



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Witches

Roald Dahl



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Witches

Roald Dahl

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Writing

Letter, report, dialogue, story,
poem, advertisement

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
summarizing

Thinking

Brainstorming, compare/
contrast, analysis, researching,
inferring, forming opinions

Literary Elements

Genre, characterization,
figurative language, theme,
point of view

Vocabulary

Definitions, context clues,
synonyms/antonyms, dictionary

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, performance,
presentation, review

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—brochure,
interview; Art—models, painting,
drawing; Music—songwriting,
appropriate selections; Math—
graphing

Genre: fantasy

Setting: Norway and England

Point of View: first person

Themes: importance of love, transience of life, family, acceptance, courage, sacrifice

Conflict: person vs. person

Style: narrative

Tone: conversational, humorous, fantastical, awed, fearful

Date of First Publication: 1983

Summary

A boy goes to live with his grandmother when his parents die in an automobile accident. She describes witches in detail and tells the boy how to recognize and avoid them. They spend the summer in a seaside resort where the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children holds its annual meeting. However, the RSPCC's meeting turns out to be the annual meeting of English witches. There The Grand High Witch gives orders to all the English witches for the coming year. The boy overhears a plan for turning all English children into mice using a special mixture called Formula 86. When the witches discover him, The Grand High Witch turns him into a mouse. The boy and his grandmother thwart The Grand High Witch's plan by stealing a bottle of Formula 86 and pouring it into some soup that The Grand High Witch and the English witches eat. The witches turn into mice and are hunted down by the hotel's staff. Encouraged by this success, the boy and his grandmother hatch a plan to make Formula 86 themselves and use it to wipe out all of the witches in the world.

About the Author

Roald Dahl was born on September 13, 1916 in Llandaff, Wales. His parents were from Norway. Roald had one brother and five sisters. His father died from pneumonia in 1920, and in accordance with his father's wishes, the Dahl children attended English schools. Roald's mother spoke the Norwegian language around the house, read the children Norse myths, and took them on annual trips to Norway to visit relatives. At school, Roald excelled at swimming and cricket, but he struggled academically. He was treated cruelly by headmasters and some older students. During his years at boarding school, Cadbury, the chocolate company, would periodically send boxes of new chocolates to be tested by the pupils. Roald would sometimes dream of coming up with a new kind of chocolate bar that would impress the head of the company. It was from this time in his life that Roald later drew the inspiration for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and there are references to chocolate in his other books for children. Roald's main hobbies were reading and photography, and he especially liked stories of heroes and fantasy. He became a Royal Air Force (RAF) fighter pilot during World War II, serving in Greece, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya, where he survived a crash that temporarily blinded him. His first book for children was *The Gremlins*, which was published in 1943. In 1953, Dahl married actress Patricia Neal. His books have won countless awards and have been translated into 34 languages. Many of Dahl's books, including *The Witches*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, and *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, have been adapted into feature films. Less than a year before his death, Britain's five best-selling books

A Note about Witches—How to Recognise a Witch

A boy goes to live with his grandmother in Norway after his parents die in a car accident. Grandmamma tells the boy all about witches. She tells him that real witches look like ordinary women. They hate children and spend all their time plotting to get rid of all the children in their territory. Grandmamma tells the boy about five children she once knew who have disappeared because of witches. She then explains how to recognize witches and reveals that she once had a frightening encounter with a witch.

Vocabulary

ordinary
particular
churning
swoops
admit
forehead
expert
drawn
crouched
vanished
billowed
twinkle
surface
shivers
quiver

Discussion Questions

1. How do fairy tales describe witches? How do real witches differ from the ones in fairy tales? Based on this information, how will this novel be different from fairy tales? *(In fairy tales, witches wear silly black hats and black clothes and ride around on broomsticks. Real witches look like ordinary women and work ordinary jobs. Answers will vary. This novel will be different from a fairy tale since the witches will be harder to spot and will turn up in unexpected places.)*
2. How do real witches spend their time? How does a real witch feel about squelching a child? What predictions can you make about this novel based on this information? *(A real witch spends all her time plotting to get rid of the children in her territory. She usually tries to squelch one child per week. Witches love to squelch children. Answers will vary. This novel will not have a “happily ever after” ending. The children involved in the story face real danger.)*
3. What makes a witch grumpy? What is the witches’ motto? What does this tell you about witches? *(A witch gets grumpy when she does not squelch at least one child a week. The motto is*

“One child a week is fifty-two a year. Squish them and squiggle them and make them disappear” [p. 8]. Answers will vary. Witches are serious about their work. They set goals and are organized.)

4. Write the words that the author uses to describe a witch’s magic powers. How do these powers help a witch? *(“A witch...has magic in her fingers and devilry dancing in her blood. She can make stones jump about like frogs and she can make tongues of flame go flickering across the surface of the water” [p. 9]. Answers will vary, but such powers would deter people from challenging her, allow her to vanquish those who did, and prevent her from getting caught by the police.)*
5. What makes witches dangerous to children? Why do you think this makes them more dangerous? *(Witches are dangerous to children because they do not look dangerous. Answers will vary. Witches look like nice ladies, so children are not afraid to walk right up to them.)*
6. What happens to the boy when he is seven years old? What does Grandmamma do to take the boy’s mind off of his sadness? Do you think that is a good idea? *(The boy’s parents are killed in an automobile accident. He moves in with his grandmother in Norway. Grandmamma tells him stories about witches. Answers will vary. It takes his mind off of his sadness, but it could scare him a lot. On the other hand, the boy should know about witches so he can avoid them.)*
7. According to Grandmamma, who is seen in every case of a child disappearing? Explain what happens to each child who vanishes. What pattern do you notice? *(Each child who disappears goes away with a strange lady. One child walks away with a lady she meets in her front yard, one child becomes part of a painting, one child turns into a chicken, one child turns to stone, and one child turns into a porpoise. Answers will vary. Though the first child’s fate is unknown, the others are not killed. Instead they are forced to exist in some different form.)*

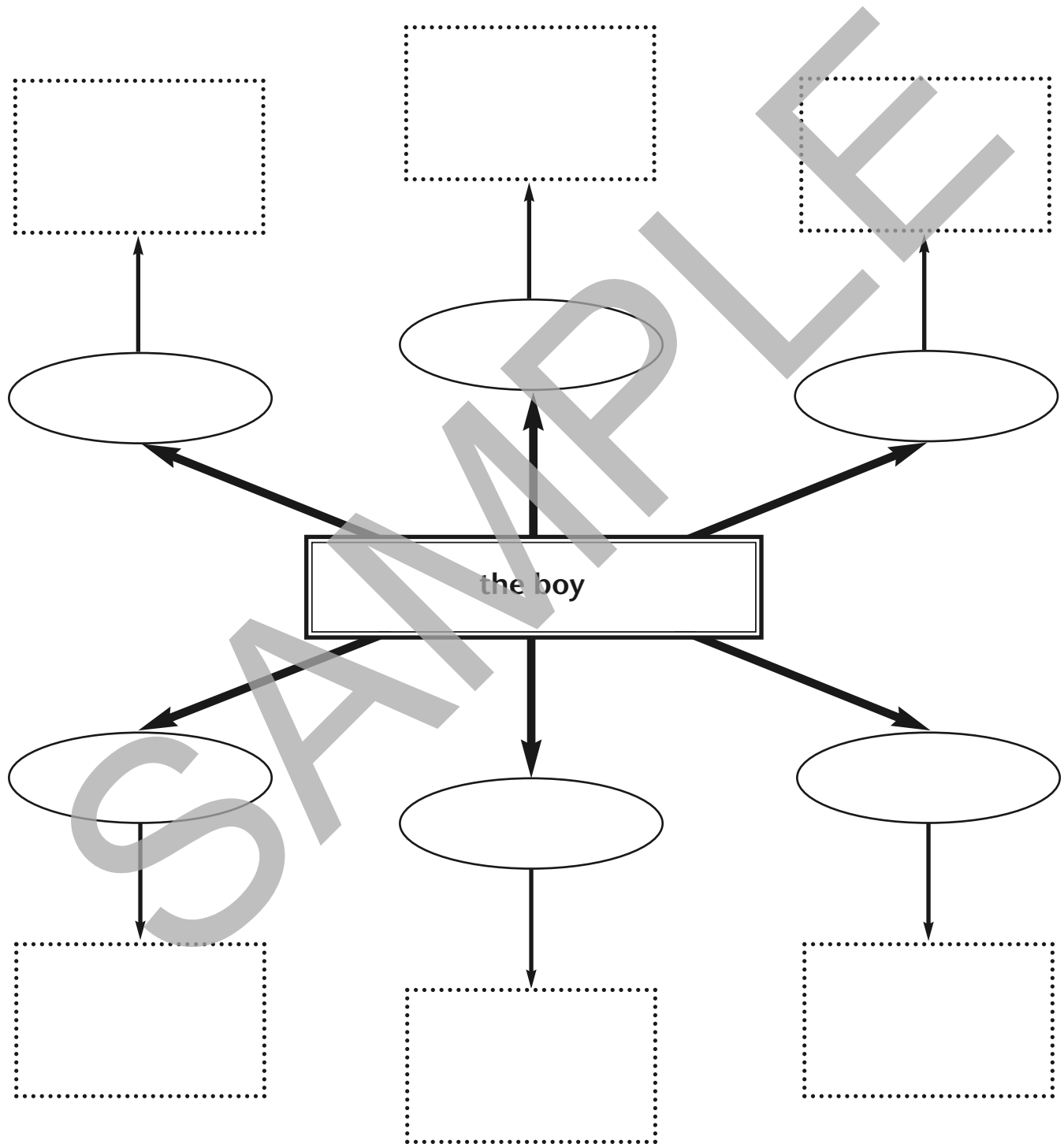
8. What clues help someone recognize a real witch? Which clue is the best, and why? *(Real witches always wear gloves to hide their claws and wigs to cover their bald heads. The wigs give them wig rash, so they scratch their heads a lot. Their nose-holes are large, pink-rimmed, and curvy like a sea shell. Their pupils change colors, and one can see fire and ice dancing in them. A witch may limp because she has square, toeless feet that do not fit the kinds of small, pointed shoes that many women wear. However, the kinds of shoes a witch wears would prevent people from seeing her toeless feet. Real witches have blue spit which leaves a bluish tinge on their teeth. Answers will vary. Blue spit may be the best clue because no ordinary person has that. Some people may limp, wear gloves or wigs, and have itchy scalps. The nose-holes and eyes are good clues, but you would have to get very close to see them.)*
9. What are stink waves? What does this passage tell you about the author? *(Stink waves are odors that children give off that only witches can smell. They smell like fresh dog droppings to a witch. This makes a child's presence easy for a witch to detect. Answers will vary, but the author seems to find extensive discussion of such gross details humorous and fun.)*
10. Why do you think witches do not climb up drainpipes or break into people's houses to get at children? *(Answers will vary. Witches do not risk getting caught. They are sneaky and try to trick children into going with them.)*
11. Why do you think Grandmamma is silent when the boy asks whether the witch she met has something to do with her missing thumb? *(The boy is probably correct in thinking that the witch Grandmamma met is responsible for her missing thumb. Grandmamma is seemingly still haunted by the incident and is too overwhelmed by the sudden memory of it to react to her grandson when he says goodnight to her.)*

Supplementary Activities

1. Character Analysis: Begin the Characterization chart on page 24 of this guide. Continue adding to it as you read.
2. Literary Elements: Begin the Story Map on page 25 of this guide. Continue adding to it as you read.
3. Art: Using the descriptions in this section, paint or draw a witch.
4. Social Studies: Find some facts and pictures about Norway. Design a travel brochure that illustrates what you learn.
5. Social Studies: Interview your grandparents or an elderly relative. Find out what nationalities are in your family's history. Find out what jobs they have held and their favorite foods, colors, holidays, sports, music, books, etc. Plan a presentation for your class. Include pictures if possible.

Characterization

Directions: In each oval, write an adjective that describes the boy's personality. Then fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail that illustrates that part of the boy's personality.



Story Map

Directions: As you are reading the novel, fill in each section of the story map.

Main Characters

Setting (time and place)

Main Conflict

Summary of Major Story Events

Climax

Resolution of Conflict

SAMPLE