James and the Giant Peach

Roald Dahl

NOVEL NOTES
3RD CLASS

TEACHER’S RESOURCES

READING ZONE
English Language Programme for Primary Schools
Novel Notes

James and the Giant Peach
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James and the Giant Peach

James Henry Trotter lives a happy life until he is four years of age. It is at this age that he loses his parents who are eaten by an enormous rhinoceros in broad daylight. Following this incident, James has to live with his two aunts. Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker live in an old house on a hill which is surrounded by a desolate garden. James is mistreated by his aunts and as a result is miserable and lonely.

Then one day, a strange thing happens. While James is hiding in the garden a man appears from nowhere and gives him a handful of green crocodile tongues. James runs to hide them in a safe place but he falls over and they escape and burrow their way into the ground. This leads to another strange event. A peach suddenly appears on a barren peach tree in the garden. It continues growing until it is so big that it touches the ground.

While Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker are initially in shock, they soon devise a plan to make money from the enormous peach. They build a fence around it and charge people to see it. While all the excitement is taking place outside, James is locked away in his bedroom. Then at night, when the crowds have gone home, James is ordered to clean up the rubbish in the garden that has accumulated from the visitors.

Late one night James finds a secret path into the centre of the peach where he meets a short-horned grasshopper, a spider, a ladybug, an earthworm, a centipede, a glow-worm and a silkworm. Together they leave the hillside, knocking over and killing James’ wicked aunts, and begin a great adventure together.

On this adventure James becomes the natural leader and a hero. Together, James and the other creatures experience many wonderful and scary things along the way, such as landing in the sea and suffering a shark attack, being rescued by seagulls and making enemies of the disgruntled Cloud-Men who attack the peach relentlessly.

Their amazing journey ends in America. They land high up on top of the Empire State Building in New York city. Their arrival sends waves of panic throughout the city as an alien invasion is suspected. However, once they see that James and the creatures are not a threat they bring them down from the top of the building to safety. A parade is held in the city in their honour. James and the creatures make a new life for themselves in New York. James converts the stone from the peach into his new home and welcomes children from far and wide. It is here that he writes the story of James and the Giant Peach.

Themes and issues addressed in this novel include misfortune, magic, adventure and friendship.
Roald Dahl is one of the world’s most famous children’s authors. He was born in Wales in 1916 to Norwegian parents and had a tragic life. Many people close to him died including, at an early age, his father and elder sister, leaving his mother to raise the other children alone.

As a child, Dahl loved stories and books. He began writing his own stories for children when his first born child was old enough to understand them. Some of his most famous novels include *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, *The Witches*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Many of these stories have won awards and have been made into films. Dahl died in 1990 aged seventy-four.

Curriculum Objectives

The child should be enabled to understand the relationship between text and illustration; use simple dictionaries effectively, know the structure and terminology of books, use a knowledge of printing conventions as an aid to expression and comprehension, engage in discussion about the book, experience a shared response to fiction through the use of a class novel.

Learning Outcomes

- Record events in the story in a reading log.
- List verbs and nouns found in a selected passage from the book.
- Write three diary entries from the perspective of one of the characters living in the peach.
- Compose a poem or song to introduce James to the people of New York.
- Demonstrate an event from the story using puppets.
- Create a series of drawings to depict major events in the story.
- Plan a party that the characters from the story would want to attend.
Cross-curricular Links

Gaeilge
Pupils can learn the names of different foods including different fruits and vegetables. Colourful posters can be created to display the new words learned by the class.

History
The children can investigate the life of Roald Dahl from a historical perspective. For example, they can create timelines and fortune lines, examine what changed in his life and the causes of these changes.

Geography
The children can look at forms of transport and investigate ways to get from England to America. Timetables of trains, buses, flights and ships can be provided to help the children complete the task.

Drama
Pupils can work in groups to dramatize different scenes in the book, e.g. James’ parents being eaten by the rhinoceros, James living with his aunts, the man with the green crocodile tongues, meeting the creatures inside the peach and so on. Different dramatic approaches can be explored, such as still imagery, hot seating and conscience alley.

Music
Children can compose music that reflects the journey that James and his friends experienced while travelling on board the peach.

Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Keep a reading log for each chapter in the book.
- Select a paragraph from anywhere in the novel. List all the verbs and the nouns contained in that paragraph.
- Imagine you are one of the creatures living in the peach. Write three diary entries about your adventures.
- James introduces each of the creatures to the people of New York in a poem/song in Chapter Thirty-seven. Write a paragraph that introduces James. Use what you know about how he looks and how he acts to help you.
- Make puppets of the creatures and act out a scene from the story using the puppets.
- Make a series of five drawings depicting the major events in the story. Describe each picture in a short paragraph.
- Plan a party that the characters from the story would want to attend. Where would they enjoy going, what kind of food would they want to eat and what would they wear. Write a description of the type of party you have planned.
Web Links

Join in the mission to roll James’ peach around the world:
http://www.followthatpeach.com/

The official Roald Dahl website:
http://www.roalddahl.com/

Link to Roald Dahl’s Revolting Rhymes:
http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoem.do?poemId=7428

A resource that explores adapting the novel for the stage:

Website for the illustrator of the novel, Quentin Blake:

Pre-reading Activities

Oral Pre-reading Questions

Chapter 1
Look at the illustrations in this chapter. What do you think the chapter will be about?

Chapters 2 and 3
Do you think anything will happen to change James’ life?

Chapters 4 and 5
What are the green stones, do you think?

Chapters 6 and 7
Why, do you think, were James’ aunts screaming?

Chapter 8
Do you think the peach will bring good fortune to James’ aunts? Why?/Why not?

Chapters 9 and 10
Do you think James will get revenge on his cruel aunts? Why?/Why not?

Chapter 11
Who, do you think, lives inside the peach?

Chapter 12
Do you think James will become friends with the creatures in the peach?

Chapter 13
Do you think James will spend the night in the peach? Why?/Why not?

Chapter 14
What do you think will happen in the morning?

Chapters 15 and 16
Where do you think the peach will roll to?

Chapters 17 and 18
Where might the peach travel to next?

Chapters 19 and 20
Who, do you think, will become James’ closest friend? Why did you pick that creature?
Comprehension Activity Sheets

Presented on the following pages are a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.

Vocabulary

The illustrations in Roald Dahl’s books were created by Quentin Blake, a well-known illustrator. These illustrations and the cover of the book can provide a context for building vocabulary. Ask children to describe each illustration using as many adjectives as they can. Dictionaries and thesauruses can be used as aids. Further activities include pre-teaching new vocabulary and adding new vocabulary to the word wall.
1. What happened to James’ parents while they were shopping in London?

2. Who is James sent to live with?

3. How is James treated in his new home?

4. Why is James not allowed to leave the garden?

5. What sort of people are Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker, do you think?

6. How, do you think, did James feel when he had to move in with his two aunts?

7. James is badly mistreated by his aunts. Why, do you think, does he stay in their house? What are the advantages of staying with them?
James and the Giant Peach: Comprehension Activity Sheet 2

‘Two’ & ‘Three’
Chapters 2 & 3

1. What is James doing in the garden with his two aunts?

2. Describe Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker.

3. What does James request to do with his aunts?

4. What unexpected thing happens that day?

5. How are the tiny green crocodile tongues inside the bag made?

6. Do you think James is scared of the old man?

7. If you were James, what questions would you have asked the man?
1. What does James need to do to the little green crocodile tongues to get them working?

2. How does James feel when the man leaves him with the bag?

3. What happens to the green crocodile tongues when they hit the ground?

4. What punishment does Aunt Sponge suggest for James?

5. If you were James, what questions would you have liked to ask the man about the green crocodile tongues?

6. What do you think will happen next in the story?
1. What do James’ aunts see on the peach tree?

2. What do James’ aunts order him to do?

3. What surprises James’ aunts about the peach?

4. How does the author describe the peach?

5. How, do you think, does Aunt Spiker plan to make money from the peach?

6. What thoughts are going through James’ mind when he sees the enormous peach, do you think?
1. How do James’ aunts make money from the peach?

2. How much does it cost to see the giant peach?

3. Where is James during all the excitement? Why is he there?

4. Why would James’ aunts not feed him that day?

5. Do Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker remind you of characters from other stories? Explain your answer.

6. If you were in James’ situation how would you cope with being mistreated by Aunt Spiker and Aunt Sponge, do you think?
1. How does James feel when he was outside at night?

2. How does the peach feel when James touches it?

3. What did James find inside the peach?

4. If you were James, would you have gone into the peach? Give a reason for your answer.

5. What makes James go into the peach?

6. How would Aunt Spiker and Aunt Sponge react if they knew James had climbed into the peach?
1. Name the creatures James finds inside the giant peach.

2. What creatures are sitting on the sofa?

3. What is lying on the floor?

4. Why does James look ill with fear?

5. What does the Centipede need help with?

6. What do you think, did the creatures mean when they told James he was one of the crew?

7. If you were James, would you believe the creatures?
1. How many feet does the Centipede have?

2. Why did the Earthworm think he was better off than the Centipede?

3. How does the Centipede get to be so big?

4. Why does James like the Centipede?

5. Which character would you like to learn more about? Why?

6. Why, do you think, do the creatures have a tough day ahead of them?
1. What type of beds does Miss Spider make?

2. Why is it difficult for James to take off the Centipede's boots?

3. How was James' old bed different to his new bed?

4. What noises do the creatures make as they sleep?

5. What did James see on the ceiling?

6. How, do you think, does James feel about spending the night with the creatures in the peach?

7. Rewrite this scene from the Centipede's point of view.
1. What is happening when James wakes up?

2. Who is trying to break the peach away from the tree?

3. What do the creatures sing about as the peach begins to move?

4. What effect does the moving peach have on the creatures inside?

5. Are you surprised that James doesn't think about his aunts' feelings before leaving? Give a reason for your answer.

6. If you were travelling in the peach, what things would you like to see on your journey?
1. Do Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker seem worried about James? How do you know?

2. What causes the noise in the garden?

3. What happens when the peach rolls over James' aunts?

4. What obstacles did the peach pass as it travelled downhill?

5. What happens when the peach passes through the factory?

6. Imagine you were asked to give an interview to a newspaper about what happened when the peach began rolling down the hill. What would you say to the reporter?

7. Do you think the illustration in chapter sixteen is a good one? Why?/Why not?
1. Why is the journey inside the peach a terrible one for the creatures?

2. Where do the creatures predict they are located?

3. Why does the Centipede not want to go upstairs?

4. Write some adjectives to describe the Earthworm.

5. What would the creatures have done if James had not been there, do you think?

6. Would you like the diet of the Centipede? Why?/Why not?

7. Write a summary of the journey on the peach so far.
1. What approaches the peach from the water?

2. Which of the creatures can make string?

3. How does James plan to rescue the peach?

4. What does the word ‘martyr’ mean? Write a sentence using the word.

5. What role, do you think, does James play in the group?

6. Do you think James’ plan will work? Why?/Why not?
1. What is the Earthworm afraid of?

2. What orders does James give to the creatures?

3. Where is the Earthworm positioned?

4. What makes the sharks attack the peach more furiously?

5. Who, do you think, is the biggest hero in this chapter? Explain your answer.

6. If you were on board the peach, where would you like to go next?
Chapter 23  ‘Twenty-three’

1. How do the creatures celebrate their flight?

2. Why is James worried about the peach?

3. What sort of condition did Miss Spider find the underside of the peach in?

4. Why were the sharks not able to do much damage to the peach?

5. Why, do you think, did the crew of the ship not believe the captain?

6. Imagine you were on the ship when the giant peach flew by. Write a postcard to your friend about it.
1. What causes the creatures to become spellbound?

2. What does James learn from the Old-Green-Grasshopper?

3. How are earthworms and ladybirds useful for farmers?

4. What does Aunt Sponge do to Miss Spider's father?

5. Do you think creatures such as Miss Spider and the Earthworm deserve more respect from humans?

6. Imagine you are a spider. Describe a typical day you might have as a spider.

7. Who is your favourite character in the story so far? Why?
Chapters 26 & 27

1. How does James try to help the Centipede?

2. Why does the Old-Green-Grasshopper play the ‘Funeral March’?

3. How is travelling by aeroplane different to the journey on the peach?

4. What did the Cloud-Men do?

5. Why, do you think, is the Centipede unkind to the Cloud-Men?

6. If you were one of the other creatures living in the peach how would you feel towards the Centipede?

7. If you were travelling over your area on the peach what things would you see?
1. In what way do the Cloud-Men make the peach’s journey more difficult?

2. What does the peach collide with?

3. How does the peach become trapped?

4. Describe the appearance of the Cloud-Men.

5. Do you feel sorry for the Centipede when he is covered in paint? Why? Why not?

6. Do you think a spider could really live for six months upside down on the ceiling while stuck in paint? Explain your answer.
1. What are ‘faucets’?

2. How do the peach and the travellers on it escape the water?

3. How does the Centipede become clean?

4. What sort of activities were the Cloud-Men doing that night?

5. Pick your favourite description from this section of the book. Say what it is and explain why you like it.

6. When morning comes, where will the giant peach and its travellers be, do you think?
1. What did James and the creatures see when they looked down?

2. Where are they flying over?

3. How will they lower themselves to the ground?

4. How do the American’s react to the arrival of the peach?

5. Why, do you think, are the people of New York so afraid of the peach?

6. If you saw a giant peach flying in the sky how would you react?
Chapters 34, 35, 36 & 37

1. How does the Centipede help the peach to land?

2. What causes the peach to suddenly hit the ground?

3. Where does the peach land?

4. Who first spoke to the Chief of Police on behalf of the visitors?

5. Do you like James’ descriptions of each of the creatures? Why?/Why not?

6. Do you think people will like the creatures once they come down to the ground? Why?/Why not?
Chapters 38 & 39

1. How is the peach lowered to the ground?

2. What does the ticker tape parade involve?

3. Why are children chasing the peach on Fifth Avenue in New York?

4. What do each of the creatures go on to do?

5. How was James' life different at the end of the novel to his life at the start of the novel?

6. What would happen to James today if he lived by himself without a guardian?

7. Did you like the ending of the novel? Why?/Why not?
### Book Report Sheet

If you don’t have enough space to write your answers, use the notes section on the following pages.

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**Title of book:**

**Author:**

**Illustrator:**

**Setting (where the story took place):**

**List the main characters:**

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________
4. ______________________________

**Describe your favourite character:**

**Describe your favourite part of the story:**

**This book was:**

- Exciting
- Boring
- Complicated

- Interesting
- Slow-moving
- Imaginative

- Scary
- Fast-paced
- Amusing

### Did you like the book? Why?/Why not?

______________________________

### Grade the book (✓ Tick one)

- Easy to read
- Just right
- A little difficult
- Difficult

- Rate the book out of ten: /10