

Text C: Roald Dahl

Famed children's author Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff, South Wales, on September 13, 1916. Dahl's parents were Norwegian. As a child, he spent his summer vacations visiting his grandparents in Oslo. When Dahl was 4 years old, his father died.

The young Dahl received his earliest education at Llandaff Cathedral School. When the principal gave him a harsh beating for playing a practical joke, Dahl's mother decided to enroll her rambunctious and mischievous child at St. Peter's, a British boarding school, as had been her husband's wish. Dahl later transferred to Repton, a private school with a reputation for academic excellence. He resented the rules at Repton; while there, the lively and imaginative youngster was restless and ached for adventure. While Dahl hardly excelled as a student, his mother offered to pay for his tuition at Oxford or Cambridge University when he graduated. Dahl's response, as quoted from his autobiography, *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, was, "No thank you. I want to go straight from school to work for a company that will send me to wonderful faraway places like Africa or China."

And that he did. After Dahl graduated from Repton in 1932, he went on an expedition to Newfoundland. Afterward, he took a job with the Shell Oil Company in Tanzania, Africa, where he remained until 1939.

Lusting for yet more adventure, in 1939, Dahl joined the Royal Air Force. After training in Nairobi, Kenya, he became a World War II fighter pilot. While serving in the Mediterranean, Dahl crash-landed in Alexandria, Egypt. The plane crash left him with serious injuries to his skull, spine and hip. Following a recovery that included a hip replacement and two spinal surgeries, Dahl was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he became an assistant air attaché.

While in Washington, D.C., Dahl met with author C.S. Forrester, who encouraged him to start writing. Dahl published his first short story in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He went on to write stories and articles for other magazines, including *The New Yorker*. Of his early writing career, Dahl told *New York Times* book reviewer Willa Petschek, "As I went on the stories became less and less realistic and more fantastic." He went on to describe his foray into writing as a "pure fluke," saying, "Without being asked to, I doubt if I'd ever have thought to do it."

Dahl married film actress Patricia Neal, who won an Academy Award for her role in *Hud* in 1961. The marriage lasted three decades and resulted in five children. Dahl told his children nightly bedtime stories that inspired his future career as a children's writer. These stories became the basis for some of his most popular kids' books, as his children proved an informative test audience. "Children are ... highly critical. And they lose interest so quickly," he asserted in his *New York Times* book review interview. "You have to keep things ticking along. And if you think a child is getting bored, you must think up something that jolts it back. Something that tickles. You have to know what children like."

Dahl first established himself as a children's writer in 1961, when he published the book *James and the Giant Peach*. The book met with wide critical and commercial acclaim. Three years later, Dahl published another big winner, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Both books were eventually made into popular movies. A film adaptation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was released as *Willy*

Wonka and the Chocolate Factory in 1971, and an originally titled remake of the film, starring Johnny Depp, was released in 2005. The movie version of *James and the Giant Peach* was released in 1996.

In addition to *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Dahl's most popular children's books include *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970), *The Witches* (1983) and *Matilda* (1988).

After suffering an unspecified infection, on November 12, 1990, Roald Dahl was admitted to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England. He died there on November 23, 1990, at the age of 74. Over his decades-long writing career, Dahl composed 19 children's books and nine short story collections. He also wrote several television and movie scripts.