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Author/Interview subject: Laura Dockerill, Jonathan Meres (Roald Dahl)

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (AUD), Male on VT (M), Female on VT (F), Boy, Girl, Chris Hoy (CH).

JF: Hello there, I'm Janice Forsyth. A very, very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live, and indeed our Roald Dahl Day celebration. Authors Live, as you probably know if you've been watching some of these before, is a series of virtual author events organised by the Scottish Book Trust in conjunction with BBC Scotland Learning and it's funded through the First in a Lifetime fund, which is administered by Creative Scotland.

Now, if you've done this before you'll know the score. If you haven't, you need to be told but you probably will guess all about this anyway. Sometimes the image can judder or freeze but don't panic, don't try to adjust it, that just happens sometimes with these webcasts and the computer will catch up.

Now, we're delighted to welcome you back. This is the first of these Authors Live events since the summer holidays so I hope you had a great time, and we have a swizzfiggling, whoopsiesplunker of a party to kick off this, which is the next chapter of Authors Live. Now, as well as the 46,000 children watching right across the UK on Glow in schools and in libraries, we have some real live pupils here too. We like to do that, real human beings, and they're a particularly gorgeous bunch. They may be slightly cheeky but very, very bright. Do you want to meet them? They're from the P7 in Bothwell Primary School in South Lanarkshire. They're going to wave to you right now and you wave right back. Say hello to everybody.

AUD: Hi.

JF: Aren't they fabulous? And they're all yellow. Now, this is Roald Dahl Day, as I said. Why are we celebrating Roald Dahl? Well, quite simply he is, I guess, the king of children's books. He's been described as one of the greatest storytellers of the Twentieth Century and has brought us a host of stunning books, including

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Fantastic Mr Fox, James and the Giant Peach, Boy, Matilda, The Twits - I could go on but I'll run out of time.

Now, sadly, I'm sure you know that Roald died in November 1990 but, of course, the great thing is he lives on in his stories and his books and, on 13 September every single year, we celebrate his life and his work. But you know something? This year is extra special because we're also celebrating the 30th birthday of the BFG. Have we got party hats to pop on? Are you going to do that out there? Good, I can see you. Get your party hats on.

Now, obviously, we would have loved to have had Roald Dahl here today but we can't so I know that you are going to absolutely love our very special guests who are going to guide us through the brilliant world of Roald Dahl. So, our first guest is a poet, a performer, has created a Dahl disco, went to the famous BRIT School and her first novel, Darcy Burdock, is coming out in March next year. Boys and girls out there and here, please welcome the brilliant, Laura Dockerill.

AUD: [Applause]

LD: Hi you, cuddle.

JF: Love your spots.

LD: I love your spots, hi.

JF: They're very colourful.

LD: Hello, I know, I can see.

JF: Shall we kick off with a nice easy question first of all...

LD: Please, nice and easy.

JF: ...maybe tell folk what is it about Roald Dahl that you love so much?

LD: I think his imagination. He's got an incredible imagination. He was never afraid to push the boundaries, to be brave and exciting. His characters, his words - he invented so many new words and recipes and storylines. For me, it was also about the fact that he was so brave. He didn't mind making these really ugly, scary characters that we could all get our teeth into. What also I loved about him was the fact that he could be scary. Who found him scary?

AUD: Yeah.

LD: Did you ever find him scary? Roald Dahl never a bit scary?

JF: [Laughs]

LD: What about The Witches? Yeah, a little bit scary. I love the fact that he could also be funny and sometimes sensitive and beautiful. He had these lovely, delicate moments that were just so sweet and always the characters you just fell in love with them, they were so innocent, and then these massive journeys would happen to them. He'd always make the weak characters be the heroes at the end, like Charlie from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, that's why I love him.

JF: Wonderful, thank you very much. they say they're not scared of anything, do you believe that?

LD: I know, we'll find out in a bit, I think. [Laughs]

JF: Yeah, we will find out. I think you mentioned words there including beautiful, charming, witty, slightly scary. I think it's time to meet the man who's going to be your host for today. He's done so much stuff, he's an author, an actor - I remember him in the old days when he was a stand-up comedian but he's still very funny.

LD: [Laughs]

JF: Please give a massive warm welcome to Jonathan Meres.

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Hello, hello - thank you very much.

JF: Good luck because I think they're a bit dodgy.

JM: Yes, hello everybody. Hello everybody in the school, happy Dahl day. Yes, I know I look like the Big Friendly Giant. I'm cool with it, just get over it. Okay, we can crack on now. So, I know that you'll all have your favourite Roald Dahl books. Mine, for instance, is Matilda. Laura's, who you've just met, is George's Marvellous Medicine and the Big Friendly Giant, but would you like to see what some of your favourite authors have chosen as their number one Dahl book? Of course you would - roll VT.

M1: I like Danny, Champion of the World, absolutely love that book. It's not one of his really funny books, it's a lot quieter and more mellow and more subtle and it just gives me a really warm feeling inside.

M2: No question, the Big Friendly Giant. I love it for lots of reasons. It's got a brilliant opening but what I really love about it is that it's got a lot more heart than a lot of Roald Dahl books. I think in a lot of Roald Dahl books he gets his energy and

comedy from things that he hates and things that annoy him, but in the Big Friendly Giant there's a lot that he loves.

- F1: It has to be *The Twits*. It's just my favourite one because all the characters are so brilliant in it and it's one of those books that I only discovered when I had children of my own.
- M3: I can remember being on a holiday with my parents and I was very, very young and it was raining for the entire week and the only book I had was *Danny, Champion of the World*. I must have read it three, maybe even four, times and it just totally caught me in this magical world.
- F2: I love *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* because I love the names - Verruca Salt, and I've always thought Violet Beauregard was one of the best names ever for a character in a book. But I also really love *George's Marvellous Medicine* because that's the book that my girls loved best. In fact, my number three daughter did once try to make some marvellous medicine, and I can tell you never, ever try and boil up shoe polish.
- M4: It's very difficult to choose a favourite Roald Dahl book. I'm a big fan of *Esio Trot*, which is the word tortoise backwards. I rather like the plot in that because it's so crazy.
- M5: *The BFG*, which I didn't read until I was in my 20s, I think. At the time I was just amazed that a story for kids could be this scary.
- F3: *Matilda*. The reason that I love that book so much is because you've got this tiny little girl, Matilda, who gets her own back on this big, scary headmistress.
- M6: My favourite Roald Dahl book has got to be *Matilda* because I'd like Matilda to be my daughter. I could have brought her up on television and kept her away from all sorts of evil books.
- M7: My favourite Roald Dahl book is *The Twits*. I think it's his funniest, but also I'm amazed that he managed to craft a children's story without a child character at the centre of it.
- M8: It would be *The Witches*. I just remember being completely gripped by that story, not being able to put it down. Terrified to put it down, actually, and stupidly reading it before bed and having nightmares about women with no toes coming to get me.
- M9: My favourite Roald Dahl book is *Fantastic Mr Fox*. I think it's so clever the way he presents us with these characters which might not seem at first all that

sympathetic. Mr Fox goes around killing chickens and belching but he's a fox, what do foxes do?

F4: My favourite Roald Dahl book is definitely Charlie and the Chocolate Factory because it was one of the first brand new books I was ever given and I remember reading it for the first time when it came out and always having to read it with loads and loads of chocolate.

JM: So, now that we've heard what our authors have chosen as their favourite Roald Dahl book, I want to find out what your favourite Roald Dahl books are and you guys back in the classroom. I'm going to come amongst you with my roving microphone and I'm going to ask you, yes, you, what is your favourite Roald Dahl book?

Girl 1: The Twits.

JM: The Twits? Marvellous choice. Your good self - what is your favourite Roald Dahl book?

Girl 2: Esio Trot.

JM: Esio Trot, fantastic. Now, all of you out there, and that includes everybody here at Pacific Quay, on the count of three I want you all to shout out at the top of your lungs what your favourite Roald Dahl book is. Don't let me down you lot in the classroom. After three - one, two, three.

AUD: [Shouting various books]

JM: Which part of, at the top of your lungs, did you not understand? One, two, three - your favourite Roald Dahl book.

AUD: [Shouting various books]

JM: I'm getting James and the Chocolate Crocodile, something like that. Now, it's not just authors and you guys who have your own favourite Roald Dahl books, everybody loves a Roald Dahl book. Even Olympic champions love a Roald Dahl book. Who do you think I might be talking about? Will I give you a clue? He won more than one gold medal at the London Olympics. He's also a world champion and world record holder in his sport - any clues? He is the most decorated British Olympic athlete of all time. He's Scottish, he's a cyclist. That's right, let's see what none other than Olympic cycling gold medallist, Sir Chris Hoy, has to say.

CH: Roald Dahl was, without doubt, my favourite author when I was a kid. I think my first book that I read of his was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Actually, it was my parents who used to read it to me at bedtime before I went to sleep. Probably my favourite book by Roald Dahl was George's Marvellous Medicine. I just loved the descriptions of his grandma and of the potions he was making as well. I remember the one line that stood out for me was the way he described his grandma's mouth as being a - she had a puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom, which I always found very humorous and loved getting to that page to read it.

JM: Now, Scottish Book Trust have been running a poll on their website asking people to vote for their favourite Roald Dahl title and they have chosen - cue drumroll. Drumroll, guys? No drumroll? Guys, you're going to have to help me out, and you back in the classroom too. I need a drumroll, I need it big time. after three, and - cue drumroll.

AUD: [Drumroll]

JM: Marvellous drumrolling. The winner of the favourite ever Roald Dahl title is - Fantastic Mr Fox. Laura is going to come back on and read you an extract from it right now.

LD: Hiya. Are you ready? See if you know this bit - who's read it recently? Nobody? Right, I'll remind you. Bunce's Giant Storehouse. 'My dear Foxy!' cried Badger. 'What in the world has happened to your tail?' 'Don't talk about it, please,' said Mr Fox. 'It's a painful subject.' They were digging the new tunnel. They dug on in silence. Badger was a great digger and the tunnel went forward at a terrific pace now that he was lending a paw.

Soon they were crouching underneath yet another wooden floor. Mr Fox grinned slyly, showing sharp white teeth. 'If I am not mistaken, my dear Badger,' he said, 'we are now underneath the farm which belongs to that nasty little pot-bellied dwarf, Bunce. We are, in fact, directly underneath the most interesting part of the farm.' 'Ducks and geese!' cried the Small Foxes, licking their lips. 'Juicy tender ducks and big fat geese!'

'Ex-actly!' said Mr Fox. 'But how in the world can you know where we are?' asked Badger. Mr Fox grinned again, showing even more white teeth. 'Look,' he said, 'I know my way around these farms blindfold. For me it's just as easy below ground as it is above it.' He reached high and pushed up one wooden floorboard, then another. He poked his head through the gap.

'Yes!' he shouted, jumping up into the room above. 'I've done it again! I've hit it smack on the nose! Right in the bull's-eye! Come and look!' Quickly Badger

and the three Small Foxes scrambled up after him. They stopped and stared. They stood and gaped. They stopped and stared, they stood and gaped, they were so overwhelmed they couldn't speak, for what they now saw was a kind of fox's dream, a badger's dream, a paradise for hungry animals.

'This, my dear old Badger,' proclaimed Mr Fox, 'is Bunce's Mighty Storehouse! All his finest stuff is stored in here before he sends it off to market.' Against all the four walls of the great room, stacked in cupboards and piled upon shelves reaching from floor to ceiling, were thousands and thousands of the finest and fattest ducks and geese, plucked and ready for roasting. And up above, dangling from the rafters, there must have been at least a hundred smoked hams and fifty sides of bacon.

'Just feast your eyes on that!' cried Mr Fox, dancing up and down. 'What d'you think of it, eh? Pretty good grub.'

JM: Thank you very much, Laura. Round of applause, please, for Laura.

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Round of applause back out there in the classroom. Now, Laura, just stay right where you are because we're about to have a little bit of fun with your own personal favourites. Now, in 1981, Roald Dahl introduced the world to the Kranky family. Mr Killie Kranky, Mrs Kranky, their son George, and his grandma. Yes, this comes from George's Marvellous Medicine. Take it away, Laura.

LD: 'You know what the matter is with you?' the old woman said, staring at George over the rim of the teacup with those bright wicked little eyes. 'You're growing too fast. Boys who grow too fast become stupid and lazy.' 'But I can't help it if I'm growing fast, Grandma,' George said. 'Of course you can,' she snapped. 'Growing's a nasty childish habit.' 'But we have to grow, Grandma. If we didn't grow, we'd never be grown-ups.'

'Rubbish, boy, rubbish,' she said. 'Look at me. Am I growing? Certainly not.' 'But you did once, Grandma.' 'Only very little,' the old woman answered. 'I gave up growing when I was extremely small, along with all the other nasty childish habits like laziness and disobedience and greed and sloppiness and untidiness and stupidity. You haven't given up any of these things, have you?'

'I'm still only a little boy, Grandma.' 'You're eight years old,' she snorted. 'That's old enough to know better. If you don't stop growing soon, it'll be too late.' 'Too late for what, Grandma?' 'It's ridiculous,' she went on. 'You're nearly as tall as me already.'

JM: Thank you once again, Laura, thank you very much. Now, for those of you familiar with the book, George's Marvellous Medicine, you will know that George has his own particular way of wreaking horrible revenge on his particularly dastardly grandma. Anybody here remember what it is? Anybody out there remember what it is? That's right, he concocted his own brand of marvellous medicine. Now, here's some we prepared earlier - well, I say almost prepared earlier. We still have one or two missing ingredients to add. In fact, I need a couple of helpers. My lovely two helpers for George's Marvellous Medicine. A round of applause for my two marvellous helpers, thank you very much.

AUD: [Applause]

JM: If you get over here - yourself here. I must ask you for health and safety reasons to put on these goggles, these special marvellous safety goggles. I too will put on my marvellous safety goggles and there we go, Laura, over to you. Now, let's see what we've got here.

LD: In the kitchen, George put the saucepan on the stove and turned up the gas flame underneath it. 'George!' came the awful voice from the next room. 'It's time for my medicine!' 'Not yet, Grandma,' George called back. 'There's still twenty minutes before eleven o'clock.' 'What mischief are you up to in there now?' Granny screeched. 'I hear noises.'

George thought it best not to answer this one. He found a long wooden spoon in a kitchen drawer and began stirring hard. The stuff in the pot got hotter and hotter. Soon the marvellous mixture began to froth and foam. A rich blue smoke, the colour of peacocks, rose from the surface of the liquid, and a fiery fearsome smell filled the kitchen. It made George choke and splutter. It was a smell unlike any he had smelled before. It was a brutal, bewitching smell, spicy and staggering, fierce and frenzied, full of wizardry and magic.

Whenever he got a whiff of it up his nose, firecrackers went off in his skull and electric prickles ran along the backs of his legs. It was wonderful to stand there stirring this amazing mixture and to watch it smoking blue and bubbling and frothing and foaming as though it were alive. At one point, he could have sworn he saw bright sparks flashing in the swirling foam.

And suddenly, George found himself dancing around the steaming pot, chanting strange words that came into his head out of nowhere: 'Fiery broth and witch's brew, foamy froth and riches blue. Fume and spume and spoondrift spray, fizzle swizzle, shout hooray. Watch it sloshing, swashing, splashing. Hear it hissing, squishing, spissing - grandma better start to pray.'



George turned off the heat under the saucepan. He must leave plenty of time for it to cool down. When all the steam and froth had gone away, he peered into the giant pan to see what colour the great medicine now was. It was a deep, brilliant blue. 'It needs more brown in it,' George said. 'It simply must be brown or she'll get suspicious.'

George ran outside and dashed into his father's tool shed where all the paints were kept. There was a row of cans on the shelf, all colours, black, green, red, pink, white and brown. He reached for the can of brown. The label said simply DARK BROWN GLOSS PAINT ONE QUART. He took a screwdriver and prised off the lid. The can was three-quarters full. He rushed it back to the kitchen. He poured the whole lot into the saucepan. The saucepan was now full to the brim. Very gently, George stirred the paint into the mixture with the long wooden spoon. Ah-ha! It was all turning brown. A lovely rich creamy brown.

'Where's that medicine of mine, boy?!' came the voice from the living-room. 'You're forgetting me! You're doing it on purpose. I shall tell your mother!' 'I'm not forgetting you, Grandma,' George called back. 'I'm thinking of you all the time, but there's still ten minutes to go.'

'You're a nasty little maggot!' the voice screeched back. 'You're a lazy and disobedient little worm, and you're growing too fast.' George fetched the bottle of Grandma's real medicine from the sideboard. He took out the cork and tipped it all down the sink. He then filled the bottle with his own magic mixture by dipping a small jug into the saucepan and using it as a pourer. He replaced the cork.

Had it cooled down enough yet? Not quite. He held the bottle under the cold tap for a couple of minutes. The label came off in the wet but that didn't matter. He dried the bottle with a dishcloth. All was now ready, this was it. The great moment had arrived.

'Medicine time, Grandma!' he called out. 'I should hope so, too,' came the grumbly reply. The silver tablespoon in which the medicine was always given lay ready on the kitchen sideboard. George picked it up. Holding the spoon in one hand and the bottle in the other, he advanced into the living-room.

JM: Thank you once again, Laura. A big round of applause.

AUD: [Applause]

JM: More marvellous reading of George's Marvellous Medicine by the marvellous Laura Dockerill, thank you very much, Laura. The concoction, George's Marvellous Medicine, has been coming on famously but there is still one more

ingredient we need to add, and here it is. The famous brown gloss paint. I require one of you chaps to take off the lid of the brown gloss paint, that will be yourself. Add it nice and gently into the concoction and give it a good stir, a nice big stir. Here we go, what's going to happen?

Shall I give it a stir as well? All of it, no half measures here. It's got to be suitable dastardly, suitably disgusting. Even more. It's starting to fizz. We have some kind of chemical reaction here everybody, you have to take my word for it. Stand well back. Now, here we go - lovely, you give it one final stir there. Would you like to try some? Are you quite sure? Of course, we couldn't possibly let anyone drink this vile medicine. It did, after all, make granny whoosh through the roof, it turned the brown hen into a rocket and made the pig blow smoke from its nose. Please don't try this at home, we have tested this out under laboratory conditions and made sure that everything that we used in the saucepan medicine was safe.

While we're clearing this lot up our friendly authors are going to tell you what Roald Dahl means to them. While you're watching, have a think about what your favourite Roald Dahl character is. Once more, run VT please.

- M1: Roald Dahl is the Beatles of children's books, he is the alpha and the omega. He is the common currency of children's writing in this country and perhaps around the world, and if you're writing books for seven, eight, nine year olds, you've got Roald Dahl hard wired into you.
- M2: He's an inspiration. I guess he must be an inspiration to just about anyone in my position as a children's writer that came after him, because he set the standard and it's a gold standard. His body of work is something that all of us have to aspire to.
- F1: Everybody who writes funny books for children has to admit a huge debt to Roald Dahl, he made making children laugh a very respectable thing to do and we all owe him a great deal for that.
- M3: When he worked with Quentin Blake there was something about that collaboration that just made the book come alive, I think. Certainly in my work, when I work with a writer I think I'm always looking for a Roald Dahl. Sometimes you've got to make do with what you're going to find.
- M4: The great thing about Dahl is he makes kids love reading and he grabs them really young and kids get into a love of books, turning the page, enjoying the story.

- M5: He showed me that it was okay to do comic brutality, if you like. He killed off parents at a frightening rate and usually by rhinoceros or something.
- M6: Roald Dahl to me means the excitement of being afraid, genuinely scared by things that are purely in your own imagination.
- F2: There were no holds barred. You could have children doing all kinds of different things and you could have children having terrible experiences as a result of being revolting little children.
- F3: They're written with a real understanding of what it's like to be a child and how vile and horrible grown-ups can be and how much children long for adventure and revenge.
- M7: To me, Roald Dahl means excitement at Christmas, raptures in a bookshop, nagging on mother's cardigan to get me that one and get me that one and then get me the next one.
- M8: It's just that high energy. He just starts from far higher up the energy scale than any other writer. He's just got this strength and conviction and this energy which sometimes comes from anger but sometimes comes from joy. I just think he's amazing.
- F4: His inventions of word are absolutely brilliant. Fantastic for children and good fun.
- M9: I loved his sense of the dark, black humour, his wit, his comedy, and particularly the fact that his young characters were so strong. They had so much power over their own destiny. That's something that, as a child, you really want to relate to.
- F5: I never, ever get tired of reading Roald Dahl. He's so totally fearless and he's not scared to be aggressive and mean and he just goes for the throat.
- M10: I first came across Roald Dahl when I was a very young illustrator and I was offered Fantastic Mr Fox to illustrate. It seemed, to me, such an elevation from the stuff I was doing [laughs] to the stuff I was suddenly introduced to do. Would you please illustrate Fantastic Mr Fox? Would I? I'd do it without a fee. [Laughs]
- JM: Some favourite authors there telling us who their favourite Roald Dahl characters are, but once again it's the moment to come amongst you and ask what your favourite Roald Dahl characters are. I'm going to quite randomly ask you - who is your favourite Roald Dahl character?
- Girl: Matilda.

JM: Matilda, a fine choice. And you, good sir?

Boy: Willy Wonka.

JM: Willy Wonka and Matilda, two fine characters in the cannon of Roald Dahl but, once again, I need you at home and everybody here in Pacific Quay on the count of three to shout out what your - who your favourite Roald Dahl character is. don't let me down you guys in class. One, two, three.

AUD: [Shout various characters]

JM: Willy Esio and all that and the James and the Peach and stuff. So, fantastic. Roald Dahl was brilliant at creating memorable characters like Matilda, like Willy Wonka and George, who we've just heard about. But he was also brilliant at creating some absolute rotters. Of all the horrible characters that Roald Dahl created, including Verruca Salt, Boggis, Bunce, Bean and Mrs Trunchbull, perhaps the scariest of the lot were The Witches. But never fear because I am here to keep you safe and to stop them turning you into a mouse. I'm here to show you how to spot a witch but I'm no expert when it comes to witch-spotting.

So, how are we going to do this? Well, I'll tell you. All the secrets are contained in this here book, The Witches. Together we're going to show you some simple steps how to spot a witch. Can we please have our first contender?

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Yes, marvellous. Very good. Well, in fairy tales, witches always wear silly black hats and black cloaks and they ride on broomsticks, but this is not a fairy tale. This is about real witches. The most important thing you should know about real witches is this - listen very carefully. Never forget what is coming next. Real witches dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and they work in ordinary jobs. That is why they are so hard to catch and that is why our first contestant is patently not a witch. On your bike, wicked witch of the west. On your broomstick, I should say. Off you go, nice try. Missing you already, free to leave.

Now, a real witch is certain always to be wearing gloves when you meet her because she doesn't have fingernails. No, instead of fingernails she has thin curvy claws like a cat and she wears gloves to hide them. So, real witches wear gloves. I need your help, guys. You guys in Pacific Quay and you guys down there too, can you all put your hands in the air, please? All of you, teachers too down there. Yes, hands in the air. Wait for it, can you please put your hands down - wait for it. Please put your hands down if you are not wearing gloves.

That's pretty much most of you, except two. Ladies, if you'd be so kind to make your way to the stage right now, please? Big round of applause for our two potential witches, but which witch is which?

AUD: [Applause]

JM: I bring you now - here we go. You stand there and yourself there, lovely. Okay, now, would you mind taking off your gloves? Okay, no problem? No qualms whatsoever about taking off your - a-ha, let's see your hands? Shall we show everybody at home your hands? Lovely, manicured hands. Okay, I think we can safely count you out. You are not a witch, you're obviously just feeling the cold a little bit. Thank you very much, make your way back. Thank you very much. That just leaves us with one prime suspect. How about yourself, are you a witch by any chance? You don't seem very talkative, has the cat got your tongue? Slightly suspicious about this one.

There is one more test. It says that witches' spit is blue. So if I just randomly take out this piece of fruit, care for an apple? Just a little flick of the tongue possibly and - oh my goodness, look everybody, a perfectly blue tongue! Guards, seize her! She's run off but don't worry everybody she won't get far. The BBC have lots of highly trained witch-catching security staff on standby, they'll catch her. Remember what I told you about how to spot a witch and you too will be safe.

Now, as Janice said at the beginning of today's event, this year marks the 30th birthday of the BFG. So, if you're all sitting comfortably, Laura will join us again. Little round of applause for Laura? Actually, a big round of applause for Laura.

LD: [Laughs]

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Laura here is going to read you a little story and this time I'm going to sit and listen to it myself.

LD: Good boy. Were you scared of The Witches? Okay, this is BFG. The Witching Hour. Sophie couldn't sleep. A brilliant moonbeam was slanting through a gap in the curtains. It was shining right onto her pillow. The other children in the dormitory had been asleep for hours. Sophie closed her eyes and lay quite still. She tried very hard to doze off. It was no good. The moonbeam was like a silver blade slicing through the room on to her face.

The house was absolutely silent. No voices came up from downstairs. There were no footsteps on the floor above either. The window behind the curtain was

wide open, but nobody was walking on the pavement outside. No cars went by, not the tiniest sound could be heard anywhere. Sophie had never known such a silence. Perhaps, she told herself, this was what they called the witching hour. The witching hour, somebody had once whispered to her, was a special moment in the middle of the night when every child and every grown-up was in a deep, deep sleep, and all the dark things came out from hiding and had the world to themselves.

The moonbeam was brighter than ever on Sophie's pillow. She decided to get out of bed and close the gap in the curtains. You got punished if you were caught out of bed after lights-out. Even if you said you had to go to the lavatory, that was not an accepted excuse and they punished you just the same. But there was no one about now, Sophie was sure of that. She reached out for her glasses that lay on the chair beside the bed. They had steel rims and very thick lenses. She could hardly see a thing without them. She put them on, then she slipped out of bed and tiptoed over to the window.

When she reached the curtains, Sophie hesitated. She longed to duck underneath them and lean out of the window to see what the world looked like now that the witching hour was at hand. She listened again. Everywhere it was deathly still. The longing to look out became so strong she couldn't resist it. Quickly, she ducked under the curtains and leaned out of the window. In the silvery moonlight, the village street she knew so well seemed completely different. The houses looked bent and crooked, like houses in a fairy tale. Everything was pale and ghostly and milky-white.

Across the road, she could see Mrs Rance's shop, where you bought buttons and wool and bits of elastic. It didn't look real. There was something dim and misty about that too. Sophie allowed her eye to travel further and further down the street. Suddenly she froze. There was something coming up the street on the opposite side, something black. Something tall and black. Something very tall and very black and very thin.

It wasn't a human. It couldn't be. It was four times as tall as the tallest human. It was so tall its head was higher than the upstairs windows of the houses. Sophie opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Her throat, like her whole body, was frozen with fright. This was the witching hour all right. The tall black figure was coming her way. It was keeping very close to the houses across the street, hiding in the shadowy places where there was no moonlight.

On and on it came, nearer and nearer. But it was moving in spurts. It would stop, then it would move on, then it would stop again. What on earth was it

doing? Ah-ha, Sophie thought. She could see what it was up to. It was stopping in front of each house. It would stop and peer into the upstairs window of each house in the street. It actually had to bend down to peer into the upstairs windows. That's how tall it was.

It would stop and peer in and then it was much closer. Sophie could see it more clearly. Looking at it carefully, she decided it had to be some kind of PERSON. Obviously it was not a human. But it was definitely a PERSON. A GIANT PERSON, perhaps.

Sophie stared hard across the misty moonlit street. The giant (if that was what he was) was wearing a long black cloak. In one hand he was holding what looked like a very long, thin trumpet. The giant had stopped now right in front of Mr and Mrs Goochey's house. The Goochey's had a greengrocer's shop in the middle of the High Street, and the family lived above the shop. The two Goochey children slept in the upstairs front room, Sophie knew that.

The giant was peering in through and she saw the giant step back a pace and put the suitcase down on the pavement. He bent over and opened the suitcase. He took something out of it. It looked like a glass jar, one of those square ones with a screw top. He unscrewed the top of the jar and poured what was in it into the end of the long trumpet thing.

Sophie watched, trembling. She saw the giant straighten up again and she saw him poke the trumpet in through the open upstairs window of the room where the Goochey children were sleeping. She saw the giant take a deep breath and, whoo, he blew through the trumpet. No noise came out, but it was obvious to Sophie that whatever had been in the jar had now been blown through the trumpet into the Goochey children's bedroom. What could it be?

JM: Another round of applause there for Laura everybody.

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Oh my goodness! If it isn't the Big Friendly Giant himself. I big round of applause everybody for the Big Friendly Giant.

AUD: [Applause]

LD: [Laughs]

JM: Big Friendly Giant, how marvellous to see you. Let me take your suitcase there. How wonderful you could join us today for this special celebration. Well, it wouldn't be a birthday without a birthday cake, would it? So, Janice, without

further ado, bring on the special BFG birthday cake. Everybody help me - for he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fell-ow, and so say all of us. Big breath now.

JF: Well done!

JM: In a one-r, how about that?

AUD: [Applause]

JM: Big round of applause for the Big Friendly Giant. Now, Big Friendly Giant, we mustn't keep you. I know you've got many, many dreams to collect so why don't I give you your suitcase back, and everybody wave to the Big Friendly Giant. Everybody in the classroom, all the teachers, everybody here at Pacific Quay. Bye-bye Big Friendly Giant, bye-bye everybody.

JF: Bye-bye. You know, I just baked that cake. It was enormous, wasn't it? Yeah, I think he could inhale that, actually.

LD: [Laughs]

JF: Guess what? Aw, that's just about all we've got time for. Aww, that was so spontaneous. I think the first thing we want to do is give a huge round of applause from our wonderful pupils here today, but also out there, to all of our guests today, including The Witches. Let's hear it for The Witches.

AUD: [Applause]

JF: Weren't they marvellous? We love The Witches. And, of course, the BFG. I think the biggest round of applause and cheering for the wonderful Laura Dockerill and Jonathan Meres, thank you very much.

AUD: [Applause]

JF: I think you two should go and have a wee lie down now.

LD: [Laughs] Yeah, thank you.

JF: Thank you very much indeed. Now, obviously we've delved into the world of Roald Dahl today, so I know that you'll want to read even more books, won't you Bothwell Primary?

AUD: Yes.

JF: Yes, and so will all of you out there. So clearly there are many, many other books that you can go and explore. For example, why not ask your teacher to



point you in the direction of some? I'm sure there are lots at your school and also at your local library. We want you to go and use your local library, they'll have lots of copies of the books. A big, massive thank you from me and from everyone here to everyone who took part in the filming at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, you saw all the authors there, and also to the Book Festival for allowing us to film there on the site. Thanks also to the Roald Dahl Foundation.

I do hope you've enjoyed our whoopsiesplunker of an Authors Live event celebrating Roald Dahl Day and the 30th birthday of the BFG. You saw him, he doesn't look 30, does he?

AUD: No.

JF: No, double that. Our next event promises to be something completely special. A poetry slam featuring Lemn Sissay, Elspeth Murray and Paul Lyalls. So the date for your diary is Thursday 29 November at 11 o'clock in the morning and that's part of Book Week Scotland. For details of how to register, or indeed watch online, I'm sure you know by now the website. It's [scottishbooktrust.com](http://scottishbooktrust.com) and you do the forward slash thing to Authors Live. In the meantime, don't forget, people here were asking and I'm sure you want to know too if your mums and dads and people want to watch, you can watch this even and indeed all of the other marvellous events we've had over the past months and years at the BBC Authors Live site and the Scottish Book Trust website.

All of the events are free to watch and the learning resources are free to download. So it's goodbye from all of us, goodbye - and I hope you have a whizzpopping day, bye-bye.

JM: Bye.

JF: Big round of applause and cheering again, I think.

AUD: [Applause]