Matilda

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROALD DAHL

Dahl was born in Cardiff, Wales in 1916 to Norwegian immigrant parents. When he was still very young, Dahl's sister and father died within weeks of each other. Rather than return to Norway to live near family, Dahl's mother remained in Wales so her children could be educated in English schools. However, Dahl's school days were unpleasant for him—he hated the hazing rituals and prevalence of corporal punishment. Following school, Dahl worked for Shell Oil until World War II, in which Dahl served as a fighter pilot. In 1940, Dahl was seriously injured in a crash landing that temporarily robbed him of his sight. He flew again and served briefly as a flight instructor after his recovery, and then he became a diplomat in Washington, D.C. During his time in the U.S., Dahl published his first story, anecdotes about his time as a pilot. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Dahl published a number of short stories for adults as well as *The Gremlins*, his first book for children. 1961's *James and the Giant Peach* catapulted him to fame and became the first of his many successful children's novels. Dahl was married twice, first to actress Patricia Neal and then to Felicity Dahl. He had five children with Neal. In his lifetime, Dahl was a fierce advocate for immunization—his daughter died of measles in 1962—and posthumously, Felicity Dahl created Roald Dahl's Marvelous Children's Charity to support sick children. His novels have sold millions of copies and remain immensely popular. Dahl is often considered one of the most influential British authors of the late 20th century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While a children's novel that focuses closely on the experience of its young protagonist, it's nevertheless possible to see the influence of wider 1980s culture and media on *Matilda*. Dahl makes references to the *Star Wars* franchise when he mentions stormtroopers, and he alludes to some of the concerns of the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s when Matilda and Miss Honey acknowledge the freedom Miss Honey would gain if she had control of her own paycheck. And though Dahl frames television as a terrible thing, just as he did in his earlier novels (such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), the way that Dahl frames television in *Matilda* speaks to how established television was in modern life by the late 1980s. The Trunchbull also greatly resents what would've been a very recent ban on corporal punishment, if *Matilda* is assumed to take place around the time it was published (1988). The UK outlawed corporal punishment in English public schools in 1986, through private schools and schools in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland didn't fully ban corporal punishment until 2003.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Like *Matilda*, many of Roald Dahl's children's novels feature adult characters who are evil and cruel, magic and nonsense, and bright young children as protagonists. For his children's books, Dahl drew inspiration from Lewis Carroll's Alice books, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Published more than a century before *Matilda*, the Alice novels brought the genre of nonsense literature to the forefront—and were some of the first stories for children that weren't simple morality tales. He also grew up listening to his mother, a Norwegian immigrant, tell him Norwegian folk and fairy tales, which influenced a number of his novels. Matilda reads a number of classic novels, including those by Charles Dickens (most notably *Great Expectations* and *Nicholas Nickelby*) and Ernest Hemingway (the novel mentions *The Old Man and the Sea*). Miss Honey also introduces Matilda to romantic poetry and recites a poem by Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. *Matilda* was Dahl's last full-length novel before his death in 1990 and one of only a handful that feature a female protagonist (the other particularly famous one being *The BFG*). Though Dahl is best known for his children's literature, he also wrote a number of short stories for adults that share some of the same odd, macabre elements.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Matilda
- **When Written:** 1987
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1988
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Children's Novel; Fantasy
- **Setting:** An English village
- **Climax:** Matilda uses her secret power to make the Trunchbull believe that Miss Honey's father's ghost wants Mrs. Trunchbull to return the family home and fortune to Miss Honey.
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Trunchbull and Matilda's Parents
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Great Welshmen. Dahl and poet Dylan Thomas (whose poem "In Country Sleep" appears in *Matilda*) are sometimes considered the best-known Welsh writers. Though the men never met, they were born only 40 miles and two years apart.

Thomas died at age 39 (having already achieved fame and recognition for his poetry and radio work) not long after Dahl's career took off, and Dahl developed a great love for Thomas's poetry—one of Thomas's poems was read at Dahl's funeral.

Fixed It! Dahl wrote *Matilda* twice—and the first time, he wrote Matilda as the villain. He's quoted in interviews as saying that he knew after finishing the first draft that he'd gotten Matilda wrong. The rewrite paid off: *Matilda* won the Federation of Children's Book Group Award in 1988.

PLOT SUMMARY

Most parents think highly of their children and (incorrectly) believe their children are geniuses. This is not the case with Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood, who have two children, Michael and Matilda. Matilda is a genius, but her parents are counting down the days until they can get rid of her. They're not impressed when Matilda can speak like an adult by 18 months, or when she asks for books at age four. Instead, they tell her to be quiet and that she's spoiled if she's asking for books—she should watch television instead.

Since Matilda is left alone every afternoon, she starts walking to the library every day. The librarian, Mrs. Phelps, points Matilda to English-language classics, like novels by Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, and Jane Austen. As Matilda devours books, she develops a moral compass. So when Mr. Wormwood, a used car salesman, tells Michael about how he puts sawdust in the gear boxes of old cars and runs the speedometers back with an electric drill, she tells him this is dishonest. He scolds her, so Matilda decides she must get back at him. She sneakily puts a line of Superglue in Mr. Wormwood's hat the next morning, which successfully sticks the hat to his head—Mrs. Wormwood has to cut it off. Then, when Mr. Wormwood tears up one of Matilda's library books, Matilda borrows a neighbor boy's parrot and stuffs it up the chimney—her parents believe there's a ghost in the house. Not long after, as Mr. Wormwood tries to coach Michael through adding up daily profits, Matilda mentally does the math and gets the answer right. In retaliation for her father calling her a cheat and a liar, Matilda replaces some of Mr. Wormwood's hair oil with Mrs. Wormwood's platinum blonde hair dye.

Matilda finally starts primary school when she's five-and-a-half. She goes to the local public school, Crunchem Hall Academy, and is in Miss Honey's first-form class. Matilda wows Miss Honey in the first few minutes of class by demonstrating that she can read and perform complex mental math. Knowing that Matilda is a genius and needs to be moved up, Miss Honey works up her courage and goes to speak with the formidable headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. Miss Trunchbull is a former Olympic athlete who's muscular, loud, and hates both children and education. She talks over Miss Honey and refuses Miss Honey's request to move Matilda up. Miss Honey attempts to speak to Matilda's parents that evening. She tells them that with some tutoring, Matilda could be ready to attend university soon. But the Wormwoods insist that college is terrible—girls should focus on appearances and getting married.

Meanwhile, at school, Matilda and her new best friend, Lavender, learn about the Trunchbull from older kids. One 10-year-old, Hortensia, earns the girls' admiration when she tells them about the tricks she's played on the Trunchbull, such as putting Golden Syrup on her chair or itching powder in her knickers—and the time she's done in the Trunchbull's lock-up, the Chokey. Hortensia also shares that the Trunchbull threw a boy out the window for eating in class. Just then, the entire playground watches as the Trunchbull—who hates plaits and pigtails—picks up a little girl with golden plaits named Amanda and throws her into the playing field. The very next day, the Trunchbull accuses a round little boy, Bruce Bogtrotter, of eating a slice of her special cake. To punish him, she makes him eat a whole 18-inch cake by himself while the other students watch. Bruce manages to finish the whole cake, which enrages the Trunchbull.

On Thursday afternoons, Miss Trunchbull takes over Miss Honey's class for a period. In preparation for her first visit, Lavender offers to fetch and prepare Miss Trunchbull's water jug and glass. Wanting to impress Matilda and Hortensia, Lavender captures a newt and puts it in the jug. Miss Trunchbull enters Miss Honey's classroom and immediately begins punishing and tormenting students. For having dirty hands, Nigel has to stand on one foot in the corner; for not being able to give the answer to a math problem, Miss Trunchbull picks Rupert up by his ears. When she finally pours herself a glass of water, the newt plops into the glass. This terrifies the Trunchbull—and she blames Matilda.

Incensed at this injustice, Matilda screams she didn't do it. But the Trunchbull won't listen. Angrier than she's ever been, Matilda sits in silence. She begins to feel peculiar: her eyes feel hot and as though there are invisible arms reaching out of them. With this odd **power**, Matilda pushes the glass containing the newt over—right onto Miss Trunchbull's bosom. Enraged but unable to blame Matilda, Miss Trunchbull leaves.

When Miss Honey dismisses the class, Matilda hangs back and tells Miss Honey about her odd power. Miss Honey believes Matilda is telling stories until Matilda repeats the trick. Stunned, Miss Honey invites Matilda back to her cottage for tea. They walk out of the village and down a rural road until they reach a tiny farm worker's cottage. Matilda is shocked; the cottage looks straight out of a fairy tale, and it's clear that Miss Honey lives in dire poverty. As they eat their bread and margarine, Matilda asks about Miss Honey's financial situation. Miss Honey agrees to tell her story.

Miss Honey's mother died when Miss Honey was two. Her father, a doctor, asked his sister-in-law to come help with Miss

Honey—and then he died mysteriously, supposedly by suicide, three years later. Miss Honey's aunt was abusive and controlling, and things were so bad that Miss Honey was—and still is—too afraid to fight back. Her aunt forced her to do all the housework, and even now that Miss Honey has a job, she takes all of Miss Honey's paycheck except for a one-pound allowance every week. The aunt lives in the Honeys' house and, since Miss Honey's father's will disappeared, there's no way for Miss Honey to take ownership of anything. It was Miss Honey's greatest achievement to find this cottage and move out. Matilda greatly admires her teacher—but she realizes Miss Honey needs help when Miss Honey admits she doesn't have a bed, and then admits that her aunt is Miss Trunchbull.

Miss Honey walks Matilda to the Wormwoods' gate. There, Matilda asks Miss Honey three questions: what Miss Trunchbull and Miss Honey's father called each other (Agatha and Magnus, respectively), and what they called Miss Honey as a child (Jenny). With this information, Matilda concocts a plan. Inside her house, she grabs one of her father's cigars, places it on her dressing table, and practices using her power to move it every day after school until she can do exactly what she wants to with it.

The following Thursday, when Miss Trunchbull is in Miss Honey's class tormenting a boy named Wilfred, Nigel shouts that the chalk is writing on the chalkboard all on its own. The chalk writes that it's Magnus's ghost, and he asks Agatha to give Jenny her house and paycheck back. Miss Trunchbull turns white and faints—and over the next 24 hours, she runs away. Lawyers contact Miss Honey, who gains ownership of her family's home, her paychecks, and her father's fortune. Matilda is moved into a higher form and visits with Miss Honey every afternoon. The two form a close friendship. Matilda's power disappears, but she's happy it did.

When Matilda returns home after a visit with Miss Honey one afternoon, Mr. Wormwood informs her that the family is moving to Spain and is never coming back. Matilda races back to Miss Honey's; she wants to stay with Miss Honey, not move to Spain. Miss Honey agrees to take Matilda if the Wormwoods agree, so they run back to the Wormwood house. Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood agree that leaving Matilda would be one less thing to deal with and don't look back as they drive away.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Matilda Wormwood – The protagonist of the novel, Matilda is an exceptionally smart little girl: she could speak like an adult by 18 months and was reading Charles Dickens by age four. But her parents, Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood, aren't proud of her—rather, they can't wait to get rid of her. Without support at home, Matilda begins visiting the library, where the librarian, Mrs. Phelps, guides Matilda through reading classic novels. Reading helps Matilda develop a moral compass and see that Mr. Wormwood's used car business is unethical. Though she feels powerless at home, Matilda uses her cleverness to get back at her parents for the way they treat her, such as by hiding a parrot in the chimney to frighten them into thinking there's a ghost. Matilda enters school knowing how to read and perform complex mental math. This shocks her teacher, Miss Honey, who advocates unsuccessfully for Matilda to be moved into a higher form. As Matilda settles in at school, she makes friends with a girl named Lavender and learns about the student body's crusade to torment their evil headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. Miss Trunchbull hates Matilda instantly, as she detests precociousness and believes that Matilda is part of a gang. So when Miss Trunchbull discovers a newt in her water glass while she's teaching Miss Honey's class, she blames Matilda. The injustice makes Matilda so angry that she taps into a strange **power**: she's able to move objects, just by staring at them. Matilda trusts Miss Honey and so she tells her about her power. In return, Miss Honey tells Matilda about how her aunt, Miss Trunchbull, raised her, abused her, and probably killed Miss Honey's father to take control of the family's home and money. Wanting to help her teacher, Matilda practices using her power until she's able to write on the chalkboard, posing as the ghost of Miss Honey's father, and she tells Miss Trunchbull to return the house to Miss Honey. Several weeks later—and after Matilda has been moved into the highest form—her power disappears. At this point, Mr. Wormwood decides to move the family to Spain. But Matilda convinces her parents to allow her to stay with Miss Honey.

Mr. Wormwood – One of the novel's antagonists, Mr. Wormwood is Matilda and Michael's father, and Mrs. Wormwood's husband. He's a small, ratty man, with luscious black hair. He always wears suits with loud plaid prints to his job as a used car salesman. Though Mr. Wormwood is a successful businessman, he's not successful because he's honest—rather, he's successful because he runs back old cars' speedometers and fills gearboxes with oil and sawdust, and then tells people the cars came from old ladies who barely drove. Because of his dishonesty and perceived self-importance, Matilda detests her father. He detests her in return; he doesn't like Matilda at all and doesn't care that she's extremely intelligent. Instead, he's actually offended that she can amuse herself with books when he can't (Mr. Wormwood doesn't value education at all, and though he reads car magazines, he doesn't believe reading books is a good use of time). Mr. Wormwood's habit of antagonizing Matilda leads Matilda to play several tricks on him, such as gluing his favorite hat to his head with Superglue and replacing his hair oil with Mrs. Wormwood's peroxide hair dye, thereby bleaching his hair. Eventually, it comes out that Mr. Wormwood is involved in a nationwide criminal operation that sells stolen cars. He decides to move the family to Spain immediately. When Matilda

asks to stay with Miss Honey instead of go with the Wormwoods, Mr. Wormwood agrees—leaving her means he has one less thing to worry about in Spain.

Mrs. Wormwood – Mrs. Wormwood is Matilda and Michael's mother, and Mr. Wormwood's wife. Though she thinks of herself as very beautiful, the narrator's tone suggests otherwise—the narration describes her as having mousy brown hair dyed platinum blond, as being overweight and never fitting into her clothes well, and as wearing too much makeup. She's also obsessed with American television shows, something the novel portrays as a moral and cultural failing. When Mrs. Wormwood isn't watching television at home, she's in the next town over playing bingo. So though she's not as openly antagonistic to Matilda, she's also absent—and she never pushes back when Mr. Wormwood does or says mean things to Matilda. Part of this is because Mrs. Wormwood, like her husband, doesn't value education. Instead, she believes that women should focus on their appearance so they can snag a husband who will care for them—and she insists that, in dyeing her hair and marrying Mr. Wormwood, she's followed her own advice and ended up successful. Because of this belief, she's extremely rude to Miss Honey when Miss Honey visits to discuss Matilda's education. Mrs. Wormwood doesn't see any reason to insist that Matilda come with them to Spain, so she convinces Mr. Wormwood to let their daughter stay with Miss Honey.

Miss Trunchbull – Miss Trunchbull is the evil headmistress at Crunchem Hall Primary School. It's a mystery how she got the job, as she hates children and education. A former Olympic athlete, Miss Trunchbull is extremely tall and muscular. And to keep her throwing arm in practice—she used to throw the hammer—she regularly throws children. She throws one boy because he was eating in class and throws another little girl because the girl had her hair in two braids, a hairstyle that Miss Trunchbull detests. Her entire purpose in life seems to be tormenting her students—and she gets away with it because her methods are so outrageous. No sensible adult, Matilda realizes, is going to believe that Miss Trunchbull is throwing children by their braids or locking them up in the Chokey (a tiny closet with broken glass and nails embedded in the walls, which children are made to stand in as punishment). And though she regularly laments that she can't whip children anymore, she still comes up with horrible ways to torment them, as when she makes a boy named Bruce (who supposedly stole a piece of cake) eat an entire 18-inch cake by himself. But the students at Crunchem Hall fight back: one girl, Hortensia, has done things like put Golden Syrup on Miss Trunchbull's chair and itching powder in her knickers. Miss Trunchbull enrages Matilda by accusing Matilda of lying about having read *Nicholas Nickelby*. This makes Matilda so angry that she discovers she has the **power** to move objects by looking at them. That afternoon, Matilda learns even more horrifying things about Miss Trunchbull: Miss Trunchbull is Miss Honey's aunt and has abused Miss Honey since Miss Honey was a child. She probably murdered Miss Honey's father so she could take control of the Honey family house and fortune, and she takes almost all of Miss Honey's paycheck. Matilda poses as the ghost of Miss Honey's father and writes on the chalkboard, warning Miss Trunchbull to give Miss Honey back the house and fortune. Matilda is successful: she not only makes Miss Trunchbull faint, but Miss Trunchbull also leaves the Honeys' house and Crunchem Hall forever.

Miss Honey – Miss Honey is the first form teacher at Crunchem Hall Primary School. She's thin and pretty, like a "porcelain doll." And though she doesn't smile much, she still has a way with children—all her students adore her, including Matilda. Miss Honey is shocked when she discovers that Matilda has already read Charles Dickens, can perform complex mental math, and can compose limericks on the spot. Realizing that Matilda needs far more than what Miss Honey can give her, Miss Honey attempts to get Matilda moved into a higher form. When the headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, refuses, Miss Honey decides to give Matilda upper-level textbooks so she can study independently. She also tries to convince Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood to get Matilda private tutoring so that Matilda can attend university, but the Wormwoods insult Miss Honey—choosing education like Miss Honey did, they insist, isn't what women should do with their lives. Miss Honey is very shy and quiet, particularly around Miss Trunchbull, but she does try to advocate for her students' health and safety when Miss Trunchbull teaches her classes one afternoon per week. After Matilda shares with Miss Honey the news of her strange **power** and Miss Honey shows Matilda that she lives in a tiny farm laborer's cottage, Miss Honey agrees to share her story. Her parents died when she was little, and before Miss Honey's father's death, he asked his sister-in-law to care for Miss Honey. That sister-in-law was none other than Miss Trunchbull, and Miss Trunchbull abused and frightened Miss Honey at every turn. In the present, because of the abuse she suffered, Miss Honey is far too frightened to advocate for herself in any way—so Miss Trunchbull takes almost all of Miss Honey's salary and currently lives in the Honey family's home. Matilda uses her power to frighten Miss Trunchbull into leaving forever and giving Miss Honey back her house and family fortune. Matilda and Miss Honey become close friends after this—and when Matilda's family moves to Spain, her parents agree to let Matilda stay with Miss Honey.

Dr. Magnus Honey/Miss Honey's Father – Miss Honey's father died when Miss Honey was five years old. He died under mysterious circumstances: though his death was ruled a suicide, he was thought of as being too happy a person to kill himself. When his wife died three years before him, he'd asked his sister-in-law, Miss Trunchbull, to come live with him and help care for young Miss Honey—and upon his death, Miss

Trunchbull assumed control of his home, his fortune, and his daughter. And since his will mysteriously disappeared (and a letter appeared, supposedly from him, leaving everything to Miss Trunchbull), Miss Honey has no way to take what she and Matilda believe is rightfully hers. When Matilda discovers that Miss Trunchbull has abused Miss Honey her entire life, she uses her **power** to make it seem like Magnus's ghost is writing on the blackboard. She makes him scold Miss Trunchbull and tell her to give Miss Honey back her house.

Mrs. Phelps – Mrs. Phelps is the librarian in the village. Though she's in awe of Matilda's apparent genius, Mrs. Phelps never says anything to make Matilda feel odd or uncomfortable. Instead, Mrs. Phelps supports Matilda as she reads the library's entire children section, and then works through many English-language classics such as novels by Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, and Jane Austen. She encourages Matilda to keep reading and enjoying books, even when Matilda doesn't entirely understand what she's reading. She's also concerned somewhat for Matilda's welfare, since she knows that the Wormwoods don't like books and don't care about their daughter at all. But Mrs. Phelps believes that it never ends well to get involved with other people's children, so she settles for supporting Matilda as best she can while Matilda is at the library.

Lavender – Lavender is a girl in Matilda's class at Crunchem Hall Primary School, and she soon becomes Matilda's best friend. She's a tiny girl with brown hair. Lavender greatly admires Matilda for the tricks Matilda played on her father, and she also admires Hortensia when Hortensia tells the girls about all the time she's spent in the Chokey as punishment for playing tricks on Miss Trunchbull. More than anything, Lavender wants to do something that would impress her friends and make her seem just as crafty and cunning. So Lavender volunteers to prepare Miss Trunchbull's water jug and glass—and Lavender puts a newt from her pond in the jug. Though Lavender doesn't own up to her crime and lets Matilda take the fall for it, this isn't framed as a bad thing. Indeed, it creates the situation where Matilda discovers her **power**.

Hortensia – Hortensia is an older girl at Crunchem Hall Primary School. She's not particularly attractive, as she eats chips greedily and has a huge boil on her nose. But this ceases to matter to Matilda and Lavender as Hortensia tells them all about the pranks she's pulled on Miss Trunchbull. Hortensia has done things like putting syrup on Miss Trunchbull's chair, or putting itching powder in her knickers. And for these transgressions, Miss Trunchbull has locked Hortensia in the Chokey, a narrow closet with broken glass and sharp nails embedded in the walls (a person in the Chokey has to stand straight upright or risk getting cut). As Hortensia tells the younger girls about her exploits, she turns into a goddess in their eyes and inspires Lavender to put a newt in Miss Trunchbull's water jug.

Amanda Thripp – Amanda is a little girl who attends Crunchem Hall Primary School. She has beautiful blonde hair that her mother styles in two braids tied with ribbons—a style that Miss Trunchbull happens to detest. To punish Amanda for her hairstyle, Miss Trunchbull throws Amanda into a nearby field by her braids and tells Amanda to have her mother cut the braids off by tomorrow.

Bruce Bogtrotter – Bruce Bogtrotter is a round little 10-year-old at Crunchem Hall Primary School. When Miss Trunchbull accuses him of being greedy and sneaking her piece of special cake off her tea tray, Bruce denies the accusation. But when, to punish him for his theft, Miss Trunchbull produces a massive cake and tells Bruce he must eat the entire thing in front of his classmates, Bruce rises to the occasion and does just that. This, of course, angers Miss Trunchbull, who expected eating so much cake to be torture. Bruce is so stuffed with cake by the end that when she breaks the cake plate over his head, Bruce doesn't even feel it.

Michael "Mike" Wormwood – Mike is Matilda's older brother by five years. He's not nearly as intelligent as Matilda, and the narrator says that Mike has inherited Mr. Wormwood's love of crime. Though Mike only appears briefly in the novel, he doesn't seem like a bad kid—he's the only one who looks back at Matilda when he leaves with their parents for Spain. He's going to take over Mr. Wormwood's used car business one day.

Nigel – Nigel is a boy in Matilda's class at Crunchem Hall Primary School. He comes to school already knowing how to read some words. When Miss Trunchbull sits in on Miss Honey's class the first time, she makes him stand in the corner on one foot as punishment for having dirty hands. He also annoys her by sharing that Miss Honey taught the entire class to spell "difficulty" using a song.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Fred – Fred is a boy who lives around the corner from Matilda. He lends Matilda his pet parrot, Chopper, overnight.

Chopper – Chopper is a parrot who belongs to Matilda's friend Fred. Matilda borrows Chopper and hides him in the chimney so that when he talks, Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood think there's a ghost in the house.

The Cook – The cook at Crunchem Hall Primary School is old, wrinkly, and expresses no emotion. It's unclear whether she actually supports Miss Trunchbull's desire to torment children, or whether like most kids and adults, she's just too afraid to stand up to her boss.

Rupert – Miss Trunchbull torments Rupert when she takes over Miss Honey's class one Thursday afternoon.

Eric Ink – Eric is a student in Matilda's class whom Miss Trunchbull torments.

Wilfred – Wilfred is the student in Matilda's class whom Miss Trunchbull is tormenting when Matilda starts to use her **power**

and write on the chalkboard.

Mr. Trilby – Mr. Trilby is initially second in command at Crunchem Hall Primary School. Unlike Miss Trunchbull, he's "excellent" and he takes over as Head Teacher when Miss Trunchbull disappears.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ADULTS, CHILDREN, AND POWER

Despite being a uniquely brilliant young girl, Matilda is a powerless child. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood, treat her like a "scab" that they can't wait to get rid of, and they refuse to see their daughter's genius. And the formidable headmistress of Matilda's primary school, Miss Trunchbull, hates all children as a rule—but she especially hates Matilda. Through Matilda's struggles with her parents and Miss Trunchbull, *Matilda* taps into a power dynamic that many kids feel and resent, where children feel like they have little or no power compared to the adults who control many aspects of their lives. For young readers, Matilda's eventual triumph over her parents and Miss Trunchbull is a satisfying inversion of the usual power structure—and for older readers, the novel is a warning not to abuse their power over younger people.

Matilda initially portrays children as powerless in a world ruled by all-powerful—and not always kind—adults. For instance, the narrator notes on several occasions that, because she's only a five-year-old girl, Matilda has no choice but to do whatever her parents tell her to do. It doesn't matter how ridiculous their whims might be, or how wrong—as a small child, Matilda has no choice but to obey. This dynamic persists, to some degree, once Matilda goes to school. At Crunchem Hall Primary School, Miss Trunchbull rules the school with an iron fist. In addition to not standing for humor, snark, talking back, or wrong answers, Miss Trunchbull also doesn't tolerate things like pigtails on girls, long hair on boys, or children who know more than Miss Trunchbull thinks they should. And whenever she encounters a child doing something she doesn't like, Miss Trunchbull punishes that child severely—whether that's by throwing a little girl with pigtails into a nearby field *by* her pigtails, or putting children into the "Chokey," a tiny closet with nails and broken glass embedded into the sides. Miss Trunchbull is objectively ridiculous and abusive to the children in her care, but being children, the children mostly have to go along with whatever she tells them to do.

Given this power dynamic, the children must turn to creative means of asserting themselves to adults. Though she's not big enough to stand up to Mr. Wormwood when he's cruel to her, Matilda is clever and sneaky enough to do things like bleach his hair or glue his hat to his head with Superglue. And while the other children in the novel aren't geniuses like Matilda, they're still crafty enough to get back at adults. Hortensia plays tricks on Miss Trunchbull like putting itching powder in her knickers, and a little girl named Lavender puts a newt in Miss Trunchbull's water pitcher. These tricks don't change anything in the long run, but they have an important effect: they help the kids maintain their sanity and composure in the face of abuse.

When Matilda discovers her supernatural **power**, however, she's able to significantly alter the lives of everyone around her. By using her power to pose as the ghost of Miss Honey's father and write a threatening message to Miss Trunchbull on the chalkboard, Matilda is able to drive Miss Trunchbull away forever and restore Miss Honey to her rightful home and wealth. This improves the lives of all the children at Crunchem Hall who are saved from the cruelty of Miss Trunchbull, and it also sets Matilda and Miss Honey up with a better life, one where they can live together in Miss Honey's family home. But notably, Matilda is only able to do this by way of supernatural power—were she a child without that ability, it seems like nothing would have changed at all.

Because of this, it's possible to read *Matilda*'s strongest message as one for older readers: since children are mostly powerless to demand respect and fix the injustices they face, it's up to adults to respect children. Matilda's path to thwarting Miss Trunchbull is fantastical and could not happen in the real world, which means that adults have a responsibility to behave respectfully and use their more powerful social position to protect the vulnerable children in their lives. But even when they don't, the novel shows that children do have some recourse: while the pranks like those Hortensia, Lavender, and Matilda play on abusive adults don't change their lives, they do create a lot of distress for cruel adults, which *Matilda* suggests they heartily deserve.

EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Five-year-old Matilda is a child genius; she can read and understand novels by authors like Charles Dickens and Ernest Hemingway by the age of four, and she can perform complex mental math not long after. Matilda's intellect—particularly her ability to escape into other worlds through books—provides a much-needed escape from her parents' neglect. And as Matilda starts school and connects with her kind teacher, Miss Honey, it seems as though Matilda's love of learning is going to take her far—Miss Honey advocates from the very beginning for Matilda to receive education at a high level, seeking to prepare Matilda for university within a few years. Matilda's trajectory frames education, kind teachers,

and institutions like schools and libraries as being capable of getting bright students like Matilda out of neglectful, unhappy situations.

Even before young Matilda begins school, the novel shows how learning—specifically learning to read and then enjoy books—can provide a much-needed escape from a neglectful, sad reality. As a young child whose parents don't care about her, it falls to Matilda to entertain herself and avoid her parents' ire. Though her learning to read initially irks her parents, discovering the local library allows Matilda a way to safely and happily entertain herself—and stay out of her parents' way. Reading allows Matilda to develop a moral compass, and it also helps her learn how to tune out the television which, in her house, is always on (and which the novel frames as something inferior to books). And in many ways, being able to read makes Matilda more impervious to her parents' abuse: when Mr. Wormwood comes home in a towering rage, Matilda is able to ignore him with little effort. Besides this, it's Matilda's books that provide her with the inspiration to take revenge on her parents when they treat her poorly. When Mr. Wormwood, enraged that Matilda is enjoying a book, destroys her library book, it's not hard for Matilda to come up with the idea to run a line of Superglue in her father's hat to glue it to his head. Matilda's books not only offer her a mental and emotional escape: they also teach her how, and why, to fight back against her parents' unfair treatment.

Once Matilda starts school, her teacher, Miss Honey, implies that with formal education, Matilda will be able to continue along her path of escaping her parents' abuse. Miss Honey realizes instantly that Matilda is a genius. She insists to Miss Trunchbull that Matilda should be in the top form at school and tells Matilda's parents that she could be ready for university in only a few years. In a way, Miss Honey frames Matilda's educational trajectory as one that's essentially going to help Matilda grow up and gain independence much sooner than she would otherwise. Even though both Miss Trunchbull and the Wormwoods refuse to move Matilda up and give her the mental stimulation Miss Honey insists she needs, Matilda still gets something very important in Miss Honey's classroom: recognition for her talents. For the first time, Matilda finds herself in a place where her genius is noticed, encouraged, and developed. And Miss Honey's support for Matilda and her education, the novel suggests, is what gives Matilda the guts to fight back and ultimately escape both her parents and Miss Trunchbull.

Ultimately, choosing to prioritize her education allows Matilda to escape her parents' neglect for good. When Matilda discovers that Mr. Wormwood is moving the family to Spain in less than an hour, her argument with him shows how much she values her education: she doesn't want to leave because she loves her school. And with Miss Honey's help, Matilda manages to convince her parents to allow her to stay with Miss Honey in England. This does two things. First, it means that Matilda will no longer have to deal with her parents' neglect. Second, she won't have to deal with their refusal to prioritize her education—living with Miss Honey, a teacher who believes Matilda could attend college in a few years, essentially guarantees that Matilda will have the opportunity to do just that. While Matilda's level of genius may be fantastical, her story nevertheless suggests that children interested in education have a way out of neglectful situations. By applying themselves to their schooling, students can gain the skills they need to be independent from their parents—and also find teachers and support networks that are willing and able to support them where their parents can't or won't.

FAMILY, INSTITUTIONS, AND CHOSEN FAMILY

Matilda begins by noting that parents are, on the whole, far too convinced that their children are geniuses—and while this is annoying for everyone else who has to listen to the proud parents, it's the way the world should be. The narrator then introduces readers to Matilda, whose parents don't know or care that their five-year-old daughter is actually a genius and instead treat her "like a scab," counting down the days until they can get rid of her. But Matilda isn't the only person in the novel to grow up in an unfair, abusive family situation: Matilda's teacher at Crunchem Hall Primary School, Miss Honey, was raised by her overbearing and abusive aunt, who is none other than the headmistress Miss Trunchbull. So while *Matilda* acknowledges that children need love, respect, and support from their parents and guardians, it also acknowledges the reality that this sometimes doesn't happen. Rather, *Matilda* suggests that in the absence of supportive blood family, chosen family—whether that's teachers, librarians, or friends—can provide the support that one's parents can't.

Matilda shows first that children, on the whole, want their parents to love and protect them—but sometimes, as in Matilda's case, this doesn't happen. Little Matilda wants nothing more than for her parents to be good people who love her. But she also realizes that no matter what she does or doesn't do or say, this is never going to be the case. If she wants love and support, she's going to have to look elsewhere for it. When Miss Honey tells Matilda her story later in the novel, she implies that she wanted the same thing as a child. Though she remembers her father, who died when she was five, Miss Honey was raised by her aunt, Miss Trunchbull—who wasn't just neglectful, but also outright abusive. Rather than protect Miss Honey, Miss Trunchbull destroyed her niece's confidence—and this has profound effects into the novel's present, when Miss Honey, as an adult, doesn't feel able to assert herself. With this, the novel shows how horrific abuse can keep children from ever fully growing up. However, the novel also acknowledges that even when parents are good and

kind, they can't always protect kids as much as kids would like. For instance, Matilda realizes that no sensible parent is going to believe a child who shares that Miss Trunchbull is swinging kids around by their braids and throwing them into fields—Miss Trunchbull's behavior is too outrageous to be believed. And this creates a situation where even supportive parents can't effectively protect their children.

In the absence of safe, supportive parents and guardians, Matilda frames institutions like schools and libraries as capable of providing children with safe havens. This is, of course, only marginally true at Crunchem Hall Primary School, where Miss Trunchbull physically abuses children. But the novel suggests that the actual teachers at Crunchem Hall are "exceptional" and do care for their students; Miss Honey, for instance, goes out of her way to keep her students safe from Miss Trunchbull, and other teachers—like Mr. Trilby and the upper-level teacher who eventually accepts Matilda into her class—are framed as supportive people who genuinely love and care about the kids in their care. In Matilda's case, she discovers at four years old that even if her parents don't support her, other adults in her community will. The kindly village librarian, Mrs. Phelps, guides Matilda through reading a number of classics and inquires into Matilda's home situation (though she never takes any action to protect Matilda from her parents' neglect). And once Matilda starts school, she quickly identifies Miss Honey as a "trusted grown-up" in whom she can confide when she discovers she has the mysterious **power** to move objects with her eyes. So even though Matilda must contend with Miss Trunchbull at school, school is still more or less a safe haven for her: Miss Honey and the other students at school like and support Matilda as a person and as a student.

Finally, the novel presents chosen family as an option for people whose families of origin are abusive or neglectful. Towards the end of the book, Matilda and Miss Honey strike up a close, trusting friendship. In Miss Honey, Matilda continues to find an adult she trusts to care for her, be interested in her, and steer her in the right direction. And in Matilda, Miss Honey essentially gets to do for another child what nobody was able to do for her when she was little—and she finds caring for Matilda extremely fulfilling. All of this culminates in Matilda asking her parents to allow her to stay in England with Miss Honey when Mr. Wormwood announces that the family is leaving suddenly and permanently for Spain. Though the novel ends as the Wormwoods drive away without Matilda, and it doesn't explore how Matilda and Miss Honey's relationship evolves once Miss Honey becomes Matilda's guardian, the narrator's descriptions of how the various parties behave during the parting frames this as an entirely positive thing. Matilda, upon hearing that she can stay, leaps into Miss Honey's arms—an intimate action that expresses how much Matilda loves and trusts her teacher. And Matilda's parents don't even bother to look back at their daughter, thereby underscoring how little they care about her. Biological family doesn't guarantee love or care; what matters in a family—whether biological or chosen—is that adults are willing and able to advocate and care for their children.

THE POWER OF FIGHTING INJUSTICE

As five-year-old Matilda learns about right and wrong from classic novels, she comes to detest her parents' unfair treatment of her and take issue with her father's unethical used car business. So when Mr. Wormwood destroys Matilda's library book because he hates reading, Matilda stuffs a parrot up the chimney to trick her parents into thinking there's a ghost in the house, thereby frightening them into good behavior for a while. Later, when Matilda discovers that her formidable headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, is responsible for keeping Matilda's teacher Miss Honey in poverty, Matilda knows she can't let it go: she harnesses her mysterious **power** to frighten Miss Trunchbull into returning Miss Honey's house and fortune to its rightful owner. Through this, the novel suggests that simply recognizing injustice and refusing to accept it is akin to having a superpower, and it's the prerequisite for improving one's own life and the world.

The first step to fighting injustice is recognizing where and how injustice exists. One step towards recognizing injustice is education, and reading in particular. Matilda doesn't start to resent Mr. Wormwood's unethical sales practices until she develops a moral compass through reading. And through Mike, Matilda's older brother, the novel shows the opposite: because Mike *doesn't* read, he doesn't see anything wrong with selling cars that aren't just stolen, but will stop working about 100 miles after Mr. Wormwood sells them. Similarly, though Matilda immediately recognizes Miss Trunchbull as an adversary and a bully, it doesn't seem urgent to get rid of her until Matilda hears about how Miss Trunchbull has abused Miss Honey for Miss Honey's entire life. So it's learning new information—in this case, the full story of who Miss Trunchbull is and what she's done—that motivates Matilda to act.

The novel also suggests that recognizing abuse and injustices can, in itself, give a person some power to right those wrongs. In many instances, this consists of badly-treated children playing tricks on adults. Once she realizes how terrible her father is, for instance, Matilda glues his hat to his head, bleaches his black hair, and frightens him into thinking there's a ghost in the house. Matilda's anger at her father's terrible behavior motivates her to try to change things, and her pranks *do* change Mr. Wormwood's behavior, making him into less of a bully for at least a short time. But, significantly, recognizing injustice also literally gives Matilda a superpower. When Miss Trunchbull is bullying students in class, Matilda becomes so furious that she develops the ability to move objects with her mind, thereby allowing her to punish Miss Trunchbull for her abuse. This makes literal the notion that recognizing injustice can give

someone power. And by using her superpower, Matilda is able to get rid of the Trunchbull for good, getting justice for Miss Honey and improving the lives of all the students Miss Trunchbull abused.

Through Miss Honey, the novel shows how damaging it can be to simply accept injustices and not do anything to change them. Miss Honey has lived under Miss Trunchbull's thumb since she was two years old, and Miss Trunchbull isolated Miss Honey and taught her not to fight back even in the face of extraordinary cruelty. And because Miss Honey is too afraid to advocate for herself, she must ultimately accept help from Matilda, a child, to get out of this abusive situation—even trying to better her life is beyond her capabilities. With this, the novel shows that the first, difficult step to righting wrongs is to recognize that they exist, but after that, it's essential to channel anger into action.

WOMEN, FINANCIAL SECURITY, AND ETHICS

Matilda's mother, Mrs. Wormwood, believes that women should focus on their looks so they can snag a husband who will provide for them. In her opinion, it's useless for a girl to educate herself, because it's appearance alone that can secure a woman's future. Miss Trunchbull embodies another path through adult life: while she appears to be independent and professionally successful, she's living off of money she stole by murdering her brother-in-law, Miss Honey's father. So Miss Trunchbull has gained success through violence and deceit. Miss Honey, on the other hand, lives her life through honesty and hard work, supporting herself and maintaining her independence through teaching, even as she lives in poverty. And while Matilda is only a child, she knows intuitively that this is the path she prefers. Matilda and Miss Honey eventually succeed at banishing the horrible women in their lives: Mrs. Wormwood moves away, and Miss Trunchbull is forced out of her job and home. In this way, the novel implicitly supports Matilda and Miss Honey's choices: women who value education, work hard, and behave morally will succeed.

Through Mrs. Wormwood's example, *Matilda* shows that relying on appearances and marriage to achieve success and security may work in theory—but in actuality, Mrs. Wormwood is neither secure nor successful. Mrs. Wormwood implies that she's spent her entire life working on making herself look as beautiful as possible, with the goal of securing a husband who can support her. Outwardly, she's succeeded at this: Mrs. Wormwood is blonde, curvy, and lives in a nice home that Mr. Wormwood pays for. But in reality, Mrs. Wormwood isn't actually successfully making herself beautiful: the narrator regularly notes that her hair is badly dyed and her clothes never seem to fit quite right. So while Mrs. Wormwood is trying to embody a feminine ideal, her mousy roots and ill-fitting dresses imply that she's failing. In addition, Mrs. Wormwood's marriage seems not to be providing the financial security that she seeks. While Mrs. Wormwood lives in a nice house and can afford fancy makeup, Mr. Wormwood is engaged in criminal activity through his used car business, which puts the family's wellbeing at risk. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the Wormwoods are forced to pack up and move to Spain in a matter of hours—all because Mr. Wormwood was discovered by the authorities. So while Mrs. Wormwood may have enjoyed the financial security while it lasted, the novel also suggests that her security has always been tenuous at best.

Miss Trunchbull, like Mrs. Wormwood, is outwardly successful—but again, the novel shows that achieving success through violence and deceit is unreliable. Miss Trunchbull began amassing her power as a young woman, when she came to help Miss Honey's father after his wife, Miss Trunchbull's sister, died. Three years later, Miss Trunchbull murdered her brother-in-law, which not only gave her guardianship over Miss Honey (whom she abused and made do all the housework), but it also gave Miss Trunchbull ownership of the Honey house and access to the Honey fortune. Throughout most of the novel, she continues to steal money from her in-laws by taking almost all of Miss Honey's paycheck. But again, the novel shows that gaining power in this way is unreliable. Miss Trunchbull may look outwardly successful and untouchable, but it only takes getting her to believe that the ghost of Miss Honey's father will haunt her and punish her to get her to give Miss Honey her home and her fortune back. Miss Trunchbull's physical strength and penchant for violence can't help her when she's faced with having her crime discovered by the wider community.

Through Miss Honey, though, the novel presents an alternative: success is more reliable—and more meaningful—when women focus on education, financial security, and acting in moral ways. In telling her story, Miss Honey shows that she knew from an early age that education and financial self-sufficiency were going to be her ticket out of her abusive situation. She enrolled in a teacher training course at age 18, which allowed her to get a job—and that job enabled her to rent the farm laborer's cottage where she lives when Matilda meets her. Her poverty is crushing, but Miss Honey suggests that having control of her money—even if that's only her allowance of one pound per week—is enough to make her independent. Miss Honey's moral superiority, moreover, is what motivates Matilda to admire her teacher and take steps to frighten Miss Trunchbull so she will give Miss Honey her house and her family's fortune back. Miss Honey may be earning her own money thanks to the education she worked hard to get—but the novel also suggests that her innate goodness leads directly to her recapturing her family's fortune, since it's her goodness that wins Matilda's loyalty.

For Matilda, the correct path to successful adulthood is clear: she should, like Miss Honey, endeavor to be financially independent through educating herself, and she should take

only what she's earned honestly. Through this, the novel suggests that financial security is only truly secure when a woman honestly earns her paycheck and can support herself, rather than relying on a husband or violence to get what she wants.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MATILDA'S POWER

Matilda's miraculous power is, essentially, a manifestation of her firm sense of morality. With her power, Matilda can channel her anger at the injustices she sees in the world and with it, cause objects to move. At first, Matilda uses her power—accidentally—to tip a glass of water containing a newt onto Miss Trunchbull's chest. Miss Trunchbull is unfairly tormenting the students prior to this incident, and this enrages the justice-loving Matilda. So Miss Trunchbull's unfairness provides Matilda with the emotional ammunition she needs to tip over the glass, thereby embarrassing Miss Trunchbull—and getting back at the tyrannical headmistress for abusing students.

Later, when Matilda hears about how Miss Trunchbull has abused Miss Honey for years and is even now stealing Miss Honey's paycheck and living in the house that rightfully belongs to Miss Honey, Matilda can't let this injustice go. Instead, she channels her anger and her desire for justice until she's able to control her power enough to write with chalk on the blackboard. Matilda makes it seem like the ghost of Miss Honey's father—whom Miss Trunchbull may have murdered—is the person writing, telling Miss Trunchbull to leave Miss Honey alone and give the young woman back her house. When Matilda frightens Miss Trunchbull so badly that Miss Trunchbull leaves the school and the house, never to be seen again, it gets Miss Honey the justice she deserves.

Having saved Miss Honey from financial ruin and students and parents from Miss Trunchbull's tyranny, Matilda soon discovers that her power disappears. At this point, Miss Honey suggests that Matilda no longer has anything to fight against. She's in a class that challenges her, and she was able to get rid of Miss Trunchbull. Put simply, after having righted the wrongs in her world, Matilda no longer needs her power to fight back, as there's no longer anything to fight back against.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Puffin Books edition of *Matilda* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

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 adoration that 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.

Related Characters: Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood, Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's opening lines, the narrator introduces the idea that parents, on the whole, think more highly of their children than what's warranted. The narrator presents it as a strange but inarguable fact—it's just the way things are that parents are unable to see their children's faults. And it's also normal that when a parent happens to have a child who's a "disgusting little blister" or who is in no way a genius, the parent will likely not be able to see this about their child. Though the narrator goes on to say that it does sometimes make them want to vomit when parents talk about their kids like this, the narrator still presents a parent's unconditional positive regard for their child as a good thing.

This introduction is important because readers soon meet the Wormwoods, who hate Matilda and can't see that she's actually a genius. So by opening up the novel this way, the narrator tells readers how the world *should* be—and then goes on to show that it's not that way all the time. This also situates the Wormwoods as strange outliers and not normal—they are, per the narrator, some of the only parents on the planet who don't think their children are exceptional.

They had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as 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 Wormwood looked 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.

Related Characters: Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood, Michael "Mike" Wormwood, Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator is introducing Matilda's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood. This comes right on the heels of the narrator noting that, as a general rule, parents adore their children far more than their children deserve. But with the Wormwoods, the narrator shows people breaking that rule—and doing so in the extreme.

The narrator paints a picture of the Wormwoods as extremely neglectful of their children and as people who are unhappy in their roles as parents. Referring to Matilda as a "scab" evokes feelings of revulsion—as the narrator notes, scabs aren't something most people enjoy having. Rather, they're a necessary evil after a skin injury, and eventually it's a good thing when the injury is healed enough for the scab to fall off. So likening Matilda to a scab is like saying she's an injury, or an impediment, to her parents. Her mere presence is reminding them of something terrible, and the only remedy is for Matilda to grow up enough for her parents to "flick her away" and be done with her. All of this establishes Matilda's life with her parents as sad, and it gives the impression that she's being neglected. She's unwanted and doesn't have any support at home.

"My mother goes to Aylesbury every afternoon to play bingo," Matilda had said. "She doesn't know 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.

Mrs Phelps was concerned about the child's safety on the walk through the fairly busy village High Street and crossing the road, but she decided not to interfere.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Mrs. Phelps (speaker), Mrs. Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda, now four years old, has been visiting the local library for several weeks. The librarian, Mrs. Phelps, is concerned for Matilda's safety, since Matilda walks to the library on her own.

Mrs. Phelps goes into this conversation believing that, as the narrator noted in the novel's opening, parents should—and do—think highly of their children and care about them. It's inconceivable to Mrs. Phelps when Matilda shares that her parents aren't at all what, per the novel, they should be; rather, they don't care about her or where she goes. Mrs. Phelps recognizes that in some ways, this puts little Matilda in danger. What's supposed to happen if Matilda is injured or lost on her way to or from the library, especially since her parents have no idea that she's even leaving the house? It's unclear how much power Mrs. Phelps might have to influence the Wormwoods' treatment of Matilda, but by doing nothing, Mrs. Phelps doesn't do anything to remedy the neglect Matilda experiences at home.

Then, in explaining why her parents don't care about her, Matilda paints the Wormwoods as being against intellectualism, education, and reading. When she notes that her parents just want her to watch television—and places this in contrast to Matilda's desire to go to the library and read—it suggests that her parents wouldn't approve of her going to the library if they did know. So Mrs. Phelps is dealing with an interesting case here: the Wormwoods are not only neglectful of Matilda; they also don't want Matilda to be in the library in the first place. It's possible to see that Mrs. Phelps's unwillingness to intervene is, in a way, how she can keep helping Matilda read at the library, as it ensures that the Wormwoods won't ban Matilda from coming at all.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"How long will it run like that before it starts rattling again?" Matilda asked him.

"Long enough for the buyer to get a good distance away," the father said, grinning. "About a hundred miles."

"But that's dishonest, daddy," Matilda said. "It's cheating."

"No one ever got rich being honest," the father said. "Customers are there to be diddled."

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood (speaker), Michael "Mike" Wormwood, Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Wormwood is explaining to Michael that he gets old, beaten-up cars running again by putting sawdust and oil in the gear box; this gets them going long enough for buyers to purchase the cars and drive them away. Matilda is listening from across the room.

Matilda is right: what Mr. Wormwood is doing is extremely unethical. His customers believe they're buying used cars that are in good condition and will run for thousands of miles—and as he notes here, cars he sells will only run for about a hundred. Matilda is far more interested in ethics, fairness, and justice than her father is, which is why she takes offense at his business practices. To Matilda, what Mr. Wormwood is doing is terrible—and readers are meant to see Mr. Wormwood in the same light as Matilda does. Matilda doesn't have the power to do anything to change her father's behavior yet, but by voicing her displeasure with what he does, she at least makes things uncomfortable for him.

While this passage mostly establishes Matilda's firm sense of right, wrong, and justice, it also shows that Mr. Wormwood and Miss Trunchbull think similarly about success and how to achieve it. Both of them believe that it's perfectly fine to cheat people to get what they want. Mr. Wormwood cheats customers, and Miss Trunchbull manipulated, abused, and probably murdered Miss Honey's father in order to gain control of the Honeys' home and fortune. So this passage also establishes clearly who the villains in the novel are: those who believe cheating and lying to get ahead is perfectly okay.

❝ Mrs Wormwood sat munching her meal with her eyes glued to the American soap-opera on the screen. She was a large woman whose hair was dyed platinum blonde except where you could see the mousy-brown bits growing out from the roots. She wore heavy makeup and she had one of those unfortunate bulging figures where the flesh appears to be strapped in all around the body to prevent it from falling out.

Related Characters: Mrs. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

The conversation about how Mr. Wormwood cheats his customers comes to a halt as the Wormwoods focus on the television again, and the narrator describes Mrs. Wormwood. The way the narrator describes Mrs. Wormwood suggests that the woman is trying to embody a certain feminine ideal. She dyes her hair a more striking color, she uses heavy makeup to transform her appearance, and judging by the novel's illustrations, Mrs. Wormwood goes to great lengths to make her "bulging" appearance look fashionable by choosing revealing dresses. But the fact that Mrs. Wormwood achieves these ends with dye, makeup, and ill-fitting clothing suggests she's not doing a good job of actually achieving her goal. So her appearance mirrors her supposed success. While Mrs. Wormwood believes that she's secure and successful as a woman because her husband owns a successful used car business, in reality, the family is at risk of everything falling apart the minute Mr. Wormwood's illegal activity is found out. Mrs. Wormwood herself, and the Wormwoods as a whole, essentially put on a good show—but if one looks beneath, such as by noticing her "mousy-brown" roots or her normal face under her makeup, the narrator suggests it's possible to see that the success isn't real or trustworthy.

❝ The anger inside her went on boiling and boiling, and as she lay in bed that night she made a decision. She decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she would get her own back in some way or another. A small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocities and would stop her from going crazy. You must remember that she was still hardly five years old and it is not easy for somebody as small as that to score points against an all-powerful grown-up. Even so, she was determined to have a go.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

After learning how her father cheats customers at work and having him tell her that she's unintelligent, Matilda is furious and vows to get back at him.

The narrator acknowledges that Matilda has a tough road

ahead of her. She's just a small child who's barely five years old—so in many ways, particularly because of her size, she's powerless next to adults in her life. The narrator encapsulates this by describing the adults as "all-powerful." This creates the impression that Matilda is not only working from a disadvantage, but might not even be able to make a dent when her adversaries are so extremely powerful.

But the narrator also suggests that Matilda has a lot to gain by getting revenge on her father. Most importantly, getting revenge will help Matilda maintain her composure and not lose her mind in the face of her parents' cruelty and ridiculousness. At this point, at this age, Matilda has no other choice—there's no other way for her to blow off steam or punish her parents for their terrible behavior. So even though the narrator notes that Matilda's victories, if she scores any, will be small, the narrator still insists that this is a valid endeavor for her.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Mr Wormwood glared at Matilda. She hadn't moved. She had somehow trained herself by now to block her ears to the ghastly sound of the dreaded box. She kept right on reading, and for some reason this infuriated the father. Perhaps his anger was intensified because he saw her getting pleasure from something that was beyond his reach.

Related Characters: Mr. Wormwood, Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Wormwood comes home in a rage one night, he turns on the TV while Matilda is reading—and seeing her not react makes him even angrier.

Matilda's ability to read with the television going is a sign of her moral superiority. She's choosing books over easy visual entertainment, which the novel insists is superior to the television in every circumstance. And it's even more infuriating for Mr. Wormwood when he realizes that Matilda has learned to block out the television as she reads. This shows him that he's losing power over his daughter, as he can't actually *force* her to watch TV. Rather, she has the ability to disappear into her own world through a book. While this is infuriating for Mr. Wormwood in this situation, the novel more generally frames this as a good thing: reading gives Matilda a way to escape her parents' abuse and neglect.

The note that perhaps Mr. Wormwood is so angry because books are "beyond his reach" speaks to the idea that Mr. Wormwood is very anti-intellectual. Books, and reading for pleasure, aren't things he knows how to enjoy. Even if he wanted to connect with Matilda over books, he can't—their interests are too different, and the novel frames Matilda's interest in books as far superior to her father's interest in television. So part of Mr. Wormwood's anger comes from the fact that though he probably can't articulate it, Mr. Wormwood sees his daughter getting further away from him—and gaining power as she consumes novels, while he can't.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Being very small and very young, the only power Matilda had over anyone in her family was brain-power. For sheer cleverness she could run rings around them all. But the fact remained that any five-year-old girl in any family was always obliged to do as she was told, however asinine the orders might be. Thus she was always forced to eat her evening meals out of TV-dinner-trays in front of the dreaded box. She always had to stay alone on weekday afternoons, and whenever she was told to shut up, she had to shut up.

Her safety-valve, the thing that prevented her from going round the bend, was the fun of devising and dishing out these splendid punishments, and the lovely thing was that they seemed to work, at any rate for short periods.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda has, by this point, played several tricks on her parents, such as stuffing a parrot up the chimney to fool them into thinking there's a ghost in the house. But the narrator acknowledges that despite this, Matilda is still very powerless in her family.

The narrator suggests that Matilda's powerlessness is something that most, if not all, girls her age experience. While not all little girls have neglectful, evil parents like the Wormwoods, the narrator still presents it as fact that little girls can't always stand up for themselves—within the world of the novel, those children have to do as they're told. They have to eat whatever's served to them for dinner, no matter how disgusting it might be; and if their parents tell them to

be quiet, they have to comply. This, the narrator insists, is maddening—for all kids, but especially to Matilda since her parents are so neglectful.

The only recourse Matilda has, per the narrator, is playing these tricks on her parents. The tricks allow Matilda to show off her cleverness (if only to the reader and to herself), and best of all, the tricks do change her parents' behavior for a while. Matilda also shows that justice doesn't always have to come in the form of a lawsuit, or formally in a justice system. It can be cathartic and meaningful enough to, say, glue her father's hat to his head and cause him embarrassment. Matilda might not be doing anything harmful or permanent to her parents, but when faced with parents like hers—whom the novel suggests wholly deserve Matilda's tricks—it's not a bad thing at all to play the tricks on them and gain whatever satisfaction is possible.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"Matilda is a very lucky girl. She has wonderful parents who have already taught her to multiply lots of numbers. Was it your mother, Matilda, who taught you?"

"No, Miss Honey, it wasn't."

"You must have a great father then. He must be a brilliant teacher."

"No, Miss Honey," Matilda said quietly. "My father did not teach me."

Related Characters: Miss Honey, Matilda Wormwood (speaker), Mr. Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

On Matilda's first day of school, her teacher, Miss Honey, quickly ascertains that Matilda is skilled at math when Matilda confidently rattles off her two-times tables.

Miss Honey goes into this exchange believing that Matilda's parents must be supportive if she's already so skilled. This, the narrator noted earlier in the novel, is a normal and expected outlook—and under any other circumstances, Miss Honey would probably be right to suspect that Matilda's parents taught her to multiply. This continues to drive home just how unfortunate and unique Matilda's situation is. That her parents neglect her and don't care about her education isn't normal, per the logic of the novel. The quiet voice Matilda uses to respond to Miss Honey highlights this—it's possible to read her quietness as shame, sadness, or disappointment about her home situation. Matilda also doesn't come right out and say that her parents don't care about her at all, which would no doubt make an awkward situation even more awkward. But as awkward as this is for everyone, it shows Miss Honey that Matilda needs support—and it motivates Miss Honey to step up and attempt to advocate for Matilda going forward, first with Miss Trunchbull and then with Matilda's parents directly.

Chapter 8 Quotes

Now most head teachers are chosen because they possess a number of fine qualities. They understand children and they have the children's best interests at heart. They are sympathetic. They are fair and they are deeply interested in education. Miss Trunchbull possessed none of these qualities and how she got her present job was a mystery.

Related Characters: Miss Trunchbull, Miss Honey, Mr. Wormwood, Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator introduces Matilda's headmistress, Miss Trunchbull, by explaining that she's nothing like what a headmistress should be. Instead, she's the exact opposite.

Miss Trunchbull's obvious unsuitability for her job is, on the surface, humorous. The narrator goes into this believing that most readers would agree with them about how head teachers should behave. It's commonly accepted, the narrator proposes, that head teachers *want* to be working with children and are interested in preparing those children for adulthood. So it comes as a shock that Miss Trunchbull is so obviously unsuited for the job. In this way, the framing mirrors how the narrator introduced typical parents and then compared them to Matilda's parents at the beginning of the novel. The narrator notes that parents should be loving and think highly of their children—but in this one situation, the opposite is true.

While the novel never goes into how exactly Miss Trunchbull got her job, it does imply that part of it was her willingness to cheat, lie, and hurt people to get what she wants. This is, for instance, how she wound up currently living in the Honeys' family house and stealing Miss Honey's paycheck: she cheated and possibly murdered Miss Honey's

father to get ahead. This total disregard for ethics (and children) aligns her with Matilda's father, Mr. Wormwood, and establishes her as a villain for Matilda to fight against. Matilda is interested most in justice—and Miss Trunchbull goes out of her way to make sure that nobody around her gets justice.

❝ "I have discovered, Miss Honey, during my long career as a teacher that a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy. What's more, they're much harder to squash. Squashing a bad girl is like trying to squash a bluebottle. You bang down on it and the darn thing isn't there. Nasty little things, little girls are."

Related Characters: Miss Trunchbull (speaker), Miss Honey, Matilda Wormwood, Hortensia, Amanda Thripp

Page Number: 85-86

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Honey has approached Miss Trunchbull about getting Matilda moved up to a higher class, since Matilda is so brilliant. Miss Trunchbull refuses and insists that Matilda must be terrible.

Keep in mind that Miss Trunchbull is effectively the most powerful person at Crunchem Hall Primary School. The staff and students are terrified of her, and Miss Honey goes on to warn her students to never go out of their ways to cross Miss Trunchbull—the results won't be pretty. So it's interesting that Miss Trunchbull essentially frames little girls as dangerously powerful, and impossible to shut down. Something in the little girls at Crunchem Hall frightens Miss Trunchbull, and at this point, it's unclear exactly what that is.

Given what's revealed and what happens later in the novel, though, it's possible to infer that what Miss Trunchbull resents in little girls is their willingness to torment her and play tricks on her. Hortensia, for instance, later shares with Matilda stories of the times she's tricked Miss Trunchbull and caused her embarrassment or pain—and continues to do so, despite being punished severely for it. And for her part, Matilda is a crafty little girl who's played several tricks on her parents and not gotten caught. So Miss Trunchbull may just be taking issue with the fact that, at least in terms of what the narrator shares with the readers about this fictional world, it tends to be the girls who play tricks on unsuspecting (but deserving) adults.

In this passage more generally, Miss Trunchbull also articulates some of her internalized misogyny. Later, the novel reveals that she hates pigtails and braids on girls, which are styles associated with femininity and girlhood. For whatever reason, Miss Trunchbull resents anything that reads as youthful and feminine—which seems to be why she targets characters like Matilda, Miss Honey, and Amanda Thripp (whom Miss Trunchbull throws by her braids).

9 Quotes

❝ She was deciding that she would go herself and have a secret talk with Matilda's mother and father as soon as possible. She simply refused to let the matter rest where it was. The whole thing was ridiculous. She couldn't believe that the parents were totally unaware of their daughter's remarkable talents. After all, Mr Wormwood was a successful motor-car dealer so she presumed that he was a fairly intelligent man himself. In any event, parents never *underestimated* the abilities of their own children. Quite the reverse.

Related Characters: Miss Honey, Matilda Wormwood, Mrs. Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

After Miss Trunchbull denies Miss Honey's request to move Matilda up, Miss Honey decides to speak with the Wormwoods to make sure Matilda gets the support she needs at school.

Once again, Miss Honey goes into this believing that parents always think more highly of their children than perhaps they should. In her experience as a teacher, parents pretty much always think their kids are smarter than the kids actually are, so Miss Honey reasons that there must be a misunderstanding with the Wormwoods. She believes they must be intelligent people, and able to see that their daughter is just as intelligent as they are —and probably *more* intelligent.

Then, what Miss Honey has to say about Mr. Wormwood's car business shows that at this point, Mr. Wormwood's reputation in town is still intact. He's still thought of as a savvy businessman who's doing well for himself selling quality used cars—even though readers know that Mr. Wormwood is actually cheating his buyers and selling them cars that will inevitably fall apart within a few weeks of purchase. This creates tension and starts to foreshadow Mr. Wormwood's eventual fall from grace at the end of the novel—it's impossible, the novel suggests, for him to keep up

this ruse forever. Eventually, he'll have to answer for his crimes.

"A girl should think about making herself look attractive so she can get a good husband later on. Looks is more important than books, Miss Hunky..."

"The name is Honey," Miss Honey said.

"Now look at *me*," Mrs Wormwood said. "Then look at *you*. You chose books. I chose looks."

Miss Honey looked at the plain plump person with the smug suet-pudding face who was sitting across the room. "What did you say?" she asked.

"I said you chose books and I chose looks," Mrs Wormwood said. "And who's finished up the better off? Me, of course. I'm sitting pretty in a nice house with a successful businessman and you're left slaving away teaching a lot of nasty little children the ABC."

Related Characters: Mrs. Wormwood, Miss Honey (speaker), Mr. Wormwood, Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Honey is trying to speak with the Wormwoods about Matilda's education, but Mrs. Wormwood explains here that she has no interest in supporting her daughter's education—that won't help her get married.

Through this, Mrs. Wormwood shows that she believes women achieve success by attending to their appearances, which, by her logic, will help them get married to a man who will be able to support them. Books and education, she believes, have nothing to do with this success—a woman's currency is her appearance, not whether she can read or do math.

Once again, the narrator implies through the language they use to describe Mrs. Wormwood that she's not actually all that attractive. Saying she's a "plain plump person" with a "smug suet-pudding face" suggests that Mrs. Wormwood is unattractively overweight, and no amount of makeup or money is going to change that fact. Readers, for that matter, are aware that Mr. Wormwood's used car business is unethical and will probably collapse at some point, suggesting that Mrs. Wormwood's supposed success isn't actually all that stable. Indeed, her comfort and success is dependent on her husband not getting caught—something that the novel has already alluded will happen at some point in the future.

And while Mrs. Wormwood is very on the nose in characterizing Miss Honey as "slaving away" in a classroom (Miss Honey later tells Matilda that she's like a "slave" to her aunt, Miss Trunchbull, and is working for a fraction of her paycheck), she also misses the fact that Miss Honey's particular situation aside, Miss Honey is earning her own money. And she's earning it honestly and legally, which means there's a whole lot more that Miss Honey can do with her money than Mrs. Wormwood can. So though Mrs. Wormwood insists that she's better off than Miss Honey is, the novel ultimately shows that Mrs. Wormwood is wrong about this. Looks aside, the novel proposes that women are better off when they honestly earn their paychecks and can do what they need or want to do with the money they earn.

Chapter 10 Quotes

Both Matilda and Lavender were enthralled. It was quite clear to them that they were at this moment standing in the presence of a master. Here was somebody who had brought the art of skullduggery to the highest point of perfection, somebody, moreover, who was willing to risk life and limb in pursuit of her calling.

Related Characters: Hortensia, Matilda Wormwood, Lavender, Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

Hortensia has just awed Matilda and Lavender with stories of tricking Miss Trunchbull and ending up in the Chokey as punishment. Hortensia's stories earn her power in a couple different ways. First, Hortensia gains power over Miss Trunchbull by tormenting her. Putting itching powder in her knickers, or Golden Syrup on her chair, doesn't do anything in the long run. But it does give Hortensia the satisfaction of annoying the tyrannical headmistress, whom the novel suggests fully deserves having these pranks played on her. Then, Hortensia also gains social power as she tells these stories to younger kids on the playground. It's known among the student body that Miss Trunchbull is formidable and not one to mess with, so Hortensia looks cool, powerful, and admirable to younger kids who wish they could perform such tricks on the headmistress. Earning the younger girls' admiration also ultimately inspires Lavender to play a trick of her own on Miss Trunchbull: putting a newt in Miss

Trunchbull's water jug. So telling these stories also helps Hortensia further the students' cause of tormenting Miss Trunchbull. If it's framed as an admirable thing to play tricks on the headmistress, kids will continue to try to do just that—and Miss Trunchbull will continue to feel like the kids at school are out to get her, because in a way, they are.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"He simply wouldn't believe you."

"Of course he would."

"He wouldn't," Matilda said. "And the reason is obvious. Your story would sound too ridiculous to be believed. And that is the Trunchbull's great secret."

"What is?" Lavender asked.

Matilda said, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable. No parent is going to believe this pigtail story, not in a million years. Mine wouldn't. They'd call me a liar."

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Lavender (speaker), Miss Trunchbull, Amanda Thripp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda and Lavender have just witnessed Miss Trunchbull throwing Amanda Thripp into the playing field by her braids. Lavender is insisting that were she to tell her father about this, he'd believe her.

Matilda suggests that Lavender's wholehearted belief in her father is somewhat misguided. Even parents like Lavender's will hear a story like this from their daughter and think that she's making things up. What headmistress, Matilda points out, actually throws kids by their braids? Miss Trunchbull clearly does—the girls have seen it happen—but she realizes that this is so ridiculous that most parents wouldn't believe it unless they saw it firsthand. And Miss Trunchbull seems to carefully choose when to torment kids so their parents don't see. In this way, Miss Trunchbull holds onto her power, while continuing to do things like throw kids by their braids that make her students seem like ridiculous liars when they do speak up.

This creates a situation where even supportive, loving parents like Lavender's can't protect their children. If Lavender's parents think she's telling stories, they won't step in to protect her—in their minds, there won't be anything to protect Lavender against. So it's not just kids like Matilda, whose parents are neglectful, who can suffer when powerful and cruel adults like Miss Trunchbull are in charge.

Chapter 12 Quotes

Already Lavender's scheming mind was going over the possibilities that this water-jug job had opened up for her. She longed to do something truly heroic. She admired the older girl Hortensia to distraction for the daring deeds she had performed in the school. She also admired Matilda who had sworn her to secrecy about the parrot job she had brought off at home, and also the great hair-oil switch which had bleached her father's hair. It was *her* turn now to become a heroine if only she could come up with a brilliant plot.

Related Characters: Lavender, Hortensia, Matilda Wormwood, Miss Trunchbull, Mr. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

Lavender has just volunteered to prepare the water jug and glass of water for Miss Trunchbull—and she wants to use this opportunity to play a trick on the headmistress.

This passage shows what an effect Hortensia in particular has had on the younger students at Crunchem Hall. Saying that Lavender admires Hortensia "to distraction" because of Hortensia's exploits shows that Hortensia has done a fantastic job of making tormenting Miss Trunchbull seem like a good, just, and even heroic thing to do. It's how kids at school gain social currency, and it's also how they fight back against Miss Trunchbull's evil. Lavender wants to be a part of this movement and do her part to annoy Miss Trunchbull and give the kids at school any taste of power she possibly can.

Matilda, on the other hand, shows Lavender that one doesn't need to be Hortensia's age (10) in order to play tricks that make an impact. If a little girl is crafty enough, it's more than possible for them to wreak havoc, just as Matilda did in her own home. So while Hortensia spurs Lavender to action, Matilda essentially shows Lavender that Lavender can be successful despite her youth and her size.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"How perfectly ridiculous!" snorted the Trunchbull. "Why are all these women married? And anyway you're not meant to teach poetry when you're teaching spelling. Cut it out in future, Miss Honey."

"But it does teach them some of the harder words wonderfully well," Miss Honey murmured.

"Don't argue with me, Miss Honey!" The Headmistress thundered. "Just do as you're told!"

Related Characters: Miss Trunchbull, Miss Honey (speaker), Nigel, Mrs. Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Nigel has just shared the song with Miss Trunchbull that Miss Honey used to teach her students to spell "difficulty." In the song, each letter or letter group of the word is a married woman (so, Mrs. D, Mrs. I, and so on).

Referring to Miss Honey's habit of using song to teach hard words as "ridiculous" shows just how out of touch Miss Trunchbull is with teaching theory. Songs are easier for lots of people to memorize, and songs exist to help people learn all sorts of things—from the alphabet, to U.S. presidents, to the elements of the periodic table. So Miss Trunchbull is rejecting an established method of teaching information as "ridiculous." This shows that it doesn't matter to her whether students in her care learn or not—she wants them to "do as [they're] told," just as she commands Miss Honey to do. Put another way, she wants to create obedient kids at Crunchem Hall, not kids who know how to think and question what they see and hear around them.

It's also interesting that Miss Trunchbull specifically takes issue with the fact that the characters in Miss Honey's song are married. This shows how Miss Honey and Mrs. Wormwood's ideas of female success differ. While both would probably agree that education isn't the path to success, and would also agree that cheating and unethical behavior are valid ways to get ahead, Miss Trunchbull wouldn't agree with Mrs. Wormwood's insistence that a woman finds success through marriage. The novel ultimately discredits both women's versions of female success and instead supports women becoming educated and earning their own money, but this passage illustrates how the two older women differ.

Chapter 14 Quotes

Matilda, in the second row, sat very still and said nothing. A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world. With the power of her eyes alone she had compelled a glass of water to tip and spill its contents over the horrible Headmistress, and anybody who could do that could do anything.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda has just tapped into her power to move objects with her eyes for the first time, tipping a glass of water containing a newt onto Miss Trunchbull's bust.

This is a transformative experience for Matilda. Despite being a tiny, unassuming child (if also a child genius), Matilda has somehow developed the ability to move things around her. This gives her all sorts of opportunities to play tricks and wreak havoc without outing herself and getting in trouble, as she did moments ago when she dumped the glass onto Miss Trunchbull. This, of course, couldn't happen in the real world—in the real world, a little girl in Matilda's situation would still be just as powerless as she was moments ago. But within the world of the novel, recognizing injustice, and wanting to do something about it, is enough to give Matilda this mysterious power.

And the novel shows that simply knowing one has power is enough to make things seem way better than they were a moment ago. A moment ago, Matilda felt totally out of control. Miss Trunchbull had accused Matilda of lying to her about having read a novel by Charles Dickens, and Matilda had no good way to prove Miss Trunchbull wrong. Now, though, not being able to prove Miss Trunchbull wrong doesn't matter, because Matilda knows she can do anything she wants.

Chapter 15 Quotes

What she needed was just one person, one wise and sympathetic grown-up who could help her to understand the meaning of this extraordinary happening.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Miss Honey,

Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

Matilda spilled a glass of water on Miss Trunchbull using her mysterious power. Now, she knows she has to talk to someone about it—and that someone is Miss Honey.

The fact that Matilda turns to Miss Honey shows that despite her neglectful home situation, Matilda realizes she needs an adult to care for her. And through her attempts to nurture Matilda's talents and further her education, Miss Honey has showed Matilda that she cares about her and wants Matilda to succeed. Because of this, she's created a relationship with Matilda where Matilda feels comfortable asking Miss Honey for help when she encounters this mysterious power, which Matilda needs help making sense of.

More broadly, this speaks to the fact that education and institutions can help bright kids like Matilda get the help and support they need to thrive and feel safe. Matilda doesn't feel safe and supported at home. But at school, Matilda has found an ally in Miss Honey, just as the librarian Mrs. Phelps helped Matilda when Matilda was younger.

Chapter 16 Quotes

"I myself," Miss Honey said, "am probably far more bowled over by what you did than you are, and I am trying to find some reasonable explanation."

"Such as what?" Matilda asked.

"Such as whether or not it's got something to do with the fact that you are quite exceptionally precocious."

"What exactly does that word mean?" Matilda said.

"A precocious child," Miss Honey said, "is one that shows amazing intelligence early on. You are an unbelievably precocious child."

Related Characters: Miss Honey, Matilda Wormwood (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Honey has invited Matilda to her cottage so they can have tea and discuss Matilda's power. More than anything, this passage highlights how young, innocent, and naïve Matilda is. Because she's so intelligent, it's hard to remember that she is only five—she's just a little girl. And that youth shines through here, when she needs Miss Honey to define "precocious" for her. Asking Miss Honey to define the word also highlights that while Matilda *is* no doubt precocious and a genius, she isn't at all aware of it. If she had any idea how unusually intelligent she is, Matilda would likely know the meaning of the word.

Matilda's willingness to ask Miss Honey these questions also shows how badly Matilda craves a trustworthy, kind adult figure in her life. Her parents never react like this when Matilda asks them questions; they brush her off. Matilda wants to be around adults who take her seriously and are willing to answer her questions honestly and openly. And she finds that person in Miss Honey, which foreshadows Matilda's eventual move to live with Miss Honey when her parents leave the country.

Chapter 17 Quotes

"I think what I am trying to explain to you," she said, "is that over the years I became so completely cowed and dominated by this monster of an aunt that when she gave me an order, no matter what it was, I obeyed it instantly. That can happen, you know. And by the time I was ten, I had become her slave. I did all the housework. I made her bed. I washed and ironed for her. I did all the cooking. I learned how to do everything."

"But surely you could've complained to *somebody*?" Matilda asked.

"To whom?" Miss Honey said. "And anyway, I was far too terrified to complain."

Related Characters: Miss Honey, Matilda Wormwood (speaker), Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Honey is telling Matilda about her childhood and being raised by her overbearing aunt (who, unbeknownst to readers and Matilda at this point, is Miss Trunchbull). In

explaining how she became so "cowed and dominated," Miss Honey illustrates what the novel suggests are the consequences of recognizing injustice and doing nothing about it. It is, of course, impossible to say what Miss Honey should've done, given her circumstances—especially when she implies that she had no one to ask for help. But comparing her to Matilda suggests that Miss Honey's choice to do nothing, even if it wasn't much of a choice, is inferior to Matilda's choice to speak out and punish the evil adults in whatever way she can.

Though Matilda finds it hard to believe that Miss Honey didn't have anyone to talk to, she also articulated earlier in the novel how Miss Trunchbull gains power: by doing things so ridiculous that nobody will believe her victims. This is certainly at least part of the reason why Miss Honey couldn't ask for help. It's possible Matilda misses this because at this point, she doesn't know Miss Honey's aunt is Miss Trunchbull. And Miss Trunchbull's evil is hard enough to fathom once; it's hard to imagine two such women exist who torment kids for their own gain and pleasure.

"You shouldn't have done that," Matilda said. "Your salary was your chance of freedom."

"I know, I know," Miss Honey said. "But by then I had been her slave nearly all my life and I hadn't the courage or the guts to say no. I was still petrified of her. She could still hurt me badly."

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Miss Honey (speaker), Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Honey is telling Matilda how, when she got her teaching job, her aunt forced her to sign paperwork that allowed for Miss Honey's paycheck to be deposited into the aunt's bank account (Miss Honey's aunt is Miss Trunchbull, but she hasn't revealed this yet).

Matilda realizes instantly that this was a mistake: there's power in having control of one's own paycheck. But the fact that she doesn't control her own money explains why Miss Honey is living in poverty in a farm laborer's cottage and relying on the lunch served at school to get enough to eat. With this, the novel starts to reveal what it suggests is an ideal situation for an adult woman. Women, the novel proposes, will be most secure when they work honestly for their money and then have control of their paychecks. The fact that Matilda is the one to bring this up shows that she endorses this view; this is the kind of life she'd want for herself one day.

But for Miss Honey, this now seems out of reach. In many ways, Miss Honey is still living like a child under her aunt's thumb: she's independent enough to rent her own house, but the house is so small that it's almost like Miss Honey is playing house, like a child might, with a house that's not really much bigger than a dollhouse. Without control of her paycheck, Miss Honey can't do anything to improve her situation—and knowing that her aunt is Miss Trunchbull explains why Miss Honey doesn't feel safe advocating for herself. She's been abused for years, and Matilda has seen Miss Trunchbull throw kids by the hair for the supposed crime of wearing that hair in braids. Miss Trunchbull is effectively denying Miss Honey real, independent adulthood by controlling her paychecks.

Chapter 20 Quotes

"I wish I was grown up," Nigel said. "I'd knock her flat."

Related Characters: Nigel (speaker), Miss Trunchbull

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Soon before Miss Trunchbull arrives to take over Miss Honey's class, Miss Honey warns the children to behave—and Nigel wishes he could effectively fight back against Miss Trunchbull. With this, Nigel gets at a feeling that the novel suggests is universal among kids. It's normal for children to feel like they have no power over the adults around them—and indeed, to feel like adults are all-powerful and able to get whatever they want. The only remedy, Nigel suggests, is to grow up. Doing so will give him the physical strength and power to take Miss Trunchbull (and other adult bullies) on with physical strength, which is what he alludes to when he says he'd like to "knock her flat."

Of course, within the world of the novel, Matilda develops a supernatural power that ultimately lets her get the better of Miss Trunchbull. But this isn't something that can happen in the real world. So for younger readers who feel like Nigel, or can at least empathize with him, *Matilda* is a satisfying upset to the normal power structure. To older readers, though, Nigel's words are a warning that one day, small kids who feel like they're being taken advantage of will grow up—and to avoid being "knock[ed] flat," it's a better idea to respect

those kids while they're still small.

Chapter 21 Quotes

"While you were in my class you had nothing to do, nothing to make you struggle. Your fairly enormous brain was going crazy with frustration. It was bubbling and boiling away like mad inside your head. There was tremendous energy bottled up in there with nowhere to go, and somehow or other you were able to shoot that energy out through your eyes and make objects move. But now things are different. You are in the top form competing against children more than twice your age and all that mental energy is being used up in class. Your brain is for the first time having to struggle and strive and keep really busy, which is great."

Related Characters: Miss Honey (speaker), Matilda Wormwood

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 129-130

Explanation and Analysis

Several weeks after Matilda uses her power to banish Miss Trunchbull, she discovers her power is gone. Miss Honey is telling Matilda her theory as to why this happened.

Miss Honey essentially makes the case that Matilda is so smart that before, when she wasn't supported or challenged in school, her brain got so frustrated at the injustice of it all that it developed the supernatural power to change things. If Miss Honey is right—which she acknowledges at various points she might not be—then this speaks to just how focused Matilda is, and was, on getting justice and getting an education. Her desire to help not just herself, but the other students at school and Miss Honey, morphed into this strange power that allowed Matilda to do just that.

Now that Matilda has fixed her world's problems, though, she doesn't need this special power anymore. Her teachers at school all support her, and Miss Honey has become a friend and a trusted adult in Matilda's life. Miss Trunchbull is gone, and for the most part, Matilda's parents have faded into the background. (At the very least, Matilda doesn't seem to chafe under their neglect anymore, thanks to the support she gets at school.) Essentially, there's nothing to fix—so there's no need for Matilda's power to stick around.

Matilda leapt into Miss Honey's arms and hugged her, and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave through the rear window, but the other two didn't even look back.

Related Characters: Matilda Wormwood, Miss Honey, Mrs. Wormwood, Mr. Wormwood, Michael "Mike" Wormwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

The Wormwoods are moving to Spain immediately, and Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood have just agreed to let Matilda stay in England with Miss Honey.

First, the Wormwoods are moving because Mr. Wormwood's unethical car business was probably discovered by authorities. This shows that Mrs. Wormwood's insistence that she was safe and secure with a successful businessman as a husband was misguided. Her safety and security was always questionably reliable, as the novel made it clear on multiple occasions that Mr. Wormwood was at risk of being found out.

Then, it's worth considering what's happening physically in this passage. As soon as she gets the okay from her parents, Matilda leaps into Miss Honey's arms and gives her teacher a hug. Miss Honey responds. This intimate action shows how much Matilda loves and trusts her teacher—especially since throughout the novel, there's been no indication that Matilda has ever enjoyed this kind of physical intimacy with her parents. And the Wormwoods don't even look back at their daughter, which only highlights how little they care about her. The novel offers some hope that Mike isn't as bad as he might seem at first, since he looks back at his sister and waves as he leaves. All of this gives the impression that Matilda is finally getting not just what she wants, but what she needs. It doesn't matter that Miss Honey isn't Matilda's biological mother. What matters is that Miss Honey loves Matilda, cares for her, and is willing to support her. This, the novel suggests, is what makes a family, not necessarily blood.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1. THE READER OF BOOKS

Parents have a funny habit: no matter how terrible their child is, parents inevitably think their child is wonderful. Some parents take this way too far and (wrongly) believe their child is a genius. This is all pretty normal—though it does make the narrator vomit when parents try to talk about their children. According to the narrator, teachers deal with this the most. If the narrator were a teacher, they'd write "scorch[ing]" end-of-term reports for the proud parents. They'd write things like hopefully Maximilian can go into the family business, since nobody else will hire him. Or they'd write that Wilfred is like a cicada—and they're *still* waiting for him to come out of his chrysalis.

Though the narrator finds it sickening when parents think highly of their children (when the children don't deserve it), the narrator also presents this as just the way things are. It's normal, expected, and possibly even a good thing (if only because it gives the narrator the chance to come up with these humorous "scorchers"). Starting the novel this way gives readers a sense of how, per the narrator, things are and should be—so that the narrator can go on to upset these expectations.

But it's time to get on with the story. On occasion, parents take the opposite tack and show no interest in their children. Mr. Wormwood and his wife, Mrs. Wormwood, are like this. They have an older son, Michael, and a little daughter, Matilda. They hate Matilda in particular and are just waiting for the day when she's old enough to send far away. And while it's always bad when parents treat kids like this, it's even worse when the child in question—like Matilda—is so brilliant. Matilda's brilliance should be obvious to anyone, but the Wormwoods are too self-involved to notice. They might not even notice if Matilda broke her leg.

Unlike the parents that the narrator described previously, the Wormwoods seem downright neglectful to their children, Matilda in particular. When the narrator says that it's especially bad when parents neglect their brilliant kids, this implies that parents are, in theory, an important force in helping those brilliant kids succeed. In Matilda's case, though, it's not just that her parents seem indifferent to her intelligence. They may, through their neglect, actually put her in danger.


Now Michael is pretty normal. But Matilda is exceptional. By 18 months, she could speak perfectly, like a grown-up. But her parents accused her of being "a noisy chatterbox" and insisted that girls should be seen, not heard. By age three, Matilda knew how to read after teaching herself with newspapers and magazines. At age four, Matilda decided she'd like to read books. She read Mrs. Wormwood's copy of *Easy Cooking*, and when she memorized all the recipes, she asked Mr. Wormwood to buy her a book. Mr. Wormwood refused, saying the television is good enough, and that Matilda must be spoiled if she's asking for a book.

Matilda's parents dislike her for several reasons. First, they have very specific ideas about how women and girls should behave—and being smart and talkative is not in line with their expectations. Then, more broadly, they also don't value education. The fact that there are newspapers, magazines, and at least one cookbook in the Wormwood home suggests that the Wormwoods value the written word for purely practical purposes. But getting enjoyment out of a book is, per Mr. Wormwood, inappropriate.



Matilda spends every afternoon alone while Michael is at school, Mr. Wormwood is at work, and Mrs. Wormwood plays bingo. On the day that Mr. Wormwood refuses to buy Matilda a book, Matilda walks alone to the little library in her village. There, she introduces herself to Mrs. Phelps, the librarian, and asks to sit with a book. Though Mrs. Phelps is shocked to see such a little girl all alone, she tells Matilda she's welcome and points her to the children's books. Matilda then starts spending every afternoon at the library. Soon, she's read every children's book in the library.

It seems like Matilda's parents neglect her in every way. They're not around to make sure she stays out of trouble in the afternoons—and there's no indication they'd even care if she did get in trouble. But Matilda discovers that she can find care elsewhere. And the library doesn't just give Matilda Mrs. Phelps (who seems to care more for Matilda than the Wormwoods do), it also gives her access to the books—and education—she craves.

Mrs. Phelps has been watching Matilda for weeks. Now, as she sees Matilda perusing the shelves, she offers to help Matilda. Matilda says she doesn't know what to read next, since she's read—and actually read, not just looked at the pictures—all the children's books. She enjoyed *The Secret Garden* the most. Mrs. Phelps is stunned, especially when Matilda admits she's only four years and three months old. Hiding her shock, she considers Matilda's request for a "famous," "grown-up" book. Passing by the romances for teenagers, Mrs. Phelps offers Matilda *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens.

Matilda isn't at all self-conscious about her precociousness. She doesn't seem to realize that it's unusual for a four-year-old to be able to read The Secret Garden, *let alone the entire children's section of the library. Mrs. Phelps realizes that the best way to help Matilda is to not draw attention to the fact that Matilda is an oddity. Rather, it's more helpful to give Matilda something that will definitely challenge her. The worst case scenario is that Matilda discovers her limits and asks for something easier.*

Though Mrs. Phelps figures this is ridiculous, she spends the next week watching Matilda rest the heavy book in her lap and read it. Mrs. Phelps is concerned for Matilda's safety walking to and from the library, as Matilda has already shared that Mrs. Wormwood doesn't care what she does and hates books.

Again, though Mrs. Phelps doesn't do anything to help Matilda deal with the neglect at home, she does express concern—and gives Matilda a safe place to spend her afternoons. Matilda is learning to read, but she's also learning that there are adults outside of her home who will help and support her.

Finally, Matilda finishes the book and announces she loved *Great Expectations*—did Mr. Dickens write other books? With Mrs. Phelps's help, Matilda works through many classics, such as *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling, and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. Mrs. Phelps is excited by Matilda's obvious genius, but she knows it never goes well to get involved with other people's kids.

Matilda's intelligence is clear as she works through classic novels that can be challenging for adults. Mrs. Phelps believes that the best way to help Matilda is to keep giving her these books. Next to a parent, who has legal rights to decide what their child does, she's powerless. So all she feels she can do is encourage Matilda to keep reading.

Matilda especially loves Hemingway, though she admits she doesn't understand everything he says. Mrs. Phelps assures her that's okay and shares that libraries allow people to borrow books to take home. Matilda then begins visiting the library only weekly and spending her afternoons reading in her bedroom with a mug of hot chocolate. As she reads, she travels all over the world.

In passages like these, Matilda's youth shines through—she doesn't have the life experience, or the maturity, to understand what some of the more sophisticated titles she's reading are all about. But with Mrs. Phelps's guidance, Matilda still finds books enjoyable. Even when she takes them home, they help her cope with her parents' neglect.

CHAPTER 2. MR. WORMWOOD, THE GREAT CAR DEALER

Because Mr. Wormwood is a successful used car salesman, the Wormwoods live in a nice, big home. One evening, he announces that the key to success is sawdust—and it's free. When Matilda expresses interest in the subject, he calls her "an ignorant little twit." But Matilda is used to the abuse and knows that if she flatters him—such as by saying he must be clever to find a use for sawdust—he'll explain it to her. Sure enough, Mr. Wormwood turns to Mike and says he loves buying old, beat-up cars. Even if the gears are shot, if he mixes oil with sawdust and puts it in the gearbox, the car runs great for 100 miles or so. Matilda interjects that this is dishonest, but Mr. Wormwood says you don't get rich being honest.

Mr. Wormwood may be successful, but from the looks of things, Matilda is right—he's very dishonest. To some degree, this jeopardizes his success, because his reputation will at some point suffer due to how he's tricking people. It's interesting, though, that Matilda seems to be the only one in the Wormwood household who sees her father's dishonesty as something bad. Mike is conspicuously silent, which makes it seem like he supports what his father is doing.

Mr. Wormwood then says that everyone wants to know how many miles a used car has on it. Nobody wants an old car with 150,000 miles on it, and it's not possible anymore to mess with the speedometer. So he uses his brains instead. He explains that he could run the car backwards, but nobody wants to drive backward for thousands of miles. So instead, he hooks the speedometer cable up to a drill and runs the drill backwards—in no time, speedometers read only 10,000 miles. He tells everyone that his cars used to belong to old ladies who seldom drove.

Mr. Wormwood might be adept at coming up with ways to make old cars look newer and more desirable, but again, this seriously jeopardizes his reputation. By extension, this means his success—and the family's financial security—is tenuous, as it seems like only a matter of time before someone figures out what he's doing and spreads the word.

Matilda pipes up that that's dishonest; Mr. Wormwood is cheating people and she hates his "dirty money." Turning red, Mr. Wormwood scolds his daughter and calls her ignorant. Mrs. Wormwood agrees with her husband and tells Matilda to be quiet so she can watch her TV show. The family is eating their TV dinners in front of the TV, which they always do. Mrs. Wormwood is engrossed in the TV. She's a big woman with dyed platinum blond hair, heavy makeup, and a bulging figure. Matilda asks to eat in the dining room so she can read her book, but Mr. Wormwood tells her no.

Though Matilda clearly resents that her father is being dishonest, as a small child, she doesn't have much power to fight back. She has to sit down, be quiet, and eat her meal wherever she's told to eat it because in her world, the adults around her have total control. The narrator's description of Mrs. Wormwood gives the impression that she's trying to be beautiful and classically feminine—but the fact that her hair is dyed and her figure is "bulging" suggests that she's failing at this.

Matilda's anger boils inside her. She hates her parents, though she knows it's wrong to feel this way. Since she started reading, she's developed a moral compass. If only her parents would read, they'd stop cheating people and watching TV. Matilda also resents being called "stupid" when she isn't. So that night, in bed, she vows to get revenge every time they're mean to her. Matilda isn't quite five yet, so going up against grown-ups will be a challenge—but she's determined.

Here, the novel links reading and becoming educated with morality. Matilda is morally superior to her parents because, unlike them, she reads and is trying to better herself. (She also knows right from wrong and can recognize that what Mr. Wormwood is doing is very unethical.) And the novel also implies that her braininess is going to give her the tools she needs to best the adults, despite her size.

CHAPTER 3. THE HAT AND THE SUPERGLUE

The next morning, before Mr. Wormwood leaves for work, Matilda sneaks into the cloakroom and, using a walking stick, gets her father's hat off its hook. She carefully squeezes Superglue around the hat's rim and then puts it back on the rack. When Mr. Wormwood puts the hat on moments later, he doesn't notice anything—but when he gets to work, he discovers his hat is stuck on his head. And Superglue is strong stuff; it'll take his scalp off if he pulls too hard. So he tries to look like he's keeping his hat on deliberately.

Matilda has to be crafty as she goes about embarrassing her father—and ultimately, she's successful. By successfully gluing his hat to his head, Matilda achieves some degree of power over him. Note that this power isn't permanent; there's no indication he knows who's responsible, and it probably won't make him change his ways. But at the very least, it will give Matilda—and readers—a chuckle.

When Mr. Wormwood gets home and admits he can't get his hat off, Mrs. Wormwood tries to yank it off. Mr. Wormwood shrieks and Matilda, nestled in a chair with a book, watches. She innocently asks if her father's head is swollen. Though Mr. Wormwood suspects his daughter, he knows he has no reason to. Mrs. Wormwood sighs that Mr. Wormwood needs to be careful with the Superglue and not try to glue feathers in his hat while he's wearing it. Mr. Wormwood shouts at her, incensed at the implication that he *meant* to glue his hat to his head.

Despite his faults, Mr. Wormwood knows it'd be going too far to blame Matilda for something he believes she couldn't do. So in a way, Matilda's power comes from the fact that the adults around her underestimate her. Readers know that she's capable of such a trick, but she's never going to have to face up to consequences because nobody in the novel thinks she's capable.

Matilda helpfully notes that a little boy once got Superglue on his finger and stuck it up his nose. People scolded him for a week to stop picking his nose. Mrs. Wormwood scoffs that picking one's nose is a nasty habit he shouldn't have been doing anyway, but Matilda notes that she saw Mrs. Wormwood pick her nose yesterday.

With Mrs. Wormwood's reaction to this anecdote, Matilda gets another unexpected victory over her parents: embarrassing her mother by pointing out that she, too, picks her nose. She essentially points out that adults have faults too, which is clear to readers after meeting the Wormwoods but doesn't seem nearly as clear to the Wormwoods themselves.

Mr. Wormwood looks ridiculous as he wears his hat all evening. He can't shower, and later, as Mrs. Wormwood watches her husband in his striped pajamas and hat, she thinks he looks "stupid." Mr. Wormwood can't sleep that night. In the morning, Mrs. Wormwood cuts the hat away. She cuts away a band of her husband's hair, but in front, patches of leather stick to his forehead. Matilda earnestly tells her father he looks like he has lice; he must try to get it off. The whole thing is very satisfying for Matilda.

Perhaps unwittingly, Matilda is even hurting her parents' marriage (recall that Mrs. Wormwood seems convinced her husband glued his own hat to his head). The fact that this trick is so successful shows Matilda that she can gain power over her parents. She's not totally powerless, just because she's a small child.

CHAPTER 4. THE GHOST

After the Superglue episode, things are calm for about a week. But then, Mr. Wormwood resumes his bullying tactics. He comes home from work one evening and Mrs. Wormwood can immediately sense that he's enraged. She disappears, so Mr. Wormwood strides into the living room and finds Matilda reading. She ignores him when he turns on the television, which angers him even more—she's "getting pleasure from something that [is] beyond his reach." Matilda responds pleasantly when he snaps at her, but then he rips her book out of her hands. He insists it's trash and tears all the pages out. He shouts that he doesn't care if it's a library book; Matilda can save her pocket money to buy a new one.

Notice that Mrs. Wormwood only protects herself *from Mr. Wormwood here, rather than trying to protect Matilda. This is a sign of her selfishness and her willingness to neglect her daughter. Mr. Wormwood makes his disdain for books clear when he rips up Matilda's library book. The narrator also suggests that he's jealous of Matilda's ability to enjoy books. This speaks to his desire for power and control. On some level, he realizes Matilda is gaining power because she reads, and he resents this.*

After Mr. Wormwood storms away, Matilda sits silently. She knows she has to strike back, so she asks a neighbor boy, Fred, to see his new pet parrot. The next afternoon, Fred takes Matilda to his bedroom and introduces her to Chopper. Chopper says, "Hullo," and then "Rattle my bones!" in a spooky voice. Matilda is charmed. She and Fred strike a deal: for her weekly pocket money, she can borrow Chopper overnight. Once Matilda gets Chopper and his massive cage home, she wedges the cage up the chimney.

Once again, Matilda can't just scream and yell at her father because, as a small child, that won't do anything but get her into deeper trouble. The fact that she's friends with Fred and has access to Chopper suggests that even now, Matilda has something of a support network outside of her family. It may be transactional (since she has to pay to borrow Chopper), but it's there and it's useful.

That evening, as the Wormwoods are eating dinner in front of the TV, a voice calls, "Hullo." Mrs. Wormwood is terrified and tells everyone to listen—it must be burglars. Mr. Wormwood suggests they all go look together. Each family member picks up something to use as a weapon. Matilda leads the way into the dining room with a knife, but no one's there—and then Chopper says, "Rattle my bones." Even Matilda jumps, since she's a good actress. She insists it's a ghost, which makes Mrs. Wormwood scream. The next afternoon, Matilda fishes Chopper out of the chimney and returns him to Fred. She insists that her parents "adored" Chopper.

Significantly, making it seem like there's a ghost in the house forces the adult Wormwoods to rethink how safe they are in the home that Mr. Wormwood has bought for them. In many ways, they're not safe or secure here—and not just because there seems to be a ghost in their house. Rather, they're unsafe because Mr. Wormwood is engaging in unethical activity, which jeopardizes the family's wellbeing and ability to stay in the house in the future.

CHAPTER 5. ARITHMETIC

Matilda wants nothing more than for her parents to be good, smart people who love her. They are, of course, none of these things, so Matilda's revenge game is the only thing keeping her sane. And being a small five-year-old girl, the only thing Matilda has to make her more powerful than her family members are her brains. In every other way, she has to do everything they tell her to do.

Keep in mind that Matilda's pranks don't have a lasting effect on her parents. They force her parents to behave for a bit, but then they revert to their old ways. While the novel insists that this is sad, it still suggests that the pranks serve an important purpose: to keep her sane, and to keep her working toward getting away from her parents.

Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood are civil to Matilda for about a week after the parrot incident. But then, as Matilda and Michael are waiting in the living room for their TV dinners, Mr. Wormwood marches in looking very pleased with himself. He sits and tells Michael that he sold five cars today and is now rich. Then, he pulls out a piece of paper and says that since Michael is going to help him with the business one day, Michael must learn to calculate end-of-day profits.

The difference in the way Mr. Wormwood treats Matilda and Michael is startling: Michael is treated as the heir to the Wormwood fortune and business, while Matilda is ignored. Recall that Michael is, per the narrator, "normal," so this just goes to show how misguided the Wormwoods are when it comes to how they treat their children.

After Michael fetches a pencil and paper, Mr. Wormwood reads off how much he paid for each car that he sold, and how much each car sold for today. Michael dutifully writes the numbers down and agrees that his father is brilliant. When he's written down all the numbers, Mr. Wormwood tells Michael to figure out the profits. Michael is worried—"That's a lot of sums"—but Mr. Wormwood says he has to learn. He notes that though he can't do the math in his head, he worked it out on paper in under 10 minutes.

Mr. Wormwood isn't entirely against education—he recognizes the need to be able to do simple addition, as that's how he knows how successful his business has been. This may help explain why he dislikes Matilda so much: not only can she do far more than simple sums, Mr. Wormwood also has no intention of bringing her on as part of the business one day.

Quietly, Matilda says that Mr. Wormwood made 3,303.50 pounds. He scolds her to stop guessing, but then checks his final figure. Mr. Wormwood stiffens, turns red, and calls Matilda a cheat—she must've looked at his paper. Matilda points out that she's across the room, but Mr. Wormwood shouts that no one, "especially a girl," can do math like that. Just then, Mrs. Wormwood carries in everyone's dinners: fish and chips she picked up on the way home from bingo. Mr. Wormwood tells his wife that Matilda is "a cheat and a liar" and turns on the TV.

Part of Mr. Wormwood's dislike for Matilda, this passage shows, is rooted in sexism. Matilda is, to him, inferior to Michael because she's female—and this makes her less intelligent and less worthy in her father's eyes. This is, of course, a ridiculous stance; in addition to sexism being silly and baseless anyway, Matilda is clearly far more intelligent than her brother.

CHAPTER 6. THE PLATINUM-BLONDE MAN

As Matilda eats her "awful" fish and chips, she decides how to punish Mr. Wormwood. The next morning, Matilda gets up early and goes to the bathroom. Mrs. Wormwood gets her mousy brown hair dyed blonde at a salon every six months, but she touches up her roots often at home with a product called "PLATINUM BLONDE HAIR-DYE EXTRA STRONG," which has a warning label about the peroxide content. Mr. Wormwood has lush black hair, which he keeps that way by rubbing a hair tonic into it every morning. (As he does this, he emits "masculine grunts.") Matilda tips most of Mr. Wormwood's hair tonic down the drain and fills the bottle up with her mother's dye.

The fact that the narrator continues to bring up that Mrs. Wormwood isn't a natural blonde is an indicator that Mrs. Wormwood is failing to embody a feminine ideal. She's blonde and busty, but readers are supposed to see this as an unsuccessful ruse. Mr. Wormwood, on the other hand, is trying hard to make himself seem as big, important, and masculine as possible, as evidenced by his "masculine grunts" as he attends to his hair. Dyeing his hair blonde will deprive Mr. Wormwood of his prized hair, something he sees as a symbol of his masculinity and success.

Later, Matilda and Michael are eating breakfast in the dining room while Mrs. Wormwood busily cooks up Mr. Wormwood's breakfast. Mr. Wormwood bustles into the room, purposefully being loud to alert everyone that "the master of the house, the wage-earner" is here, and slaps Michael on the back. Matilda studies her cornflakes—she doesn't want to laugh if she's been successful. Just then, Mrs. Wormwood comes into the dining room with her husband's breakfast, and she screams and drops the plate. Mr. Wormwood scolds her for making a mess.

*Referring to Mr. Wormwood as "*the *wage-earner" implies that Mrs. Wormwood doesn't have a job; her job is to be a housewife and care for her husband and children. So keep in mind that her livelihood depends on Mr. Wormwood's inherently unreliable shady business practices. Mr. Wormwood also asserts his power here when he scolds Mrs. Wormwood for dropping the plate and making a mess—this implies that it's* his *house she lives in, and she's messing up his house.*

In a shriek, Mrs. Wormwood asks what Mr. Wormwood did to his hair. Michael joins in and shouts too; Matilda stays silent. Mr. Wormwood insists he doesn't know what everyone is talking about until Michael notes that his father's hair is "the same colour as mum's only much dirtier looking." At this, Mr. Wormwood shrieks for a mirror. Mrs. Wormwood offers him her powder compact, which contains her best Elizabeth Arden powder. He spills the powder on his chest and then shouts when he sees his reflection. Matilda offers that he must've mistakenly used Mrs. Wormwood's bottle of hair product instead of his own.

Unexpectedly (and certainly not on purpose), Michael helps Matilda torture their parents when he insultingly describes Mr. Wormwood's new hair color as "dirtier looking" than Mrs. Wormwood's. Spilling Mrs. Wormwood's best powder as he hurries to look at himself also shows how little Mr. Wormwood actually cares about his wife; it doesn't seem to occur to him that he could respect his wife's belongings. This may also reflect how precarious Mrs. Wormwood's security really is.

Mrs. Wormwood agrees that this is probably what happened. She notes that she's only supposed to use a tiny bit and dilute it—Mr. Wormwood might lose his hair after using so much. Peroxide, after all, is what they clean lavatories with. Matilda suggests her father wash his hair well. As he runs to shampoo his hair, Mr. Wormwood commands his wife to make him an emergency appointment to get his hair dyed back. Alone with her mother, Matilda observes that Mr. Wormwood does silly things. Mrs. Wormwood responds that men aren't as smart as they think they are.

On the other hand, Mrs. Wormwood doesn't seem to think very much of her husband—she doesn't seem to think he's particularly intelligent, given what she says here. This is another potential indicator that the Wormwoods' marriage isn't especially strong, which could jeopardize Mrs. Wormwood's security. But Mr. Wormwood seems to totally ignore or overlook all of this, since he gets what he wants when he orders his wife to make him an appointment.

CHAPTER 7. MISS HONEY

Since Matilda's parents aren't concerned about her education and regularly forget about her, they don't put her in primary school until she's five and a half. They enroll Matilda in Crunchem Hall Primary School, which is headed by "a formidable middle-aged lady" named Miss Trunchbull. Matilda is in the lowest class, which a young woman named Miss Honey teaches. Miss Honey is lovely, slim, and looks fragile—she's "like a porcelain figure." She's also quiet and barely smiles, but every child adores her.

The circumstances surrounding Matilda starting school show that her parents are actively and passively hindering her education. They not only refuse to support her when she wants to read; they also don't follow through with getting her into school when they should. The description of Miss Honey paints her as a sympathetic, kind person—and a possible ally for Matilda.

Miss Trunchbull, on the other hand, is "a gigantic holy terror." She's a tyrant and loves to frighten students and teachers. She marches everywhere and children who get in her way go flying. (The narrator warns readers to, if they meet someone like Miss Trunchbull in real life, climb a tree until the person goes away.)

The narrator's warning to readers suggests that while Miss Trunchbull might be fictional, there are people like her in the real world. And those people who torment children, think only of themselves, and get whatever they want through brute strength should be treated with caution and avoided if possible.

Back in Miss Honey's classroom, Miss Honey asks her students for their names and passes out their exercise books. Then, she warns the kids that while they're at Crunchem Hall, they must take care around Miss Trunchbull. Miss Trunchbull demands discipline and deals "severely" with anyone who acts out. Then, Miss Honey says she's going to teach her students as much as possible. This week they're going to learn the two-times table and by next year, the students should know *all* their times tables. She asks if anyone already knows their two-times tables. Matilda puts her hand up and, when Miss Honey asks, recites the two-times table—all the way up to two times 16.

Miss Honey is in a tight spot as a teacher. She shows that she wants to protect her students when she warns them not to get on Miss Trunchbull's bad side—but she also makes it seem like she can't actually protect the kids from Miss Trunchbull's ire, should they attract it. Keep in mind that in school, this is the first time since meeting Mrs. Phelps that Matilda has been around an adult who values education. And like Mrs. Phelps, Miss Honey instantly sees that Matilda is no ordinary child—she's a genius.

Miss Honey asks Matilda to stop, then she asks Matilda if she knows two times 28 and then two times 487. Matilda answers both problems instantly. Miss Honey continues to question Matilda on her times tables and then tells the class that Matilda is lucky—her parents taught her to multiply very well. Matilda corrects her teacher that nobody taught her; she just doesn't find multiplication difficult. Matilda can't explain her thinking, but she instantly has the answer when Miss Honey asks if she can solve 14 x 19. Again, Matilda can't explain how she does this, just that she does.

Unlike Mrs. Phelps, Miss Honey doesn't try as hard to hide her shock that Matilda is so intelligent. Miss Honey also shows here that she expects all parents to teach their children and be proud of their children. Matilda, though, immediately sets Miss Honey straight: she's just naturally good at math. And interestingly, Matilda doesn't mention that her parents don't care about her education one bit. She may sense that Miss Honey wouldn't want to hear this.

Miss Honey is shivery; Matilda is obviously a genius. She lies and assures the other students that they'll soon be able to do math as well as Matilda. Then, Miss Honey introduces a spelling lesson. She asks if any students can spell "cat." Matilda, a girl named Lavender, and a boy named Nigel put their hands up. Then, Miss Honey writes, "I have already begun to learn how to read long sentences" on the chalkboard and asks if any of the students can read it. Nigel and Lavender are lost, but Matilda reads it perfectly. Matilda admits she can read most things, though she doesn't always understand what things mean.

Miss Honey may be taken with Matilda, but she also doesn't want to make her other students feel bad—she's responsible for educating all of them, after all. Notice too that Matilda doesn't seem to be showing off. It's just a fact for her that she can perform mental math and read everything. This shows that Matilda is humble, which, within the world of the novel, is part of what makes her a morally superior character.

Miss Honey offers Matilda a book of funny poetry and asks her to read a poem. Matilda reads the poem without hesitation. She knows what a difficult word in the poem (epicure) means and knows that the poem is a limerick. Then, Matilda admits that she loves limericks but struggles to write good ones. When Miss Honey asks Matilda to recite one she wrote, Matilda refuses—she wrote one about Miss Honey, but it uses her first name. Finally, Matilda agrees to recite a limerick, which is about how pretty Miss Honey is. Miss Honey blushes happily, and other students praise Matilda's poem.

In addition to being wildly intelligent, Matilda shows here that she also knows how to be polite (by not wanting to be disrespectful and use Miss Honey's first name). When she's able to flatter her teacher like this—seemingly with little effort—it shows how smart, good, and kind Matilda is. She also seems more than capable of relating to kids her own age, since her classmates seem to appreciate her intelligence and not see her as a threat.

Again, Matilda explains that she taught herself to read and has read every book in the public library. She says she liked *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but C. S. Lewis unfortunately doesn't write funny books. Neither does Tolkien, and Matilda thinks children's books should be funny—children aren't serious like adults are. Miss Honey is astounded, especially when Matilda says she also loves Charles Dickens.

When Matilda says that children's books should be funny, this reflects one of the ideas that guides most of Dahl's work for children. And when Matilda is the one to convey this message, it suggests that even the smartest kids are still kids—and they want the same things that all other kids want.

CHAPTER 8. THE TRUNCHBULL

During the first break, Miss Honey heads for Miss Trunchbull's study. Matilda obviously needs to be moved up since she's so brilliant. Miss Honey knows she has to advocate for Matilda, even though she's terrified of Miss Trunchbull. At this, the narrator explains that most head teachers are chosen because they're good with kids and interested in education. Miss Trunchbull is the exact opposite, so who knows how she got her job. She's tall and used to be a famous athlete. Her muscles bulge all over her body. She's not beautiful and wears "odd" clothes: a brown cotton smock cinched with a belt, breeches, and turned-down stockings that show off her muscular calves. Her shoes are flat. She looks ready for a stag hunting expedition, not like she should be leading a school.

Miss Honey shows that she believes in Matilda's right to receive an education—a real one, one that will challenge her. This is so important to Miss Honey that she's willing to face her fears of the formidable Miss Trunchbull to try and make this happen for Matilda. The description of Miss Trunchbull paints the picture of someone who has no business working in a school, let alone as the most powerful person in the school. And the fact that Miss Honey is so frightened of Miss Trunchbull suggests that Miss Trunchbull doesn't do well at her job—her goal is, perhaps, terrifying people so she has more power.

When Miss Honey enters Miss Trunchbull's study, Miss Trunchbull asks if the "little stinkers" have been flicking spitballs at Miss Honey. Miss Honey mentions Matilda and at this, Miss Trunchbull interjects that she just bought an almost-new car from Mr. Wormwood for a great price. And he said that Matilda is terrible. Miss Trunchbull figures that Matilda probably stuck the stink bomb under her desk this morning and notes that bad girls are much more dangerous than bad boys. Little girls are nasty; Miss Trunchbull notes that fortunately, she never was a little girl. At the very least, she became a woman quickly. Miss Honey is convinced Miss Trunchbull is mad, but she insists that Matilda is not responsible for the stink bomb.

From the moment Miss Trunchbull opens her mouth, it becomes clear that she doesn't think highly of children at all. They're nuisances to stamp out, in her mind, and they're all intent on tormenting adults. The fact that some kid other than Matilda put a stink bomb under Miss Trunchbull's desk implies that there are other kids who, like Matilda, might be relatively powerless—but can still cause the adults around them a lot of grief by playing tricks on them. And again, it's a mark of how dedicated Miss Honey is to Matilda's education that she persists in defending Matilda.

Finally, Miss Honey tells Miss Trunchbull why she came: Matilda isn't awful. Matilda is a genius. This word causes Miss Trunchbull's face to turn purple, and Miss Trunchbull insists that according to Mr. Wormwood, Matilda is in a gang. Miss Honey explains that Matilda can do amazing mental math and can already read. She believes Matilda needs to be with the eleven-year-olds. Miss Trunchbull accuses Miss Honey of wanting to get rid of Matilda so Matilda can cause havoc in the upper forms. She refuses to let Matilda move, not least because she has a rule here that children should stay with their age group, no matter what. Then, Miss Trunchbull wishes she could still whip Matilda for the stink bomb. Miss Honey leaves the study and vows to help Matilda herself.

Miss Trunchbull seems a lot like Mr. Wormwood in that she clearly doesn't value education. This is, of course, ironic given that she runs a school. But it suggests that Miss Trunchbull has this job for the power it gives her, not because she has any interest in doing the job well. She also shows that she thinks everyone is just as selfish as she seems to be; it's inconceivable to her that Miss Honey is legitimately trying to help Matilda rather than herself. The fact that Miss Trunchbull also wishes she could whip Matilda shows how much she relies on violence to get her way—or, at least, wishes she could.

CHAPTER 9. THE PARENTS

First, Miss Honey goes around to the upper-level teachers to borrow textbooks on geometry, literature, and French. Then she calls Matilda over and says that rather than sit and be bored, she should study from the textbooks during each lesson. Matilda very politely thanks Miss Honey for the books and the help. Miss Honey knows Mr. Wormwood is wrong about his daughter—and she's shocked that Matilda doesn't seem aware of how brilliant she is. When class reconvenes, Matilda happily studies the geometry textbook.

Just as Miss Phelps did, Miss Honey is showing Matilda that she's someone Matilda can trust and who will help Matilda receive the education she wants and deserves. And Matilda soaks up the attention and help—this is the first time, aside from her afternoons at the library, where her intelligence has been framed as a good thing. It's another indicator that, per the novel, parents are supposed to overestimate their children when Miss Honey is so shocked by the Wormwoods' behavior.

As she teaches the other students, Miss Honey decides that she must speak with Matilda's parents. Mr. Wormwood has such a successful business that he must be intelligent, and it's unusual for parents to underestimate their children. It shouldn't be hard to convince the Wormwoods that Matilda is brilliant. Perhaps she can even get them to agree to let her give Matilda private lessons. She decides to call on the Wormwoods later in the evening, after Matilda is in bed.

Miss Honey shares the narrator's belief that parents consistently overestimate their children—and encountering the opposite is just beyond understanding. She also shows how dedicated she is to helping bright students reach their full potential, particularly since Miss Honey seems so shy and reserved normally. This boldness in visiting the Wormwoods reads as somewhat out of character for her.

So after nine that evening, Miss Honey walks to Matilda's house and rings the doorbell. She can hear the TV inside. A small, "ratty" man—Mr. Wormwood—answers the door, and when Miss Honey introduces herself as Matilda's teacher, says he's not surprised she's already in trouble. He says it's Miss Honey's responsibility to deal with her. Miss Honey insists she has good news about Matilda and asks to come in, but Mr. Wormwood says it's an inconvenient time—they're in the middle of their favorite TV show. Angrily, Miss Honey suggests the Wormwoods shouldn't be parents if they think TV is more important than Matilda's future. He angrily lets her in.

Describing Mr. Wormwood as "ratty" cuts into Mr. Wormwood's insistence that he's extremely handsome—at least to the narrator, he isn't. He shows how little he thinks of his daughter when he instantly decides Matilda must be in trouble. For Miss Honey, it's disturbing to encounter parents who so obviously dislike and don't care about their child. Miss Honey realizes that Matilda's future is at stake here. If she can't get an education, Matilda won't have as many opportunities for success as an adult.

Mr. Wormwood leads Miss Honey to the living room, where Mrs. Wormwood continues to stare at the TV. When Mr. Wormwood turns down the volume, Mrs. Wormwood shrieks—they're just getting to the good part. Miss Honey introduces herself and sits down. She notes that Matilda came to school today able to read. She asks if Mr. or Mrs. Wormwood taught Matilda to read; perhaps, as they insist, Matilda is lying about who taught her to read. Mr. Wormwood notes that he reads *Autocar* and *Motor* every week, but his family doesn't believe "sitting on your fanny and reading story-books" is a good use of time.

The novel frames television as morally inferior to books. So having the television play such a huge role in this passage (it's clearly what both the Wormwoods are interested in) makes it clear that per the logic of the novel, the Wormwoods are morally inferior to those (like Matilda and Miss Honey) who do read books. To Mr. Wormwood, reading must serve a purpose; he seems to see his car magazines as essential to doing his job. Matilda, though, gets pleasure from reading—and this, he suggests, is a waste of time.

Miss Honey says that, regardless, Matilda is brilliant, and her parents should know this. Mrs. Wormwood gripes that Matilda is always reading, but Miss Honey asks if they're really not curious about a five-year-old who can read Dickens and Hemingway. Mrs. Wormwood says that girls should concentrate on their appearances so they can marry, not get an education. They should do what she did—she choose looks, while Miss Honey obviously chose books. Miss Honey is shocked, especially when Mrs. Wormwood says that she's better off than Miss Honey is.

Finally, Mrs. Wormwood articulates why she dislikes Matilda and reading so much: it's not appropriate for girls to be educated, she believes. She insists that she's a more successful woman because she's beautiful and married, while Miss Honey is an unsuccessful woman because she's (presumably) unmarried and has to work. So Mrs. Wormwood and Miss Honey have very different ideas of what constitutes success for women. And given how the novel frames Mrs. Wormwood as morally inferior, it implies readers should believe Miss Honey is doing things right.

Trying to hold her temper, Miss Honey says that Matilda also seems to be a math genius. Mr. Wormwood doesn't see the point when calculators exist, and Mrs. Wormwood insists it doesn't do a girl any good to be "brainy." Gesturing to the TV screen, where a busty woman is embracing a male actor, she points out that the woman didn't get the man by multiplying. The TV couple is going to get married, and the woman will have maids. Miss Honey makes one more attempt to convince the Wormwoods that Matilda needs private tutoring and could attend university in a few years. At this, Mr. Wormwood shouts that all people learn at university are "bad habits." Miss Honey points out that doctors and lawyers are all university graduates, but she can see she's not going to get anywhere. She leaves.

Mrs. Wormwood using the actress on television as an example is humorous because what she's seeing on the show is scripted. It's fiction, not real. Further, it's worth noting that in portraying this fiction, the actress is working for money, *just like Miss Honey is. The actress may have gotten this particular job because of her beauty, but Mrs. Wormwood's logic still falls flat—women, no matter how beautiful, can work for their own paychecks. Miss Honey, of course, implies that a university education rather than beauty is the best way forward. But she still makes the connection between education and being able to earn money as a professional.*

CHAPTER 10. THROWING THE HAMMER

According to the narrator, the nice thing about Matilda is that she seems perfectly normal and sensible, unless you bring up literature or math. Because of this, Matilda easily makes friends at school, even though she gets to read her own books during lessons—mostly because kids that age are too caught up in their own struggles to be too curious when their classmates do something different. Matilda's new best friend is Lavender, who's extremely tiny. The girls like each other because they each believe the other is "gutsy and adventurous."

At school, Matilda is discovering a community and friends. This community will be able to help give her the support that she's lacking at home. The fact that the girls admire each other because they think they're both "gutsy and adventurous" also suggests that their friendship is going to spur them to a new level of playing tricks on adults.

During the first week of school, the new students learn all manner of tales about Miss Trunchbull. One morning, when Matilda and Lavender are on the playground for morning break, a 10-year-old named Hortensia welcomes them and asks if they've met "the Trunchbull" yet. Hortensia warns the girls that the Trunchbull hates small kids; many don't survive and leave school for good on stretchers. Observing the little girls' non-reactions, Hortensia asks if they've heard of the Trunchbull's lock-up cupboard, the Chokey. It's a tall, narrow cupboard with glass embedded in three walls and spiky nails in the door—a person in it has to stand still or get stabbed.

At this early point, it's hard to tell if Hortensia is just trying to scare Matilda and Lavender, or if she's telling the truth about the Trunchbull sending kids away on stretchers and putting them in the Chokey. Her choice to escalate what she's telling them suggests she's looking for a reaction, though the way the narrator has described Miss Trunchbull in the past makes it seem like she probably isn't lying. This question of what to believe about Miss Trunchbull gives the headmistress some of her power—it's impossible to tell just how maniacal she really is and thus what she's capable of doing to the kids.

Hortensia says she's been in the Chokey a bunch, six times her first term. It's terrible. The first time, she poured Golden Syrup on the Trunchbull's seat for the morning prayer. The syrup squelched when the Trunchbull sat in it, just like the mud on the Limpopo River in the *Just So Stories* (which the little girls are "too small and stupid to have read") . Matilda notes that she's read them, but Hortensia calls her a liar and continues her tale. The chair stuck to the Trunchbull's green breeches for a moment—and then the Trunchbull grabbed her syrupy bottom and got syrup all over her hands. A little boy told on Hortensia, so Hortensia spent a day in the Chokey.

Hortensia plays pranks on Miss Trunchbull, just as Matilda played pranks on her parents. As with Matilda's pranks, playing the tricks on Miss Trunchbull doesn't really get the kids anywhere (indeed, it gets them punished in horrific ways). But it still annoys and embarrasses Miss Trunchbull, which is something the novel heavily implies she deserves for the way she treats children. And Matilda's genius is hard to believe, even for kids like Hortensia. But again, this doesn't affect Matilda's ability to make friends and connect with her classmates.

Lavender wants to know what else Hortensia did to get time in the Chokey, but Hortensia nonchalantly says she doesn't remember. She can recall one more story: she excused herself to the restroom once and, since the Trunchbull was teaching a class, Hortensia snuck into her office. She put itching powder in every pair of the Trunchbull's knickers. A few days later, during prayers, the Trunchbull started to scratch. In the middle of the Lord's Prayer, the Trunchbull leapt up, grabbed her bottom, and left the room.

Simply asking Hortensia to tell her more shows that Lavender is very interested in playing tricks on adults. She sees Hortensia as someone to admire, especially since she was able to cause someone as powerful as the Trunchbull such grief. But again, the novel's tone implies that Miss Trunchbull deserves to have these tricks played on her because of how she treats the kids in her care.

Lavender and Matilda are in awe of Hortensia, who's clearly a master and dedicated to her craft. Hortensia explains that the Trunchbull never proved it was her that time; the Trunchbull tends to guess when she can't figure out for sure who did something. She's usually right. Matilda says this is like a war, and Hortensia agrees—the students are crusaders while the Trunchbull is "the Prince of Darkness, the Foul Serpent, the Fiery Dragon." The students all try to support each other. Lavender pledges her support, but Hortensia says Lavender is too little—though she may be useful for an undercover job.

Hortensia gains power over the younger students by aweing them with stories of her pranks on Miss Trunchbull. So while Hortensia isn't making a dent in Miss Trunchbull's hold on the school, she's still getting something out of her exploits. And she suggests that having Miss Trunchbull to fight against makes the student body closer and more of a community, since they all have the same goal: torment Miss Trunchbull as much as possible.

Matilda and Lavender ask for another story, so Hortensia tells them about a boy named Julius Rottwinkle. He was eating during scripture class, so the Trunchbull threw him right out the window. The Trunchbull, Hortensia explains, threw the hammer in the Olympics. Throwing the hammer refers to throwing a huge cannonball on the end of a wire; the thrower spins it around and then lets go. The Trunchbull loves practicing on children, especially since she insists large boys weigh the same as Olympic hammers.

Hortensia frames Miss Trunchbull's love of sport and throwing the hammer as one of the big reasons she's a headmistress (and is also so bad at her job). Being in a school gives her access to the boys to use for throwing practice. This also gives Miss Trunchbull a lot of power over the students—it's terrifying to consider a headmistress hurling a student like this! It deprives students of their bodily autonomy and their dignity.

Suddenly, the loud playground goes silent. Miss Trunchbull is striding across the playground, shouting for Amanda Thripp. Hortensia whispers that Amanda has made the mistake of letting her hair grow long, and then letting her mother braid it in two braids—the Trunchbull hates pigtails. The girls watch as the Trunchbull stops in front of Amanda, who has golden braids tied with blue bows. Amanda is clearly terrified as the Trunchbull tells her to chop off her braids before tomorrow. She insists that her mother likes the braids, but the Trunchbull says she doesn't care.

Amanda goes into this interaction with Miss Trunchbull seemingly believing that her mother's love of her braids is going to protect her. But Miss Trunchbull shows that she doesn't respect parents' authority to support their kids, if that support goes against what Miss Trunchbull wants. Miss Trunchbull's hatred of pigtails, meanwhile, also reads as sexist. Pigtails and braids are associated mostly with little girls, and recall that Miss Trunchbull hates little girls way more than she hates little boys.

The Trunchbull then snatches Amanda by the braids and picks her up, swinging her around by her braids before throwing her into the playing field. Matilda asks if the parents ever complain, but Hortensia says parents are afraid of the Trunchbull, too.

Hortensia makes the case that Miss Trunchbull doesn't just terrify kids. She terrifies everyone in the community. And this is how Miss Trunchbull gains and keeps her power: she terrifies people and resorts to violence as needed.

CHAPTER 11. BRUCE BOGTROTTER AND THE CAKE

Lavender asks Matilda how the Trunchbull can get away with this; her father would be very upset if the Trunchbull swung her by the hair. Matilda says that Lavender's father wouldn't believe her. The Trunchbull knows that she has to be outrageous to get away with it. No parent will believe a headmistress swung a student by her braids. When Lavender notes that Amanda's mother will cut Amanda's braids off, Matilda says that Amanda will cut her own braids. Then, she says the Trunchbull probably isn't mad, but she is very dangerous.

Matilda suggests here that even caring parents who want to protect their kids sometimes fail to do so. Sensible adults, Matilda realizes, aren't going to believe Miss Trunchbull is as bad as she actually is, which leaves their kids vulnerable to abuse by Miss Trunchbull. This puts kids like Amanda in a position where they have to sneak around and, in this case, cut her own braids off to keep herself safe.

The next day during lunch, the students are told to go to the Assembly Hall after the meal. When everyone is seated, the Trunchbull takes the stage with a riding crop and calls a boy named Bruce Bogtrotter to the stage. Bruce is a round boy and very nervous; he eyes the Trunchbull's crop warily. The Trunchbull announces to the students that Bruce is a thief. Bruce has no idea what she's talking about, but the Trunchbull accuses Bruce of stealing her piece of special chocolate cake from her tea tray yesterday. Unlike food for the students, her cake was made with real butter and cream. Bruce denies the accusation.

Recall that Miss Trunchbull is upset in general because she isn't allowed to hit kids anymore—so the riding crop is just a prop designed to terrify poor Bruce. So Miss Trunchbull doesn't have to even touch the students to gain power over them. It also seems like Miss Trunchbull continues to abuse her position as headmistress if she's getting food made out of real ingredients while the children eat something else presumably not as good.

Then, the Trunchbull leans down to Bruce and quietly asks if he liked the cake. Bruce can't help himself—he says the cake was very good. The Trunchbull agrees and says that, to be polite, Bruce must thank the chef. She yells for the cook to enter the hall and coaches Bruce through telling the old lady that the cake was wonderful. Bruce knows the Trunchbull can't hit him with her riding crop, but he's certain something bad is going to happen.

Miss Trunchbull isn't, as a rule, polite—she throws kids by their braids and threatens them with riding crops. So this display of supposedly coaching Bruce on how to be polite reads as extremely concerning and dangerous for Bruce. Though Bruce can't rely on any other adults to help him, it is some solace that the law preventing corporal punishment is at least on his side.

The Trunchbull asks the cook if she has more cake to share with Bruce. Right on cue, the cook disappears and returns with a huge cake, 18 inches in diameter, and a knife. Once the cake is on the table, the Trunchbull asks Bruce to sit down and invites him to have a slice of this cake, which is all for him. Bruce thanks the cook, but he is hesitant to eat now. The Trunchbull forces him to cut a slice. All the students wonder if there's castor oil or pepper in the cake, or maybe poison. Bruce dutifully eats a tiny slice—but the Trunchbull tells him to have another. The boy doesn't want one, but the Trunchbull says Bruce got exactly what he wanted: cake. He's not leaving until the cake is gone.

It's impossible to tell if the cook is going along with Miss Trunchbull because she agrees with the headmistress, or because, like the students, she's terrified of her boss. So Miss Trunchbull might have the entire staff at school cowed. When it comes to forcing Bruce to eat the entire cake in front of all his classmates, the goal here is clearly to humiliate Bruce and show the other kids what happens when they cross Miss Trunchbull. This shows that Miss Trunchbull excels at coming up with punishments like this, that terrify children without having to actually hit them.

Matilda and Lavender watch, fascinated, as Bruce eats three slices of cake. They're not sure he can do it—especially with the Trunchbull calling him greedy and threatening to put him in the Chokey. When he's halfway through the cake, Bruce starts to eat faster. The watching students are now rooting for Bruce, who seems like he's going to succeed. He almost seems like he's enjoying it, especially when someone shouts out encouragement to Bruce. Lavender and Matilda are shocked and watch as Bruce shoves the last bites of cake in his mouth—and the Trunchbull turns red with anger. When he's done, the students all cheer. The Trunchbull picks up the platter and breaks it over Bruce's head. Bruce, though, is so full of cake that it doesn't hurt him.

Before Bruce started to do well, it was a bit of a liability for the other kids to root for him. It's dangerous, after all, to openly oppose Miss Trunchbull and stand up to her abuse. But when Bruce manages to beat Miss Trunchbull at her own game by finishing the cake, it's much safer for the other students to celebrate—they're several hundred against one, after all. When Miss Trunchbull still ends this torture session by breaking the plate over Bruce's head, it shows that whatever the law says, she still consistently turns to physical violence to get her way and make a point.

CHAPTER 12. LAVENDER

At one point during the first week of class, Miss Honey asks Matilda to pay attention with everyone else: Miss Trunchbull will take over the class every week on Thursday afternoons. She does this with all classes. The children need to be clean, obey, and never make jokes. The children agree. Miss Honey says that Miss Trunchbull will probably test the children on the two-times table, so the children should practice tonight in preparation. There will also be a spelling test. And someone needs to volunteer to make sure that Miss Trunchbull's jug of water and glass are on the table when she arrives. Lavender volunteers.

Again, Miss Honey is doing everything she thinks she can feasibly do to protect her charges from Miss Trunchbull. She feels as though she can warn them and prepare them to be quizzed by Miss Trunchbull—but she doesn't seem to think she can get in Miss Trunchbull's way. Through her actions, she shows that she believes the best way to deal with Miss Trunchbull is to do everything to avoid provoking her, and accept the abuse if it happens.

Lavender's mind is spinning. She wants to be heroic like Hortensia, and Matilda has already told Lavender about stuffing the parrot in her parents' chimney and bleaching her father's hair. That afternoon, as Lavender walks home, Lavender hatches her plan. She picks her way down to the muddy pond in her garden, where a colony of ugly newts live. She scoops up a newt and carefully traps it in a pencil box lined with pond scum. Lavender carries the newt to school and though she wants to tell everyone, she knows she can't—that way, nobody can rat her out if Miss Trunchbull tortures them.

Lavender's thought process throughout this passage shows that she now thinks of herself as part of a close-knit underground resistance movement. She wants to be brave and crafty like Hortensia and Matilda, and she also wants to protect her idols and friends so nobody gets in trouble. And keep in mind that whatever Lavender is going to do with the newt, it probably won't do any lasting damage. The point is more to show Miss Trunchbull that the kids can and will play tricks on her.

By the time lunch rolls around, Lavender is so nervous she can't eat. When the meal is over, she races to the kitchen for one of the jugs. It's a huge piece of pottery, which Lavender fills with water. Then, alone in the classroom, Lavender tips the newt into the jug, along with the pond scum. She puts her pencils back in her pencil box and rejoins her classmates on the playground.

Showing Lavender putting the newt into the water jug builds tension—readers and Lavender now expect that at some point, an unsuspecting Miss Trunchbull is going to discover the newt and be very unhappy. This lets readers in on the joke and lets them vicariously help torment Miss Trunchbull.

CHAPTER 13. THE WEEKLY TEST

Matilda's class sits still and straight in preparation for Miss Trunchbull's arrival. Miss Honey stands in the back. Presently, Miss Trunchbull marches in, tells the children they're "nauseating little warts," and says she'll expel as many as she can. She says that no matter what the children's parents say, the children are terrible. Then, she asks them to stand up and show her their hands; she wants to make sure they're clean. Nigel's hands aren't clean enough, but he tries not to be afraid as Miss Trunchbull shouts at him. He explains he hasn't washed his hands since yesterday; his father's a doctor and says that a few more germs won't hurt. Miss Trunchbull also takes issue with a bean stuck on the front of Nigel's shirt.

The way that Miss Trunchbull speaks to the students is wildly inappropriate—but the fact that she feels comfortable speaking to them like this indicates how powerful she is. Nobody is going to challenge her, because what parent is going to believe that a headmistress would actually call children "nauseating little warts"? It seems like the children are trying hard to be brave, since Nigel attempts to explain why his hands are dirty and doesn't just stand down. He's trying to see how far he can push Miss Trunchbull without getting in trouble.

To punish Nigel, Miss Trunchbull tells him to stand in the corner on one foot, facing the wall. From there, she says she's going to test his spelling and asks him to spell "write." Nigel asks her to clarify whether she wants him to spell write or right (he's a bright boy and his mother coaches him on spelling) and spells the word correctly. This annoys Miss Trunchbull, who thought "write" was a difficult word. Nigel then says that yesterday, Miss Honey taught the class to spell "difficulty." Miss Trunchbull asks a "daft" girl, Prudence, to spell it—and Prudence spells it correctly.

It's a sign of how little Miss Trunchbull values education that she's not impressed with Nigel for asking whether she wants him to spell write or right. Rather, she just wants to be right and put the kids in situations where they're wrong, so she can berate them. So it's important to her to make it seem like she's intelligent by setting everyone else up to fail. This is one of the ways she holds onto her power.

Miss Trunchbull snorts that Miss Honey wasted a whole class teaching the class to spell one word, but Nigel says the lesson only took three minutes because Miss Honey gives the class little songs to sing to remember how words are spelled. He sings the song for "difficulty," which goes, "Mrs. D, Mrs. I, Mrs. FFI / Mrs. C, Mrs. U, Mrs. LTY." The Trunchbull says this is ridiculous; why are the women married, and Miss Honey can't teach poetry with spelling. Miss Honey suggests the songs work well, but Miss Trunchbull shouts at her.

Miss Honey is clearly a good teacher if she's able to teach all her kids to spell "difficulty" so easily. More interesting here, though, is that Miss Trunchbull objects to the women in the song being married. While Mrs. Wormwood suggested that women become successful through marriage, Miss Trunchbull clearly doesn't see the point in being married. This is because she uses violence to get her way and achieve success; marriage would just be an obstacle to that.

Next, the Trunchbull calls on Rupert to test his multiplication tables. She asks him for the answer to two times seven—he instantly answers "16." The Trunchbull calls him an "ignorant little slug" and then grabs him by his long, golden hair (she hates long hair on boys as much as she hates plaits and pigtails on girls). She lifts Rupert by his hair and commands him to give her the right answer; she'll only put him down when he answers. Rupert stops screaming long enough to give her the right answer—and then she drops him onto the floor. The children are transfixed; this is fantastic entertainment, though it's terrifying.

Miss Trunchbull seems to reject and hate anything remotely feminine, whether that's a very feminine hairstyle on girls or longer (and, per the novel, more feminine) hair on boys—she has some internalized misogyny going on here. Lifting Rupert by his hair, just for getting an answer wrong, gives Miss Trunchbull lots of power over the class. It shows every child to be afraid—and nobody performs well when they're afraid. So she's setting the entire class up to perform poorly, possibly so she can justify abusing them further.

The Trunchbull mutters that she hates "small people." Children should be kept in boxes and seem to purposefully take forever to grow up. One brave little boy points out that surely Miss Trunchbull was a child once, but Miss Trunchbull says she's been big her whole life—and others should be like her. When the boy says she must've been a baby, the Trunchbull tells the boy he's being rude. The boy introduces himself as Eric Ink. The Trunchbull asks Eric to spell "what," which confuses Eric—and then he spells it "wot." When the Trunchbull says nothing, Eric corrects his answer to "whot."

It's possible to pick out some parts in this passage that humanize Miss Trunchbull—she may have been teased if she was a bigger kid, and she may have turned to violence to defend herself. But however she became so evil, the fact remains that she inappropriately uses her power to frighten children who have little or no power to fight back. If she was willing to lift Rupert by his hair, there's no telling what she'll do to Eric.

The Trunchbull shouts that Eric is wrong, in every way possible. She gives him one more chance to spell "what," so he spells it "whott." At this, the Trunchbull picks Eric up by his ears. Eric squeals and Miss Honey protests, but the Trunchbull says that boys' ears are resilient and stretchy. Matilda is shocked and afraid as she watches the Trunchbull coach Eric through spelling "what" correctly. When he spells it right, the Trunchbull drops him. Then, she turns to Miss Honey and says children learn best when teachers use "twisting and twiddling" to "concentrate[] their minds." Miss Honey protests that this does permanent damage, and Miss Trunchbull agrees with a grin—but Eric will look interesting now.

If a person wants to learn how to spell and do math, being afraid of bodily harm isn't the way to make that happen. Since Miss Trunchbull isn't at all interested in educating the children, her motives become clear: she's actually interested in teaching them to fear her. This is what will give her more power over them and allow her to feed her ego. So her teaching "advice" to Miss Honey is really just advice on how to get kids to be afraid and make them unwilling to fight back out of fear.

When Miss Honey protests again, the Trunchbull tells her to go get another job or just read *Nicholas Nickleby*—the headmaster in that book is fantastic, whipping children. Unfortunately, the Trunchbull says, Miss Honey's students are "morons" and will never read the book. Matilda says quietly that she's read *Nicholas Nickleby*. The Trunchbull is incredulous and insists that an "unhatched shrimp" like Matilda must be lying to her.

Again, Miss Trunchbull shows that she doesn't want her students to receive any real education. If she wanted them to be able to read Nicholas Nickleby *one day, she'd be encouraging them to keep trying so that they eventually get to that point. And finally, Matilda and Miss Trunchbull butt heads, bringing forth one of the novel's main conflicts.*

The Trunchbull asks if Matilda thinks she's a fool. Matilda thinks she is, but she can't say that—and the Trunchbull seems to sense Matilda's thoughts. She asks Matilda to introduce herself and when Matilda shares her last name, the Trunchbull starts ranting about Mr. Wormwood—the car she purchased was full of sawdust. Matilda insists her father is clever, but the Trunchbull says that all clever people—including Matilda—are horrible crooks, and Matilda should sit down and be quiet.

In this moment, it serves Matilda's purposes to support her father and say he's clever, even if she doesn't think that's true. Her true adversary is Miss Trunchbull, and one way to annoy Miss Trunchbull is to say things that Miss Trunchbull doesn't like or want to hear. Through this, Matilda can gain some power over Miss Trunchbull, though it's pretty marginal in this case.

CHAPTER 14. THE FIRST MIRACLE

Both Matilda and the Trunchbull sit down, and the Trunchbull reaches for her water jug. Before she pours, she says she hates children and believes they should be exterminated like flies. She'd love to get them all stuck to sticky paper. Miss Honey says this joke isn't funny, but the Trunchbull says it isn't a joke. Ideally, schools wouldn't have children at all; maybe she should start one. Then, the Trunchbull pours water from the jug into her glass—and a newt plops into the glass too. The Trunchbull screams and leaps away from the squirming newt. Lavender joins the other children in shouting and suggests the thing bites.

Likening children to flies reveals how Miss Trunchbull thinks of kids. To her, they're powerless to actually do much damage—but extremely annoying. And this is somewhat true within the world of the novel. The kids don't have the power to actually get rid of Miss Trunchbull or cause her harm, but they can sneakily make her life miserable. Lavender was successful with the newt prank—but now, this means that Miss Trunchbull will probably choose a child to punish for this transgression.

The Trunchbull, the "mighty female giant," stands quivering. She's furious that someone got such a reaction out of her, and she also hates the newt. Sitting back down, she tells Matilda to stand up. Matilda says she didn't do it but finally stands. Lavender feels guilty, but she's not going to admit she put the newt in the jug. The Trunchbull tells Matilda that she belongs in jail or a school for delinquent girls. Her face is, by now, a "boiled color" and she's frothing. Matilda is also losing her cool—this injustice of being accused of doing something she didn't do is too much.

This brief insight into Miss Trunchbull's inner monologue shows how important appearances are to Miss Trunchbull. She wants to look powerful, not like the sort of person who's afraid of a small amphibian. And by targeting Matilda even though Matilda didn't do it, Miss Trunchbull shows the kids just how powerful she is. True justice doesn't happen in this school—what matters is that Miss Trunchbull makes a show of force that frightens her charges.

Matilda screams that she didn't do it, and the Trunchbull roars back that Matilda must have. The Trunchbull says she's going to make sure that Matilda is locked up and will never see daylight again as Matilda continues to screech that she didn't do it. The Trunchbull tells Matilda to be quiet and sit down and, slowly, Matilda does. But she continues to seethe. She feels ready to explode as she glares at the Trunchbull. Matilda desperately wants to dump the newt over the Trunchbull's head.

Dahl's word choice here (Matilda's screaming versus Miss Trunchbull's roaring) highlights the size and power difference between them. Matilda is a small child, so she makes higher-pitched noises than Miss Trunchbull's terrifying roar. And Miss Trunchbull might be wrong about Matilda, but she still has the power to ruin Matilda's life because she feels like it.

It seems like everyone is staring at the newt in the glass. Suddenly, a strange feeling starts to come over Matilda, mostly in her eyes. They feel electric and somehow strong. She doesn't understand it; it's almost like there's lightning in her eyes. Her eyes feel hot as she stares at the glass. It feels like lots of tiny invisible arms are shooting out of her eyes toward the glass. Matilda whispers, "Tip it!" and the glass wobbles. She keeps pushing with the strange hands until, finally, the glass leans over—and dumps the water and the newt right onto Miss Trunchbull's bust. Miss Trunchbull screams loudly and shoots up in her chair, swiping the newt off her chest. Lavender surreptitiously scoops the newt into her pencil box.

Matilda is so angry at the injustice of being accused of this crime when she didn't do it that she literally develops a supernatural power—one that allows her to get back at Miss Trunchbull. This suggests that noticing injustices, and wanting to do something about them, can give someone a lot of power (though developing this supernatural power is, of course, far less likely in the real world). For now, though, Matilda's odd power doesn't do anything but help her continue her habit of playing tricks on adults; it's still relatively benign.

The Trunchbull is shaking with fury. In a roar, she asks who pushed the glass over. When no one answers, she accuses Matilda. But Matilda feels serene and confident—she isn't afraid of anyone after somehow using the **power** in her eyes to spill water on the Trunchbull. When the Trunchbull demands an answer, Matilda calmly notes that she hasn't moved. The other students agree with Matilda and suggest that the Trunchbull knocked it over herself. Miss Honey notes that none of the children have moved. The adults stare at each other until the Trunchbull says she's "fed up with you useless bunch of midgets" and slams out the door. Miss Honey excuses the class.

After taking action, Matilda gains another power: the power that comes from satisfaction after getting justice. Even though no one knows what exactly transpired, Matilda's supernatural power still gives the other students and Miss Honey something to rally around—this is the first time that all of them feel comfortable standing up to Miss Trunchbull. And it works, so this suggests that when one person stands up to injustice, it can spur others to stand up for what's right, too.

CHAPTER 15. THE SECOND MIRACLE

Matilda doesn't follow her classmates. She has to tell someone about what happened—and Miss Honey happens to be a "wise and sympathetic grown-up." As soon as Matilda asks to speak with Miss Honey, Miss Honey perks up. First, Matilda asks if Miss Trunchbull is really going to expel her. Miss Honey assures Matilda she won't. Then, Matilda asks Miss Honey if the teacher saw the glass fall. Matilda says she didn't touch it, but she *is* responsible. Miss Honey is confused, as Matilda says that she made the glass tip over with some odd **power** in her eyes. Miss Honey figures Matilda is telling a tale and kindly asks Matilda if she'd do it again.

Matilda craves a connection with an adult who will care about her and take her seriously. Miss Honey fits this bill, as she's intent on getting Matilda as much education as possible under the circumstances. Even though Miss Honey doesn't believe Matilda at this point, to her credit, she doesn't brush Matilda off. In this way, Miss Honey sets an example for how adults should interact with children, per the novel. Even if what a kid has to say doesn't make sense, it's still important to listen and take their concerns seriously.

Miss Honey puts the empty water glass upright and Matilda says she'll try to do it again; it might take a minute. Matilda stares hard at the glass and, in her mind, she yells at it to tip over. She can feel the electricity gathering and the **power** reach out of her eyes like little hands. The glass wobbles and then tips over. Miss Honey's jaw drops, and she leans away.

Of course, within the world of the novel, Matilda's power is real—and Miss Honey gets concrete proof that she was right to humor Matilda and ask for a demonstration. Matilda doesn't seem nearly as shocked by all of this as Miss Honey, which could mean that Matilda has some quality (even if that's just youth, innocence, and hopefulness) that Miss Honey doesn't.

Matilda's face is white, trembling, and her eyes are unseeing—and then Matilda seems to come to. Miss Honey murmurs that Matilda seemed far away, and Matilda says she was. She was "flying past the stars on silver wings." Miss Honey says this shouldn't be possible and invites Matilda for tea at her cottage. When Matilda asks, Miss Honey promises to keep this a secret.

Tapping into her power makes Matilda feel like she's physically taller than everyone else—she's in the stars. This symbolizes how powerful Matilda's strange power really makes her. She still looks like an innocent, unassuming little girl—but she can do amazing things.

CHAPTER 16. MISS HONEY'S COTTAGE

Miss Honey leads Matilda down the village's High Street and onto a country road. Once they're past the village, Matilda seems to suddenly come alive. She runs beside Miss Honey, hopping and talking about her strange **power** and all the things she could push over with it. Miss Honey cautions Matilda to calm down—they're wading into the unknown and they need to be careful. Matilda is too excited to take Miss Honey's concern too seriously. Miss Honey says she's trying to figure out where Matilda's power came from—perhaps it has to do with how precocious Matilda is. She has to tell Matilda what "precocious" means and is shocked when Matilda seems unaware of how exceptional she is.

Now that Matilda is with an adult she trusts, she suddenly opens up—and acts way more like a child her age than she has in the rest of the novel. This makes it clear that despite Matilda's genius and very adult sense of morality, she is just a kid in need of guidance and protection. For Miss Honey, Matilda is very odd. It's odd that Matilda doesn't have any idea how intelligent she is, or that this kind of intelligence is unusual in a kid her age. But this could be a product of the Wormwoods' neglect—Matilda's parents have never told her she's special.

Then, Matilda asks if Miss Honey is afraid she's going to hurt herself, and she insists that using her **power** feels "lovely." Also, it was easier the second time, so she probably just needs to practice. By this time, the landscape is rural and there are changing autumn trees all over. Miss Honey distracts Matilda by telling her the names for the trees until, finally, they reach a gap in the hedge. Miss Honey leads Matilda through a gate and down a narrower, rutted lane.

It's subtle, but Matilda makes an important point about learning here: that in order to learn something, one needs to practice. And despite Matilda's genius, even she needs to practice things like reading (as when she read Mrs. Wormwood's cookbook early in the novel) and now, using her power.

Matilda realizes she's never thought of Miss Honey as a real person who doesn't just live at school. Does she have a sibling, or a mother, or a husband at home? When Matilda asks, though, Miss Honey says she lives alone in a small farm worker's cottage. She points ahead to a tiny brick cottage shaded by trees and surrounded by blackberries and nettles. Miss Honey recites part of a poem by Dylan Thomas, which she thinks of every time she approaches her house. In it, the speaker tells a girl to not "fear or believe" that a wolf in sheep's clothing will leap out and eat the girl's heart. Matilda is stunned; she's never heard such beautiful poetry. Miss Honey is embarrassed and pushes on ahead.

Again, it becomes clear that Matilda is just a child: her world is expanding as she realizes that Miss Honey has a life outside of being a teacher at school. Miss Honey also has preferences about poetry and now has the opportunity to share a poem she loves with Matilda. The poem is interesting, as it's possible to read it as a warning to, say, not fear Miss Trunchbull. It suggests that Miss Trunchbull might be dangerous, but she can't actually beat Matilda and Miss Honey down.

Matilda hangs back; she's frightened now. This cottage seems like something out of a fairy tale. But when Miss Honey calls for her, Matilda follows her teacher into the house. Miss Honey isn't tall, but she has to crouch inside. The kitchen is the size of a closet, with a sink (with no taps), a shelf, and a cupboard with a camping stove on it. There's only a single bottle of milk. Miss Honey sends Matilda outside to the well with a bucket to draw water.

Seeing Miss Honey's tiny, primitive cottage shows Matilda that the world is much bigger and scarier than she ever imagined. The cottage seemed like the stuff of fairy tales moments ago—but now, she has to confront that her beloved teacher still lives very simply, with no modern amenities like running water. This is also a sign that Miss Honey lives in dire poverty.

Matilda thoroughly enjoys the task. When she returns with the water, though, she asks how Miss Honey ever gets enough water for a bath. Miss Honey explains that she heats a bucket of water, strips, and washes herself, just like poor people in England used to do—though in the olden days, people didn't have a nice stove like she has. Matilda asks if Miss Honey is poor and Miss Honey says she is. As Matilda watches Miss Honey make tea, slice brown bread, and spread margarine on it, Matilda sees her teacher is right. She seems to sense that she shouldn't embarrass Miss Honey, though, so she insists she doesn't need sugar.

At first, having to draw water from a well is fun for Matilda—this is like going camping for her. But soon, things start to look sinister. Miss Honey doesn't live this way because it's fun. Rather, she lives this way because she has to for some mysterious reason. And despite Matilda's naivete, which shines through in much of this chapter, she still is mature for her age: she knows to tread carefully so as to not embarrass Miss Honey.

Miss Honey takes the tray and leads Matilda to the sitting room. Matilda is stunned: the room is tiny and the only furniture are wooden boxes. It's appalling that Miss Honey lives here. Something fishy must be going on. Miss Honey invites Matilda to sit and eat the bread; she eats most of her food at school. Wanting to be polite, Matilda complies. This is strange and sad, but fun—and Matilda wants to know what's going on. Miss Honey pours tea and tells Matilda that her **power** is amazing. It'd be interesting to figure out how much Matilda can do, and Matilda says she'd love to find out.

Very quickly, Miss Honey's cottage has transformed from fun to sinister. Matilda understands that Miss Honey is somehow being forced to live here and, perhaps, doesn't want to live this way. And it's up to her, the narrator suggests, to figure out exactly what's going on with Miss Honey. By then bringing this chapter's close around to Matilda's power, the novel foreshadows that Matilda may be able to use her power to help her teacher.

CHAPTER 17. MISS HONEY'S STORY

Miss Honey invites Matilda to eat the second slice of bread. As Matilda nibbles, she asks if Miss Honey is badly paid and if the other teachers live like this. Stiffly, Miss Honey says she's the exception. Matilda says Miss Honey must just want to live simply—it must save her from having to dust and buy "junky" food like ice cream and eggs. Miss Honey's face looks tight and strange as she sits in silence. Matilda apologizes for her forwardness, but Miss Honey notes that Matilda is too bright to not be curious. She admits that Matilda is the first visitor to the cottage, and she notes that Matilda may look like a child but, really, Matilda is an adult inside.

Keep in mind that the Wormwoods are fairly wealthy, at least compared to Miss Honey. Matilda is well aware that Miss Honey's lifestyle isn't the norm. Asking if Miss Honey wants to "live simply" is a way to let Miss Honey save face; if Miss Honey chose, she could agree and move on to another subject. But instead, Miss Honey is drawn in by Matilda's curiosity. To Miss Honey, it's normal for a child like Matilda to wonder about this sort of thing, and Matilda's intelligence makes her notice things that other kids don't.

Miss Honey says she hasn't been able to speak to anyone about her problems, but Matilda seems magical, and she'd love to tell Matilda her story. Matilda accepts more tea, and then Miss Honey begins her story. She says she's only 23. Her father was a doctor and they lived in a nice big, brick house. Then, her mother died when she was two, so her father invited his unmarried sister-in-law to look after Miss Honey. Miss Honey says she hated her aunt instantly, since she wasn't kind. Her father never knew, since the aunt was nice when he was around. Then came the second tragedy: Miss Honey's father died when she was five. Her aunt continued to care for her—and took ownership of the house.

As Miss Honey tells her story, it becomes clear that, like Matilda, Miss Honey didn't grow up in happy circumstances. Once her father died, Miss Honey didn't have any adults to protect, nurture, or advocate for her, since her aunt was so terrible to her. Miss Honey also shows that her aunt had ulterior motives for caring for her niece: getting control of the Honeys' house, which is no doubt a valuable bit of real estate. So the aunt shows a desire for power, both in terms of finances and having control of other people.

Matilda asks how Miss Honey's father died. Miss Honey says it's all very mysterious; her father didn't seem like the sort to commit suicide, but that's what everything looked like. Matilda suggests the aunt did it, but Miss Honey says you can't think those things without proof. Then, after a moment, Miss Honey says her aunt turned into a "holy terror." She won't even say what happened; it's too terrible. Miss Honey says she always shook whenever her aunt was around. She didn't have other family to care for her. Over the years, she became so terrified of her aunt that she did whatever her aunt said. She lived in the house like a "slave," doing all the housework. Miss Honey implies she was beaten as well.

Miss Honey may accuse Matilda of jumping to conclusions about her aunt killing her father, but it doesn't seem like it'd be a stretch given how Miss Honey describes her aunt. The fact that Matilda jumps to this conclusion at all is a sign of Matilda's keen sense of justice. And in describing life with her aunt, Miss Honey describes another alternative to neglect: outright abuse. Miss Honey was terrified into obedience and, unlike Matilda, wasn't able to simply work around her caregivers to get the things she wanted (as Matilda did by going to the library, for instance).

Miss Honey says that, though she was bright, she couldn't go to university because her aunt needed her to do housework at home. So she took the bus to Reading for a teacher training course starting when she was 18. She couldn't leave her aunt until she had a job—and anyway, she was too afraid of her aunt to walk away.

Here, Miss Honey also draws similarities between herself and Matilda when she notes that she was a bright child. She might not have been a child genius like Matilda, but she did have a desire to learn and better herself through education.

Miss Honey insists the story is over, but Matilda asks how she managed to escape. Miss Honey said that when she got her teaching job, her aunt insisted on taking all of Miss Honey's earnings except for a pound per week to pay her back. Now, Miss Honey's paycheck goes straight to her aunt. Matilda notes that Miss Honey's salary could've been her freedom, but Miss Honey says she was too afraid to fight back.

Matilda recognizes instantly that in order to free herself from her aunt, Miss Honey needs control of her own paycheck. With money, Miss Honey can make choices for herself. But without that money, Miss Honey remains under her aunt's thumb and can't be totally free, or a fully independent adult.

Two years ago, Miss Honey came across this tiny cottage while on a walk. She asked the farmer if she could rent it and he agreed to let her have it for 10 pence per week. Miss Honey paid for a month in advance. That night, she packed her things, told her aunt she was leaving, and walked out. Matilda praises Miss Honey. Miss Honey says with the money left over after rent, she has enough to buy paraffin for her lamp and some basic food staples. To Matilda, Miss Honey seems like the bravest person ever. But when Miss Honey says she doesn't have a bed, Matilda realizes her teacher needs help.

Miss Honey is brave—she did something terrifying in defying her aunt and moving out into this cottage. Moving out gave Miss Honey some degree of independence, though her aunt still constrains her ability to live well by keeping control of Miss Honey's paycheck. Realizing that Miss Honey doesn't have a bed, though, shifts something for Matilda. Miss Honey may have physically escaped her aunt, but she has to escape financially in order to be truly secure and safe.

Matilda suggests that Miss Honey quit teaching and collect unemployment, but Miss Honey says she loves teaching too much. Then, Matilda asks what happened to Miss Honey's aunt. She's still living in the family house, and she's nowhere close to dying.

Matilda seems mature beyond her years when she suggests collecting unemployment. For Miss Honey, though, this isn't an option: it's more important to her to make a positive impact on kids' lives as a teacher than it is to quit so she can have the means to escape her aunt.

Matilda asks if Miss Honey's father really intended for the aunt to own the house. Miss Honey says he no doubt intended for her to have it for a time, but usually houses are left for children when they're old enough. But Miss Honey says her father's will was likely destroyed—and her aunt was able to produce a note from Miss Honey's father, supposedly leaving the house to her and not Miss Honey. Miss Honey insists she doesn't have the money to fight her aunt, especially since her aunt is so respected in the community. After a moment, Miss Honey reveals that her aunt is Miss Trunchbull.

Everything makes sense once Miss Honey shares that Miss Trunchbull is her aunt. Miss Trunchbull is terrifying and intimidating—it's no wonder Miss Honey is so quiet and nervous. Learning that Miss Trunchbull resides in the Honeys' house and is taking Miss Honey's paycheck shows Matilda that Miss Trunchbull got her financial power through theft. And she keeps that power by earning respect in the community, so that nobody is brave enough to actually shut her terrible behavior down.

CHAPTER 18. THE NAMES

Matilda shouts; no wonder Miss Honey was so terrified. When Matilda tells Miss Honey about the pigtail incident on the playground the other day, Miss Honey says that's nothing—Miss Trunchbull used to hold her head under the water during baths. But Miss Honey changes the subject; they should talk about Matilda. Matilda says she knows she can push things over—but she'd rather not experiment. She'd like to go home and think about things. Immediately, Miss Honey jumps up and agrees to walk Matilda home.

Miss Honey makes it clear that having her head held underwater was the least of the physical abuse she suffered. This gives the impression to readers that the extent of Miss Trunchbull's evil is beyond comprehension—it's up to the reader's imagination to decide just how terrible Miss Trunchbull is. When Miss Honey leaps up to walk Matilda home, the dynamic changes. While before Miss Honey spoke to Matilda like a fellow adult, Matilda is now a child again.


Matilda and Miss Honey walk in silence. Matilda is so lost in thought that she barely seems to notice where she's going. At Matilda's gate, Matilda refuses Miss Honey's request that she forget everything—but she agrees to keep quiet about what she heard. Then, Matilda says she has an idea, and she has three questions. First, what did Miss Trunchbull call Miss Honey's father? Then, what did he call Miss Trunchbull? And finally, what did they call Miss Honey? Miss Honey's father went by his first name, Magnus; Miss Trunchbull went by Agatha; and they called Miss Honey Jenny. Matilda agrees to not say anything, laughs, and thanks Miss Honey for tea.

Matilda is clearly planning something, as evidenced by being so lost in thought and then asking these questions as she bids Miss Honey goodbye. Also keep in mind that Matilda is very interested in justice, and Miss Honey's situation is about as unjust as it gets. So Matilda is motivated by her love and admiration for her teacher, but she's also motivated because she sees a huge wrong and seems to believe that she has the power to fix it.

CHAPTER 19. THE PRACTICE

As usual, the Wormwood house is empty. Matilda fishes out one of Mr. Wormwood's cigars and then locks herself in her room to practice. By now, she has a plan for how to help Miss Honey. She's confident that if she practices, she'll succeed—and the cigar is about the right weight. Matilda puts the cigar on her dressing table and then sits on her bed. She concentrates until her power is flowing and manages to roll the cigar onto the floor.

Again, even a genius like Matilda needs to practice new skills until they're second nature. This is a message to readers who might not be geniuses that it's normal to have to work for and practice new things. And Matilda confirms that she's practicing moving the cigar so she can help Miss Honey, motivated by her desire to get her teacher justice.


Next, she tries to lift the cigar. It takes a huge effort. Matilda practices for another hour—and it's so exhausting that she falls asleep. Mrs. Wormwood finds her like this later. From this day on, Matilda practices every day after school. Six days later, her practice pays off: she can move the cigar exactly how she wants to.

Throwing herself so fully into helping Miss Honey shows just how dedicated Matilda is to righting the world's wrongs. But keep in mind that she also has an ulterior motive to trying to take down Miss Trunchbull: Miss Trunchbull hates the kids at school, too, so Matilda is also helping herself.

CHAPTER 20. THE THIRD MIRACLE

It's Thursday, the day when Miss Trunchbull takes over Miss Honey's class. In the morning, Miss Honey checks in with the students who were physically harmed last time. Nigel says he wishes he were a grown-up—he'd knock Miss Trunchbull over. Miss Honey tells the children to practice their three-times table and releases them for lunch.

Nigel encapsulates the idea that children commonly feel powerless next to adults. And the remedy, he suggests, is for those kids to grow up so they have the power to stand up for themselves. Miss Honey brushes this off, though. Readers now know that she does this because she doesn't believe fighting Miss Trunchbull is going to end well.

After lunch, the class waits silently for Miss Trunchbull. Soon enough, the Trunchbull strides in and checks the jug. There's no newt this time, so the Trunchbull points to a small boy named Wilfred and asks him to recite the three-times table backwards. He insists he hasn't learned it backwards and Miss Honey murmurs that she doesn't teach things backwards, since life moves forward—and anyway, could Miss Trunchbull really recite a word backwards without practice? The Trunchbull snaps at Miss Honey and gives Wilfred a problem: how much fruit does he have if he has seven apples, seven oranges, and seven bananas?

As Miss Honey points out, reciting something like a times table backwards is more of a party trick than anything useful. So Miss Trunchbull asking Wilfred to recite it backwards is a sign both of her desire to set kids up to fail and an indicator of how morally backwards she is. (Recall that Miss Trunchbull is interested in power, not educating kids.) The fact that Miss Honey stands up to Miss Trunchbull at all suggests that she's becoming more confident, perhaps from sharing her story with Matilda.

Wilfred cries out that that's adding, not multiplication. The Trunchbull shrieks that it *is* multiplication and the answer is 21. She gives him another question: how many nuts does he have if he has eight coconuts, eight monkey-nuts, and eight "nutty little idiots" like Wilfred? Flustered, Wilfred counts on his fingers, but the Trunchbull screams that this is simple multiplication. By now, Wilfred is too afraid and upset to even try, so the Trunchbull flips him up and grabs him by an ankle.

Wilfred is in a difficult spot. He knows that Miss Trunchbull is trying to trip him up, but he also knows that his health and safety depend on figuring out what she's asking and being able to answer it. And in this situation, neither Wilfred's parents nor Miss Honey can really protect him. In the classroom, Miss Trunchbull is all-powerful.

Just as the Trunchbull screams at Wilfred that eight threes is 24, Nigel screeches that the chalk is moving on its own. Everyone stares at the blackboard, where the chalk is writing "Agatha." The Trunchbull drops Wilfred and asks who's doing this in a shout. But the chalk keeps writing. It writes that this is Magnus—and at this, Miss Honey glances at Matilda. Matilda's eyes look like glittering stars. Then, "Magnus" tells the Trunchbull to "give my Jenny back her house." Everyone is staring at the Trunchbull, whose face is white. Magnus continues, commanding the Trunchbull to give Jenny her wages and the house—or he'll come for the Trunchbull. The chalk falls to the ground and breaks.

Now, it becomes clear what Matilda has been practicing with the cigar: using her power to write. This literalizes the idea that recognizing injustice gives someone the power to change things. Not only that, it also allows Matilda to expose Miss Trunchbull's theft and meanness, which chips away at Miss Trunchbull's credibility in the community. Further, Matilda seems as though she's going to be able to save both the students at Crunchem Hall and Miss Honey from Miss Trunchbull's abuse.

Wilfred screams that the Trunchbull is on the floor—and sure enough, she fainted. Miss Honey sends someone to fetch the matron, while Nigel notes that his father insists it's best to pour water over someone who's fainted. He dumps the water in the jug on the Trunchbull's head and no one says anything.

Miss Trunchbull's fainting spell puts her in a vulnerable position—so Nigel is able to gain some power over her by dumping the water over her head. This shows that at least in the short term, Matilda has been successful at shifting the power balance at school.

Matilda sits motionless and happy. She feels wonderful—writing with the chalk had been so easy. The matron and five teachers rush in. One of the teachers congratulates Miss Honey and another suggests they throw more water on the Trunchbull, but the Matron scolds her helpers. Once the adults get Miss Trunchbull out of the room, Miss Honey sends her class to the playground. Miss Honey hugs and kisses Matilda as she passes by.

The way that the other adults speak in this passage suggests that most adults at school were afraid of Miss Trunchbull—and her downfall is welcome to all of them. This shows that Crunchem Hall is actually populated with caring educators whom Miss Trunchbull just didn't allow to do their jobs and protect the kids.

CHAPTER 21. A NEW HOME

Before long, everyone knows about the Trunchbull's fainting episode—and that she marched out of the school once she recovered. The following morning, the Trunchbull doesn't show up. When the Deputy Head, Mr. Trilby, phones to check on her, nobody answers. He visits her after school—but nobody is in the brick Georgian house in the woods. Mr. Trilby realizes the Trunchbull up and left and goes to inform the School Governors.

Her crimes exposed, Miss Trunchbull sees no way forward but to leave without a trace. This shows that her success prior to Matilda's antics was tenuous. All it took was a child exposing what Miss Trunchbull did, and putting Miss Trunchbull in a vulnerable position, for Miss Trunchbull to decide that it's better to give everything up and move on.

The following morning, Miss Honey receives a letter from local lawyers saying that they've found her father's will. The house belongs to her, along with her father's lifetime savings. She should contact them as fast as possible to take ownership of the property and the money. Within a few weeks, Miss Honey is living in her family home. Matilda visits her teacher every afternoon after school, and soon they're great friends. At Crunchem Hall Academy, Mr. Trilby replaces Miss Trunchbull as Head Teacher. Soon after, Matilda moves into the top form.

Miss Trunchbull presumably sent the will to the lawyers, thereby finally giving Miss Honey the rights to her home. Finally, Miss Honey has gotten the justice she deserves—and she's financially and socially secure for the first time in her life. Her newfound security allows her to form this close relationship with Matilda. And for Matilda, things are also looking up. With Miss Trunchbull gone, school has become a place where Matilda's teachers can appropriately challenge and educate her.

A few weeks later, when Matilda is having tea with Miss Honey, she reveals that her **power** seems to be gone. Miss Honey says she's not surprised. She wonders if Matilda's power stemmed from being so frustrated—and that energy eventually bubbled over and manifested as Matilda's ability to move objects. Now, though, Matilda is in the top form and is challenged in school, so her brain is busy. Matilda says that, in any case, she's relieved—she didn't want to be a miracle worker. Miss Honey thanks Matilda again for all she did for her.

Miss Honey essentially suggests that Matilda's power stemmed from necessity. Matilda developed her power to right all the egregious wrongs she saw in her world. And now that Miss Honey is living in her family home and Matilda is being challenged in school, there's no need for her brain to go to such lengths anymore. Now, Matilda can be a normal (if unusually intelligent) child.

Matilda adores these evenings with Miss Honey. They speak like equals, and she feels safe and loved. Matilda shares with Miss Honey that a mouse's heart beats 650 times every second. A hedgehog is slower, at 300 beats per minute. Miss Honey thinks to herself that she loves how interested Matilda is in everything. They talk for another hour and then Matilda sets out to walk home. It's a short walk and when she arrives, there's a new black Mercedes parked outside. This isn't unusual; Mr. Wormwood often has odd cars parked outside.

Matilda may feel like she and Miss Honey are equals. But what's really happening here is that Matilda is finally learning what it's like to have a caregiver who takes an interest in what Matilda is interested in—and in Matilda herself. Miss Honey is, in this sense, taking on the role of a third parent to Matilda, and one who's far more interested in Matilda than her biological parents are.

Inside, though, is mayhem: Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood are stuffing as much as they can into suitcases. Mr. Wormwood tells Matilda to pack; they're leaving for Spain. Matilda doesn't want to go, since she loves her school, but her father tells her to hurry up. He also says that they're not coming back.

It's a sign of how settled and challenged Matilda is that she doesn't want to leave because she loves her school. In a way, this is an indicator of how much Matilda loves and trusts Miss Honey and the other teachers at school—they're there for her, while Matilda's parents aren't.

Rather than pack, Matilda runs all the way to Miss Honey's house. Miss Honey is pruning her roses and comes out to meet Matilda. Matilda cries that her parents are moving the family to Spain forever. Miss Honey says she's not surprised—Mr. Wormwood is "in with a bunch of crooks" and is probably selling stolen cars. He'd often change the license plates and repaint stolen cars. He's probably been planning this move for years, just in case.

Miss Honey makes the case here that the Wormwoods' success and security has been tenuous for years. Because Mr. Wormwood is involved in business practices that are illegal, there's always been the risk that this move—or worse, like being arrested—was going to happen. So Mrs. Wormwood may have looked secure and successful in her nice home, but in reality, she, like Miss Trunchbull, couldn't rely on her power or success.

Matilda shouts that she doesn't want to go with her parents. She wants to live here, with Miss Honey. Miss Honey says that Matilda has to go with her parents—though she acknowledges that if they agreed to let Matilda stay, that would be okay. Matilda notes that her parents don't care about her anyway, so they might agree. She grabs Miss Honey's hand and leads her back to her house at a run.

Miss Honey understands that Matilda's parents do have rights to their daughter. Because Matilda is a child, Matilda can't just decide on her own who she lives with. But Matilda does have the power to perhaps convince her parents to let her stay with someone who will no doubt love and care for her.

Now, Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood are filling the Mercedes with their suitcases. Matilda stops and asks her parents if she can stay with Miss Honey. Mr. Wormwood barely acknowledges this, and Miss Honey promises to care for Matilda—but only if her parents agree. Mrs. Wormwood suggests it'd mean one less thing to look after, so Mr. Wormwood agrees. Matilda leaps into Miss Honey's arms and they watch the Wormwoods leave. Michael waves at Matilda out the window, but Mr. Wormwood and Mrs. Wormwood don't look back.

Notice how everyone behaves during this parting. Matilda's leap into Miss Honey's arms is an intimate action that shows how deeply they care for and trust each other. The Wormwoods, on the other hand, show one last time how little they care about their daughter—it's not even worth it to them to look back at her. Letting Matilda stay with Miss Honey ensures that Matilda will not only get the love and care she desires at last; Matilda will also be guaranteed the support she needs as she pursues her education.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "*Matilda*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Sep 2021. Web. 25 Sep 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "*Matilda*." LitCharts LLC, September 25, 2021. Retrieved September 25, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/matilda.

To cite any of the quotes from *Matilda* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Dahl, Roald. Matilda. Puffin Books. 2007.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Dahl, Roald. Matilda. New York: Puffin Books. 2007.