***The Witches***

***Chapter 6***

***Frizzled like a Fritter***

***Summary:***

* All the women are staring at the platform, where there stands a very short, pretty lady... with gloves, of course. She's pretty, that is, until she peels her face off. No joke. Then – without her mask – she's pretty much the most revolting thing on the planet. That's The Grand High Witch (the GHW, from here on out).
* On the GHW's orders, the other women take off their gloves, shoes, and wigs. It's not a pretty sight underneath their disguises.
* The narrator quickly realizes that they might be able to smell him out, but luckily he hasn't bathed in a while. If only we were all so lucky.
* Finally, the GHW begins to speak. She has a funny accent where she uses "v"s for "w"s and rolls her "r"s a lot. Sometimes she rhymes. If you're not reading along in your book, Shmoop thinks you should go check out some of her dialogue to see how Roald Dahl transcribes it – it's really funky.
* She screams and yells (lots of exclamation points ensue) about disgusting children, and even kills one of the other witches (with her eyes – and pretty violently) when that witch suggests that they can't possibly wipe out all the children in England in one year. Talking back in Witch School gets you more than a visit to the principal's office, apparently.

***Brief Synopsis:***

All the women now quiet down and one woman approaches the platform at the front of the room. She is a small, young-looking woman wearing long, fashionable black gloves but no hat. She gets on the stage, faces the crowd, and puts her hands to her face. Slowly, she pulls off the beautiful face which turns out to have been a mask, revealing a horrible, "shrunken and shriveled" face underneath (60). The boy is transfixed on the disgusting face and realizes immediately that this is The Grand High Witch.

[The Grand High Witch](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-witches/study-guide/character-list#the-grand-high-witch)checks that the door is locked and then tells all the witches to remove their gloves, shoes, and wigs. The Grand High Witch has a strong foreign accent. The boy is scared of being found out by the witches, but they are distracted by The Grand High Witch and the freedom of having taken off their constricting wigs and clothes; in addition, the boy realizes that he likely doesn't smell too strongly because he hasn't bathed in many days.

The Grand High Witch yells at the English witches, telling them that there are still thousands of children roaming England, and many at the hotel. She demands that they kill all the children of England within the year, and when one witch protests, she recites a scary poem, perhaps an incantation, and then burns the offending witch up with a stream of sparks that come out of her eyes.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

Very slowly, the young lady on the platform raised her hands to her face. I saw her gloved fingers unhooking something behind her ears, and then…then she caught hold of her cheeks and lifted her face clean away! The whole of the pretty face came away in her hands!  
It was a mask! (7.4-5)

***Explanation:***

A mask is probably the most drastic form of disguise. Put on a hat and gloves, or get a new hairstyle, and everyone you know will probably still recognize you. Wear a mask, though, and you won't be recognized. Check out Quentin Blake's illustrations of this for some proof.

***Quotation 2:***

"You may rrree-moof your gloves!" […]  
  
"You may rrree-moof your shoes!" […]  
  
"You may rrree-moof your vigs!" (7.12, 14, 16)

***Explanation***:

This dramatic stripping of the witches' disguises is really neat. It shows us how aware the witches are of their deception. Each of these pieces – gloves, shoes, wigs – is carefully worn in order to hide something particular about their witchy bodies.

***Quotation 3:***

I simply cannot tell you how awful they were, and somehow the whole sight was made more grotesque because underneath those frightful scabby bald heads, the bodies were dresses in fashionable and rather pretty clothes. It was monstrous. It was unnatural. (7.17)

***Explanation***:

Contrast is important here. The witches are ugly, but they're made even uglier because their disguises are pretty. Like, if you put Voldemort next to Kreacher the House Elf, he might look like Brad Pitt.

***Quotation 4:***

"My orders are that every single child in this country shall be rrrubbed out, sqvashed, sqvirted, sqvittered and frrrittered before I come here again in vun year's time! Do I make myself clear?" (7.41)

***Explanation***:

Lesson in demographics: there are over ten million children in England under the age of eighteen. You think these 84 witches could have succeeded in their plan if the narrator hadn't gotten in their way?

***Quotation 5:***

"A stupid vitch who answers back  
Must burn until her bones are black!" (7.47)

***Explanation***:

The violence in this book isn't reserved only for children. The Grand High Witch is perfectly content burning one of her fellow witches. That's just to say that violence isn't always associated with hatred. In the case of the Grand High Witch, it's performed on a whim, too, just because she's annoyed.

***Quotation 6:***

I saw the sparks striking against her and burrowing into her and she screamed a horrible howling scream and a puff of smoke rose up around her. A smell of burning meat filled the room. (7.48)

***Explanation***:

Roald Dahl appeals to many of our senses when describing violence – the sight of sparks, the sound of a scream, and the resulting smell. It's not enough to see someone burned into a puff of smoke, we also have to imagine what it smelled like after. Ew. And when you remember that the "burning meat" is actually flesh, it's even more gross.

***Quotation 7:***

"Miserrrable vitches!" she yelled. "Useless lazy vitches! Feeble frrribling vitches! You are a heap of idle good-for-nothing vurms!" (7.31)

***Explanation***:

Hatred within a group can sometimes be the worst kind. People tend to hate those outside their group (whether social, familial, religious, ethnic, or anything else) because they don't understand the other. But the Grand High Witch certainly knows what it's like to be a witch, and yet she still hates the rest of 'em. This isn't ignorance, this is just mean.

***Quotation 8:***

"Vye have you not rrrubbed them all out, these filthy smelly children?" (7.33)

***Explanation***:

Shmoop wonders what the Grand High Witch is doing to help eliminate all these children? She seems to hate them more than any of the other witches, but we never hear about the number of kids that she's rubbing out herself. What do you think her story is? She can talk the talk, but can she walk the walk?

***Quotation 9:***

That face of hers was the most frightful and frightening thing I have ever seen. […] There are times when something is so frightful you become mesmerised by it and can't look away. I was like that now. I was transfixed. I was numbed. I was magnetised by the sheer horror of this woman's features. (7.7-8)

***Explanation***:

When we're afraid of something, sometimes the best solution is to expose ourselves to it in order to overcome our fears (unless, of course, you're afraid of man-eating grizzly bears, that is). Our narrator does this naturally, staring at the witch because of how terrible and scary she is.