

Learning with Roald Dahl



TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

Roald Dahl always kept a notebook to record his ideas. He found inspiration for his writing all around him.

Ideas can be generated through words, pictures or actions. Below are some suggested activities to get your class thinking about how to use their own experiences to write or to create suspense in their stories.

- **Going round the class, take it in turns to play a word-association game**

For example, peach – strawberry – jam – toast – breakfast. When you've played it a few times, divide the class into small groups. Each group should have a whiteboard and a drywipe pen. The teacher begins with a word. Each group then needs to think of and write down an associated word. Points are awarded for each word – if there are 5 groups and no one else has your word then that group receives 5 points, if 2 groups have the same word then only 4 points are given to those groups, if 3 groups have the same word then only 3 points are given, etc. Words must be associated. After a few more times, the teacher chooses another word and each group needs to write down an associated word that is unexpected and explain why, for example, red – wolf (as in *Little Red Riding Hood*) – woolly jumper (as in a wolf in sheep's clothing), etc. Associations can be as unexpected as possible as long as they can be explained.

- **As a class read 'Little Red Riding Hood' in Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes***

How does Roald Dahl play with the ending of the story? Why is it funny? Choose another short story that is very well known to your class. In small groups, write a synopsis of the story to make it unexpected.

Share the ideas and discuss which ones work and why.

- **Create a plot for your own 'Tale of the Unexpected' by choosing random Who, What, Why and Where details.**

To begin with, use the 'Roll your own Tale of the Unexpected' sheet. You could then create your own class versions depending on the children's knowledge and interests.

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Wondercrump Words

1. *But obviously the mind of a person who is lucky enough to be an inventor of stories must work a bit differently from other minds. Sometimes, when I am trying to think of new twists and turns to a story, it actually feels as though long tentacles are reaching out from my head and groping around in the air, trying to pluck ideas out of nowhere, and these tentacles pop in and out, grasping their little bits of rubbish or jewellery and it is very exciting.*

Roald Dahl, 1977

2. *If you can create genuine suspense in a story, then the reader is hooked. And if you can prolong that suspense, stretching the elastic out more and more until it looks as though it is going to snap at any moment, then the reader is your slave and he will chase after your words from page to page until you finally release him with an ending.*

Roald Dahl, 1968

3. *The most effective suspense is invariably created in a low key and without any violence at all.*

Roald Dahl, 1964

4. *Don't sort of consciously sit down and work things out, I've always found that rather deadening. I'd rather start with a vague idea of what's going to happen and work out from that into the area of complete uncertainty. So I'm always writing towards uncertainty from certainty and I just find that's a rather congenial way of doing it but the details come at the point of the pen as you sit and write. Write what you want to write. Write what you passionately, most particularly, earnestly and urgently and desperately want to write. Then tell people about it.*

Phillip Pullman, 2004

5. *All this happened very suddenly to me. By all this, I obviously mean all the fuss around the books and I don't think I've ever quite got over the feeling that it's all been a gigantic mistake.*

J. K. Rowling, 2004

