

Your Shortcut to... Roald Dahl

He was a British spy... a lover of chocolate... and one of the most famous children's authors the world has ever known. This is your Roald Dahl Squiz Kids Shortcut—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce, Sept 13 is Roald Dahl day... chosen because on that day in 1916, the author of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory was born.

I absolutely LOVE that book.

You are definitely not alone. Today, we'll take you through WHO Roald Dahl was, WHY kids and adults love his books so much, and WHAT you can do to write like him.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

Now Bryce, Roald Dahl's childhood is going to sound a little familiar if you've read a lot of his books, which I know you have. When he was just a young kid, something sad happened - his Dad died.

Like in James and the Giant Peach! Both James' parents die...

Although in the book, they die in a very crazy way, when a rhinoceros escapes from the zoo and eats them... even though rhinos are vegetarians in real life. Roald's father died of a lung infection—something that's fairly easy to treat nowadays, but not back in 1920.

Well that's good to hear that it's not as dangerous now. How else was his childhood like his books?

You're going to love this one. Where Roald grew up, in Wales, the woman who owned the local lolly shop was apparently, in Roald's words, "mean and loathsome." So he and his friends came up with what they called "The Great Mouse Plot of 1924." They put a dead mouse into a jar of gobstoppers!

Oh my goodness! There are Everlasting Gobstoppers in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory!

And there's another connection between Roald Dahl's real life and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory ... not long after the mouse incident, Roald Dahl was sent to boarding school in England. Overall he did NOT love it, but there was one really great part. The Cadbury chocolate company occasionally sent boxes of new chocolates to

the school to be tested by the pupils. Roald Dahl dreamt of inventing a new chocolate bar that would win the praise of Mr Cadbury himself... and this is where the inspiration came from for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

I want to test chocolate bars! Where do I sign up to volunteer for that?

Wouldn't that be an amazing job? Once Roald Dahl was a grownup, though, he had a much more serious job. He worked for Shell, selling oil in Africa. He did that for a few years, then World War II started, and he became a fighter pilot in Africa, the Middle East and Greece before being sent to America to work at the British embassy in Washington.

And you said he was a spy?

Yes, while he was in Washington, he sent intelligence back to Britain about what the Americans were up to... even though they were fighting on the same side, I guess they didn't completely trust each other!

So when did Roald Dahl start writing children's books? After the war?

Actually, no. He started writing during the war! His first book was called *The Gremlins*, and it was about little creatures that air force pilots blamed for anything that went wrong with their planes. He actually sent a copy to the First Lady while he was in Washington—the first lady is the wife of the President—and Eleanor Roosevelt read it to her grandchildren in the White House!

Pretty impressive for his first kids' book! Why is it that people love Roald Dahl's books so much?

Michael Rosen, a children's poet, has spent a lot of time thinking about this question of why Roald Dahl's books are so beloved by kids and adults, and he's got some pretty convincing reasons. Ready to hear them?

Sure am!

Gobblefunk. Whizzpopping. Scrumdiddlyumptious.

Huh???

Those are all words from the official Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary. Roald Dahl invented more than 500 phizz-whizzing (that means excellent) words, and children adore his fantastic language. It's not just random... I mean, what else could scrumdiddlyumptious mean except SOUNDFX... delicious? And uckyslush? SOUND FX That's clearly the opposite.

What about whizzpopping?

Well, that actually takes us to another reason why people love him so much. Whizzpopping is what happens when air escapes out of our bums... SOUND FX.... the Big Friendly Giant did it all the time. Lots of Roald Dahl's books have slightly naughty words and moments when characters do things that go against what was acceptable. Like whizzpopping in front of the Queen of England. Kids love that kind of stuff.

There are lots of secret plans and clever tricks in his books, too. I know I love that about him.

Not only that, but it's usually KIDS hatching those plans against mean adults. And when you think about it, there are a LOT of mean adults in his books... the terrible Trunchbull from Matilda, the horrible aunts in James and the Giant Peach, the Witches, the nasty grandma in George's Marvellous Medicine. And the heroes, who are always kids, always get the better of them. Revenge is sweet in a Roald Dahl book.

And anything seems possible - a magic finger, a marvellous medicine...

Not to mention worlds in which there are giant peaches inhabited by talking insects! So WHAT can we all do to write like Roald Dahl?

So Amanda, I'm guessing the first thing to do to write like Roald Dahl is to make up your own words.

True! But you need to be careful that you do it in a way that your readers will understand. One thing Roald Dahl used a lot of was onomatopoeia...

Ono-mato-what-o?

Onomatopoeia. It's where the word sounds like what it's describing. So "crunch" sounds like what happens when you bite down on an apple. Every made up word that started with "trog" was bad... trogglehumper is the very worst kind of nightmare you can have. SOUND FX..

He rhymed a lot too, didn't he?

Basically, Roald Dahl used all of the writing tricks... alliteration, rhyming, similes and metaphors

Actually, Bryce, this is definitely one of those situations where it's best to show, not tell! Squiz Kids, your classroom resources are a little different this time. At the end of this podcast, you'll be able to stay listening, and hear me reading a passage from TKTK. Partly because I love reading aloud, but partly because you're going to draw what you hear. That will help you realise what a master of description Roald Dahl was! Then, you'll be creating your own character, and describing them using all of Roald Dahl's tricks.

And is there a second resource? You usually do two!

Don't worry, I've got you covered. Your second challenge will be to create a recipe for a marvellous medicine, just like George did. It'll be a beautiful brew, I'm sure. And I just had to share a link in the episode notes to an official interactive research paper in the British Journal of Medicine last year. You can click on various ingredients from George's original brew, and see what medical effect they'll have. Even doctors love Roald Dahl.

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

Question 1. What did Roald Dahl and his friends leave in a jar of gobstoppers? (Dead mouse)

Question 2. Who read Roald Dahl's first kids' book, The Gremlins, to her grandchildren? (Eleanor Roosevelt, US First Lady)

Question 3. What does whizzpopping mean? (FARTING)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of Roald Dahl.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.