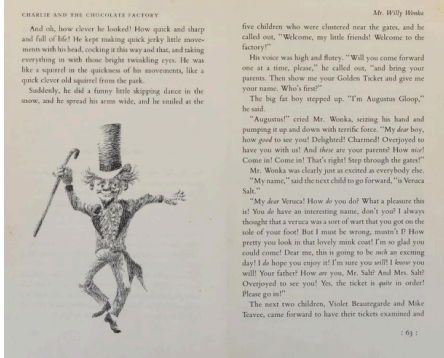
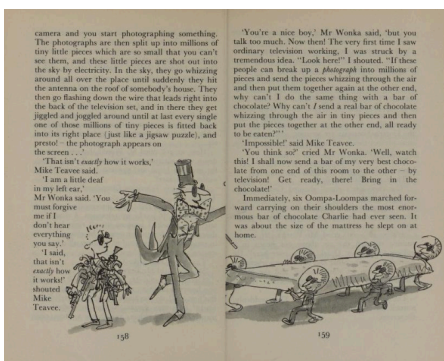


The Importance of Early Reading



1964 Edition *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*



2007 Edition *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

Books are important in every stage of life, but especially important during childhood. During the stages of development, when the brain is still very much maturing and, like a great sponge, soaking in everything around it, the child must not be content, or allowed to be content, to sit and watch the television at every possible moment. For a young mind in particular, the television can only provide pre-conditioned nonsense, false marketing slogans, an attention-deficit, and an automated reliance on the screen to do the thinking for them.

The earlier a child is taught and encouraged to read, the better. Not only for the sake of their development in literacy, creativity, and intelligence, but for the potential to realise for themselves the importance and enjoyment of reading.

Roald Dahl's classic children's book remains an accurate polemic in an age where children have a tragic habit of frequently watching television. Despite high literacy levels and the widespread availability of books, children are reluctant to read. According to [a 2021 survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust](#), only 1 in 2 (51.5%) children and young people said that they enjoyed reading, in a survey consisting of 42,502 children and young

people aged 8 to 18 in the UK. And worse still, only 3 in 10 (30.1%) children and young people said in 2021 that they read something daily in their free time. Such a survey can only indicate that children are not being encouraged to read enough. Why is it that only *half* of the survey can say they enjoy reading? Has the television set and computer game overthrown the book entirely?

I believe that those of us in our final year of higher education are the last generation to have lived in an age where books were the primary source of education and entertainment. The children of tomorrow, unless they are taught it effectively, will not be aware of the importance of books. They may have some instinctive inkling that the book is, in general, of great importance, but they shall not be, as the survey sadly suggests, enthusiastically inclined to read.

Let us however return to the polemic of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Ironically, this much-loved book was twice turned into a successful film, which in turn promoted the reading of the book. The book, however, is far more hilarious and is just one reason why children should first turn their attention to literature, before gluing their eyes to the television. In other words, we do not wish to see them turn into Mike Teavee.

Anyone who has read the book will know that Mike Teavee was addicted to his television set, and subsequently turned out a very ill-adjusted child prone to temper tantrums and rather belligerent behaviour.

When we are first introduced to Mike Teavee in the book, he is completely absorbed in the television. Teavee is a vehicle to launch a delicious parody of the television-obsessed child in the modern age:

"Didn't I *tell* you not to interrupt! This show's an absolute whiz-banger! It's terrific! I watch it every day. I watch all of them every day, even the rotten ones, where there's no shooting. I like the gangsters best. They're terrific, those gangsters! Especially when they start pumping each other full of lead, or flashing the old stilettos, or giving each other the one-two-three with their knuckledusters! Gosh, what wouldn't I give to be doing that myself! It's the *life*, I tell you! It's terrific!"

'That's quite enough!' snapped Grandma Josephine. 'I can't *bear* to listen to it!'

'Nor me,' said Grandma Georgina. 'Do *all* children behave like this

nowadays — like these brats we've been hearing about?'
'Of course not,' said Mr Bucket, smiling at the old lady in the bed.
'Some do, of course. In fact, quite a lot of them do. But not all.'

There's a contrast between the overtly violent, Americanised, and fanatical speech of Teavee and the shrewd remarks of the elder Buckets. The elders are the voices of reason. They cannot bear to think of the deterioration of today's generation. Mike Teavee is the very embodiment of a brainwashed child, impressionable and suggestible to the misleading world on the television screen. The story stresses that television is a strictly modern disease; the elders were brought up on good old-fashioned books. Mr Bucket however assures Georgina that "not all" children have degenerated into television monsters.

Let us hope that Mr Bucket is correct. The aforementioned National Literacy Trust statistics would suggest that he is, yet they also affirm that "quite a lot" of children could indeed be prone to Teaveeitus. The children reading this section of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* would however come to realisation, as I once did, that they are one of the lucky few.

When Teavee foolishly ignores Wonker's warning against the teleportation of a person by television, and regretfully shrinks in the process, the Oompa-Loompas hurl themselves into a wonderful song, or rather a potent and hilarious moral parable, against the television. This, perhaps, is the best part:

"IT ROTTS THE SENSES IN THE HEAD!
IT KILLS IMAGINATION DEAD!
IT CLOGS AND CLUTTERS UP THE MIND!
IT MAKES A CHILD SO DULL AND BLIND
HE CAN NO LONGER UNDERSTAND
A FANTASY, A FAIRYLAND!
HIS BRAIN BECOMES AS SOFT AS CHEESE!
HIS POWERS OF THINKING RUST AND FREEZE!
HE CANNOT THINK — HE ONLY SEES!"

The Oompa-Loompas' chanting chorus is of course completely truthful in its message. They may as well be the words of a child psychologist. Television prevents imagination, concentration, creativity, and the clarity, integrity, and power of thought.

And so the Oompa-Loompas offer the only logical alternative to the nauseating television screen:

"What used the darling ones to do?
How used they keep themselves contented
Before this monster was invented?"
Have you forgotten? Don't you know?
We'll say it very loud and slow:
THEY . . . USED TO . . . READ! They'd READ and READ,
AND READ and READ, and then proceed
TO READ some more. Great Scott! Gadzooks!
One half their lives was reading books!
The nursery shelves held books galore!
Books cluttered up the nursery floor!
And in the bedroom, by the bed,
More books were waiting to be read!"

And this, I think, concludes that books can replace the television set. Reading is ever more important. The children of today should be encouraged from an early age to read and read and read. Teaveeitus must be prevented.