

The Twits

SECTION

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About the book

It is a rare child who does not enjoy a Roald Dahl book. *The Twits* lives up to the expectations of existing fans but is also a great introduction to the popular author's zany, mischievous style.

The title's eponymous couple are unattractive, perfectly matched in their ugly looks and equally repugnant nature. A personal diatribe against beards provides an unusual introduction to a funny tale of revenge and retribution. The Twits' mutual practical jokes grow increasingly sinister and spiteful, providing the setting of the story. Their cruelty towards each other is matched only by that to any helpless creatures that cross their path, from the caged monkeys, endlessly made to perform tricks upside down, to the wild birds caught, for Bird Pie, with Hugtight sticky glue on the branches of The Big Dead Tree.

The book's extremely short chapters make it an easy read, perfect for children to develop reading stamina – and possibly numbering among their early experiences of unputdownable reads.

Quentin Blake's cartoon-style illustrations complement the narrative and are used on the very first page to introduce the characters even before the formal title page. This listing of characters leads well into a story which is episodic in nature, while carrying the plot forward to its rewardingly vengeful, if horrifying, ending. The illustrations bring Dahl's words to life, perfectly complementing the story.

Almost a quarter of a century after its publication, David Wood succeeded in the seemingly impossible task of turning the book into a series of short plays for children. He combines and adapts episodes while retaining the spirit of the original book. Owing to the physical impossibilities of much of the content, the playwright makes effective use of narration and puppetry.

About the author

Roald Dahl (1916–1990) wrote numerous books for adults and children. His ability to remember what it was like to be a child helped him tap into children's psyche. His own childhood memories are recorded in his autobiography, *Boy*.

The author's somewhat anarchic viewpoint and borderline vulgarity form part of his appeal to children, who recognise the underlying sincerity in his macabre humour. He strongly defended his work against accusations of catering for sadistic streaks in children. There is a distinct sense of moral justice in the downfall of his 'bad' characters and the triumph of his 'underdogs'. He recognises children's hopes and fears and leads them safely through fear to resolution by skilfully combining real-life situations with pure fantasy.

He was one of four children, born in Wales of Norwegian parents. He married twice and fathered five children, of whom his eldest daughter died of encephalitis following a bout of measles, and one son was brain-damaged following a road accident. His first wife, actress Patricia Neale, suffered a series of strokes while still in her thirties, but was nursed back to health, not least by Roald Dahl, who took over running their household while caring for her and their children.

Further information can be found on the author's official website: www.roalddahl.com.



Facts and figures

Roald Dahl

He wrote many of his books in a small hut at the bottom of his garden. His work has been translated into 34 languages.

Awards

In 1983 he won the Whitbread Award for *The Witches*. In 1988 he won the Children's Book Award for *Matilda*.

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