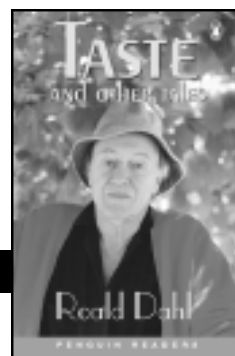


Teacher's notes

Taste and Other Tales

by Roald Dahl



SUMMARY

All the stories in *Taste and Other Tales* have a wonderfully inventive story line and Roald Dahl's trademark 'twist in the tale'. The characters are all ordinary people on the surface, but have a dark and often cruel side to their nature. Tension is built up around the relationships between the various characters.

In 'Taste', what begins as a harmless bet about the name of a wine becomes deadly serious as one man bets his daughter's future against two houses. When one man is found to have cheated, the other becomes understandably outraged.

A bet on the distance a ship will travel makes Mr Botibol take drastic action in 'A Swim'. In order to slow the ship down, and win the bet, he jumps overboard in front of an elderly woman, sure that she will raise the alarm. But the old lady doesn't ...

In 'Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat', Mrs Bixby escapes from her boring dentist husband every month to be with the Colonel. When the Colonel gives her an expensive mink coat, she realizes that she has to prevent her husband from knowing who it came from so she puts it in a pawnshop. But Mr Bixby goes to the pawnshop instead to collect it. When Mrs Bixby goes to his surgery to collect the coat, he gives her a little fur neckpiece instead. Then his assistant comes in wearing the fur coat. Mr Bixby knows that his wife cannot protest.

In 'The Way up to Heaven', Mrs Foster's terrible fear of being late is cruelly used by her husband to put her into a state of panic. When Mrs Foster leaves for a flight to Paris, she recognises a sound in their apartment. Six weeks later she returns to find the apartment empty and the lift stuck between floors. Where is Mr Foster?

'The Sound Machine' tells the story of Klausner's obsession with sound. He makes a machine that he thinks can hear flowers screaming when they are picked. He tests the machine by cutting a tree with an axe and persuades his doctor to put iodine on the cut ...

'The Leg of Lamb' tells the story of a possible 'perfect crime'. When policeman, Patrick Maloney, tells his pregnant wife that he is leaving her, she kills him with a frozen leg of lamb. After getting an alibi by going to her local shops, she invites the investigating policemen to have dinner, and they eat the murder weapon.

In 'Birth and Fate', Ida has just given birth to her fourth child, a healthy baby boy. But her three other children have all died young, and Ida is worried that her drunken husband will think that the baby is too small. Mr and Mrs Hitler

decide to call their baby – Adolf!

'Poison' is a tense story of Harry Pope, a man in bed who says he has a poisonous snake lying on his stomach. Dr Ganderbai gives him some serum and then puts chloroform into the bed to put the snake to sleep. When the sheets are pulled back, Harry jumps up but there is no snake. So why does Harry call the doctor 'you dirty little rat'?

ABOUT ROALD DAHL

Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff, South Wales in 1916. His parents were both Norwegian. He first worked for the Shell Oil Company in Nairobi and at the start of the Second World War he joined the Royal Air Force. He served as a fighter pilot in Africa and was injured in an air crash. In 1942 he went to Washington as a military official and began to have success as a writer. His first collection of short stories, *Over to You*, were published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1946. In 1953 Dahl married Patricia Neal, an American actress and they had five children. Many of his famous children's stories came from stories that he had invented for his own children. His collections of stories include *Someone Like You* (1953), *Kiss, Kiss* (1960 and *Switch Bitch* (1974). A number of these were rewritten for television as *Tales of the Unexpected*. Dahl is most famous for his children's stories, though. His first, *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) were made into very successful films. In all, Dahl wrote nineteen children's books. His dark sense of humour and the feeling that characters can make anything happen made the books extremely popular with children, if not with adults. Roald Dahl also wrote two highly successful screenplays for the cinema – 'You only Live Twice' (1967) and 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' (1968).

Roald Dahl died in 1990

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Roald Dahl began his writing career retelling his experiences as a fighter pilot in the war. He moved on to write short stories for adults in which the development of the action rather than that of the characters is central. His stories are characterized by their unexpected endings, their unusual twist in the tale. Very often, the reader is left guessing what will happen next. Dahl moved on to write stories for children and they immediately became very popular. The first was *James and the Giant Peach*, in which a boy crosses the Atlantic in a large piece of fruit with some ver-

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big insects. In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Charlie goes on a tour of a magical and mysterious chocolate factory and sees four unpleasant children disappear. Many of Dahl's stories present unpleasant characters to whom unpleasant things happen: in *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981) a boy has a mean, unkind grandmother, but in return for her unkindness, he gives her a medicine which does some strange and unpleasant things to her.

Taste and Other Tales shows us seemingly ordinary people, a housewife, a retired couple, an expectant mother, etc, but they all have a mysterious, darker side to them.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found in the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Ask students what they know about Roald Dahl. Have they ever read any of his books either in English or in their own language? Ask them to tell you the plot of one of his books.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

'Taste'

- 1 Ask students what they think Richard Pratt will say and do to get out of the situation at the end of the story.
- 2 Ask students, in small groups, to continue the story. How will Mike react? What will he do? How will the evening end?

'A Swim'

- 1 Ask students if they have ever been to an auction. If so, did they buy anything? How did they feel during the bidding?
- 2 Put students into small groups. Ask them to think of two other ways in which Mr Botibol could have won his bet. The groups discuss their suggestions and decide on the best one.

'Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat'

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss these questions.

What will Mrs Bixby do next?

Will Mrs Bixby try to get the coat back? How will she do it?

What do they think will happen to Mr and Mrs Bixby? Will their marriage last?

'The Way up to Heaven'

In small groups, students discuss the following questions.

What has happened to Mr Foster?

Will Mrs Foster stay in America?

'The Sound Machine'

- 1 At the end of the story, the sound machine is broken. In groups, students discuss whether Klausner will make another machine. What do they think he will do with his invention? Will people believe him?
- 2 Students discuss this question.
Do you think that plants feel pain?
They give their reasons.

The Leg of Lamb

Mrs Maloney thinks she has committed the perfect crime and that the police will not catch her. In groups, students imagine their perfect crime. Will it be a robbery, a murder or something else. How will they do it? What will be involved? Why will they not be caught?

'Birth and Fate'

This story raises some important issues. How an innocent baby becomes a power-crazy dictator? How do the parents of the baby feel when the baby grows up? Ask students to discuss what factors might influence the development of someone like Adolf Hitler to become the person he did and do the things he did.

'Poison'

In small groups, students discuss the following question. What would you do if you were bitten by a poisonous snake?

They need to think about stopping the poison from spreading through their body, about getting the poison out, about getting help.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

In small groups, students choose their favourite story and write an alternative ending. The whole class can discuss these and choose the best ending to each story.

Glossary

It will be useful if your students know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those used in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.)

Taste

bet (n) an agreement to risk money on the result of a race, competition, game, etc

claret (n) a red wine from the Bordeaux area of France

epicure (n) someone who enjoys good food and drink

A Swim

auction (n) a public meeting where things are sold to the person who offers the most money for them

deck (n) the flat part of a ship that you can walk on

purser (n) an officer who is responsible for the money on a ship and also for the passengers' cabins, comfort, etc

rail (n) a bar that is fixed along or around something especially to stop you falling

Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat

Colonel (n) a high rank in the army

mink (n) a very valuable fur used to make coats

pawnbroker (n) someone whose business it is to lend people money in exchange for valuable objects

The Way up to Heaven

butler (n) the main male servant of a house

The Sound Machine

axe (n) a tool with a heavy metal blade on the end of a long handle, used to cut down trees

dial (n) part of a piece of equipment such as a radio that you turn to listen to different stations

iodine (n) a dark blue chemical substance used on wounds to prevent infection

vibrate (v) to shake or make something shake with small fast movements

Birth and Fate

fate (n) the things that will happen to someone, especially unpleasant events

Poison

anaesthetic (n) a drug that stops you feeling pain

chloroform (n) a liquid that makes you become unconscious if you breathe it

serum (n) a liquid that contains substances that fight infection that is put into a sick person's blood



Student's activities

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These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Read the Introduction to the book and answer these questions.

- Where was Roald Dahl born? When?
- What nationality were his parents?
- What did he do during the Second World War?
- Where was he living when he started writing?
- What subject did he write about first?
- What are Dahl's two most famous children's stories?
- When did he die? How old was he?

Activities while reading the book

'TASTE'

- Answer these questions.
 - Does Richard Pratt drink the first wine?
 - Why is the claret in the study?
 - What is Mike's first bet?
 - What does Pratt then ask him to bet?
 - What does Mike's wife think of the bet?
 - What does Mike say to Louise to show that he is very confident?
 - Does Pratt guess the name of the wine correctly?
 - How does he do this?
- Who says these things? Who are they speaking to?
 - 'An attractive little wine, don't you think?'
 - 'In my study, already open. It's breathing.'
 - 'I want you to bet me the hand of your daughter in marriage.'
 - 'But I don't want to hear it.'
 - 'Just so long as you swear there's no danger of losing.'
 - 'You left them in Mr. Schofield's study.'
- Imagine that you are Louise Schofield. Tell the story of the evening to a friend the next day. What do you say?

'A SWIM'

- Answer these questions.
 - What does Mr Botibol bet on exactly? How much does he pay?

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- What did he wait for before he went to bed?
 - Why is he alarmed the next morning?
 - Who does he see on the deck?
 - What reason might the person on deck have for not sounding the alarm?
 - What does Mr Botibol tell her he does every morning?
- Do you think Mr Botibol survived? Discuss how he might live?

'MRS BIXBY AND THE COLONEL'S COAT'

- Find words in the story to show that these statements are false.
 - Mrs Bixby goes to see the Colonel twice a month.
 - Mrs Bixby is disappointed by the Colonel's letter.
 - Aunt Maude is very rich.
 - Pawnbrokers never give people the full value of the goods they exchange.
 - Mrs Bixby likes the way her husband dresses.
 - Mr Bixby does not think his wife will be pleased with the present from the pawnbroker's.
- Write questions for these answers.
 - To visit a gentleman known as the Colonel.
 - A mink coat.
 - Fifty dollars.
 - On the seat of her taxi.
 - Because she doesn't want him to recognise her.
 - A mink neckpiece.
 - To Miss Pulteney.
- Do you think that Mr Bixby knew about his wife's affair with the Colonel?
- What do you think is the relationship between Mr Bixby and Miss Pulteney?
- With another student, act out a conversation between Mr and Mrs Bixby the evening the story ends.

'THE WAY UP TO HEAVEN'

- Who is being described in questions (a) and (b) and who is speaking to whom in questions (c) – (g)

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Student's activities

- She began walking up and down the hall and whenever the butler came by, she asked him the time.
 - He walked down the stairs slowly, pausing halfway to look at the sky
 - 'I warned Mr Foster that you must leave at 9.15.'
 - 'I'm just going to wash my hands.'
 - 'Well ... how was Paris?'
 - 'I must have left it in my bedroom.'
 - 'Isn't your husband travelling with you?'
- In your own words, say what you think has happened to Mr Foster.
 - What do you think Mrs Foster will do now?

'THE SOUND MACHINE'

- Are these sentences true or false? Correct the ones that are false.
 - Klausner has bought a machine to hear sounds that we cannot normally hear.
 - Klausner is a tall, strong man.
 - Klausner hears the flowers scream when they are cut.
 - He asks Mrs Saunders to cut another flower.
 - Klausner phones the doctor very late at night.
 - The doctor thinks that Klausner is insane.
 - The doctor puts iodine on the tree because he is frightened of Klausner.
- Put these events in the correct order.
 - Mrs Maloney telephones the police.
 - Mrs Maloney gives Jack a drink.
 - Patrick tells his wife some bad news.
 - Mrs Maloney goes to the shop.
 - Mrs Maloney kills her husband.
 - Mrs Maloney puts the meat in the oven.
 - A doctor and a photographer come to the house.
 - Jack Noonan arrives.
 - A policeman goes to the shop.
 - The policemen have a meal.
- Imagine that you are the doctor. Describe to a friend what happened, how you felt when you first went to Klausner's house and when you went to the park. Discuss what you will do next.

'THE LEG OF LAMB'

- Answer these questions.
 - What did Patrick Maloney tell his wife?
 - Why did he hope that she wouldn't cause any trouble?

- Why did Mrs Maloney go to the shop?
 - How many policeman come to the house?
 - How does Noonan think they will find the murderer?
 - What idea does this give Mrs Maloney?
 - Why does Mrs Maloney laugh?
- Talk to a partner. Discuss whether Mrs Maloney will be caught or whether she will get away with the murder. How might the police catch her?

'BIRTH AND FATE'

- Answer these questions.
 - Which of the woman's other children was the oldest?
 - Which of her other children died first?
 - What is her husband's job?
 - Where do they live now?
 - Who helps the doctor with the birth?
 - What is the problem with all the woman's children?
 - What does the woman's husband think about the new baby?
- The doctor says to Mr Hitler 'Give this one a chance.' What do you think happened to the other children?

'POISON'

- Answer these questions?
 - How did the snake get into Harry's bed?
 - What did Timber plan to do if Harry was bitten?
 - What does Harry suggest to Timber?
 - Why does Harry not want a cold cloth on his face?
 - Is the doctor confident that the serum will protect Harry?
 - What will the chloroform do to Harry?
 - Why did Harry start jumping in the air?
- Why do you think Harry calls the doctor 'you dirty little rat'? What do you think are the relationships of Harry, Timber and the doctor?

Activities after reading the book

- Which of the characters in the stories is the most honest and which is the most dishonest. Give reasons for your answers.
- What is the main theme linking all of the stories in the book? Give reasons for your choice.

