

# Matilda The Musical

Book: Dennis Kelly  
Music and Lyrics: Tim Minchin  
Based on the book by Roald Dahl

## ABOUT

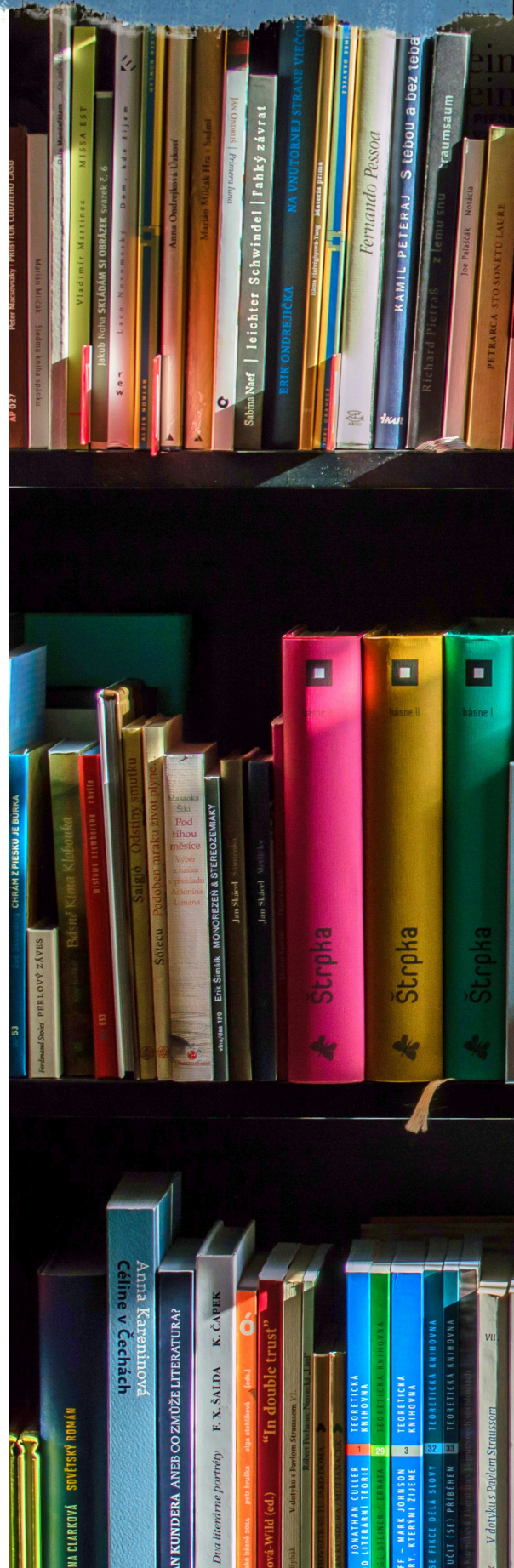
*Matilda the Musical* follows a young girl from an unfortunate family (The Wormwoods). She tries to escape her life by telling stories to her local librarian and reading books. At school, her teacher, Ms. Honey, discovers that Matilda has extraordinary intellectual abilities. Ms. Trunchbull, the school's headmistress, tries to squash Matilda's creativity and the antics of her classmates. Ms. Honey tries to connect with Matilda's parents, but they think she would be better off watching TV. Ultimately, Matilda discovers she has magical powers and is able to start a revolution for what is "right" in her school and home life.

## BIG IDEAS

Sometimes, you have to be a little bit "naughty" to make things "right."

Regardless of your past, you can still inspire others to do extraordinary things.

Young people have the power to change a contradictory and unjust world.





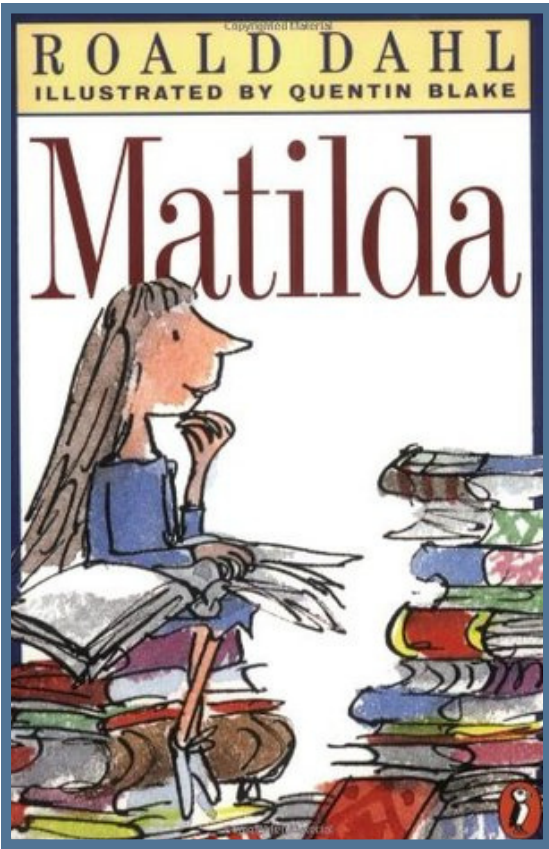
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ADAPTATION



Above: Book cover for *Matilda* by Roald Dahl

Below: Royal Shakespeare Company Logo



Roald Dahl (1916-1990) was born in the U.K. and is the author of several children's books with fantastical twists including *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Witches*, and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Dahl's books tend to be dark in tone, feature surprise endings, and include evil adult characters that children have to fight or escape from. Although he is among one of the most loved children's writers in the world, he has been criticized for misogyny, antisemitism, and stereotypes in his books. Many adaptations of his work try to update the tales to rectify offensive material.

*Matilda the Musical* was adapted by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Britain, beginning work in 2009. While the RSC usually focuses on producing plays by Shakespeare, they also train actors and produce new plays and musicals by living playwrights. In 2011, the show transferred to London's "West End," (the British version of Broadway). Netflix is scheduled to release a filmed version of the musical in December 2022.

## LANGUAGE IN THE PLAY

There are lots of British words and phrases, and lots of challenging vocabulary words in *Matilda the Musical*. [Check out this glossary!](#)



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## TEACHING MATILDA IN THE CLASSROOM

### Questions to discuss before the play:

- Is it ever okay to break the rules at school or at home?
- If you do something that most people would consider “wrong”, but it can help a friend, does that make it okay?
- Can you change your circumstances?
- Do young people have the power to make change?

### Questions to discuss after the play:

- Matilda was able to use magic to change the life of her and her friends; what “magic” abilities might you have that you could use to fight for what’s right?
- What things in your world do you want to change? What may be the consequences of fighting back?
- Matilda loves stories; what books and stories do you love? How could you share those stories with other people?
- Matilda the Musical is an adaptation of a book. What book or story would you like to see adapted into a play, musical, or movie? What messages does that book or story tell that you want the world to hear?



## ACTIVITY PROMPTS

- “You’ve Got to be Loud”: Listen to songs in Matilda the Musical and discuss how tempo, volume, pace, etc. help tell the story. (Music)
- Bruce Bogtrotter needs help! In order to eat a whole cake, Bruce wants to cut it into as many pieces as possible, but he can only make four cuts! Get out a piece of paper and a pencil. How can you draw the maximum number of pieces using only four cuts? (Math)
- “School Song”: Write a group song or chant for a community that you belong to. Ex: School, Place of Worship, Club (Writing, Music)
- “The Hammer”: Miss Trunchbull was an olympic hammer thrower! Do some research on olympic sports. What’s the most unusual one you can find? Is there one you want to compete in? (Physical Education, Research)
- Mrs. Wormwood is a ballroom dancer, what dance styles do you know? Teach some moves to a friend! (Physical Education, Dance)
- Matilda and Mrs. Honey have a special relationship, write a letter to a teacher or other important adult in your life telling them how much you appreciate them. (Writing)
- At the end of the show, Matilda shocks everyone by negotiating with the Russians in their native language! Learn about the people in your community and what languages they speak. Try to learn a few phrases like “Hello.” or “How are you?” in those languages so you can communicate with neighbors and friends. (Foreign Languages)

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## DRAMATURGY INVESTIGATION: LET'S GO TO THE LIBRARY!



Matilda loves to read with help of her local librarian, Ms. Phelps. Keep an ear out for the many famous books and authors that she loves throughout the show! Librarians are great resources to help community members find out new information, resources, and of course...cool books! We were happy to partner with Ms. Macy Davis, a Children's Librarian with The Public Library of Brookline to explore some book recommendations inspired by some of Matilda's favorite books.

Matilda's Reads	Ms Davis Recommends
<u>Oliver Twist</u> by Charles Dickens (1837)	<u>Dear Mr Dickens</u> by Nancy Churnin (2021): A picture book biography about Eliza Davis, who corresponded with Charles Dickens to change the use of harmful stereotypes in his books.
<u>Jane Eyre</u> by Charlotte Brontë (1847)	<u>Wish You Were Eyre</u> part of "The Mother Daughter Book Club" Series by Heather Vogel Frederick (2013) <u>Gold Rush Girl</u> by Avi (2020): "The main character is inspired by Jane Eyre to live a life of adventure!"
<u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u> by Thomas Hardy (1891)	<u>Tess of the Road</u> by Rachel Hartman (2018): This book about a girl in search of herself and adventure has "a lot in common with <u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u> and the author has even acknowledged the similarities between the two texts."
The Lord of the Rings Series by J.R.R Tolkein (1954-1955)	<u>The Hobbit, or, there and back again</u> by J.R.R Tolkien (1937): "Tolkien wrote the story for his children and it was originally published for children! It's still a complex read, but more accessible."
<u>The Secret Garden</u> by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1911)	<u>The Secret Garden on 81st Street</u> by Ivy Noelle Weir (2021): A modern graphic novel adaptation of <u>The Secret Garden</u> , with art by Amber Padilla. <u>Strong As Fire, Fierce as Flame</u> by Supriya Kelkar (2021): "Set slightly before <u>The Secret Garden</u> but explores British Imperialism in India in a really fascinating way that makes it a cool counter narrative".
<u>Crime and Punishment</u> by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)	<u>Dog Man: Grime and Punishment</u> by Dav Pilkey (2020): "Dog Man has a new problem to pound, and he's going to need his entire pack to help him. Will he go barking up the wrong tree?"
<u>Moby Dick</u> by Herman Melville (1851)	<u>Whales: Diving into the Unknown</u> by Casey Zakroff (2021): A nonfiction graphic novel about the cool secrets of whales, with art by Pat Lewis. <u>The Secret Explorers and the Lost Whales</u> by SJ King (2021): A graphic novel about a group of kids trying to save a pod of whales, with art by Ellie O'Shea.



**Web Investigation:**  
Click the titles of the recommended books to see where they are available in a library near you!





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## “BUT THAT’S NOT RIGHT!” CHALLENGING CONTENT IN MATILDA RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

### FAMILY DYNAMICS

In the play, Matilda’s family isn’t very nice to each other, and the way she is treated by her family isn’t okay. It can be scary to realize that sometimes, people’s families don’t get along very well. Families can have conversations and do activities together to build trust and check-in with one another so everyone can feel supported. Try having a conversation with a family member using the following prompts:

- *I feel safe when...*
- *Sometimes I worry about...*
- *My favorite thing about our family is... (or Something that makes our family special is...)*

Caregivers, you can also check out any of the following resources about fostering healthy family dynamics in your home and what to do if something concerning happens:

- [How to Strengthen Family Relationships Ted Talk](#)
- [What Happens to Kids When Parents Fight from Greater Good Magazine](#)
- [Healthy Parenting Resources from the Consortium for Science-Based Information on Children, Youth and Families](#)
- [Family Problems Resources from the Consortium for Science-Based Information on Children, Youth and Families](#)

### BODIES, FOOD, AND SELF-PERCEPTION

Many of the characters in Matilda care about what they look like, or what other people look like, and make comments about the way people look, talk, or act. It’s good to remember that a play isn’t real life and that in real life, it’s super normal for people to have different bodies! It would be weird if we all looked alike, wouldn’t it!? It’s also important to remember that even though some characters in the play are made fun of for eating, it’s important to give our bodies food because that’s how we get the energy to do things! With a grownup, make some lists based on the following prompts:

- *My body can... (list all the cool things your body can do)*
- *When I look in the mirror I see... (list all the things you like about yourself)*
- *My favorite foods are... (list all the foods that make you feel good and fuel your body)*

Caregivers, we’ve provided the following resources for talking to your young people about food and body image:

- [Promoting Healthy Body Image Tips from Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Talking About Body Image from Parents.com](#)
- [Interview from Cleveland Clinic about how to talk to kids about nutrition](#)
- [Advice for fostering healthy eating habits with your kids from the New York Times](#)



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## LESSON PLAN 1: #WHEELOCKWORLDCHANGERS



### Massachusetts State Standards Met:

#### English Language Arts

##### Grade 3 Writing

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting an opinion with reasons.
3. Produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
6. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

##### Grade 6 Writing

1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

#### Theatre

##### Grades 3rd-4th Creating:

3. Refine and complete artistic work. Respond to a theatrical challenge and hypothesize possible solutions.

##### Grades 5-6th Connecting

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

**Lesson Overview:** *Matilda The Musical* explores the power of young people and how we can use collective action to disrupt systems of power that are unfair. This lesson encourages dialogic meaning-making, persuasive writing, oration skills, and theatre for social change to get students excited about making positive changes in their community.

### Alphabet Relay:

1. Using large pieces of paper or whiteboards, create multiple posters, each lettered A-Z down the side, leaving room to write after each letter.
2. Divide students into groups (preferably around 4-5 students in each group) equal to the number of posters created.
3. Invite students to begin thinking of problems in their lives and/or communities.
4. Challenge each team to come up with problems that start with the letters A-Z (ie- pollution, gentrification, etc). Working in a line, the first person will run to their group's poster and write a word that starts with the next available letter on the list, from A to Z. The goal is to complete the whole list as quickly as possible and then cheer on the other groups that are still finishing.
5. Once everyone has finished, encourage the groups to look for similarities and differences between the different posters.

### Public Service Announcements:

1. In their groups from Alphabet Relay, invite the students to research effective public service announcements: the characteristics of the form and examples of successful campaigns.
2. Using their Alphabet Relay posters as brainstorm materials, challenge each group to select a problem, and begin researching information about specifics and possible solutions.
3. Encourage groups to create physical materials: leaflets, posters, props, etc to support and further inform their position.
4. After the research phase, each group will synthesize information from their research, develop, and perform short public service announcements about their chosen community problem and their creative solutions that could help tackle it.

#### Teacher Tech Outreach!

With caretaker and student consent, take pictures or videos from this process, and feel free to shout out your young people's hard work online with the hashtag #WheelockWordChangers

### #ItMadeMeThink:

1. After groups perform their PSAs and showcase their support materials, gather students into a circle and challenge them to sum up how this experience got them thinking into a single hashtag phrase.



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## LESSON PLAN 2: CREATING STORIES

**Lesson Overview:** *Matilda uses stories to help her understand the world, and to let her use her imagination to explore other worlds. Creating stories activates a sense of play and joy, and sometimes offers an opportunity to confront and process sadness or fear. This lesson encourages students to be playful and even outrageous as they build stories together and bring them to life.*

### Story Generation

1. Give students a large index card. Ask them to think of the silliest, weirdest, or best thing that ever happened to them. They will write this story on their index card, but it must be no more than 4 sentences and must fit on the card. They should also try to leave out specific identifying names. They should also choose a story they are comfortable sharing with others.
2. Invite students to put the notecard away and practice telling their story out loud, perhaps with everyone in a circle facing outward so no one is looking at them.

### Story Development

1. Invite students to "fill the space" by silently walking about the room in no particular pattern. Instruct students to stop walking and face the person nearest them upon a given signal (a clap, chime, or bell perhaps). Students should be standing in pairs.
2. Let students know they will be listening to their partner's story and then retelling afterward so they should listen as carefully as possible. Ask students to share the stories from their notecards with their partner one at a time, allowing only about 1 minute for each.
3. Ask students to thank their partner and begin filling the space again until the signal and a new partner is found. Instruct students to now tell the story they heard a moment ago, BUT they should make it *twice as exciting!* Encourage students to be imaginative both in their delivery of the story and the details they may choose to add or embellish.
4. Repeat step 3 a couple more times, or as much as desired -- for each round of "trading" stories a new story is received and told. Each time, encourage students to make the story they heard from the last round *twice as exciting* both in delivery and content. Once the storytelling is over, gather students in a circle to share some of the stories with the class.

### Story Embodiment - Frozen Images

1. Invite volunteer students to share their "final" stories that they found most exciting. Inform them that they will narrate, and other students will create frozen pictures or "tableaus" of a moment in the story.
2. When the narrator reaches an interesting, pivotal, or climactic moment in the story, give a signal for them to freeze, and point at volunteers to jump up to become the characters, setting, or objects as a frozen picture of that moment in the story.
3. Once a few stories have been told and embodied, ask students to reflect on their experience. What was it like to create stories in this way? How did they go about making the story "more exciting"? What do storytellers (writers, theater makers) do to make their stories exciting or interesting for their audience or reader?



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## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR NEWTS!



### Around Matilda

In Matilda, there are many examples of insects or amphibians, especially newts, which are part of the salamander family! Salamanders are amphibians- animals that are cold-blooded and have a backbone and wet skin. They are small animals that can grow up to five inches long (the same size as your hand!) and can live on both land and in the water. They enjoy wet, spongy, secluded habitats for their soft and slick skin.



Above: The Eastern Newt



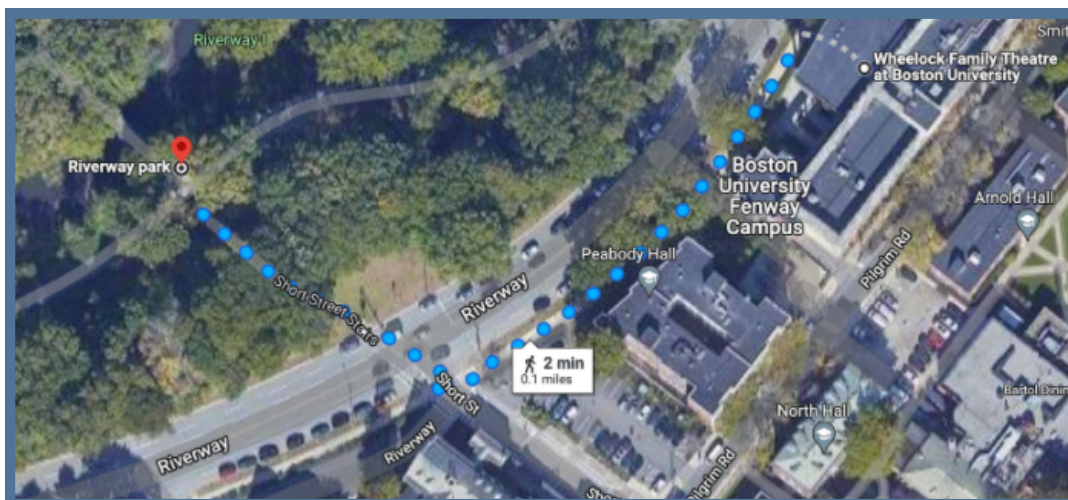
### Around You

*Have you heard the term "habitat"? What do you think it means?*

A habitat is a place where an organism naturally or normally lives and grows. It provides food, water, and shelter. Think of a place where you spend a lot of time- it could be the library, your school, or where you live. *How is that place like your habitat? What kinds of amphibian habitats do you think you could find in your community?*

### Around Wheelock

As you are entering or exiting the theatre today, you might notice a lot of green space across the street. That is actually [Riverway Park](#), one of the 6 different parks around Boston and Brookline called the "Emerald Necklace". With their 1,100 acres of parkland, there are MANY awesome ways that you and your loved ones can observe, and even work to protect amphibians and other wildlife habitats!



Above: Walking directions from The Wheelock Family Theatre and Riverway Park

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## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR NEWTS!

### Habitat Hunt

With a caregiver, try to visit Riverway Park and be wildlife observers! There are lots of wet, secluded spots that newts and other salamanders may call home. As you walk along the river, try to look for places that you may find habitats for animals and insects that live along the waterway.



You can bring along a notepad and pencil to begin a habitat journal! With any wildlife you see, feel free to use these prompts to notate your observations:

*What does the creature look like?*

*How does this creature move?*

*How does this creature find food? What does it eat?*

*How does this creature use its habitat for shelter?*

*How does this creature find water?*

*How does this creature interact with others?*



**REMEMBER:** When you are outside, you are in the neighborhoods of countless organisms!

When exploring, make sure to use your observation skills only, please do not touch wildlife without a professional present!

### Around the State

Did you know that our region is FAMOUS for its amphibians? On the first rainy night of spring, when the temperature is just right, thousands of amphibians migrate back to their birthplace. This mass migration of amphibians each spring is a naturally recurring event known as "[Big Night](#)". People from all over the Northeast will travel to watch, often stopping traffic to allow hundreds of salamanders or frogs to cross roads in the pouring rain.



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## STUDY GUIDE AUTHORS

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