

Matilda joins Crunchem Hall



Roald Dahl was born in Wales of Norwegian parents. He was unhappy at school, and this experience influenced his writing greatly. This extract is from his children's novel *Matilda*, which is about a girl who loves books. Matilda has supernatural powers – which later prove to be very useful at her school, Crunchem Hall.

Naturally Matilda was put in the bottom class, where there were eighteen other small boys and girls about the same age as her. Their teacher was called Miss Honey, and she could not have been more than twenty-three or twenty-four. She had a lovely pale oval Madonna face with blue eyes and her hair was light brown. Her body was so slim and fragile one got the feeling that if she fell over she would smash into a thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure.

Miss Jennifer Honey was a mild and quiet person who never raised her voice and was seldom seen to smile, but there is no doubt she possessed that rare gift for being adored by every small child under her care. She seemed to understand totally the bewilderment and fear that so often overwhelm young children who for the first time in their lives are herded into a classroom and told to obey orders. Some curious warmth that was almost tangible shone out of Miss Honey's face when she spoke to a confused and homesick newcomer to the class.

Miss Trunchbull, the Headmistress, was something else altogether. She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. There was an aura of menace about her even at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as from a red-hot rod of metal. When she marched – Miss Trunchbull never walked, she always marched like a storm-trooper with long strides and arms aswinging – when she marched along a corridor you could actually hear her snorting as she went, and if a group of children happened to be in her path, she ploughed right on through them like a tank, with small people bouncing off her to left and right. Thank goodness we don't meet many people like her in this world, although they do exist and all of us are likely to come across at least one of them in a lifetime. If you ever do, you should behave as you would if you met an enraged rhinoceros out in the bush – climb up the nearest tree and stay there until it has gone away.

From *Matilda*
Roald Dahl (1916–1990)

Glossary

aura atmosphere, feeling
menace threat
radiating glowing, burning
storm-trooper aggressive attacker
tyrannical cruel and domineering

- 1 What shape is Miss Honey's face?

- 2 To what does the author compare Miss Honey's slim build?

- 3 What makes the children 'adore' Miss Honey?

- 4 What is the meaning of the word 'tangible'?

- 5 From your reading of the text, give **two** words that describe how children starting school might feel.

- 6 If the children heard feet marching down the corridor, they knew that Miss Trunchbull was approaching. What other sound is referred to that might tell them that she was coming?

- 7 What happened to any children in Miss Trunchbull's way?

- 8 a) How does the author suggest we should think of people like Miss Trunchbull?

- b) What should we do to avoid them?

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