it's a funny thing about mothers and fathers even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine they still think that he or she is wonderful some parents go further they become so blinded by the Adoration they manage to convince themselves their child has qualities of Genius well there is nothing very wrong with all this it's the way of the world it is only when the parents begin telling us about the Brilliance of their own revolting offspring that we start shouting bring us a basin we're going to be sick School teachers suffer a good deal from having to listen to this sort of twaddle from proud parents but they usually get their own back when the time comes to write the end of term reports if I were a teacher I would cook up some real scorches for the children of dodding parents your son Maximilian I would write is a total washout I hope you have a family business you can push him into when he leaves school because he sure as heck won't get a job anywhere else or if I were feeling lyrical that day I might write it is a curious truth that grasshoppers have their hearing organs in the size of their abdomen your daughter Vanessa judging by what she's learned this term has no hearing organs at all I might even delve deeper into natural history and say the periodical cicada spends six years as a grub underground and no more than six days as a free creature of sunlight and air your son Wilfred has spent six years as a grub in this school and we are still waiting for him to emerge from the chrysalis a particularly poisonous little girl Might Sting me into saying Fiona has the same glacial Beauty as an iceberg but unlike the iceberg she has absolutely nothing below the surface I think I might enjoy writing end of term reports for the stinkers in my class but enough of that we have to get on occasionally one comes across parents who take the opposite line who show no interest at all in their children and these of course are far worse than the dotting ones Mr and Mrs wormwood were two such parents they had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular nothing more than a scab a scab is something you have to put up with until the time comes when you can pick it off and flick it away Mr and Mrs worm would look forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away preferably into the next County or even further than that it is bad enough when parents treat ordinary children as though they were scabs and bunions but have become somehow a lot worse when the child in question is extraordinary and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant Matilda was both of these things but above all she was brilliant her mind was so Nimble and she was so quick to learn that her ability should have been obvious even to the most half-witted of parents but Mr and Mrs wormwood were both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter to tell the truth I doubt they would have noticed had she crawled into the house with a broken leg Matilda's brother Michael was a perfectly normal boy but the sister as I said was something to make your eyes pop by the age of one and a half Her speech was perfect and she knew as many words as most grown-ups the parents instead of appointing her called her a noisy Chatterbox and told her sharply that small girls should be seen and not heard by the time she was three Matilda had taught herself to read by studying newspapers and magazines that lay around the house at the age of four she could read fast and well and she naturally began hankering After books the only book in the whole of this enlightened household was something called easy cooking belonging to her mother and when she had read this from cover to cover and had learned all the recipes by heart she decided she wanted something more interesting study she said do you think you could buy me a book A book he said what do you want a flaming book for to read Daddy what's wrong with the Telly For Heaven's Sake we've got a lovely Telly with a 12 inch screen and now you've come asking

for a book you're getting spoiled my girl nearly every weekday afternoon Matilda was left alone in the house her brother five years older than her went to school her father went to work and her mother went out playing bingo in a town eight miles away Mrs wormwood was hooked on Bingo and played it five afternoons a week on the afternoon of the day when her father refused to buy her book Matilda set out all by herself to walk to the public library in the village when she arrived she introduced herself to the librarian Mrs Phelps she asked if she might sit a while and read a book Mrs Phelps slightly taken aback at the arrival of such a tiny girl unaccompanied by a parent nevertheless told her she was very welcome where are the children's books please Matilda asked they're over there on the lower shelves Mrs Phelps told her would you like me to help you find nice one with lots of pictures in it no thank you Matilda said I'm sure I can manage from then on every afternoon as soon as her mother had left for Bingo Matilda would total down to a library the walk took only 10 minutes and this allowed her two glorious hours sitting quietly by herself in a Cozy Corner devouring one book after another when she'd read every single book when she read every single children's book in the place she started wandering around in search of something else Mrs Phelps who had been watching her with Fascination for the past few weeks now got up from her desk and went over to her can I help you Matilda she asked I'm wondering what to read next Matilda said I finished all the children's books you mean you've looked at the pictures yes but I've read the books as well Mrs Phillips looked down at Matilda from her great height and Matilda looked right back up at her I thought some were very poor Matilda said but others were lovely I liked the secret garden best of all it was full of Mystery The Mystery of the room behind the closed door and the Mystery of the garden behind the big wall Mrs Phillips was stunned exactly how old are you Matilda she asked four years and three months Matilda said Mrs Phelps was more stunned than ever but she had the sense not to show it what sort of a book would you like to read next she asked Matilda said I would like a really good one that grown-ups read a famous one I don't know any names Mrs Phelps looked along the shelves taking her time she didn't quite know what to bring out how she asked herself does one choose a famous grown-up Book for a four-year-old girl her first thought was to pick a young teenager's Romance of the kind that is written for 15 year old school girls but for some reason she found herself instinctively walking past that particular Shelf try this she said it last it's very famous and very good if it's too long for you just let me know and I'll find something shorter and a bit easier Great Expectations Matilda Red by Charles Dickens I'd love to try that I must be mad Mrs Phelps told herself but to Matilda she said of course you may try it over the next few afternoons Mrs Phelps could hardly take her eyes from the small girl sitting for hour after hour in the big armchair at the far end of the room with the book on her lap it was necessary to wrestle him a lot because it was too heavy for her to hold up which meant she had to sit leaning forward in order to read and a strange sight it was this tiny dark-haired person sitting there with her feet nowhere near touching the floor totally absorbed in the wonderful adventures of pip and old mishav shim and her cobweb house and by the spell of magic that Dickens the great Storyteller had woven with his words the only movement from the reader was lifting off the hand every now and then to turn over a page and Mrs Phelps always felt sad when the time came for her to cross the floor and say it's ten to five Matilda during the first week of Matilda's visits Mrs Phelps had said to her does your mother walk you down here every day and then take you home my mother goes to Aylesbury every afternoon to play Bingo Matilda had said she doesn't know that I come here but that's surely not right Mrs Phelps said I think you'd better ask her I'd rather not Matilda said she doesn't encourage reading books nor does my father but what do they expect you to do every afternoon in an empty house just mooch around and watch the telly I see she doesn't really care what I do Matilda said a little sadly but Feltz was concerned about the child's safety on the walk through a fairly busy Village High Street and the crossing of the road but she decided not to interfere within a week Matilda had finished Great Expectations which in that Edition contained 411 pages I loved it she said to Mrs Phelps has Mr Dickens written any others a great number said do you astounded Mrs Phelps shall I choose you another over the next six months under Mrs Phelps watchful and compassionate eye Matilda read the following books Nicholas Nickelback by Charles Dickens Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen test of the gerbervilles by Thomas Hardy Gone to Earth by Mary Webb Kim by Rudyard Kipling The Invisible Man by H.G Wells the old man in the sea by Ernest Hemingway The Sound and the fury by William Faulkner The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck the good companions by JB Priestly Brighton rocked by Graham Greene Animal Farm by George Orwell it was a formidable list and by now Mrs Phelps was filled with wonder and excitement but it was probably a good thing that she did not allow herself to be completely Carried Away by it all almost anyone else witnessing the achievements of this small child would have been tempted to make a great fuss and Shout the news all over the village and Beyond but not so Mrs Phelps she was someone who minded her own business and had long since discovered it was seldom worth while to interfere with other people's children Mr Hemingway says a lot of things I don't understand Matilda said to her especially about men and women but I loved it all the same the way he tells it I feel I am right there on the spot watching it all a fun Rider will always make you feel that Mrs Phelps said and don't worry about the you can't understand sit back and allow the words to wash around you like music I will I will did you know Mrs Phelps said the public libraries like this allow you to borrow books and take them home I didn't know that Matilda said could I do it of course Mrs phillp said when you have chosen the book you want bring it to me so I can make a note of it and it's yours for two weeks you can take more than one if you wish from then on Matilda would visit the library only once a week in order to take out new books and return the old ones her own small bedroom now became her reading room and there she would sit and read most afternoons often with a mug of hot chocolate beside her she was not quite tall enough to reach things around the kitchen but she kept a small box in their Outhouse which she brought in and stood on in order to get whatever she wanted mostly it was hot chocolate she made warming the milk in a saucepan on the stove before mixing it occasionally she made Bob real or Ovaltine it was pleasant to take a hot drink up to her room and have it beside her as she sat in the silent Room reading in the empty house in the afternoons the books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives she went on olden day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad she went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling she traveled all over the world while sitting in her room in an English Village.