

## Core Extract – A Must Read!

### Matilda by Roald Dahl

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. The only book in the whole of this enlightened household was something called *Easy Cooking* belonging to her mother, and when she had read this from cover to cover and had learnt all the recipes by heart, she decided she wanted something more interesting.



‘Daddy,’ she said, ‘do you think you could buy me a book?’

‘A BOOK?’ he said. ‘What d’you want a flaming book for?’

‘To read, Daddy.’

‘What’s wrong with the telly, for heaven’s sake? We’ve got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book! You’re getting spoiled, my girl!’

Nearly every weekday afternoon Matilda was left alone in the house. Her brother (five years older than her) went to school. Her father went to work and her mother went out playing bingo in a town eight miles away. Mrs Wormwood was hooked on bingo and played it five afternoons a week. On the afternoon of the day when her father had refused to buy her a book, Matilda set out all by herself to walk to the public library in the village. When she arrived, she introduced herself to the librarian, Mrs Phelps. She asked if she might sit awhile and read a book. Mrs Phelps, slightly taken aback at the arrival of such a tiny girl unaccompanied by an adult, nevertheless told her she was very welcome.

‘Where are the children’s books, please?’ Matilda asked.

‘They’re over there on those lower shelves,’ Mrs Phelps told her. ‘Would you like me to help you find a nice one with lots of pictures in it?’

‘No, thank you,’ Matilda said. ‘I’m sure I can manage.’

From then on, every afternoon, as soon as her mother had left for bingo, Matilda would toddle down to the library. The walk took only ten minutes and this allowed her two glorious hours sitting quietly by herself in a cosy corner devouring one book after another. When she had read every single children’s book in the place, she started wandering round in search of something else.



## The Midnighters by Hana Tooke

PRAGUE, KINGDOM OF BOHEMIA, 12 DECEMBER 1877

The twelfth child born into the Vaškov family was a girl with hair the colour of spider silk and candle-smoke eyes, flecked with the palest blue. As those eyes fluttered open for the first time, her family peered down into her crib, as if studying a rare and mystifying scientific phenomenon. 'She has Máma's small, twitchy nose,' said a younger girl.

'And Táta's perfectly symmetrical dimples,' said an older boy.

The baby hiccupped, her gaze drifting toward a shadow on the wall.

'Her eyes, though,' said another child. 'Where did those come from?'

They all looked to their mother, waiting for her to offer a hypothesis. Instead, they were greeted by a frown.

'We've examined this little specimen enough for now,' their father said quickly. 'I'm sure we can all agree she's splendid, and that it's time for breakfast.'

All eleven children nodded in agreement – some with their father's first statement, some with his second. A few hours and pastry-fuelled negotiations later, the children had settled on a name for the newest sister.

Ema.

No one was more taken with the littlest child than the eldest child, Františka. Before Ema's first morning was over, Františka had fashioned a sling out of a scarf, and tucked Ema inside it. 'I will take her everywhere I go,' she declared. 'And I will show her all there is to see.'

When Milena opened her mouth to protest, Františka silenced her with a shake of her head.

'You feed her milk, I'll feed her wisdom,' said Františka decisively. 'Besides, every child in this family has a twin, except for me and little Ema here. I see no reason why we cannot form our own, unconventional twinship.'

And so it was that Ema found herself nestled in the arms of a ten-year-old philosopher each day, listening to her soothing commentary as they roamed the house.

'A normal drawing room would be full of elegant chairs, a beautifully woven carpet, and gossiping ladies in frilly dresses. But Máma is a meteorologist and prefers entertaining

ideas, rather than people. You'll notice these chairs all have chemical burns that no amount of patching up will cover, and Mama has painted the periodic table on the floorboards, to save her having to squint at the one on the wall.'

'Are you criticizing my decorating skills?' Milena said, peering up from her clutter-strewn desk.

'Not at all,' Františka said. 'I'm merely giving Ema her first lesson in the unlikely beauty of chaos.'

## The Firework-Maker's Daughter by Philip Pullman

Colour  
me in!



A thousand miles ago, in a country east of the jungle and south of the mountains, there lived a Firework-Maker called Lalchand and his daughter Lila.

Lalchand's wife had died when Lila was young. The child was a cross little thing, always crying and refusing her food, but Lalchand built a cradle for her in the corner of the workshop, where she could see the sparks play and listen to the fizz and crackle of the gunpowder. Once she was out of her cradle, she toddled around the workshop laughing as the fire flared and the sparks danced. Many a time she burnt her little fingers, but Lalchand splashed water on them and kissed her better, and soon she was playing again.

When she was old enough to learn, her father began to teach her the art of making fireworks. She began with little Crackle-Dragons, six on a string. Then she learned how to make Leaping Monkeys, Golden Sneezes, and Java Lights. Soon she was making all the simple fireworks, and thinking about more complicated ones.

One day she said, 'Father, if I put some flowers of salt in a Java Light instead of cloud-powder, what would happen?'

'Try it and see,' he said.

So she did. Instead of burning with a steady green glimmer, it sprayed out wicked little sparks, each of which turned a somersault before going out.

'Not bad, Lila,' said Lalchand. 'What are you going to call it?'

'Mmm... Tumbling Demons,' she said.

'Excellent! Make a dozen and we'll put them into the New Year Festival display.'

The Tumbling Demons were a great success, and so were the Shimmering Coins that Lila invented next. As time went on she learned more and more of her father's art, until one day she said, 'Am I a proper Firework-Maker now?'

## Non-Fiction

### **Malala: My Story of Standing up for Girls' Rights by Malala Yousafzai**

Another day I found my father with his head in his hands. "Oh, Jani," he said, "the world has gone mad." He told me that Fazlullah's men had destroyed a girls' school in a nearby town.

I felt my heart drop. I could not imagine why anyone would want to rob children of the chance to learn to read and write. Why was a school building such a threat to the Taliban?

Please, God, I prayed, help us to protect our valley and to stop this violence.

Every day, Fazlullah's men struck a new target. Stores, roads, bridges. And schools.

Most of the attacks were outside Mingora, but soon they got closer. One day I was cleaning dishes in the kitchen, and a bomb went off so close that the whole house rattled and the fan over the window fell.

I had grown up hearing the word terrorism, but only now did I understand it. Terrorism is different from war – where soldiers face one another in battle. Terrorism is going to sleep at night and not knowing what horrors the next day will bring. It is walking down your own street not knowing whom you can trust. It is the enemy everywhere and the attacks coming out of nowhere.

