

a. What will Masuji say to his businessman father about wanting to be a professional artist?

b. How will Masuji's father feel about his son's plans? What will he say?

c. What will Sachiko (Masuji's mother) do? What will she say?

2 Now read Extract 1 and check your predictions.

Extract 1

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HEN, with some deliberation, my father picked up three or four of my paintings and held them in both hands as though to test their weight. He turned his gaze towards me and said: 'Masuji, your mother here was under the impression that you wished to pursue painting as a profession. Has there perhaps been some misunderstanding on her part?'

I lowered my eyes and remained silent. Then I heard my mother's voice beside me, almost whispering, say: 'He's still very young. I'm sure it's just a childish whim of his.'

There was a pause, then my father said: 'Tell me, Masuji, have you any idea what kind of a world artists inhabit?'

I remained silent, looking at the floor before me.

'Artists', my father's voice continued, 'live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved. Am I not right, Sachiko?'

'Naturally. Yet perhaps there are one or two who are able to pursue an artistic career and yet avoid such pitfalls.'

'Of course, there are exceptions,' my father said. My eyes were still lowered, but I could tell from his voice that he was again nodding in his perplexed manner. 'The handful with extraordinary resolve and character. But I'm afraid our son here is far from being such a person. Indeed, quite the *contrary*. It is our duty to protect him from such dangers. We do, after all, wish him to become someone we can be proud of, don't we?'

'Of course,' my mother said.

I looked up quickly. The candle had burned half-way down its length and the

flame was sharply illuminating one side of my father's face. He had now placed the paintings on his lap, and I noticed how his fingers were moving impatiently along their edges.

'Masuji,' he said, 'you may leave us now. I wish to speak with your mother.'

1 Before you read Extract 2, work in pairs and try to guess the answers to these questions.

- a. What will Masuji's father do to stop him from becoming an artist?
- b. What will Masuji's mother do? What will she say?
- c. Will Masuji change his plans because of what his parents do?

2 Now read Extract 2 and check your predictions.

Extract 2

I CAN REMEMBER a little later that night, coming across my mother in the darkness. In all likelihood, it was in one of the corridors that I encountered her, though I do not remember this. Neither do I remember why I was wandering around the house in the dark, but it was certainly not in order to eavesdrop on my parents - for I do recall being resolved to pay no heed to what occurred in the reception room after my departure. In those days, of course, houses were all badly lit, so it was not at all unusual that we should stand in the dark and converse. I could make out my mother's figure in front of me, but could not see her face.

'There's a smell of burning around the house,' I remarked.

'Burning?' My mother was silent for a while, then she said: 'No. I don't think so. It must be your imagination, Masuji.'

'I smelt burning,' I said. 'There, I just caught it again. Is Father still in the reception room?'

'Yes. He's working on something.'

'Whatever he's doing in there,' I said, 'it doesn't bother me in the least.' My mother made no sound, so I added: 'The only thing Father's succeeded in kindling is my ambition.'

1 Work in groups of three pairs. Each pair should take a section of the texts above and rewrite it as a film script. Divide up the texts.

Try to keep the Japanese flavor and to express some of the characters' unspoken thoughts. If you like, you could set the same basic story in a different country - your own perhaps, or one that you know well. How does this change the atmosphere and the way the characters behave and communicate?

2 Compare your finished section of script with those prepared by other pairs. Are there any changes you need to make so that the script fits together as a whole?

3 Try acting out your finished script. If you have a video camera, you could

film it.

An Artist of the Floating World is quite a short book. If you are interested in the rest of the artist's story, we suggest you read the whole novel.