



Roald Dahl's  
**Matilda**  
THE MUSICAL

[MATILDASCHOOLRESOURCES.COM](http://MATILDASCHOOLRESOURCES.COM)

## ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports the RSC production of **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**, written by Dennis Kelly with music and lyrics by Tim Minchin.

These activities provided have been created to support elementary and middle school students who are seeing the production and contain extension ideas to develop children’s writing.

## USING OUR RESOURCES

At the RSC we see direct parallels between teaching and learning in the classroom and the way our theatre company works, making discoveries through collaborative enquiry. These resources have been inspired by the creative process of adapting and staging **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**.

The website also contains a writing resource to take students on the same creative journey as Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin when they were writing **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**.

## COMMON CORE STATE ANCHOR STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Each activity is aligned to the following Common Core State Anchor Standards for College and Career Readiness. Teachers can align each activity to their grade level standards based on the anchor standards provided.

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## THE WORLD

Actors, directors and musicians always start a rehearsal or performance with a warm up to help them engage with the world they are about to explore and enter into. The following activity will help to bring students into the world of **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**.

### Introductory Activity: Who Has The Control?

- Ask the students to walk around the room at their own pace, noticing where everyone is.
- Ask them to choose one person in the room, without letting them know. Encourage them to keep looking at this person but not to talk to them or touch them.
- Introduce the idea that the person they have chosen is dangerous to them and that they must stay away from them at all times as they walk around the room.
- Explain that in the world of Matilda, the Head teacher of Crunchem Hall, Miss Trunchbull, controls the school and the students by intimidating. In fact, she is like a human bomb who might explode at any moment. As they walk around ask them to imagine that the room they are in is a classroom at Crunchem Hall and that the person they have chosen is Miss Trunchbull. They must stay away from her and try and disappear from her sight at all times.
- Ask the students to stop walking and silently choose another person in the room. Explain that this person is a shield and as they walk around they must try and keep this shield between themselves and their Miss Trunchbull.
- Explain that the shield is Matilda, who in the plot is the only student to stand up to Miss Trunchbull.
- Reflect with students on what it feels like to be in a school controlled by a tyrant? How do you feel about her as a Headmistress and what do you feel about Matilda?

## THE CHARACTERS

Through very detailed descriptions in his novel, Roald Dahl created brilliant three dimensional characters. Dennis Kelly has interpreted these characters for the Musical so that the actors can bring them to life on stage each evening. The following activity will enable the students to physically understand who these characters are, how they talk, move and talk within the world they have already explored.

### Activity 1: Making the Characters Come Alive (CCRA.R1, CCRA.SL2)

- Ask students to walk around the room, walking into and filling any spaces that appear. Explain that as they are walking you will call out different parts of the body (nose, head, tummy, feet etc.) and when you do, they will have to lead with that part of their body.
- Reflect with the students on what type of person might move like this? If they are walking with their head leading them, how does it make them move? Are they quick? Is their body jerky or smooth? Are they nervous? Confident? What do they do for a living?

- Ask students to think of a short line from a nursery rhyme that they know and repeat the line out loud as they continue to move, using a voice that their character might use. Is it a high or deep voice? Do they speak fast or slow?
- Invite students to find a space in the room and listen as you read a description of one of the characters from Matilda, using Appendix 1. **(Listening CCRA.SL.1)**
- As they are listening, ask students to move their bodies so they physically start to become that character, thinking about how that character walks and which body part they might lead with.
- Organize students into groups of five and provide each group with a description of one of the characters from the character sheet in Appendix 1. Allow them four minutes to make a still image of this character using all the members of the group and adding in their line of dialogue from **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**. They can choose to say their line together or as individuals. **(Reading CCRA.R1)**
- Allow students to watch each short performance and think about what might happen in a story where these characters meet.

## THE STORY

Having met the characters, this exercise is a quick way to introduce the story outline of Matilda. Please note that this is Roald Dahl's plotline for the Matilda, the **novel**, and **not** Dennis Kelly's **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**, which has a different plot structure.

### Activity 2: Telling the Story in Pictures (CCRA.R1, CCRA.SL2)

- Divide students into small groups of three or four.
- Provide each group with one of the story sections and ask them to tell their section of the story using frozen pictures. **(Reading CCRA.R1)**
- Explain that the frozen pictures will need to start with a freeze frame and end with a different freeze frame. In between the two freeze frames they will need to act out what happens, with one person narrating the story. **(Speaking CCRA.SL2)**
- Encourage each group to use the lines from the play they have been given to help to tell their part of the story.
- Invite each group to perform their frozen pictures in order. Encourage them to try and perform them as one piece, with no stops between when one group starts and another finishes.
- Explore with the group how this felt and whether working in this way provided any greater insights to the story.

### Activity 3: Plotting MATILDA THE MUSICAL (CCRA.R7)

In the films on the Writers Challenge page of [MatildaSchoolResources.com](http://MatildaSchoolResources.com), Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin talk about the process of adapting and creating **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**, how they changed the structure of story and introduced new characters to create a narrative for a live audience.

As your students watch the performance of **MATILDA THE MUSICAL** ask them to notice who the new characters are and what changes have been made in the narrative. You can then follow this up after seeing the production with specific questions such as:

- Why do they think Mrs. Wormwood dances rather than plays bingo?
- Three new main characters have been created along with a whole host of members of the Russian Mafia. Can they name the characters and say what they think each of them brings to the story? Do they make it more dramatic? Do they help us understand the other characters?
- A whole new story has been created around Miss Honey. Were they surprised by this? Did it help us to emphasize with her character more, did it create drama in the play? How did it make them feel as a member of the audience?
- Invite students to create their own 10 point structure of **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**, as in the previous exercise telling the story in 10 pictures.

## DEVELOPING WRITING

### Activity 4: Meeting New Characters (CCRA.SL1, CCRA.SL2, CCRA.SL4, CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)

Roald Dahl's choice of names for his characters offers clues as to the type of people they are. For example, **Miss Honey: is she as sweet as honey? Miss Trunchbull: is she fast or intimidating?** The following activity will allow students to use the simplest of techniques to think about names and new characters, starting with something everyone has and can identify with: their own name.

- Divide the group into pairs of students and ask them to walk around the room. As they walk, invite them to share one piece of information about their name with their pair.
  - This could be something as simple as 'I've never liked my name because everybody shortens it.'
- Encourage each pair to join up with another so they are in fours. Using Appendix 1, remind students of Dahl's character names and ask them to discuss how the name Dahl has chosen for each person immediately gives an insight into their character in their groups. **(Speaking CCRA.SL1, CCRA. SL2 and CCRA.SL4)**
- Explain that they are going to create a brand new character for the story of Matilda, just as Dennis Kelly did for **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**.
- Challenge them to create a name for their new character using the syllables in their own names to create a totally new one. They do not have to use every syllable, they can be selective and if they wish they can introduce other words such as 'Fantastic' as in 'Fantastic Mr. Fox.'
- Once they have created a name, ask them to think whether the syllables they have put together look like a believable spelling. Are there any letters they would change or adjust?
- Invite students to think about the sound of their new name. Where is this character likely to come from?
- Allow each group to complete the character fact sheet in Appendix 4 for their new character, building them into a person. **(Creative Writing CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)**

For further activities on developing character, visit the Character Generator and Teacher Resources on the Character page of their website.

**Activity 5: Hiding Meaning Within Words  
(CCRA.R1, CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)**

Tim Minchin has written some songs for **MATILDA THE MUSICAL**, which give insight into characters' thoughts and feelings and some songs which tell us more about a specific place and setting. He also wrote some songs, which are just downright clever! This exercise will help students to explore the song Tim wrote to create the setting for Crunchem Hall.

- Ask students to move around the room at their own pace.
- Challenge them to stop when you call out a number, organizing themselves into groups of that number with those closest to them.
- Develop this by also calling out a letter with each number so that students have to form a group with the right number and then create that alphabetical order.
  - Encourage students to form their letter twice so that they can experiment with different approaches to the task.
- Organize students into small groups of three or four and provide each one with a copy of Appendix 5: *The Alphabet Song*. The lyrics Tim has written for this song use all the letters of the alphabet.
  - Ask students to use a highlighter to underline the letters in order as they think they appear in the lyrics.
- Invite students to then stand in their groups as you read the lyrics aloud. **(CCRA.R1)** Appendix 6 is a useful prompt for this. Ask them to physically create each letter as they hear them – you can choose to what extent you emphasize the letters of the alphabet or read it normally.
- Develop this activity by inviting each group to create their own poem containing the letter so their new character's name, using the sounds of the letter. (Creative Writing CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)

**Activity 6: Inside the Chokey  
(CCRA.SL2, CCRA.R1, CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)**

In a circle, ask all participants to close their eyes as you read out the description of the Chokey in Appendix 6. **(Listening CCRA.SL2)**

- Ask students to think about how it might feel to be inside the Chokey, asking 'What sounds did you hear?' 'What other noises might you hear if you were inside the Chokey?' Encourage them to include those that might be inside their own head or body.
- Read through the description again and encourage individuals to make sounds at the appropriate moments as you read to try and create atmosphere they imagined.
- Divide the class into two groups.
- Provide each group with a copy of the description and a selection of percussion instruments.
- Ask both groups to prepare to sound scared using their voices and the instruments that help to create the inside of the Chokey. **(Reading CCRA.R1)**

- Invite Group 1 to stand still in a space with their eyes closed as Group 2 acts out their sound-scape around them. Encourage the sound-scapers to walk amongst the other group but not to touch them.
  - You, or a student, might want to read the description aloud during the sound scape performance as this will help Group 1 to stay focused.
- Ask the groups to swap over so that they can experience being 'inside the Chokey.'
- Encourage students to write an immediate diary entry about this part of their day at school and how it felt to be locked inside the Chokey. **(Writing CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)** What did they do to get put inside there? Was it justified and what are they going to do now they have been inside?

**Activity 7: Writing in Role**  
**(CCRA.SL2, CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)**

- Ask students to imagine that they are Matilda at a specific moment in the story - she is very angry and is imagining things that she could do to Miss Trunchbull.
- Invite them to find a place in the room where they can stand. They should imagine that this is a space that they, as Matilda, are used to and that they go there everyday.
- Ask them to imagine that they are in the classroom, standing by their desks.
- Read out the narrated action in Appendix 7 and encourage participants to act out what is being described, doing the things Matilda would do. **(Listening CCRA.SL2)**
- Ask students to return to their writing area without talking to anybody else as soon as the narration has finished.
- Imagining that they are Matilda or one of the other children in the class who observed this incident, they should write 'in role' what that person would write in his/her diary after the events. **(Writing CCRA.W3, CCRA.W4)**
- As they write, prompt students with questions: How does the person feel? What does s/he think s/he has seen? What will s/he do about the experience s/he has had?

## RESOURCES

### Appendix 1: Character Sheet

**Descriptions** taken from *Matilda* by Roald Dahl © [pub, Puffin 2001]

Character dialogue from **MATILDA THE MUSICAL** – Dennis Kelly 2012

***Matilda – “You mustn’t let a little thing like little stop you”***

‘Extra-ordinary, sensitive and brilliant – her mind was so nimble and she was so quick to learn. By the time she was three, she had taught herself to read by studying newspapers and magazines that lay around the house.’

***Mr. Wormwood – “If you knew the deal I’m pulling off at work, you’d soon see clever...”***

‘A small ratty-looking man whose front teeth stuck out underneath a thin ratty moustache. He liked to wear jackets with large brightly coloured checks and he sported ties that were usually yellow or pale green. Gormless and wrapped up in his own silly little life; he is a dealer in second-hand cars who does pretty well at it although he has some very dishonest tactics.’

***Mrs. Wormwood – “Looks is more important than books”***

‘A large woman whose hair was dyed platinum blonde except where you could see the mousy-brown bits growing out from the roots. She wore heavy make-up and she had one of those unfortunate bulging figures where the flesh appears to be strapped in all around the body to prevent it from falling out. She is glued to the TV screen most of the time which leaves her exhausted both physically and emotionally that she never has enough energy to cook an evening meal so she usually gave her family TV dinners or fish and chips.’

***Miss Honey – “Bad times don’t last forever”***

‘Not more than twenty-three or twenty-four. She had a lovely pale oval Madonna face with blue eyes and her hair was light-brown. Her body was so slim and fragile one got the feeling that if she fell over she would smash into a thousand pieces, like a porcelain figure. A mild and quiet person who never raised her voice and was seldom seen to smile, but there is no doubt she possessed that rare gift for being adored by every small child under her care. Some curious warmth that was almost tangible shone out of Miss Honey’s face when she spoke to a confused and homesick newcomer to the class.’

***Miss Trunchbull – “Children are maggots!”***

‘A formidable middle-aged lady. A gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of pupils and teachers alike. She had an obstinate chin, a cruel mouth and small arrogant eyes. When she marched – Miss Trunchbull never walked, she always marched like a storm-trooper with long strides and arms swinging – when she marched along a corridor you could actually hear her snorting as she went. She had once been a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. There was an aura of menace about hereven at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as from a red-hot rod of metal.’



## **Appendix 2: Telling the Story in Pictures**

*Text taken from Matilda by Roald Dahl © [pub. Puffin 2001]*

- 1. A girl is born to stupid, lazy and dishonest parents who don't want her – she is called Matilda**
  - 'dinners don't microwave themselves you know'
  - 'the child is clearly and idiot'
  - 'telly is better than books'
  
- 2. Matilda discovers that she loves reading and can escape her unhappy family life by entering the fantasy worlds of books**
  - 'I really love Dickens. Mr. Pickwick makes me laugh'
  - 'your stupid books and your stupid reading'
  - 'the sooner you're locked up in school the better'
  
- 3. Matilda's parents are very mean to her so she plays tricks on them to cheer herself up – she's too clever for them and never gets caught**
  - 'a man's hair is his greatest asset'
  - 'Your...hair! It's...it's...green!'
  - 'Maybe you used some of mummy's peroxide by mistake?'
  
- 4. On Matilda's first day at school, she meets her lovely teacher Miss Honey who sees how clever the girl is**
  - 'How about this; two times four hundred and eighty seven, if you took your time do you think you could-'
  - 'Nine hundred and seventy four'
  - 'My, my that is good'
  
- 5. Matilda and her friends meet terrifying headmistress of the school – Miss Trunchbull who puts children into a horrifying torture chamber**
  - 'Quiet you maggots!'
  - 'To teach the child, we must first break the child.'
  - 'You ought to be in prison, in the deepest, dankest, darkest prison!'
  
- 6. Matilda discovers that if she concentrates really hard, she can make things move with just her eyes**
  - 'Tip it...tip it over!'
  - 'I moved it with my eyes'
  - 'I think it's something to do with that incredible mind of yours'

- 7. Matilda discovers that her lovely teacher Miss Honey has been treated terribly by cruel headmistress Miss Trunchbull for many years**
  - 'My father was a wonderful man. Magnus was his name. Magnificent Magnus I used to call him.'
  - 'She was so cruel to you. Miss Honey, your aunt's a murderer! She did him in!'
  - 'All the grown-ups in this town think she's wonderful. They would never believe such a thing of her.'
  
- 8. Matilda uses magic to write something on the blackboard for the evil Miss Trunchbull which scares the headmistress and makes her run away forever**
  - 'The chalk! Look, the chalk, it's moving!'
  - 'No one's doing anything!'
  - 'Run, Agatha, now. Or I will get you – like you got me!'
  
- 9. Matilda's parents run off to Spain and so the girl and the lovely Miss Honey live together happily**
  - 'Quick, in the car!'
  - 'What about the girl? Do you want to stay? Here with Miss Honey?'
  - 'Yes! Yes I do!'

**Appendix 3: Character Facts**

|                                       |               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Name</b>                           |               |
| <b>Age</b>                            | <b>Height</b> |
| <b>Job</b>                            |               |
| <b>Distinguishing facial features</b> |               |
| <b>Body type</b>                      |               |
| <b>Last seen wearing</b>              |               |
| <b>Often heard to say</b>             |               |
| <b>Likes</b>                          |               |
| <b>Dislikes</b>                       |               |
| <b>Any other relevant information</b> |               |

**Appendix 4: Hiding Meanings Within Words Version 1**

**'Big Kids – Alphabet Song' written by Tim Minchin for MATILDA THE MUSICAL**

So you think you're  
Able to survive this mess by  
Being a prince or a princess you will soon  
See there's no escaping tragedy  
And even if you put in heaps of  
Effort, you're just wasting energy  
Cos your life as you know it is  
ancient history  
I have suffered in this gaol  
Have been trapped inside this  
Cage for ages  
This living 'ell  
But if I try to remember  
Back before my life had ended  
Before my happy days were over  
Before I first heard the  
Pealing of the bell  
Like you I was curious  
So innocent, I asked a thousand questions  
But unless you want to suffer,  
Listen up and I will teach you thing or two  
You listen here, my dear, you'll be punished so  
Severely if you step out of line and if you cry it will be  
Double, you should stay out of trouble  
And remember to be extremely careful  
Why  
Why?  
Did you hear what she said?  
Just you wait for Phys-Ed

Appendix 5: Hiding Meanings Within Words Version 2

'Big Kids – Alphabet Song' written by Tim Minchin for MATILDA THE MUSICAL

So you think you're

**A** **A**ble to survice this mess by

**B** **Be**ing a prince or a princess you will soon

**C** **See** there's no escaping traged**dy**

**E** And **e**ven if you put in heaps of

**F** **Eff**ort, you're just wasting ener**gy** **G**

Cos your life as you know it is

**H** **anc**ient history

**I** **I** have suffered in this **ga**ol **J**

Have been trapped inside this

**K** **Ca**ge for ages

This living '**ell** **L**

But if I try to rem**em**ber **M**

Back before my life had **en**ded **N**

Before my happy days were **ov**er **O**

Before I first heard the

**P** **Pe**aling of the bell

**Q** **Li**ke **you** I was curious

So innocent, I **a**sked a thousand questions **R**

**S** But **un**less you want to suffer,

Listen up and I will **tea**ch you thing or two **T**

**U** **You** listen here, my dear, you'll be punished so

**V** **Se**verely if you step out of line and if you cry it will be

**W** **Double, you** should stay out of trouble

And remember to be **ex**tremely careful **X**

**Y** **Why**

Why?

Did you hear what she said?

Just you wait for Phys**s-Ed** **Z**

## **Appendix 6: Inside the Chokey**

The Chokey is a very tall but very narrow cupboard. When you get locked up in there, you have to stand more or less at attention all the time. The floor is only ten inches square so you can't sit down or squat in it. You have to stand. And three of the walls are made of cement with bits of broken glass sticking out all over so you can't lean against them. You can't lean against the door as it's got thousands of sharp, spiky nails sticking out of it – they've been hammered through from the outside. It's terrible. It's pitch dark and you must stand up dead straight – if you wobble at all you get spiked either by the glass on the walls or the nails on the door – you'll be spiked and cut all over when you come out or babbling like an idiot – off your rocker! It's absolute torture!

**Text extracts taken from Matilda by Roald Dahl [pub. Puffin 2001] Adapted from Hortensia's description of The Chokey**

## **Appendix 7: Writing In Role – Narrated Action**

In the classroom everyone stood stock still, frozen with fear, but Matilda was beginning to see red, she shook with fury as she remembered Miss Trunchbull's poisonous accusations. How she hated her. She imagined herself escaping, getting out of her desk, standing tall, turning on her heel, walking to the classroom door, turning its handle, wrenching it open, slamming it shut with all her might and running, running as fast and as far away as possible.

Then she wished she was very small, shrinking to the size of a mouse which could dodge through desks, chairs, children's legs, climbing the curtains, skittering along the skirting boards, hiding in the lunch boxes and stuffing its face with ham sandwiches, crisps and biscuits, creating chaos before making a brilliant escape. She thought about the glass with the newt in it sitting on the desk, she imagined herself standing, marching through the rows of desks to Miss Trunchbull, reaching up with both hands, grabbing the glass and tipping the contents newt and all over the Trunchbull's head. She trembled to think what Trunchbull would do to her if she did that but she was also angry and getting angrier and angrier, so unbearably angry that something was bound to explode inside her very soon. How dare they expel her for something she hadn't done?

Gripping her desk for support Matilda pushed herself into a standing position, looked the apoplectic Miss Trunchbull straight in the face and screamed 'I did not do it; I'm telling you I did not do it!' But The Trunchbull wasn't listening she was ranting like a maniac.

Matilda looked again at the newt in the glass and then a most extraordinary and peculiar feeling began to creep over her, mostly in her eyes, she blinked several times and rubbed them, then stared hard at the glass, a kind of electricity seemed to be gathering inside them. Little waves of lightening seemed to be flashing out them. She whispered the words 'Tip it, tip it over' The glass slowly teetered then fell with a sharp tinkle onto the desk top. The water in it and the squirming newt splashing out all over Miss Trunchbull's enormous bosom.