

Matilda by Roald Dahl

Synopsis by James Musyoka

Like several other books by Roald Dahl that I have read before, Matilda is a captivating story that will make you want to keep reading. Matilda Wormwood is an extremely precocious child. At the age of one and half years, her speech was perfect and knew as many words as most grown-ups. Yet and contrary to most parents who would never underestimate the abilities of their children, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwoods thought Matilda was a nuisance girl. They called her a 'chatterbox' and told her that ***small girls should be seen and not heard***. They wanted her to spend all her time watching the television but Matilda did not find fun watching TV but instead she loved to read. By the time she was three years she taught herself how to read by studying the magazines and newspapers that lay around their home. By the age of four, she could read well and fast and begun hankering after books. The only book in their home was 'Easy Cooking' that belonged to her mother and she read it all from cover to cover and learnt all the recipes by heart.

One day, Matilda asked her father to buy her a book to read but he refused and insisted she watch the TV. On that same day, when her father had gone to work at his village garage and her mother went out playing bingo in town, Matilda went out to the public library in the village about ten minutes away and asked to be allowed to read books. The librarian Mrs. Phelps was kind and allowed her to read children books. From then, she visited the library every day. After a few weeks she had read all the books in the children section and sought help from Mrs. Phelps on which adult books she should begin to read next. Over the next six months Matilda read over a dozen adult books. She later learnt from Mrs. Phelps that she could borrow books for two weeks to read from home. From then, she only visited the library once a week to take new books and return old ones. Her own small bedroom at home now became her reading room and she could sit and read most afternoons. The books took her to new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. However, Matilda's father did not approve of her reading habit and at one point he tore up into pieces one of the library books that Matilda was reading from home. As a result of her father being mean to her, Matilda often played some brainy tricks to bring him down.

Matilda did not join school until she was 5 and half years because her parents were not concerned about their daughter's education and forgot to make arrangements in advance. Most children joined school when they were 5 years. On the first day at Crunchem Hall Primary School, her class teacher Miss Honey discovered that Matilda was a genius. She knew more maths and had superb reading skills than any child of her grade level. According to Miss Honey, Matilda needed to be taken from the lowest form and placed on the top form with 11 year olds. The headmistress Miss Trunchbull; a fierce tyrannical monster could not agree with Miss Honey's suggestion on Matilda moving to the top form. Miss Trunchbull had a rule in her school that all children remain in their own age groups regardless of ability. Miss Honey opted to borrow textbooks on algebra, geometry, French, English, literature etc. from teachers who taught senior

classes to share with Matilda. During each lesson, Matilda was supposed to study one of these books while Miss Honey taught the rest of the class. Miss Honey felt that some kind of private tuition for two to three years would help bring Matilda to University standard. She visited Matilda's parents to persuade them into the idea but Mr. and Mrs. Wormwoods brushed off the idea. Mrs. Wormwood did not believe in books but in looks while Mr. Wormwood felt that people learn bad habits at the university.

Matilda and Miss Honey become great friends and soon Miss Honey confides to Matilda about her true relation with Miss Trunchbull. It turns out that Miss Honey's parents died when she was very young and so her aunt Miss Trunchbull brought her up. Through cruelty and mischief Miss Trunchbull had disinherited her niece of her father's estate leaving her to live a miserable life. Although Miss Honey was brilliant and would have joined university, her aunt did not want her to and instead took her to a teacher training college where she could come back home each afternoon to do chores for her. When Honey finished teachers college and was employed as a teacher, Trunchbull claimed that her niece owed her thousands of pounds for her upbringing. She therefore forced Miss Honey to sign up papers allowing the Trunchbull to be paid her salary for the next 10 years. Miss Honey only received 20 pounds from Miss Trunchbull for her pocket money.

Matilda works out a miracle plan to help Miss Honey get back her father's estate and her wages from Miss Trunchbull. The miracle plan works out and Miss Honey finally gets back her father's house and all her wages. At the same time, the police catch up Mr. Wormwood for his criminal business deals and so he and his wife plus their son escape in Spain but Matilda opts to remain behind with Miss Honey.