

# Quentin Blake: Inside Stories

## Learning Resource



Illustration © Quentin Blake

### The exhibition

Quentin Blake: Inside Stories celebrates the work of one of the world's most important and best-loved illustrators. Best known for his illustrations in the books of Roald Dahl, Quentin Blake's work is recognised worldwide.

This exhibition gives an unique insight into the origins of some of Blake's most iconic and popular creations, ranging from his illustrations in Roald Dahl's *The Twits*, *Danny the Champion of the World* and *Matilda* to his own *The Story of the Dancing Frog and Clown*, *The Boy in The Dress* by David Walliams and illustrations to books by Russell Hoban and Michael Rosen.

It includes first roughs and storyboards, many never shown before, with finished artwork to demonstrate how ideas evolved, often in close collaboration with the authors. It shows how Blake used a wide range of different techniques and media including inks, watercolours and pastels, in response to the particular mood of a book and the nature of its characters, to create his distinctive and unforgettable illustrations

This learning resource is designed to support teachers and educators. It includes support in planning a visit, exploring the exhibition and suggestions for things to do back in the classroom. It is primarily aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils but can be easily adapted for older or younger students.

### Before you visit the exhibition

#### Discuss

- What does an illustrator do? Use some of your favourite picture books or comics as examples, think about how the pictures enhance the story.
- What are your favourite illustrated books/comics, what do you like about them?
- Are there things in the pictures that don't come through in the words of the book?

### Explore some of Quentin Blake's books

In most of Blake's children's book illustrations, there are very obviously sympathetic and unsympathetic characters, or "goodies" and "baddies". Children are often the heroes and heroines and adults their adversaries. Blake makes it clear whose side we are on through facial expression, pose, features and action. It is perhaps for this reason that his work is so popular and enjoyable to readers of all ages.



### In the exhibition

In the exhibition you'll see illustrations from the following books, there will be copies of the books for you to read together and a drawing table where you can create your own illustrations and display them in the gallery.

#### **1) The Twits – Roald Dahl (1980)**

A well-loved Dahl story, Blake chose to include this and Danny the Champion of the World as contrasting stories with very different illustration briefs. The Twits are the most horrible people imaginable and Blake portrays their nastiness in great detail, as well as the unpleasant, bleak atmosphere of their home. One of the most important aspects of the story is the Twits' comeuppance which is shown here too. Borrowing from the fairy-tale tradition of portraying witches as ugly, Blake has brought Dahl's creatures to life in grotesque glory that children love to hate.

#### **Discussion points:**

- How has Blake made it clear that these characters are disgusting and horrible?
- How has Blake shown that the Twits' home is the least hospitable house imaginable?
- What would you add to Mr Twits' beard to make him even more disgusting?
- What type of marks does Blake make with the ink, and what effect do these have on the illustrations?

#### **Back at School**

- Ask the children to write a description for a gruesome character. Then get them to swap and illustrate the character that a friend has described. Do these illustrations match what the person writing the original description had imagined?
- The Twits' garden is ugly and overgrown. Use the image as a starting point to explore green spaces near your school. Record the plant life that grows there, talk about what plants need to grow. Ask the pupils to design a nice new garden for The Twits.
- Birds play a very important part in the story of The Twits. Use books or the internet to research birds that you might find outside your school or in your garden.



Illustration © Quentin Blake



## 2) Danny the Champion of the World, Roald Dahl (1994)

One of Roald Dahl's best-loved children's books, *Danny the Champion of the World* is a story about a warm father-son relationship, the countryside, and the battle between landowners and people living on the land. Blake has brought to life the countryside, along with the characters of Danny and his father, with tenderness and less exaggeration than some of his other portrayals, as befits the story. As in many Dahl and Blake creations, there are both sympathetic and unsympathetic characters, drawn with glee by Blake.



Illustration © Quentin Blake

### Discussion points:

- Danny and his father explore the forest in both day and night. How does Blake draw the forest differently depending on the time of day?
- How do you feel when looking at pictures of Danny and his father's night-time adventures?
- How has Blake portrayed the teacher with whom Danny is in trouble?

### Back at School

- In the book, Danny's dad come up with tricks to try and catch pheasants. Use this as inspiration to set the class an invention challenge.
- Research the wildlife you might find in a local woodland. What plants and animals might you find there? The oak woodland display in the museum is a good place to start.

### 3) Clown – Quentin Blake (1988)

Written and illustrated by Quentin Blake, this book is the story of a toy that takes on an independent life of its own after being discarded several times. The book has no words, so the whole story is told purely through illustrations. Clown is mistreated by its initial owners, and finds life through partnership with the right people.



Illustration © Quentin Blake

#### Discussion points:

- How do we know that the woman and man who discard Clown at first are “bad”?
- How do we know that the child and baby who help Clown with his adventures are “good”?
- Look at the difference between the rough sketches and the finished illustrations. Why is it important for an artist to do a rough draft first?

#### Back at School

- Challenge your pupils to create a story just using pictures.
- The clown isn't looked after very well so in contrast focus on things that do mean a lot to children. Make a display of their 'treasured items'.
- Use the story to talk about waste and recycling

#### 4) Matilda – Roald Dahl (1988)

Matilda is a child genius but her parents and Head Teacher behave terribly towards her. One day she discovers that she has a very special power and decides to use it to get her own back. Again Blake's illustrations create an sense of who is good and who's bad, from the quiet and kind-natured Matilda, who is often seen reading a book, to the monstrous Head Teacher Miss Trunchbull, an imposing figure who terrorises her pupils.

##### Discussion Points

- Miss Trunchbull is very formidable and scary. How has Blake shown this in his drawings?
- How does Matilda compare to the adults in the pictures?
- Matilda is a very extraordinary little girl, how does Quentin Blake show this?
- What impression do you get of Matilda's parents when looking at Blake's drawings of them?
- Look at the drawings of Miss Trunchbull swinging Amanda Thrupp by her pigtails. How does Blake show movement in his pictures? Can you think of any other ways to draw something that is moving?

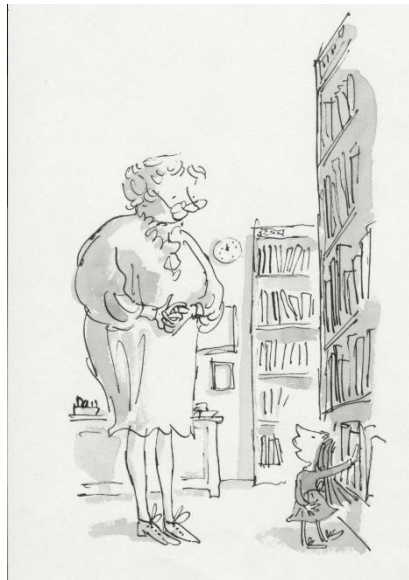


Illustration © Quentin Blake

##### Back at School

- Matilda loves to read books. Write a review of your favourite book and design an illustrated poster to tell people why they should read it too
- Matilda visits the library regularly to find new books to read. Visit your school or local library and see what services it offers. Pupils could make a poster to advertise the library.
- Matilda reads 'The Secret Garden', 'Great Expectations' and many other famous books. Set your students a Matilda-inspired reading challenge.
- Ask pupils to write a character for a nice teacher (like Miss Honey) and an unkind teacher (like Miss Trunchbull)

### 5) The Boy in the Dress - David Walliams (2008)

This is the story of a boy who does not have a good relationship with his father and brother, and who is fascinated by both football and fashion. His friend Lisa introduces him to girls' clothes and he finds out what it's like to be a girl. Blake filled the first and last pages of the book with lots of illustrations of groups of children at school. In this way he sets the scene for the story's actions: girls and boys behaving just as children do at school.



Illustration © Quentin Blake

#### Discussion points

- How has Blake captured the atmosphere of school in these drawings?
- Do the pictures look like your school and friends?
- How would you show friendships, mischief, conversation and all the social aspects of going to school in a few drawings?

#### Back at School

- The boy's friend Lisa enjoys sketching dress designs. Ask your students to design outfits for different people.
- Lisa has a scrapbook containing her illustrations. Create your own sketchbook of drawings.
- Use fabric pens to add your own design to a plain T-shirt.
- This book explores emotional issues around identity so would be a good resource to introduce these themes.

## 6) The Story of the Dancing Frog – Quentin Blake (1998)

Written and illustrated by Blake, this story is a story-within-a-story, with a mother telling her daughter about the dancing frog. The mother and daughter are drawn in sepia wash, while the story as it is told, is in full colour. The sketched storyboard shows us how Blake worked out the narrative and illustrations.

### Discussion points

- The central character is a tiny frog which often appears quite small on the page. How does Blake ensure we know he is the hero of the story?
- This story started off with words, but Blake decided to make it purely visual. How do you think it would change if it had words?

### Back at School

- Blake uses the frog to explain the difference between an illustration and a realistic drawing. Use the image from exhibition (shown below) as a starting point. What are the differences between the images? Use photos of real animals (you could photograph some of the stuffed ones in the museum) and challenge your students to draw them firstly as accurate scientific illustrations, and then as characters.
- Use Blake's storyboard to introduce the concept as a way to plan a story. Have a go at making one in class.
- Get the children to pick story prompts out of a hat. One hat should contain the names of animals, the other fun verbs that children will be familiar with. Challenge the children to write a story with the prompt as the title (e.g. The Laughing Cat, The Singing Snail)



Illustration © Quentin Blake



## 7) How Tom Beat Captain Najork and His Hired Sportsman – Russell Hoban (2006)

This book is about a hero, Tom, and his disapproving aunt who sends him to Captain Najork, a man who makes him play all sorts of made-up and challenging games. Being the hero, Tom always wins. Blake had to invent the games himself in order to depict them, and also invented the pedal-powered boat which inspired Hoban's story.

### Discussion points

- How can we tell that Aunt Fidget Wonkham-Strong is disapproving of her nephew?
- Two of the big illustrations show made-up games that Blake had to imagine. Do you think these games look like fun? What games do you enjoy playing, are they anything like the games in the story?
- Look at Blake's rough sketches compared with the finished pieces. Why do you think it's important for an artist to plan what he is going to draw?
- Look at the postcard which inspired Russell Hoban to write the story. What story would you invent to go with this old photograph?

### Back at School

- The book can provide basis for a discussion around behaviour and what's fair – is it fair that Tom's aunt punishes him like that?
- The games that Tom is challenged to play are quite unlike anything we play today. Use this idea to explore games and toys from different periods in history.



Illustration © Quentin Blake

## 8) Candide - Voltaire (2011 - Original novel published 1759)

Described by Blake as “like a savage children’s book for adults”, the illustrations for this historical novel allow Blake to explore some serious adult themes. A sarcastic novel which parodies contemporary romance and adventure stories, the book was banned soon after it came out, due to its blasphemous content.

### Discussion points:

- How has Blake approached this story compared to the children’s books he illustrates?
- Compare the gentle characters and settings with the rough ones. How has Blake shown us the difference between the two?



Illustration © Quentin Blake

### Back at School

- It's unusual for books for adults to contain illustrations, discuss why this might be?
- Use a discussion on the difference between children's and adults' books as an introduction to writing for different audiences.
- Introduce pupils to some famous authors for older readers. Read a quote from a book and challenge pupils to draw an illustration that could go with the story. Passages which describe characters or places work particularly well.

### 9) Sad Book – Michael Rosen (2004)

This book has its own separate space within the exhibition due to its subject matter: grief. The original story as conceived in an email to his publisher shows Rosen's raw workings which have then been annotated by Blake. The book is about how Rosen reacts to the death of his eighteen year old son, and explores through his words and Blake's illustrations the enormity and complexity of such a loss.

#### Discussion points:

- The image of Rosen smiling starts the book. How has Blake shown that this is a fake smile used by the author when he is pretending not to be sad?
- How do the London cityscapes help to represent the author's feelings?
- How do the pictures of happy memories differ from those of grief and loss?
- Blake intended a "hopeful resolution" by the end of the book. How has he gone about showing this?



Illustration © Quentin Blake

#### Back at School

- Ask pupils to write their own 'Sad Book' that shares things that make them sad and how they deal with this. They could also do another based on happy emotions
- Challenge pupils to think of different words / phrases that describe emotions? In the book, the author describes 'sad' as 'big, everywhere, all over me'. He also says that sad is 'just a cloud that comes along and covers me up'.
- Write a story with a sad ending? Could you write an alternative sad ending for a story that usually ends happily? Which do you prefer?
- Draw a picture to show what 'sad' looks like? Draw other emotions?