

Being a Twit: Roald Dahl's infamous Mr and Mrs explored through Drama

KS2

Helen Day

KS2

Introduction

Roald Dahl's books are adored by adults and children alike, and *The Twits* is so much fun that it just never gets old!

This scheme of work has been created in the spirit of the book, with a range of fun (and sometimes silly) games and exercises that nevertheless challenge students and align with the drama objectives of the KS2 National Curriculum. It is particularly suitable for younger KS2 students; spoken language and listening skills will be developed as they work in pairs and small groups to devise, rehearse and present imaginative work inspired by the book. They will gain a greater understanding of the characters, while at the same time growing in confidence, and honing focus and concentration.

The scheme has been written in chronological order, so could accompany a classroom reading of the book. There is a rather big leap between Lessons 3 and 4, however, therefore it is certainly not an issue if students have read beyond the guideline points given for each of the lessons.

Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme, students will:

- ▶ Have used a range of dramatic techniques to explore *The Twits*
- ▶ Have participated in group discussion
- ▶ Have experience of devising tableaux and short scenes in small groups
- ▶ Have experience of considering, analysing and portraying a variety of characters
- ▶ Have explored creating and sustaining characters, and responding to others in role
- ▶ Have experience of responding constructively to the work of others
- ▶ Have developed their spoken language and written skills
- ▶ Have experience of presenting their work in front of their peers.

Lesson 1: Getting to know the Twits

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson students will:

- ▶ Have experience of performing in front of their peers in the *These are the Twits* warm-up game
- ▶ Have considered how inner thoughts can affect outer appearance, and used this idea as a springboard to rehearse and refine a short performance
- ▶ Have experience of devising in small groups
- ▶ Have experience of performing their devised scenes in front of their peers and/or giving constructive feedback on the work of others
- ▶ Have analysed character in small groups through the *Role on the Wall* exercise.

Resources needed

- ▶ A large roll of paper from which strips can be used for the *Role on the Wall* exercise
- ▶ Marker pens.

Students should be familiar with the book to at least the end of Chapter 4 ('Mrs Twit') for this lesson.

Warm-up: *These are the Twits* (10 mins)

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Ask one student to step into the circle. You start this warm-up game by saying 'This is Mr (or Mrs) Twit ...', finishing the sentence with an activity that he or she could be doing. The student in the centre then has to act out whatever has just been said.

Helen Day is a performer and teacher of performance, and has delivered workshops for numerous theatre companies and arts education organisations. She is co-founder of H2oh! Education, who until 2017 ran a range of curriculum-linked performing arts workshops in primary and secondary schools across the South East of England. She has taught drama in schools across ages 6-18, at University level, and for various youth theatres. She is currently performing in a world tour with *Cirque du Soleil*.



The next student in the circle asks 'Who is it and what are they doing?' In response the student who has just performed says 'This is Mr (or Mrs) Twit ...', and finishes the sentence with a new activity. This passes the baton to the next student to perform, and so on and so forth.

Continue around the circle until everyone has had a go.

Listening and classroom discussion: Ugly Thoughts (10 mins)

Read aloud the section from the chapter entitled 'Mrs Twit', which starts, 'Have you ever seen a woman with an uglier face than that?', and which ends 'they will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely'.

Open up a brief classroom discussion. Do students think that what Roald Dahl says here about ugly thoughts is true?

Devising exercise (10 mins)

Divide students into groups. Four or five students per group should work well.

Ask the groups to devise a short scene in which we see Mrs Twit in a situation as a younger woman. She could be doing anything: getting on the bus, visiting a library, doing the weekly shopping, etc. However the idea of the short scene is to put across the fact that she is having ugly thoughts. How does she respond to other people that cross her path? How does that affect how people respond to her, and what does this do to her facial expression and body language?

Performing the scenes (15 mins)

Randomly select two or three groups to perform their scenes in front of the rest of the class.

Remind those not performing that they are still playing a very important role in the exercise. As the audience, you will require them to respond to the work that they see, and offer constructive feedback.

After each of the groups has shown their scene, open up the floor for a short discussion. How well were Mrs Twit's ugly thoughts shown in the pieces? How did the use of facial expression and body language contribute to our understanding of the piece?

Role on the Wall: Mr and Mrs Twit (15 mins)

Divide the class into small groups. Around five students per group should work well, so you may wish to keep the same groups that were used for the devising exercise. Give each group a large sheet of paper and a marker pen.

One student from each group should lie on the paper, and the others should draw around their body to give an outline.

Each group should decide whether their outline represents Mr or Mrs Twit, and they should write the character's name at the top of the piece of paper. They are now going to investigate that character.

Outside the outline, they should write the facts that they know about the character. It is also possible, for the purposes of this particular Role on the Wall exercise, to create some facts. How old do they think the character is? Does the character have any relatives? What is his or her favourite food/activity?

Inside the outline, they should write the thoughts and feelings of the character they are exploring. These should be written in the first person. With Mr and Mrs Twit, these will mostly be quite ugly! What do they want and hope for? Do they worry about anything?

Role on the Wall review (10 mins)

Take a few minutes to review students' work. Have any of the groups come up with any particularly interesting observations about Mr or Mrs Twit? Is there anything surprising on any of the Role on the Wall character analyses?

This exercise is a nice way to get students performing, as the fact that the activity has been decided for them by the preceding student takes a little of the pressure off. However, with most groups, you will need to intervene if the activities are inappropriate or impossible to perform. With your more confident performers, remind them to try to inhabit the character, and not just be accurate with the activity. How does Mr Twit clean his teeth? How does Mrs Twit tie up her shoelaces? Encourage students to make bold choices and to have fun!

Encourage students to keep these scenes short and simple. They do not need to tell a story. Remind them to focus on demonstrating Mrs Twit's ugly thoughts; this is the aim of the scene.

Lesson 2: Oh the tricks the Twits do play ...

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson students will:

- ▶ Have developed their physical characterisation skills through the game of Mrs Twit's Footsteps
- ▶ Have participated in group discussion
- ▶ Have experience of devising in small groups
- ▶ Have experience of presenting their work in front of their peers
- ▶ Have explored using the text as a starting point for further imaginative work
- ▶ Have considered the use of body language and facial expression when working in role.

Students should be familiar with the book to at least the end of Chapter 9 (Mrs Twit has the Shrinks) for this lesson

Warm-up game: Mrs Twit's Footsteps (10 mins)

A game of Grandmother's Footsteps, Twit style, to get everyone up on their feet and in the mood for drama!

Select one student to be Mr Twit. He or she should stand at one end of the playing space.

All the other students start at the other end of the space. When Mr Twit's back is turned, they may move forward, but as soon as he turns to look at them they should freeze. Anyone who is caught moving is sent back to the starting line. The winner will be the first student to tap Mr Twit on the shoulder.

To make the game more interesting, ask that all the sneaking students portray Mrs Twit trying to sneak up on her husband to play a trick. They should freeze in character, and you can select three students each time, who have used their facial expression and body language well, to take one additional step forward before Mr Twit turns back.

Repeat the game a few times.

Classroom discussion (5 mins)

Today's lesson will focus on the tricks that Mr and Mrs Twit play on each other. How many can students remember without looking at the book?

Devising from the text (10 mins)

Divide the class into small groups. About four students per group should work well.

Each group should now choose one of Mr or Mrs Twit's tricks to portray through a series of tableaux.

With around four students per group, there will be the opportunity to switch roles between tableaux, if students so desire. There is also the opportunity to use narration, and for one or two students to portray inanimate objects in the scenes.

Sharing the work (15 mins)

Give each group the opportunity to perform their series of tableaux in front of the rest of the class.

Move quickly between each group, and when everyone has performed, allow students to comment on which of the tableaux scenes was the most memorable. What made it funny/interesting/successful?

Devising from scratch (15 mins)

Students are going to work in small groups again for this exercise, so I would suggest keeping the same groups, as they are already in the flow of devising together.

Using the tricks that Mr and Mrs Twit play on each other in the book for inspiration, can students devise a scene in which a new trick is played?

For this exercise, students can still use narration if they wish, however they need not stick to tableaux. They can now develop their work to include movement and words.

Spotlight the scenes (10 mins)

The spotlight technique is a great way of seeing extracts of lots of scenes quickly, when you do not have class time to watch multiple devised performances.

Ask students to spread out in their groups around the space. When you clap your hands, they should all start playing their scenes.

After a few moments, you should approach one particular group and stand close to them. When you do so, that group will continue performing, whilst all other groups pause their scene and watch.

Tableaux exercises are among the best for exploring the use of facial expression and body language at KS2 level. Challenge students to explore how these elements contribute to their storytelling here, and to investigate how extreme the expression can be when portraying these larger-than-life characters.

When you have seen enough to get a sense of the work, clap your hands again, and once more everyone will *continue* to play their scenes from where they left off.

Repeat the process of standing next to a group to see an extract of their piece, and continue until all groups have had a go.

If a group has not yet performed but finishes their scene, they should start over again. If they have already been in the 'spotlight', they can sit down and watch the others once their scene is over.

Plenary (5 mins)

Bring the lesson to a close by reflecting on the tricks that Mr and Mrs Twit play on each other and what this says about them as people. What words would students use to describe them? How would they feel if they lived next door to them?

Lesson 3: Mrs Twit floats away

Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson students will:

- ▶ Have developed their speaking, listening and memory skills through the game Mr Twit's Beard
- ▶ Have experience of improvising collaboratively through the Living Tableaux exercise
- ▶ Have experience of writing in role
- ▶ Have explored performing the work of their peers
- ▶ Have developed their devising skills, using an episode in the text to inspire imaginative work
- ▶ Have further experience of performing their devised work in front of their peers.

Students should be familiar with the book to at least the end of Chapter 13 for this lesson (*Mr Twit Gets a Horrid Shock*).

Warm-up game: Mr Twit's Beard (10 mins)

An alphabetic memory game, to get the lesson going.

At the start of the book, Roald Dahl describes Mr Twit's beard as being full of lots of nasty food remnants.

Choose a student to start. He or she should say, 'In Mr Twit's beard there is ...' and then name a food (or something else suitable) that could be stuck in Mr Twit's beard. The item they name should begin with the letter A.

Continue around, with each subsequent student repeating all the items that have come before, in order, and adding something of their own to the list, according to the letter of the alphabet that has been reached.

Eventually, the list will become so long that it is difficult to remember all the items. Allow classmates to help out if someone gets really stuck.

Continue with the game until everyone has added something to the list, and round it off with everyone attempting to repeat the list all at once.

Living tableaux: Mrs Twit in the sky (10 mins)

Remind students about the section of the book in which Mr Twit has attached balloons to Mrs Twit in order to 'stretch' her, and in which he then cuts the strings so that she floats up into the sky.

Ask them to imagine being on the ground and seeing Mrs Twit in the air!

Explain that you are going to invite some students to build a tableau, showing people on the ground who have noticed Mrs Twit up in the air. Who might they be, and what might they be doing? What might their reactions be?

Invite one student to enter the playing space, and to create a pose as someone who has seen Mrs Twit in the sky. *Responding* to his or her pose, invite a second student to add to the picture. Continue this process until the tableau seems full.

When you feel the tableau is complete, clap your hands. This indicates that the scene should now come to life. Students are allowed to use words and movement. Remind them that this does not mean they *have* to talk. They should be listening to others and responding where appropriate, working together to create the scene. Allow it to play for a minute or so, before bringing it to a close.

Repeat the exercise, inviting other students to take to the playing space.

Encourage students to closely observe what others are doing in this exercise, and to respond to their poses, either by adding to them, or by creating a contrasting pose. The aim is to work together silently to build a strong image.

Writing in Role: Mr Twit in the garden (10 mins)

'Mr Twit, who thought he had seen his ugly wife for the last time, was sitting in the garden celebrating with a mug of beer.'

Ask students to imagine that they are Mr Twit, having just sent Mrs Twit up into the air attached to the balloons. What is he thinking?

Working individually, ask students to write a few sentences that represent Mr Twit's thoughts. They should write in the first person.

Presenting the Work (10 mins)

Challenge students to swap their work. Ask them to spend a minute or two preparing to read out the piece with which their classmate has just presented them. Encourage them to think about the way Mr Twit's voice will sound, and how they will say the words they have been given to the best effect.

Select some students to read the work out loud.

Devising: Mrs Twit floats away (15 mins)

'It was a calm day. There was no wind at all. And because of this, Mrs Twit had gone absolutely straight up. And now began to come absolutely straight down.'

In the book, Mrs Twit lands back in her own garden. However *what if* there had been a breeze, and she had floated away somewhere else before coming down? What might have happened?

Divide students into small groups. Four or five students per group should work well.

Ask them to devise a different outcome for Mrs Twit's descent. Each group should think of somewhere that Mrs Twit could land, and what the consequences might be.

After a few minutes' discussion, ask the groups to get up on their feet and to rehearse the scene in which Mrs Twit lands in the new location.

Presenting the scenes (15 mins)

Allow each group to present their scene in front of the rest of the class.

This is a good opportunity to remind students that when performing, they need to remember to use strong voices when speaking so that they can be heard, and that even when they are not speaking they should remember to be expressive and to stay in character.

If time allows, invite comments after everyone has performed. Which performances were most successful, and why?

When devising at KS2 level, it is really important to keep students on track. The tendency is often to do too much talking and discussion, and not get around to rehearsing the scene. There can also be much debate over who plays which part.

Avoid this by giving regular reminders of how much time is left for the exercise, and by when certain decisions should have been made.

Lesson 4: Things are turned upside down**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson students will:

- ▶ Have participated in classroom debate, lightly touching on the ethical issue of animals in circuses
- ▶ Have worked in pairs to develop short scripts
- ▶ Have experience of 'hot seating', offering insight into the characters in the book, as well as how to sustain a role.

Students should be familiar with *The Twits* to the end of the book for this lesson.

Classroom debate: The Upside-Down Circus (10 mins)

'Well, in the old days, they had both worked in a circus as monkey trainers. They used to teach monkeys to do tricks and to dress up in human clothes and to smoke pipes and all the rest of that nonsense.'

Today, although they were retired, Mr Twit still wanted to train monkeys. It was his dream that one day he would own the first UPSIDEDOWN MONKEY CIRCUS in the world.'

Ask students to consider how they feel about the idea of an upside down monkey circus. If they feel it is something that is unacceptable, why do they think that is? Why do they think Roald Dahl wrote this as the plan of Mr and Mrs Twit? What does it say about them as people?

Hot seating: Muggle-Wump and his Family (15 mins)

Give each student a number from 1 to 4.

Ask them all to close their eyes for a few moments, and to consider themselves as one of the family of monkeys.

All the ones should think of themselves as Muggle-Wump, all the twos as Muggle-Wump's wife, all the threes as the eldest child, and all the fours as the youngest child.

As they take a moment to think about their character, they should focus on their life in the Twits' cage, and training for the circus. How do they feel about having to be upside down? Who else in their family do they worry about the most?

Next, place four 'hot seats' in the playing space, and invite one student from each numbered group to take a seat.

The rest of the students now get to ask questions to those in the hot seats. The four representing Muggle-Wump, his wife, and the two children should answer the questions in character.

The questions should focus on the lives of the monkeys, and how they feel about Mr and Mrs Twit and the circus training they do.

Encourage those in the hot seats to try to inhabit totally the characters they are playing. How does he or she talk? How do his or her opinions and answers differ from those of the rest of the family?

Those asking questions should aim to ask things that bring additional insight to the characters of the four monkeys. We don't get to know them very well in the book. What can we discover about them through the hot seating exercise?

After each player has answered a couple of questions, allow four new students to take to the hot seats. Repeat this a few times.

Script creation: The Twits Upside Down (10 mins improvisation)

"I'm SHRINKING!" burred Mr Twit.

"So am I!" cried Mrs Twit.

"Help me! Save me! Call a doctor!" yelled Mr Twit. "I'm getting THE DREADED SHRINKS!"

Ask students to get into pairs.

Using the above as a starting point, ask them to cast themselves as Mr and Mrs Twit, and to improvise the continuation of this conversation, as the pair shrink away into nothing.

Remind students to consider how the Twits talk to each other. What sort of words do they use?

Writing the scripts (15 mins)

Next, challenge students to work together in the same pairs to commit their duologues to paper.

A script template is provided at the end of this scheme of work, which you may find to be of use.

Performing the duologues (15 mins)

Invite some of the pairs to perform their duologues (in normal class sizes it will be very time consuming – and possibly laborious – to hear all of them).

Although students will be reading from their recently-written scripts, encourage them to think carefully about their voices when they perform. This includes projecting, as well as adding suitable vocal tone and intonation to their delivery.

Invite those students who are not performing to constructively feed back on the work. How well have the pairs brought the characters of Mr and Mrs Twit to life? Do they think Roald Dahl would have approved of the duologues they have just heard?

Plenary (5 mins)

Bring this lesson, and the scheme of work, to a close by asking students to reflect on the message of *The Twits*. What do they think Roald Dahl was saying about people when he wrote the book? What can we learn from it?

Extension exercises

Further classroom work based on *The Twits* could include:

- ▶ Research the discussion around animals in circuses. Stage a full classroom debate on the issue.
- ▶ Improvise the scene in which the four boys are stuck to the branch of Mr Twit's tree. What do they talk about before Mr Twit arrives? Have they any idea what is going to happen?
- ▶ The Roly-Poly bird is on holiday! Write a postcard (or letter) home, telling friends and family all about events overseas
- ▶ Can you create an upside-down house? Using cardboard boxes and arts and crafts materials, make a version of the Twit's house after the monkeys have turned it upside down. Add some bundles of old clothes to represent the shrunken Twits!

RESOURCES

Script template

Where is your scene set?

What are the two characters doing at the start of the scene?

Write stage directions within the brackets, and speech below

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

How does the scene end?