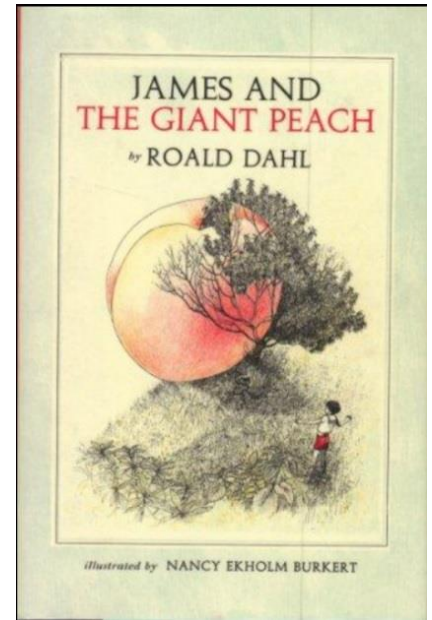


Daniel J. Seckman

I first read *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl in elementary school. I recall it being one of the first “big” books (or so I thought at the time) that I found accessible to read and thoroughly enjoyed. I have read the book numerous times since; however, the last time I read it was over ten years ago so I decided to reread the novel, albeit in Kindle format and from a slightly different perspective.

James and the Giant Peach was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1961. Perhaps better known for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and even *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Roald Dahl had previously published numerous works of fiction by the time *James and the Giant Peach* hit bookshelves in 1961. The image I chose was from Abebooks.com as the edition I read was featured on Kindle.



Roald Dahl (1961), courtesy of Abebooks.com

The book centers around the evolving story of James Henry Trotter, who lives with his two crude aunts. After James is given a magic potion by a mysterious old man on a peach, he spills it and the peach grows to massive size. James now inadvertently finds himself in a semi-Cinderellaesque storyline where his aunts make money selling tickets to the townsfolk to see the giant peach. Later, James enters the peach through a secret tunnel and embarks on a story that takes him into the English Channel across the Azores in the Atlantic Ocean until he arrives in New York City. With James is a group of personified insects and arthropods that interact with him throughout the storyline. A spider, grasshopper, ladybug, centipede, silkworm and earthworm travel throughout the journey.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main insect/ arthropod characters and how do their personality traits, characteristics and behaviors influence James in the novel?
2. The book was written in the early 1960s, how does world history influence Dahl's characterization of the insects/ arthropods in the story?
3. Of the chosen insect species, why does Dahl portray the grasshopper as James's pseudo-guardian?

4. Why is the centipede depicted as James's best friend and how does James's efforts in saving the earthworm change the dynamic between all of the insects/ arthropods?
5. Upon arrival to New York City, how does Dahl's selection of future careers for each of James's travel companions compare or contrast with society's typical understanding of insects/ arthropods?
6. Why do you suppose Dahl choose insects to accompany James on his journey instead of other creatures, such as animals or even humans?