

James and the Giant Peach

Author

James and the Giant Peach is considered to be Roald Dahl's first children's novel. Roald began writing *James* in 1959, at his home in England. While sitting in his orchard one day, he looked at one of his cherry trees and began to wonder what would happen if one of those cherries just continued to grow and grow and grow? Eventually he turned the cherry into a peach and the story of James Henry Trotter and his fantastic giant peach was created.

James and the Giant Peach tells the story of how James escapes from his two terrible aunts, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, with the help of some magic wiggly beans, a giant peach and a team of interesting insects.

Activities

1. Watch this 2 minute video about the author with your class
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1xAQloP-IA>
2. Divide your class up into groups and have each group investigate and create a presentation on a different novel by Roald Dahl. These novels can include : *The BFG*, *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Fantastic Mr.Fox* and *The Twits*. Their presentation can include a poster for the book or a dramatized scene. Each presentation must include:
 - Synopsis of novel
 - When and where it was written
 - What inspired Roald to write the story
 - What are some themes of the novel
3. After the presentations, vote on a book to read together as a class.

Discussion

Roald Dahl took events, objects and people from his own life and turned them into fantastical stories.

Think about your life. What are some boring, average things that happen everyday? What are some items or people that we see everyday that seem normal and unexciting? Maybe make a list of these things. Now look at that list again. What could turn the ordinary into the extraordinary? ex. I sit in a chair everyday to write at my desk. What if that chair became a time machine chair? But it only went 1 hour back in time! What could I do with that? What about my best friend? I see her everyday. What if one day, I found out she had a secret identity? This kind of brainstorming is important in the writing process.

Developing Characters

James and the Giant Peach is about a boy who escapes from his two mean, terrible aunts, Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, with the help of some rather interesting friends: Centipede, Ladybug/Ladybird, Spider, Earthworm and Grasshopper. These friends all have very distinct personalities and characteristics.

Activity

1. Give the students an opportunity to investigate the different insects and report their findings. Centipede calls himself a "pest", Earthworm says of himself that he is "a very useful creature" and Grasshopper calls himself a "musician". What makes them say these things? Are they true? What kind of myths or superstitions are there around the insects in the novel?
2. If you were James, what other insect would you want to be traveling with you and why? Do some research on that insect. Would they be a good traveling companion? What would their personality traits be? Draw a picture of them and write a two paragraph diary entry as that character. What do they think about their journey in the peach?
3. What are some of the insects that you see on a regular basis? What do you think of them? How do you interact with them? What do you think, they think of you? Write a dialogue between two of those insects, in which they talk about what they think of humans.
4. Roald Dahl is famous for his very descriptive writing. Pretend there is a 3rd Aunt in the story. What would her name be? What would she look like? Draw a picture of her and then write a paragraph using as many descriptive words as possible to tell the class about her.

Discussion

1. If your life were a novel or a play, who would the main characters be? If you were to change their names to be more descriptive of who they are, what would their new names be?
2. If you were an insect traveling in the peach with James, what insect would you be and why? How does the characteristics of that insect match who you are?

Developing Place and Space

James travels inside a giant peach with 5 other full sized individuals. A once in a lifetime experience! They start their journey atop a hill in England and end up on the Empire state Building.

Activities

1. Map out James' journey. We know that from his garden he can see the sea and we also know that the Peach goes over the White Cliffs of Dover. Where are the White Cliffs of Dover? Where is the Empire State Building? What ocean must they travel across to reach the Empire State Building? What direction must they travel? How many miles would that be? How tall is the Empire state building? How tall are the Cliffs of Dover? What is so important about both of these historical sites?
2. James and the insects spend their journey either inside or on top of the peach. What is the average size of a peach? How big must a peach grow in order to hold 6 characters in it? What do you think the new dimensions are? How many times larger must the peach grow? 100 x its size? 1000 x its size?
3. Imagine that you looked up and saw a giant peach overhead. Pretend you are a reporter and write a news segment about what you are seeing. Interview regular folks on the street to get their reactions. This could be prerecorded or acted out for the class.

Discussion

1. If you had to travel inside a giant fruit, which fruit would you like it to be? Why?
2. If you could travel from home right now, to anywhere in the world in a flying fruit, where would you go? What direction would you need to travel? How far would you need to travel?
3. James and the insects spend time both flying in the air and floating on the water. Which do you think is the better way to travel? What would each of them feel like? What would you see from the air? What would you see in the Ocean?

Developing Voice

The words that characters use give us understanding of who they are. For example, if a character uses very large words that we don't understand the meaning of, we may decide that they must be very smart. In James and the Giant Peach, Centipede makes up songs that both rhyme and contain silly images and words.

Activity

1. Print out one of Centipede's songs and hand it out to the class. Read it out loud and have the students follow along. Talk about the rhyming scheme. Is it ABA or ABBA or something else? Talk about the number of syllables in each line and how that plays into the rhythm of the poem. Use colored pencils and

have the students underline the words that rhyme with the same color. As a class, or in groups, decide on a topic for a poem. EX. the school day or homework. Decide on a rhyming scheme and have each group write their own poem or do it as a class. Letting each member contribute. Keep reworking it until you get the rhythm just right.

2. Roald Dahl was famous for creating new words in his books. Some examples of words he created are:
 - Biffsquiggled (adjective): If you feel biffsquiggled, you are confused or puzzled.
 - Churgle (verb): When you churgle, you gurgle with laughter.
 - Daddle (verb): If you daddle, you run very fast.
 - Darksome (adjective): Dark and murky.

Invite your students to become inventors of new words.

- Invent a word that means something is so beautiful that it bursts into flames and becomes a star.
- Invent a word that means to feel so tired that your body wants to melt into the floor.
- Invent a word that means that something smells so bad that your nose runs away.
- Invent a word that means to feel so happy that you start to float.
- What other words can they come up with?

Discussion

1. Does anyone's family use words that are made up and unique to their family?
2. Discuss how language evolves and what new words were invented with new technology. For example, what words or phrases came about just because of the invention of the computer? What about the invention of the automobile? Or the phone?
3. Read some Shel Silverstein poems to the class. Ask the students what they think of poetry? Is it effective in communicating ideas? What kind of ideas would it be best for? A business meeting? A direction manual? How about music?

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