

Frances Shiobara
Kobe Shoin Women's University

The Twits by Roald Dahl

I have been using literature to teach undergraduate university students and bilingual elementary school students at an International School for many years. In the International School I usually read the story aloud to the students then they respond to it through discussion and drawing pictures. In the university, students generally read the stories at home. I have used a variety of books and authors, but my favourite author is Roald Dahl for his character descriptions, sense of humour and moral advice. The stories are easily understood by any age and level of English learner. I would recommend any book by Roald Dahl, but 'The Twits' is a particular favourite.

Character Description

Roald Dahl is matchless in character description. I have used this book to teach adjectives or writing character descriptions. This description leads well into students trying to draw their own pictures of 'Mr Twit.' Students can then try to describe people they know or people from pictures.

Mr Twit was one of these very hairy-faced men. The whole of his face except for his forehead, his eyes and his nose, was covered with thick hair. The stuff even sprouted in revolting tufts out of his nostrils and earholes.

The hair on Mr Twit's face did not grow smooth and matted as it does on most hairy-faced men. It grew in spikes that stuck straight out like the bristles of a nailbrush.
(Dahl, 2007, pp. 4-5)

Humour

Roald Dahl has a childish sense of humour, which can appeal to all children and children at heart. Many textbooks are very serious, encouraging students to discuss deep topics of the day, but this book allows them to just enjoy laughing at the disgusting scenarios. My students also learned words like 'disgusting,' 'revolting' and 'gross.' The language is simple enough and the scene easy enough for anyone in any culture to understand.

Mrs Twit sneaked out into the garden and dug up some worms. She chose big long ones and put them in a tin and carried them back into the house under her apron. At one o'clock, she cooked spaghetti for lunch and she mixed the worms in with the spaghetti, but only on her husband's plate. The worms didn't show because everything was covered with tomato sauce and sprinkled with cheese. (Dahl, 2007, p. 15)

Good Wins Over Evil

In all Roald Dahl's children's books there is a clear message that the good and the weak win over the bad and the bullies. Even if this is not necessarily true in real life I think that is a great message to share. For example, when the evil Mr Twit is trying to catch the boys stuck (literally) in a tree:

One of the boys: "Listen I've just had an idea. We are stuck by the seats of our pants. So quick! Unbutton your pants and fall to the ground." Mr Twit had reached the top of the ladder and was just about to make a grab for the nearest boy when they all suddenly tumbled out of the tree and ran for home their naked bottoms winking in the sun. (Dahl, 2007, p. 38)

The Twits is only 76 pages including illustrations, divided into 29 chapters, making it very easy to break up into a series of readings. Although it is written as a children's book the story is very appealing to adults, too.

Bibliography

Dahl, R. (2007). *The Twits*. New York, USA: Puffin Books Ltd.