

Paper 7

A Dahl of a day out

For a whizzpopping day out, grab the kids and head for Great Missenden.

'It even smells like chocolate!' cries Dougie, aged 7, as we enter the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre in Great Missenden, Bucks. It looks like I'm onto a winner already. My challenge for the day is to help keep my nephew and his 9-year-old sister Meg entertained during the school holidays. So we've taken a short spin out of London – only 45 minutes or so – up the M40 to find out just how much fun we can have in a museum dedicated to the greatest children's author of his generation. 5

According to Dahl's widow Liccy, there are four things her late husband really didn't like: beards, committees, speeches and museums. So don't attach too much significance to the word 'Museum' in the title of this place: Roald may not have approved of dusty, fusty edifices with squeaky glossed floors and highly polished glass cabinets, but this hi-tech interactive playground for kids would surely have earned his approval. 10

As soon as we arrive, children are presented with a booklet entitled 'My Story Ideas'. It has a picture of Dahl scribbling away in his writer's hut on the cover, and as children wend their way round the small but well-designed museum, they are encouraged to use it as a mini-scrapbook, filling it with stamps and pictures as they go round. 'I can finish this when I get home,' says Meg, clutching the book as we charge through the chocolate doors to the first gallery, titled Boy. 15

This room is the most traditional part of the museum, providing an insight into Dahl's childhood and a peek into his personal archive. There are letters sent home from boarding school, reports ('very much improved' in English composition), and interactive touch-screen computer displays, cleverly designed to look like old school exercise books. These give adults a nostalgia trip while the kids press the screen and get the background info on their hero's work. I could have spent more time here, but the children have other ideas. 'The next room has puppets in it!' says Dougie, who's been checking out what else lies in store. 20

Inside the Solo gallery, a giant video screen projects images from the movie version of *James and the Giant Peach* to a background of the title music from Dahl's hit TV series from the 1970s, *Tales of the Unexpected*. But, it's the *BFG*'s dream bottle in the centre of the room that has children flocking. Here they create their own puppet shadow display. 'You can make your own show with a crocodile on a stick,' Dougie explains enthusiastically when I ask him what he likes most about this part. Meg meanwhile is investigating the stamps that print Quentin Blake's exquisite illustrations for Dahl's children's books onto card. 'It's a really good idea,' she says, proudly showing me *The Enormous Crocodile* she's just inked onto a postcard that the museum conveniently provides for the kids. The carpet on the floor bears a single line from one of Dahl's notebooks in his barely legible script: 'Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.' 25

Before heading into the next gallery – the Story Centre of the title – we stop off for a comfort break. 'That gave me a fright', says Dougie, giggling madly as the loo 30



emits an alarming whizzpopping noise, replaced a minute later by the voice of the great man himself declaring, 'I will not eat worms!'

You can also investigate the inside of a faithful recreation of Dahl's beloved writing hut. Here we discovered some of the precious objects he kept on his desk including a huge ball of foil made up of chocolate bar wrappers that he'd eaten and a piece of his own hip bone removed during an operation ('Yuk!' exclaimed Meg gleefully). Everything is designed to be opened and closed, twiddled and fiddled, so that nosey, interfering children and their equally enquiring parents and guardians can enjoy the play value of the place without being told off – or getting dirty looks from the staff.

Our last stop is Miss Honey's Schoolroom where it is story time. A couple of energetic young guys acted out tales from Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* with such infectious enthusiasm that I seriously feared for the health of one young man who puffs so much during *Tale of the Three Little Piggies* that he practically starts hyperventilating. The spellbound audience squeals delightedly as he goes redder and redder in the face. But his performance does not go unappreciated by the young audience. 'I thought you were just going to read to us,' says Dougie afterwards as he chats happily to the reader, 'but you acted out the stories too, and that was really funny.'

Article by Damien Kelleher

Answer these questions.

1 In which county is the museum? _____

2 Who is Liccy? _____

3-4 Find two pieces of evidence in the passage of the museum's links with Dahl's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

5 Why is the museum described as a 'hi-tech interactive playground for kids'?

6 In which gallery were Dahl's letters and school reports?

7 Why would interactive displays of old school exercise books give adults a 'nostalgia trip'?

8 When did Roald Dahl have a hit TV series? _____

9 Explain in your own words what Dahl meant by 'Those who don't believe in magic will never find it' (lines 37-38).

10-11 What is a 'comfort break' (line 40) and how is the experience different?

12 Why is Roald Dahl described as 'the great man' (line 42)?

13 What is the meaning of the word 'edifices' on line 10?

14-16 Give three reasons why Roald Dahl would approve of this museum. Use evidence from the article to support your answer.

17-18 Describe the sort of person Roald Dahl is, as shown in this article.

19-20 Who is the intended audience for this article? Explain your answer.

Fill the gap by writing the past tense of the word in bold.

21 **run** The children _____ as fast as they could in the race.

22 **try** I wasn't pleased with my score, but I had _____ my best.

23 **sleep** The noise of the plane meant that I only _____ for a few hours.

24 **feel** I _____ pleased when I was told that Emma was coming to visit.

25 **see** When we _____ the presents we were very excited.

26 **find** Luckily, Jamal _____ his wallet and keys.