

**Literature Guide for
Fourth Grade:**

**Danny the Champion
of the World**

by Roald Dahl

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Table of Contents

Summary and Rationale	2-3
Initiating Activity	4
Mini-Lessons.....	5-7
Critical Thinking Questions.....	8-10
Related Activities.....	11
Connections to Common Core State Standards.....	12-13
Bibliography	14
Appendices.....	15-16

Summary and Rationale

This compelling story is about a boy and his father who, bullied by the wealthy Mr. Hazell, hatch a plan to make him look like a fool. Danny and his father William live in an old gypsy caravan behind the filling station and garage that they own and operate. Danny is nine years old when the story begins; he and his father are very close and their relationship is very important. One night, Danny wakes up to find that his father is gone. When he finally returns in the wee hours, William lets Danny in on his biggest secret; he has been in Hazell's Wood poaching Mr. Hazell's pheasants. It was a hobby of his with Danny's mother before she died, and he has decided to take it back up again. Danny wants to come along, but his father will not allow it. The next time William goes out, he falls into a trap set by Mr. Hazell's "keepers" to catch poachers and breaks his ankle. Danny must go out to find his father and rescue him.

One day, Mr. Hazell stops by the filling station. He talks down to William and threatens Danny. William is, of course, outraged, and refuses to serve him. Mr. Hazell begins sending inspectors and officials to find an excuse to shut down the filling station, and William decides he has had enough. He tells Danny about an annual hunting party that Mr. Hazell will be throwing soon and declares that if they can find a way to take away all of the pheasants, Mr. Hazell will be disgraced in front of his wealthy companions. It is Danny who hatches the brilliant plan to use the pain medication his father got from the doctor when he broke his ankle to put all the pheasants to sleep so they can be carried away. They pull off the feat and are celebrated by their friends. Mr. Hazell, as they hoped, is put to shame.

I found this book incredibly engaging when I read it as a child, and no less so as an adult. The main character of the story shows independence and great courage as he faces moral questions and protects himself and his father. This book is ideal for 4th grade because its themes and characters relate well to a 9-year-old's development (in fact, the main character of the story is that very age), and because it can easily be used to meet 4th grade curriculum standards.

In his book, Yardsticks (2007), Chip Wood describes the life of a 9-year-old as full of “dark brooding and worrying” (p. 107). They are “beginning to see the bigger world” (Wood, 2007, p. 111) and consider larger questions of fairness and justice. These themes are addressed in Danny the Champion of the World in a way that encourages children to think critically and draw their own conclusions about right and wrong. Danny and his father break the law in order to stand up to Mr. Hazell, but they do it out of a sense of justice for the mistreatment they and other members of their community have received; this situation can spark genuine conversations about morality amongst 9-year-olds, who are just beginning to develop a “more mature sense of right and wrong” (Wood, 2007, p. 124).

Besides discussing the broad themes of morality in Danny the Champion of the World, 4th graders can also identify with the main character because he is the same age as they are during the main events of the book. Children at that age are able to develop a particular affinity with literary characters (Wood, 2007, p. 115), and Danny is interested in things that real-life 9-year-olds tend to enjoy as well (stories of “long ago and far away” [Wood, 2007, p. 115] and figuring out how things work [Wood, 2007, p. 113], for example; he is keen to hear his father tell stories and to help him fix cars in his auto shop and build contraptions such as kites and hot air balloons). The ability to identify strongly with a protagonist keeps readers engaged, and 4th graders are likely to feel a personal connection with this book.

Several of the 4th Grade Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature can be met by reading Danny the Champion of the World. Students are required to “refer to details and examples in a text... when drawing inferences from the text” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012, p. 12). Because the narrator of this particular book is a child, students can make inferences regarding the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the adult characters. The characters are compelling, so the book also offers an excellent venue for students to “describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story... drawing on specific details in the text” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012, p. 12). Danny the Champion of the World is narrated in first person, allowing students to “compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012, p. 12) after reading other books narrated in third person.

Initiating Activity

This book works best when read by a small book group of 5-6 students. Using a combination of read-aloud, paired reading, and independent reading that varies by chapter will keep the students engaged and allow you to bring focus to any discussion topic or reading strategy at the right time. Because the main theme of the novel centers on a moral issue, students will quickly become engaged and interested in reading the book if it is introduced to them in the context of a moral debate. Kohlberg's moral dilemma, "Heinz Steals the Drug," is an excellent venue to spark this conversation. Fourth graders are becoming increasingly concerned with right and wrong (Wood, 2007, p. 111), and because they are just beginning the process of shifting their moral thinking (Crain, 2000, p. 158), they are likely to hold a range of opinions on the questions posed in this dilemma.

Gather the group of students who will be reading the book in a circle. Read to them the following scenario, used by Kohlberg in his studies of moral development:

Heinz Steals the Drug

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that the druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19; retrieved from Crain, 2000, p. 159)

Guide the children in a discussion about this story. Do they think Heinz was right to steal the drug? Why or why not?

After the students have discussed the Heinz dilemma, introduce the book Danny the Champion of the World. Tell the students that the book is all about a scenario like the Heinz dilemma, in which many readers disagree about whether the characters are doing the right thing for the right reasons. Hand out copies of the book and have the students discuss the "Before Reading" questions in the *Chapter Questions* section, writing their answers in their reading journals.

Mini-Lessons

#1: Making Connections

In Danny the Champion of the World, the main storyline of the novel doesn't begin until the 4th chapter; the first three chapters are dedicated to exposition and fleshing out the characters of Danny and his father. Danny is a compelling character with whom nine-year-olds can easily relate; before starting Chapter 4, they will be primed to discuss his character, his relationship with his father, and the ways in which his life is similar or different to theirs. This is an excellent venue for students to practice making text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world connections.

Connect & Teach

Make a chart on the board or a large piece of paper with three columns, one for each type of connection. As you think aloud, record your own connections in each column.

In these first three chapters, we have learned a lot about who Danny is, who his father is, and what their relationship is like. We've been talking about making connections, and this is a great opportunity to practice thinking about the connections we make as we read. Who remembers the three types of connections we've been talking about?

Now, let's think about the information we've gathered about these two characters and practice making some connections. For example, I made a text-to-world connection during chapter 1 when the author describes the filling-station that Danny's father owns; it made me think about different kinds of gas stations and how they are similar and different. I made a text-to-text connection during chapter 2, when Danny's father told him the story of the BFG, because I have read the book The BFG that the author later wrote, expanding on the same story that Danny's father told. Finally, I made a text-to-self connection during chapter 3 when Danny's father made him the car out of soap boxes; it reminded me of when my older brother's boy scout troop made soap box cars and competed in a race called the Soap Box Derby.

Active Engagement

In small groups or pairs, have the students fill out their own chart with examples of each type of connection from the first three chapters of the book. Give them at least 10 minutes to discuss the chapters and write down their connections. Alternatively, you can have the students do this individually, either in class or as homework for the next book discussion. This will largely depend on how much practice they have already had with writing about their connections.

Gathering Evidence of Understanding

Collect the charts from each group or pair and look at the connections they wrote about. Are the connections genuine and logical? Do they stem from specific information or examples in the text? Are they written in the correct columns? If some of the kids are not making good connections or differentiating appropriately between the types of connections, coming together and sharing the connections as a large group might be helpful so that they can see their classmates' connections and how/why they are appropriate.

#2: Supporting Thinking With Evidence From Text

Throughout their reading of Danny the Champion of the World, students will be asked to think critically, make inferences, and draw conclusions based on what they read. They will need to support their thinking with direct evidence from the text, and many of them will probably benefit from explicit instruction in using this strategy. The chapter questions in this literature guide often ask for students' conclusions or opinions followed by evidence; the students' answers can be used to assess how effectively they are using the strategy both before and after the mini-lesson. This lesson is best taught between the students' reading of Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

Connect & Teach

Make a two-column chart on the board or a piece of chart paper. Label one column "I think..." and the other "Because..." and write the question you are trying to answer as the heading. For example, you could use one of the chapter questions from Chapter 7 that the children have already answered, and think aloud to show them how you answered it:

Alright, team. Remember earlier this year when we talked about inferring? Has anyone noticed that your chapter questions ask you to infer a lot of information that is not stated in the text? Well, one really important way to make correct inferences is to support your thinking with evidence from the text. Did you notice that the questions asked you to explain why you thought something, or asked you to provide evidence? Some of you have done a great job of that, but I think all of us can do even better.

Let's take the example of this question from the last chapter: "How did Danny know that something was wrong?" Was the answer stated explicitly in the text? No, so you had to infer the answer. I'm going to show you how I answered that question, and how I supported my thinking with evidence from the text to show that my inference was correct.

Read aloud from p. 50, "When I opened my eyes again..." to p. 51, "He never, absolutely never, broke a promise." Fill out the chart as you continue: *Now, based on this passage, I'm thinking that Danny knew something was wrong because it was the only explanation for why his father was not there. The text says that "he was four hours overdue," and that "he never broke a promise." I'm thinking that Danny knew since his father wouldn't break a promise, he would have been home on time if he could, so therefore something must be wrong.*

Active Engagement

After thinking aloud and charting your evidence on the board, give each student their own similar chart with the heading, "What did Danny's father think about Danny coming to rescue him?" Have the children read Chapter 8 and fill out the chart to track their thinking in answering the question. This can be done as a paired read-aloud in class or individually as a homework assignment, depending on your assessment of their abilities.

Gathering Evidence of Understanding

Collect the charts that the students have filled out after reading Chapter 8. Have they addressed the question? Is their thinking logical? Did they use direct evidence from the text to answer the question? Does the evidence support their conclusions? Use this information to assess whether you need to revisit this lesson, as this strategy will remain important throughout their reading of the novel.

Critical Thinking Questions

These questions are designed to engage the students in critical thinking about the plot, characters and themes of the novel, and to encourage them to use comprehension strategies to better understand the book. Have the students answer the questions in their journals after each chapter, and make time during class for them to discuss their answers.

Before Reading

What questions do you have about this book?

Where do you think the title of the book comes from?

Based on the cover of the book, what do you predict is going to happen?

Chapter 1

Where do Danny and his father live? What do they do for a living?

What are some ways the author sets the scene for the story in the first chapter?

What kind of relationship does Danny have with his father? How do you know?

Chapter 2

Draw a portrait of Danny's father.

What do you think his appearance tells you about him as a character?

Chapter 3

How old was Danny when he started school?

Why did his father wait so long to send him to school?

Did Danny's going to school affect his relationship with his father? How can you tell?

Chapter 4

How did Danny feel when he woke up and his father was gone? What evidence does the author give to show how he felt?

What is poaching?

Why do you think Danny's father participates in poaching?

Chapter 5

According to Danny's father, what was the greatest discovery in the history of poaching?

Why did he think it was so important?

Which method of catching pheasants is your favorite? Why?

Why doesn't Danny's father want to bring him along when he goes poaching?

Chapter 6

Draw a portrait of Mr. Hazell.

How does Danny's father feel about Mr. Hazell? Why? What evidence does the author give to show how he feels?

Chapter 7

How did Danny know that something was wrong?

Why did he decide to go after his father? Was it a difficult decision?

What risks did Danny take when he went looking for his father?

Chapter 8

How did Danny find his father in the woods?

How did Danny feel while he was searching for his father? Have you ever felt that way?

What did Danny's father think about Danny coming to rescue him? How do you know?

Chapter 9

How did Doc Spencer help Danny and his father? Why was his help so important?

What did he think about what happened to Danny's father?

Chapter 10

How did Danny's father's behavior change after he broke his ankle?

What was he thinking or feeling that caused him to behave differently?

Chapter 11

What was Danny's brilliant idea?

Why did Danny's father change his mind about letting Danny come to Hazell's Wood?

What do you think will be their biggest challenge in pulling off their big plan?

Halfway Through

What questions do you have about the book now? Have you learned anything new?

Has your thinking about the plot, characters, or themes changed since the beginning? How?

What is enjoyable about this book? What is challenging?

What reading strategies are you using?

Chapter 12

How is Danny's school similar to yours? How is it different?

Why do you think the author waited until this far into the story to describe Danny's school?

Based on what you already know about Danny's father, were you surprised by his reaction to Danny's injury? Why or why not?

Chapter 13

What were Danny and his father doing during this chapter?

How does Danny feel when his father talks about his mother? Why do you think he feels that way?

Chapter 14

What do Danny and his father do to avoid being seen?

How does Danny feel while they are out in Hazell's Wood? How can you tell?

How do you think his father feels?

Chapter 15

What does Danny's father do when Mr. Rabbett finds them?

How does the author use Mr. Rabbett's physical appearance to enhance his character?

Chapter 16

What does Danny's father wonder about the roosting pheasants?

Why is it an important question?

Using your schema or an outside source, see if you can answer his question.

Chapter 17

What did Danny learn for the first time in this chapter?

Was he surprised? How can you tell?

What is Danny's father planning to do with the pheasants?

Chapter 18

What were Danny and his father planning to do next?

Why was Danny worried?

Chapter 19

What do you think of their delivery system? If it were you, how would you transport the pheasants without getting caught?

Why was the baby crying?

Chapter 20

Why did Danny's father give Sergeant Samways a funny look?

Were you surprised by this chapter? Why or why not?

Chapter 21

How did Danny and his father feel after all the pheasants flew away? How do you know?

What was their big surprise? Where did it come from?

Chapter 22

Why did the author put this chapter at the very end of the book?

What did Danny think was the point of the whole story?

What did you think was the point of the whole story?

After Reading

Where does the title of the book come from?

What surprised you about this book?

Do you think that it was right for Danny and his father to poach the pheasants from Mr. Hazell? Why or why not?

What questions do you still have about this book?

Related Activities

#1: Danny's Life Map

After they have read the first three expository chapters, have each student draw a life map for Danny. It should include all the important places and people that we have seen so far, along with short paragraphs explaining what each place or person is and why it is important. As the book progresses and more places and people are introduced, either have the students add to their existing life maps or draw a new one. Additionally, if the students have already done their own life maps or if you want to do them with your class, have the students compare and contrast Danny's life map with their own. A "double bubble" diagram would be a great tool to use for this activity.

#2: "Pheasant Hunting"

This is a great activity for the students who are especially interested in how things work. Recreate one or more of the poaching techniques described in the book (setup only, of course) and have the students evaluate and discuss which they think is the easiest to make and which they think would be the most effective. Then have each student invent their own technique for catching the pheasants; depending on your time and resources, you can either have them draw it and write a description, or actually create it. Have the book group make a presentation to the rest of the class explaining the concept of poaching, its place in the book, and their inventions.

#3: Mock Trial

After the students have finished the book, stage a mock court in which Danny and his father are on trial for poaching Mr. Hazell's pheasants. Have members of the book group play the roles of Danny, William and Mr. Hazell, as well as attorneys for the defense and the prosecution. Guide the students through the process of preparing arguments and testimony from the perspective of their characters, and act out the court proceedings in front of the rest of the class (or even the students' parents). You as the teacher can play the role of judge and facilitate the "proceedings." Have the audience vote on the verdict.

Connections to Common Core State Standards

Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 4:

1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
3. Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.
6. Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrators.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills, Grade 4:

4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension
 - a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding

Writing Standards, Grade 4:

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
 - a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose
 - b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details
 - c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases
 - d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented
6. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research
 - a. Apply grade 4 reading standards to literature
10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences

Speaking and Listening Standards, Grade 4:

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on each other's ideas and expressing their own clearly.
 - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion
 - b. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles
 - c. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others
 - d. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion
2. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace
3. Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion); use formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

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