



The Mildenhall Treasure by Roald Dahl

Before reading

- 1 Students work in pairs to brainstorm what they know about Roald Dahl.
- 2 Students think of any works they know by him and try to put them in the different categories. Finally, they read *About the author* to see if any of their ideas are mentioned.
- 3 In the same pairs, students discuss what the treasure might be. Elicit ideas, but don't confirm answers at this stage.

While reading

- 1 Students read the extract quickly to check their ideas from *Before reading* 3.

Answer

The treasure is Roman silver, specifically a large plate.

- 2 Students now read the extract in more detail and decide whether the statements are true or false. When you check answers, elicit the part of the text (in brackets in Answers below) that supported the answer.

Answers

- 1 False (*There should be no oak trees underneath the soil in this place.*)
 - 2 True (*Six inches down ... eight inches ... ten inches ... twelve.*)
 - 3 True (*... in a flash of light, he saw clearly the unmistakable blue-green crust ... his heart stood still.*)
 - 4 False (*farmers ... have for years been turning up ancient objects, all local farmers are ... well aware of the possibility of finding something interesting*)
 - 5 False (*Gordon Butcher's reaction ... was a curious one.*)
 - 6 True (*He did not know precisely what impulse caused him to stop digging and walk away.*)
- 3 Students read the extract again and answer the questions, either alone or in pairs.

Answers

- 1 It means that he was suddenly nervous or shocked. He probably reacts like this because he realises he has discovered something very important.
- 2 He includes it to highlight that Butcher's reaction is indeed unusual, since he would have known that there are likely to be buried objects in the soil.
- 3 It could refer to the fact that the treasure might cause problems, rather than be a positive discovery.
- 4 Again, it refers to the fact that Butcher senses that his discovery of the treasure has the potential to cause conflict and upset people.

- 4a Students now work through the extract and underline all the different words and phrases that Dahl uses to describe the treasure. Elicit why he does this.

Answers

something solid, obstacle, you rotten old thing, something flat, blue-green crust of ancient buried metal, enormous plate, little patch of greenish blue

Dahl uses these words and phrases to provide variety to the description and avoid repetition, but also the use of 'obstacle' and 'rotten' attaches negative connotations to the treasure.

- 4b Students underline the different words and phrases that describe the action of digging. Elicit why Dahl uses so many different ways to describe digging and what this helps to convey about the treasure.

Answers

scoop the soil away, scooped up, dug, scooped it out, digging, scooped away, dig it out, scraped away, dug

Dahl uses these words and phrases to emphasises how deeply the treasure is buried, focussing the reader on the physical effort involved in Butcher trying to unearth the mysterious object.

- 5a Students read the extract again to identify the overall mood. Discuss their ideas as a class before asking them to move on to question 5b.

Answer

The mood is one of drama and suspense.

- 5b Students now focus on the use of linguistic devices to create a mood of drama and suspense, finding examples for each point listed.

Answers

Use of short sentences to build suspense: *He scooped away more earth. He enlarged the hole.*

Noun clause as subject for emphasis: *... the only thing he can remember about those first few seconds was the whiff of danger*

Inversion for emphasis: *there came to him a powerful premonition*

Words and phrases to describe things happening suddenly: *suddenly, all at once, in a flash of light, immediately*

After reading

- 1 Students work in groups to discuss questions 1–3 first and then discuss their ideas as a class. They then move on to discuss question 4. When you check their answers for 1–3, you can confirm what happened in the story (see *Cultural information* below). This will help feed into their discussion in question 4 about the kind of people Ford and Butcher are.



Possible answers

- 1 He walks away to get Ford. This is probably because he is unsure what to do and is overwhelmed by the discovery he has made.
- 2 He realises that it is very valuable (*Worth millions it must be*). His breath is coming fast because he is probably excited about the discovery and the fact that it is so valuable. In the story, he plans to keep the treasure for himself.
- 3 Because he felt Butcher had not received an appropriate reward for finding the treasure.
- 4 Possible answers include: **Ford**: selfish, greedy, cunning, exploits Butcher; **Butcher**: naive, innocent, a victim, trusting.

i CULTURAL INFORMATION

Under UK law, any treasure that is found by a member of the public must be reported to the authorities within 14 days of finding it. If it is declared to be treasure, the finder must sell it to a museum at an appropriate price. In Dahl's *The Mildenhall Treasure*, Ford is presumably aware of this, and persuades Butcher (the finder of the treasure) that it is worthless. He then keeps it for himself. Eventually the discovery is made public and both men receive a small amount of money, but Butcher does not receive as much as he would have done if he had known about the law.

- 2 Students brainstorm things Ford and Butcher might say in their role-play. Invite volunteer pairs to perform their role-play for the rest of the class.

Follow-on task

Ask students to research the real events of the Mildenhall treasure discovery, using as many sources as possible. Ask them to compare it to Dahl's version of events. In the next class, hold a discussion about how close to the truth Dahl's version is.