



Roald Dahl

Children's author Roald Dahl wrote the kids' classics 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,' 'Matilda' and 'James and the Giant Peach,' among other famous works.

Who Was Roald Dahl?

Roald Dahl was a British author who penned 19 children's books over his decades-long writing career. In 1953 he published the best-selling story collection *Someone Like You* and married actress Patricia Neal. He published the popular book *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961. In 1964 he released another highly successful work, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which was later adapted for two films.



Early Life and Education

Dahl was born in Llandaff, South Wales, on September 13, 1916. Dahl's parents were Norwegian. As a child, he spent his summer vacations visiting with his grandparents in Oslo. When Dahl was four years old, his father died.

The young Dahl received his earliest education at Llandaff Cathedral School. When the principal gave him a harsh beating for playing a practical joke, Dahl's mother decided to enroll her rambunctious and mischievous child at St. Peter's, a British boarding school, as had been her husband's wish.

Dahl later transferred to Repton, a private school with a reputation for academic excellence. He resented the rules at Repton; while there, the lively and imaginative youngster was restless and ached for adventure.

While Dahl hardly excelled as a student, his mother offered to pay for his tuition at Oxford or Cambridge University when he graduated. Dahl's response, as quoted from his autobiography, *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, was, "No thank you. I want to go straight from school to work for a company that will send me to wonderful faraway places like Africa or China."

And that he did. After Dahl graduated from Repton in 1932, he went on an expedition to Newfoundland. Afterward, he took a job with the Shell Oil Company in Tanzania, Africa, where he remained until 1939.



Lusting for yet more adventure, in 1939, Dahl joined the Royal Air Force. After training in Nairobi, Kenya, he became a World War II fighter pilot. While serving in the Mediterranean, Dahl crash-landed in Alexandria, Egypt. The plane crash left him with serious injuries to his skull, spine and hip. Following a recovery that included a hip replacement and two spinal surgeries, Dahl was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he became an assistant air attaché.



Books

Over his decades-long writing career, Dahl composed 19 children's books. Despite their popularity, Dahl's children's books have been the subject of some controversy, as critics and parents have balked at their portrayal of children's harsh revenge on adult wrongdoers. In his defense, Dahl claimed that children have a cruder sense of humor than adults, and that he was merely trying to appeal to his readers.

'James and the Giant Peach' (1961)

Dahl first established himself as a children's writer in 1961, when he published the book *James and the Giant Peach*, a book about a lonely little boy living with his two mean aunts who meets the Old Green Grasshopper and his insect friends on a giant, magical peach. The book met with wide critical and commercial acclaim.

'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' (1964)

Three years after his first children's book, Dahl published another big winner, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. A quirky, solitary businessman, Willy Wonka, has been holed up alone inside his fantastical chocolate factory until he releases five golden tickets inside the wrappers of candy bars. Winners — including the poor little boy Charlie Bucket, who doesn't have much to eat — are awarded a visit. Some critics have accused Dahl of portraying a racist stereotype with his Oompa-Loompa characters in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

'Fantastic Mr. Fox' (1970)

Three farmers are out to get the cunning trickster Mr. Fox, who outwits them every time. Mr. Fox lives in a tree with his wife and family, which was inspired by a real 150-year beech tree Dahl knew as the "witches tree" standing outside his house.

'The BFG' (1982)

Of his many stories, Roald Dahl said *The BFG* was his favorite. He came up with the idea for a giant who stores dreams in bottles for kids to enjoy when they sleep several years before, and he told the story of the Big Friendly Giant to his own kids at bedtime.

'The Witches' (1983)

A boy happens upon a witch convention, where the witches are planning to get rid of every last child in England. The boy and his grandmother must battle the witches to save the children.

'Matilda' (1988)

Roald Dahl's last long story follows the adventures of a genius five-year-old girl, Matilda Wormwood, who uses her powers to help her beloved teacher outwit the cruel headmistress.



Movies

Dahl wrote several television and movie scripts. Several film adaptations of his books have also been created (all of those made during his lifetime Dahl famously despised), most notably:

'Willie Wonka & the Chocolate Factory' (1971)

This Dahl favourite, originally known as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as a book, starred Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka. An originally titled remake of the film, starring Johnny Depp, was released in 2005.



'The BFG' (1989, 2016)

The BFG was first made into a stop-motion animated film in 1989, with David Jason playing the voice of the Big Friendly Giant. The movie was remade in 2016 by Steven Spielberg and featured live actors.

'The Witches' (1990)

In this live-action film features Anjelica Huston as the Grand High Witch. Rowan Atkinson also appeared as hotel manager Mr. Stringer.

'Matilda' (1996)

Danny DeVito directed this movie adaptation and also voiced the narrator.

'The Fantastic Mr. Fox' (2009)

In 2009, Wes Anderson directed this quirky, touching animated feature about the adventures of the farm-raiding Mr. Fox (voiced by George Clooney), with a cast including Meryl Streep (Mrs. Fox) and Bill Murray (Badger).

'The Witches' (2020)

Another live-action film of the book starring Anne Hathaway.

Short Stories

Dahl began his writing career with short stories; in all, he published nine short story collections. Dahl first caught the writing bug while in Washington, D.C., when he met with author C.S. Forrester, who encouraged him to start writing. Dahl published his first short story in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He went on to write stories and articles for other magazines, including *The New Yorker*.

Of his early writing career, Dahl told *New York Times* book reviewer Willa Petschek, "As I went on the stories became less and less realistic and more fantastic." He went on to describe his foray into writing as a "pure fluke," saying, "Without being asked to, I doubt if I'd ever have thought to do it."

Dahl wrote his first story for children, *The Gremlins*, in 1942, for Walt Disney. The story wasn't terribly successful, so Dahl went back to writing macabre and mysterious stories geared toward adult readers. He continued in this vein into the 1950s, producing the best-selling story collection *Someone Like You* in 1953, and *Kiss, Kiss* in 1959.

Roald also enjoyed enormous success on television. Having already had his stories told in six episodes of the award-winning US series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, his *Tales of the Unexpected* ran for several series between 1979 and 1988 in the UK.



Wives and Children

The same year that *Someone Like You* was published, Dahl married film actress Patricia Neal, who won an Academy Award for her role in *Hud* in 1961. The marriage lasted three decades and resulted in five children, one of whom tragically died in 1962.

Dahl told his children nightly bedtime stories that inspired his future career as a children's writer. These stories became the basis for some of his most popular kids' books, as his children proved an informative test audience. "Children are ... highly critical. And they lose interest so quickly," he asserted in his *New York Times* book review interview. "You have to keep things ticking along. And if you think a child is getting bored, you must think up something that jolts it back. Something that tickles. You have to know what children like."

After Neal suffered from multiple brain hemorrhages in the mid-1960s, Dahl stood by her through her long recovery. The couple would eventually divorce in 1983. Soon after, Dahl married Felicity Ann Crosland, his partner until his death in 1990.

Death

Dahl died on November 23, 1990, at the age of 74. After suffering an unspecified infection, on November 12, 1990, Dahl had been admitted to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England.

Mark these sentences as T (True) or F (False).

- ☐ Roald Dahl was born in the mid 1910s.
- ☐ His parents were Swedish.
- ☐ In summer he visited his aunt and uncle.
- ☐ At school he was badly beaten by a teacher.
- ☐ He was a naughty, unruly boy.
- ☐ He was happy with his new non-boarding school.
- ☐ He graduated from Cambridge University.
- ☐ He spent several years in Africa.
- ☐ He served in the Second World War as a fighter pilot.
- ☐ His plane went down in the Mediterranean.
- ☐ Roald Dahl was badly wounded.

- ☐ His books were unanimously acclaimed.
- ☐ He had his short stories published in different magazines.
- ☐ His first children's story was written for Walt Disney.
- ☐ He married actress Patricia Neal in 1961.
- ☐ They built a numerous family.
- ☐ His wife suffered from multiple brain hemorrhages and died in the mid 60s.
- ☐ Dahl never married again.
- ☐ He died of an infection on November 12th, 1990.

Answer the questions by matching them to the right book / film title.

In which book ...

1. do a boy and his granny attempt to save English boys?
_____.
2. does a smart man get the better of some men by superior cleverness?
_____.
3. does a little girl help his teacher outsmart the malicious Head of the school?
_____.
4. does a little boy make friends with giant insects?
_____.
5. does an out of the ordinary man put something aside?
_____.
6. does a host welcome five award-winning children?
_____.

James and the Giant Peach

Matilda

The Witches

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Fantastic Mr. Fox

The BFG

7. For which animation film did George Clooney, Meryl Streep and Bill Murray provide their voices?

8. Which remake changed its title?

9. Which film was directed by Danny De Vito?

10. Which live-action film was starred by Anne Hathaway?

11. In which film did Rowan Atkinson make an appearance?

12. Which film was remade by Steven Spielberg?

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