



ONCE UPON AN IF: PART 2: MATILDA, THE FIRELESS DRAGON

Because Matilda, The Fireless Dragon has been magically written by The Story Book, this story has been written in a more literary style. Though I have spent a great deal of time encouraging you to storytell, on this occasion I am going to recommend that you read Matilda, The Fireless Dragon rather than tell it, although, if you can learn and recall all the jokes then there's no reason why you shouldn't tell it. This story can also be read as a story in its own right. If you decide to do this then simply omit the part at the end that describes Zadie's reaction to the story. This, and the preceding story, can be used to show the children that they do not have to use the conventional stereotypes in their stories, and they can be used to explore plot conventions, standard tropes and clichéd or non-clichéd uses of them. (See Appendix 1 'Quick view steps' Once Upon an If (part two) and 'Once Upon an If classroom activity' on page 97.)

The Story

Once upon a time there was a dragon called Matilda. Matilda was a dragon that couldn't breathe fire and she lived in a cave by herself. All she wanted was to be left alone.

But the local townspeople just wouldn't do that. They were always bothering her with one thing or another.

This week it was the Princess. She had recently been bitten by a werewolf, but it was a werewolf that had no teeth so she had not been affected by the 'curse of the werewolf' – which says that if you are bitten by a werewolf, you turn into one! However, she had transformed into something – not because of the werewolf but because she had just turned 13. She had transformed into... a teenager! This meant that, all this week, she had lain in bed until noon and when she did finally get up she would be in a foul mood.

'I would rather DIE than live with YOU, mum and dad!' she screamed as she arrived at Matilda's cave. 'I'm going to chain myself up outside the dragon's cave until it EATS ME! And I DON'T CARE!!'

Oh no! thought Matilda as the Princess chained herself up, I was just drifting off to sleep.

When a handsome knight rode into the town the following day, the King and Queen told him that their beautiful daughter had been kidnapped by the evil dragon that lived in the hills. So the next thing to disturb Matilda was a knight with an over-long lance and a little too much enthusiasm for slaying dragons.

Oh no! thought Matilda again, with a silent sigh.

For the next three days poor Matilda was vexed by the over-zealous knight. But he was unable to slay her.

And it was a good job too.

Because on the fourth day the townspeople were themselves terrorised by a water monster. It had been created by a wizard who had lost control of it and now the huge giant, made entirely of water, was on the rampage, drowning cattle, flattening crops and destroying buildings.

'Our only hope,' said the king, 'is to ask the dragon to help us.'

Matilda was busy fighting the knight who was also busy trying to slay her. Not very effectively, it has to be said. Then the King arrived and told the knight to stop slaying the dragon.

'I have come here today to offer a royal apology,' said the King to Matilda, 'And would you be kind enough to help us repel a water monster that is terror-ising our town?'

'Why should I help you?' said Matilda. 'All you've done is cause me misery.'

'I know,' said the King, 'and I'm very sorry. But, in return for your help, we will give you anything you want,' he promised.

'There is one thing I want that you could give me,' said Matilda. 'Name it!' said the King.

'Solitude. I just want to be left alone!'

'It will be done,' assured the King, 'if you can help us.'

'The dragon can't even breathe fire!' exclaimed the knight, who was offended that his knightly services were no longer required.

Matilda flew into the town. And the water monster was there, busy creating geezers to knock down trees.

Task Question 1: What can Matilda do to repel the water monster?

When the monster saw the dragon swoop down it was somewhat alarmed as dragons are known to breathe large amounts of fire. And if there's one thing a water monster – being made entirely of water – doesn't like very much, it is large amounts of fire!

'Hello!' said Matilda. 'Now, let's get rid of you,' she said as she started to intake a huge breath.

'No! Stop!' shouted the frightened water monster. 'Okay, I'll go.'

But just as the monster was edging its way to leave the town and its people the knight shouted out, still irritated with Matilda, 'The dragon can't breathe fire, you know!'

Task Question 2: Now that the knight has revealed that Matilda cannot breathe fire what can she do?

The water monster stopped in its tracks. Then turned around and looked at Matilda, who was still holding her breath as if she was about to breathe out.

'Is this true?' asked the monster in a gurgly voice.

'Well,' said Matilda, breathing out in a slow, controlled way, 'everyone knows that dragons breathe fire.'

'But he just said that you don't,' said the monster, pointing to the knight.

'Ah, yes, the knight,' said Matilda. 'You see, he doesn't like me very much, so he's just saying that to annoy me.'

The water monster walked threateningly towards Matilda. It was growing less and less afraid of her by the second.

'Do you really want to take the risk,' said Matilda after a pause, 'given what you know about dragons? Maybe I can breathe fire and maybe I can't. Do you want to find out?'

Task Question 3: What should the water monster think?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ If all the dragons the water monster had previously met breathed fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ If the water monster had only read that *all* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ If the water monster had read that *most* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ If the water monster had read that *some* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ If the water monster had read that *few* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ If the water monster had read that it is a myth that dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- ✓ Is there something that the water monster can say, or do, to Matilda? If so, what should Matilda say, or do, in return?
- ✓ What would be the reasonable thing for the water monster to do?

And with that she took in a huge breath and looked with wide eyes at the monster.

The monster looked back at her, waited, and then... eventually he slowly turned to go.

The water monster had decided it was a risk too great to take.

Once the monster had gone Matilda was able to breathe out, which was good because she was just about to faint.

'Hip-Hip Hooray!!' the townspeople cheered.

Matilda went over to the knight, who had nearly spoilt everything, and said, 'I may not be able to breathe fire but I am big enough to EAT YOU!' She opened her huge jaws and gobbled up the knight in one go.

The princess was quite pleased because she found him annoying. Then she decided that she would move in with Matilda: her 'NBF', as the Princess said, which means 'new best friend'.

Oh no! thought Matilda. The End.

Zadie closed the book then both sighed and smiled. Matilda didn't get to be left alone, she thought, but at least she was the hero; dragons aren't usually heroes, and Matilda may have been fireless but she certainly wasn't fearless. Then Zadie put her hand on her chin and looked up towards the ceiling; she was already thinking about what she was going to write in The Little Story Book tomorrow...

What if there was a boy who had lost his name? she wondered. And what if there was a cat that couldn't say meow, and what if there was a tree that wished to fly like a bird and...

Further Nested Questions:

- ✓ **What is a stereotype? (Again, this could be a research task for the class.)**

- ✓ **Are there any stereotypes in this story?**
- ✓ **Does this story challenge any stereotypes?**
- ✓ **Is it okay to use stereotypes in stories? If so, when?**