

James and the Giant Peach

SECTION

1

About the book

James and the Giant Peach is a fantasy adventure story in which a child living with his cruel aunts is transported away from miserable circumstances.

Having a happy young childhood, James's parents are tragically eaten by a rhinoceros while visiting London. James is sent to live with his aunts, who treat him cruelly and do not let him leave their house on the hill. One day a strange man brings magic to the house and a giant peach grows in the garden.

One night, while James is cleaning up from the people who visited the peach in the day, he finds a hole leading inside the peach. Inside he encounters fantastic, overgrown creatures, with whom he escapes, in the peach, to the USA. Their Atlantic journey involves dangerous encounters with cliffs, sharks, Cloud-Men and an aeroplane.

The book includes a succession of memorable characters, from the two wicked aunts to the Centipede, the 'pest' on the peach.

About the author

Born in Wales in 1916, of Norwegian parents' Roald Dahl is one of the best-known writers of children's fiction.

As a child he attended boarding schools where he experienced discipline which he always looked back on as cruel and barbarous, but in the middle of this horror he always recalled 'blessed, beautiful Mrs O'Connor', a woman who would come and read to the boys at his school on a Saturday afternoon. It was here that he developed a love of literature.

He began writing after being injured in a terrible plane crash. The *Hornblower* author, CS Forester, suggested he write about his adventures

and the resulting short story, 'A Piece of Cake', proved to be a success.

Roald Dahl wrote two books of autobiography, *Boy* and *Going Solo*. The former contains a fantastic story about a dead mouse in a sweet shop – well worth a read.

In writing about being an author, Dahl gave two important snippets of advice. The first was: 'You should have a lively imagination', something he exhibited with his giant peaches, friendly giants, flying glass elevators and cunning poachers. He also advised: 'You must have strong self-discipline', explaining that the writer often works alone, so must keep themselves at work. Roald Dahl himself worked in a shed at the end of his garden.

Dahl's works have their critics. His portrayals of some characters have been seen as cruel and stereotypical. He also expressed some controversial political views in his non-fiction writing for adults. However, his children's books include some of the most successful titles written for children, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG*. He once wrote: 'A good plot is like a dream', adding that, when it is thought up, such a plot should be quickly

written down, or else it may be forgotten.

Roald Dahl died in 1990 at the age of 74.



Facts and figures

James and the Giant Peach

First published in the USA in 1961 by Alfred A Knopf Inc and in the UK in 1967 by Allen & Unwin.

Roald Dahl

Won the Whitbread Award for *The Witches* in 1983.

In 1988 he won the Children's Book Award for *Matilda*. Roald Dahl wrote many of his books in a small hut at the bottom of his garden.