

# Fantastic Mr Fox

SECTION

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## About the book

Roald Dahl wrote *Fantastic Mr Fox* long before the ban on hunting foxes with dogs was made law in the UK. His personification of the central character and the fox family leaves the reader in no doubt as to where the author's loyalties lie. He skilfully steers his readers to take sides, as he divides his animal and human characters into goodies and baddies, respectively. In his inimitable style, Dahl allows no grey areas except for a brief moral debate halfway through the book, in Chapter 14 where 'Badger Has Doubts'. The author's persuasive writing adds sympathetic credibility to the character's argument. It offers opportunity for children to examine the techniques used to achieve this end and sway the reader's sympathy.

The first two chapters of the book introduce the main characters in the story almost like a cast list in a play. The action begins in the third chapter when nocturnal Mr Fox, father of a hungry family, sets out to steal from one of the three farmers (Boggis, Bunce and Bean). He dramatically loses his tail after being shot by the waiting farmers, who have grown wild with rage at the repeated thefts. So begins a cold war between the unappealingly presented humans and the personified animals.

The farmers are made to look ludicrous in their heavy-handed attempts to out the foxes from their underground sanctuary and their subsequent fruitless attempts to starve out the creatures. As they wait with loaded guns, camping out above the foxes' hole, Mr Fox, his children and allies – badgers, rabbits and other underground nocturnal animals – carry out his cunning plans to outwit the farmers. Far from starving, he and his family manage raids on each farm in turn while the farmers continue to wait and '...so far as I know, they are still waiting'.

The large quantity of dialogue, combined with the dramatic action, give the narrative both a visual and script-like quality and encourage children to read on with cliffhanger chapter-endings.

Amusing, flippant 'songs' in the form of limericks complement the narrative.

## About the author

Roald Dahl (1916–1990) wrote numerous books for adults and children. Remembering what it was like to be a child helped him tap into children's psyche. His own childhood and school memories are recorded in his autobiography, *Boy*.

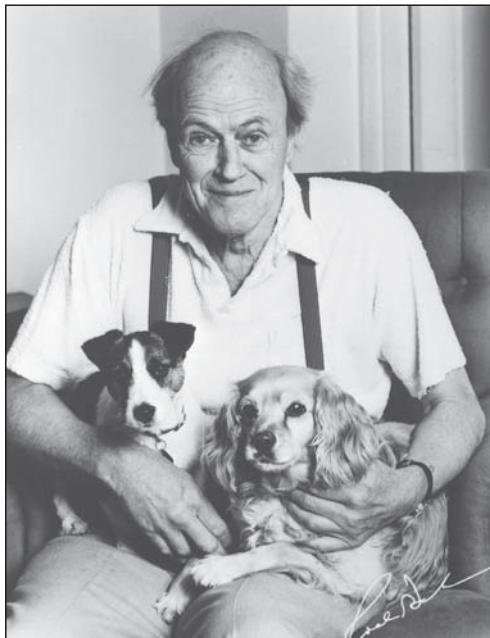
Dahl was one of four children, born in Wales of Norwegian parents. He married twice and had five children.

The author's somewhat anarchic viewpoint appeals to children, who recognise the underlying sincerity in his macabre humour. There is a distinct sense of moral justice in his 'bad' characters' downfall and the triumph of his 'underdogs'. He recognises children's hopes and fears and leads them safely through fear to resolution by skilfully

combining real-life situations with pure fantasy.

Dahl wrote many of his books from a small hut at the bottom of his garden. He worked with illustrator, Quentin Blake, from 1976.

Further information can be found on the author's (animated) official website: [www.roalddahl.com](http://www.roalddahl.com).



### Facts and figures

Roald Dahl's work has been translated into a total of 34 languages. In 1983, his book *The Witches* won the Whitbread Award. In 1989, he won the Children's Book Award for *Matilda*.

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