Matilda Quotes

School teachers suffer a good deal from having to listen to this sort of twaddle from proud parents, but they usually get their own back when the time comes to write the end-of-term reports. If I were a teacher I would cook up some real scorchers for the children of doting parents.

"I'm wondering what to read next," Matilda said. "I've finished all the children's books."

"You mean you've looked at the pictures?"

"Yes, but I've read the books as well."

"A fine writer will always make you feel that," Mrs Phelps said. "And don't worry about the bits you can't understand. Sit back and allow the words to wash around you, like music."

Miss Honey was feeling quite quivery. There was no doubt in her mind that she had met a truly extraordinary mathematical brain, and words like child-genius and prodigy went flitting through her head. She knew that these sorts of wonders do pop up in the world from time to time, but only once or twice in a hundred years.

[Miss Honey] felt wildly excited. She had just met a small girl who possessed, or so it seemed to her, quite extraordinary qualities of brilliance. There had not been time yet to find out exactly how brilliant the child was, but Miss Honey had learnt enough to realize that something had to be done about it as soon as possible. It would be ridiculous to leave a child like that stuck in the bottom form.

"It makes me vomit," she went on, "to think that I am going to have to put up with a load of garbage like you in my school for the next six years. I can see that I'm going to have to expel as many of you as possible as soon as possible to save myself from going round the bend."

"[…] My idea of a perfect school, Miss Honey, is one that has no children in it at all. One of these days I shall start up a school like that. I think it will be very successful."

There was a moment of silence, and Matilda, who had never before heard great romantic poetry spoken aloud, was profoundly moved. "It's like music," she whispered.

From then on, every day after school, Matilda shut herself in her room and practised with the cigar. And soon it all began to come together in the most wonderful way. Six days later, by the following Wednesday evening, she was able not only to lift the cigar up into the air but also to move it around exactly as she wished. It was beautiful.

"They have all learnt their three-times table. But I see no point in teaching it to them backwards. There is little point in teaching anything backwards. The whole object of life, Headmistress, is to go forwards. I venture to ask whether even you, for example, can spell a simple word like *wrong* backwards straight away. I very much doubt it."

"I know it's a ghost!" Matilda said. "I've heard it here before! This room is haunted! I thought you knew that."

And now, quite slowly, there began to creep over Matilda a most extraordinary and peculiar feeling. The feeling was mostly in the eyes. A kind of electricity seemed to be gathering inside them. A sense of power was brewing in those eyes of hers, a feeling of great strength was settling itself deep inside her eyes.

"Tip it!" Matilda whispered. "Tip it over!"

She saw the glass wobble. It actually tilted backwards a fraction of an inch, then righted itself again. She kept pushing at it with all those millions of invisible little arms and hands that were reaching out from her eyes, feeling the power that was flashing straight from the two little black dots in the very centres of her eyeballs.

A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world. With the power of her eyes alone she had compelled a glass of water to tip and spill its contents over the horrible Headmistress, and anybody who could do that could do anything.

"I made the glass tip over."

"I still don't quite understand what you mean," Miss Honey said gently.

"I did it with my eyes," Matilda said. "I was staring at it and wishing it to tip and then my eyes went all hot and funny and some sort of power came out of them and the glass just toppled over."

Miss Honey's mouth dropped open and her eyes stretched so wide you could see the whites all round. She didn't say a word. She couldn't. The shock of seeing the miracle performed had struck her dumb. […] She saw the child white in the face, as white as paper, trembling all over, the eyes glazed, staring straight ahead and seeing nothing. The whole face was transfigured, the eyes round and bright, and she was sitting there speechless, quite beautiful in a blaze of silence.

Because we are playing with mysterious forces, my child, that we know nothing about. I do not think they are evil. They may be good. They may even be divine. But whether they are or not, let us handle them carefully.

Her plan for helping Miss Honey was beginning to form beautifully in her mind. She had it now in almost every detail, but in the end it all depended upon her being able to do one very special thing with her eye-power. She knew she wouldn't manage it right away, but she felt fairly confident that with a great deal of practise and effort, she would succeed in the end.

Now for the difficult one, she thought. But if I have the power to*push*, then surely I also have the power to *lift*? It is *vital* I learn how to lift it. I *must* learn how to lift it right up into the air and keep it there. It is not a very heavy thing, a cigar.

This morning," Matilda said, "just for fun I tried to push something over with my eyes and I couldn't do it. Nothing moved. I didn't even feel the hotness building up behind my eyeballs. The power had gone. I think I've lost it completely.

It is bad enough when parents treat *ordinary* children as though they were scabs and bunions, but it becomes somehow a lot worse when the child in question is *extra*-ordinary, and by that I mean sensitive and brilliant. Matilda was both of these things, but above all she was brilliant.

The father glanced down at the paper in his hand. He seemed to stiffen. He became very quiet. There was a silence. Then he said, "Say that again."

She looked up. She caught sight of her husband. She stopped dead. Then she let out a scream that seemed to lift her right up into the air and she dropped the plate with a crash and a splash on to the floor.

Miss Honey gazed at Matilda with absolute amazement, but when next she spoke she kept her voice level. "That is really splendid," she said. "But of course multiplying by two is a lot easier than some of the bigger numbers. What about the other multiplication tables? Do you know any of those?

Both Matilda and Lavender were enthralled. It was quite clear to them that they were at this moment standing in the presence of a master. Here was somebody who had brought the art of skullduggery to the highest point of perfection, somebody, moreover, who was willing to risk life and limb in pursuit of her calling. They gazed in wonder at this goddess, and suddenly even the boil on her nose was no longer a blemish but a badge of courage.

As the very last mouthful [of cake] disappeared, a tremendous cheer rose up from the audience and children were leaping on to their chairs and yelling and clapping and shouting, "Well done, Brucie! Good for you, Brucie! You've won a gold medal, Brucie!"

"You seemed so far away," Miss Honey whispered, awestruck.

"Oh, I was. I was flying past the stars on silver wings," Matilda said. "It was wonderful."

Miss Honey was still gazing at the child in absolute wonderment, as though she were The Creation, The Beginning Of The World, The First Morning.

Matilda followed her, but just inside the doorway of the so-called sitting-room she stopped and stared around her in absolute amazement. The room was as small and square and bare as a prison cell. […] The only objects in the entire room were two upturned wooden boxes to serve as chairs and a third box between them for a table. That was all.

Matilda stared at her. What a marvellously brave thing Miss Honey had done. Suddenly she was a heroine in Matilda's eyes.

This was the most sensational bit of news of all and the entire class jumped up out of their seats to have a really good look. And there she was, the huge figure of the Headmistress, stretched full-length on her back across the floor, out for the count.

"Then go and catch them, Harry!" hissed the mother. "Go out and collar them red-handed!"

The father didn't move. He seemed in no hurry to dash off and be a hero. His face had turned grey.

"What the blazes are you all talking about?" the father yelled, putting both hands to his hair. "I most certainly have not dyed it! What d'you mean I've dyed it? What's happened to it? Or is this some sort of a stupid joke?" His face was turning pale green, the colour of sour apples.

She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. There was an aura of menace about her even at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as from a red-hot rod of metal.

"The first time," Hortensia said, "I poured half a tin of Golden Syrup on to the seat of the chair the Trunchbull was going to sit on at prayers. It was wonderful. When she lowered herself into the chair, there was a loud squelching noise similar to that made by a hippopotamus when lowering its foot into the mud on the banks of the Limpopo River. […]"

The girl wearing the pigtails, Amanda Thripp, stood quite still, watching the advancing giant, and the expression on her face was one that you might find on the face of a person who is trapped in a small field with an enraged bull which is charging flat-out towards her. The girl was glued to the spot, terror-struck, pop-eyed, quivering, knowing for certain that the Day of Judgment had come for her at last

"She's mad," Hortensia said.

"But don't the parents complain?" Matilda asked.

"Would yours?" Hortensia asked. "I know mine wouldn't. She treats the mothers and fathers just the same as the children and they're all scared to death of her. I'll be seeing you some time, you two." And with that she sauntered away.

In two large strides the Trunchbull was behind Eric's desk, and there she stood, a pillar of doom towering over the helpless boy. Eric glanced fearfully back over his shoulder at the monster. "I *was* right, wasn't I?" he murmured nervously.

"Up to now," Miss Honey went on, "I have found it impossible to talk to anyone about my problems. I couldn't face the embarrassment, and anyway I lack the courage. Any courage I had was knocked out of me when I was young. But now, all of a sudden I have a sort of desperate wish to tell everything to somebody. I know you are only a tiny little girl, but there is some kind of magic in you somewhere. I've seen it with my own eyes."

"You shouldn't have done that," Matilda said. "Your salary was your chance of freedom."

"I know, I know," Miss Honey said. "But by then I had been her slave nearly all my life and I hadn't the courage or the guts to say no. I was still petrified of her. She could still hurt me badly."

For some reason everyone now looked at the Trunchbull. The woman's face had turned white as snow and her mouth was opening and shutting like a halibut out of water and giving out a series of strangled gasps.

By the time she was *three*, Matilda had taught herself to read by studying newspapers and magazines that lay around the house. At the age of *four*, she could read fast and well, and she naturally began hankering after books.

Most children in Matilda's place would have burst into floods of tears. She didn't do this. She sat there very still and white and thoughtful. She seemed to know that neither crying nor sulking ever got anyone anywhere. The only sensible thing to do when you are attacked is, as Napoleon once said, to counter-attack.

"Do you think that all children's books ought to have funny bits in them?" Miss Honey asked.

"I do," Matilda said. "Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh."

Miss Honey was astounded by the wisdom of this tiny girl. She said, "And what are you going to do now that you've read all the children's books?"

"I am reading other books," Matilda said. "I borrow them from the library. Mrs Phelps is very kind to me. She helps me to choose them."

"…I have discovered, Miss Honey, during my long career as a teacher that a bad girl is a far more dangerous creature than a bad boy. What's more, they're much harder to squash. Squashing a bad girl is like trying to squash a bluebottle. You bang down on it and the darn thing isn't there. Nasty dirty things, little girls are. Glad I never was one."

"I'm sure you know," Miss Honey said, "that children in the bottom class at school are not expected to be able to read or spell or juggle with numbers when they first arrive. Five-year-olds cannot do that. But Matilda can do it all. […]"

"But does it not intrigue you," Miss Honey said, "that a little five-year-old child is reading long adult novels by Dickens and Hemingway? Doesn't that make you jump up and down with excitement?"

The children's eyes were riveted on the Headmistress. "I don't like small people," she was saying. "Small people should never be seen by anybody. They should be kept out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons. I cannot for the life of me see why children have to take so long to grow up. I think they do it on purpose."

[The Trunchbull] said, "I have never been able to understand why small children are so disgusting. They are the bane of my life. They are like insects. They should be got rid of as early as possible. We get rid of flies with fly-spray and by hanging up fly-paper. I have often thought of inventing a spray for getting rid of small children. How splendid it would be to walk into this classroom with a gigantic spray-gun in my hands and start pumping it. […]"

"A precocious child," Miss Honey said, "is one that shows amazing intelligence early on. You are an unbelievably precocious child."

"Am I really?" Matilda asked.

"You are so much wiser than your years, my dear," Miss Honey went on, "that it quite staggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean."

It's a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful.

[Matilda's] mind was so nimble and she was so quick to learn that her ability should have been obvious even to the most half-witted of parents. But Mr and Mrs Wormwood were both so gormless and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives that they failed to notice anything unusual about their daughter. To tell the truth, I doubt they would have noticed had she crawled into the house with a broken leg.

"She [my mother] doesn't really care what I do," Matilda said a little sadly.

"Mummy," Matilda said, "would you mind if I ate my supper in the dining-room so I could read my book?"

The father glanced up sharply. "Iwould mind!" he snapped. "Supper is a family gathering and no one leaves the table till it's over!"

"But we're not at the table," Matilda said. "We never are. We're always eating off our knees and watching the telly."

In any event, parents never *underestimated* the abilities of their own children. Quite the reverse. Sometimes it was well nigh impossible for a teacher to convince the proud father or mother that their beloved offspring was a complete nitwit. Miss Honey felt confident that she would have no difficulty in convincing Mr and Mrs Wormwood that Matilda was something very special indeed. The trouble was going to be to stop them from getting over-enthusiastic.

Do any of us children, she [Matilda] wondered, ever stop to ask ourselves where our teachers go when school is over for the day? Do we wonder if they live alone, or if there is a mother at home or a sister or a husband? "Do you live all by yourself, Miss Honey?" she asked.

"[…] I hated her [my aunt] right from the start. I missed my mother terribly. And the aunt was not a kind person. My father didn't know that because he was hardly ever around but when he did put in an appearance, the aunt behaved differently."

"I think what I am trying to explain to you," she said, "is that over the years I became so completely cowed and dominated by this monster of an aunt that when she gave me an order, no matter what it was, I obeyed it instantly. That can happen, you know. And by the time I was ten, I had become her slave. I did all the house-work. I made her bed. I washed and ironed for her. I did all the cooking. I learnt how to do everything."

"I have kept you here far too long. Your mother will be starting to worry."

"She never does that," Matilda said, smiling. "But I would like to go home now please, if you don't mind."

Matilda leapt into Miss Honey's arms and hugged her, and Miss Honey hugged her back, and then the mother and father and brother were inside the car and the car was pulling away with the tyres screaming. The brother gave a wave through the rear window, but the other two didn't even look back. Miss Honey was still hugging the tiny girl in her arms and neither of them said a word as they stood there watching the big black car tearing round the corner at the end of the road and disappearing for ever into the distance.

She resented being told constantly that she was ignorant and stupid when she knew she wasn't. […] She decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she would get her own back in some way or another. A small victory or two would help her to tolerate their idiocies and would stop her from going crazy.

Matilda longed for her parents to be good and loving and understanding and honourable and intelligent. The fact that they were none of these things was something she had to put up with.

She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. There was an aura of menace about her even at a distance, and when she came up close you could almost feel the dangerous heat radiating from her as from a red-hot rod of metal.

She didn't in the least mind being accused of having done something she had actually done. She could see the justice of that. It was, however, a totally new experience for her to be accused of a crime that she definitely had not committed.

"You're darn right it's like a war," Hortensia cried. "And the casualties are terrific.*We*are the crusaders, the gallant army fighting for our lives with hardly any weapons at all and the Trunchbull is the Prince of Darkness, the Foul Serpent, the Fiery Dragon with all the weapons at her command. It's a tough life. We all try to support each other."

"I know what you're thinking," Matilda said. "You're thinking that the aunt killed him and made it look as though he'd done it himself."

"I am not thinking anything," Miss Honey said. "One must never think things like that without proof."

"*What the blazes is this?"* yelled the Trunchbull. It had shaken her to see her own first name being written like that by an invisible hand. She dropped Wilfred on to the floor. Then she yelled at nobody in particular, "Who's *doing* this? Who's*writing*it?"

She was feeling curiously elated. She felt as though she had touched something that was not quite of this world, the highest point of the heavens, the farthest star. She had felt most wonderfully the power surging up behind her eyes, gushing like a warm fluid inside her skull, and her eyes had become scorching hot, hotter than ever before, and things had come bursting out of her eye-sockets and then the piece of chalk had lifted itself up and had begun to write. It seemed as though she had hardly done anything, it had all been so simple.

…Miss Honey received […] a letter […] informing her that the last will and testament of her late father, Dr. Honey, had suddenly and mysteriously turned up. This document revealed that ever since her father's death, Miss Honey had in fact been the rightful owner of a property on the edge of the village […] The will also showed that her father's lifetime savings, which fortunately were still safely in the bank, had also been left to her.

Back at school, great changes were also taking place. As soon as it became clear that Miss Trunchbull had completely disappeared from the scene, the excellent Mr. Trilby was appointed Head Teacher in her place. And very soon after that, Matilda was moved up into the top form, where Miss Plimsoll quickly discovered that this amazing child was every bit as bright as Miss Honey had said.