Chapter Summaries of *Boy, Tales of Childhood* by Roald Dahl

**STARTING POINT**

**Chapter 1 – "Papa and Mama"**

- Father – Harald Dahl, Norwegian – no left arm
- Father’s brother – Oscar
- The brothers ran away to France
- Uncle Oscar became successful – fishing trawlers and a canning factory
- Harald Dahl – with partner Aadnesen – became shipping brokers (suppliers to big ships) – as coal was the most important thing they supplied they set up business in a coaling port – Cardiff, South Wales, U.K.
- Harald married Marie – 2 children and then Marie died
- Harald went back to Norway to find a new wife – married Sofie Magdalene Hesselberg – 4 children - girl, girl, boy (Roald), girl
- They moved to a big house in Radyr, 8 miles outside of Cardiff
- Harald was a clever businessman, he was a good gardener and wood carver. He wrote detailed dairies of events in English (although Norwegian was his first language).

**Chapter 2 – “Kindergarten 1922-23, age 6-7”**

- When Roald was 3 his sister died from appendicitis; she was 7. This was the age that Roald’s daughter Olivia died many years later.
- Roald’s father was very upset about the death of his daughter, and he died of pneumonia shortly after.
- Roald’s mother had no family in Wales to help her; all her family lived in Norway. She was alone with 5 children and another one on the way. However, she refused to return to Norway. Harald Dahl had always wanted his children to be educated in English schools, which he believed to be superior. After all, it had enabled a small island of people to become a great empire and produce some of the world’s greatest literature.
- The family moved to a smaller house called Cumberland Lodge in Llandaff, a few miles away.
- Roald went to his first school, a kindergarten called Elmtree House, run by 2 sisters Mrs Corfield and Miss Tucker.
Chapter 3 – “The Bicycle and the Sweet Shop”

- Roald remembers 2 things clearly:
  - First, he was really impressed by a 12 year old boy who rode by, pedaling backwards, with his arms folded across his chest – Roald was in awe.
  - Second, was his memory of a sweet shop that he passed on the way to and from school. His favorite sweets were Sherbet Suckers and Liquorice Bootlaces.
- Roald’s friend Thwaites told him that his father (a doctor) had told him never to eat Liquorice Bootlaces as they were made from rat’s blood and made you look like a rat!
- The sweets are described: Liquorice Bootlaces, Sherbert Suckers, Gobstoppers, Pear Drops, Tonsil Ticklers.
- The owner of the sweet shop is Mrs. Pratchett – she was not nice, she was dirty (descriptions), she was mean to them.

Chapter 4 – “The Great Mouse Plot”

- The boys find a hiding place in the classroom where they hide their candy and treasure. One day they find a dead mouse there.
- Roald has an idea - they hide the mouse in a bottle of sweets in Mrs. Pratchett’s shop.

Chapter 5 – “Mr. Coombes”

- The sweet shop is closed – the boys wonder if they have killed Mrs. Pratchett.
- Description of Mr. Coombes.
- The boys are identified by Mrs. Pratchett.

Chapter 6 – “Mrs. Pratchett’s Revenge”

- The boys get caned – they watch each other, and Mrs. Pratchett encourages Mr. Coombes to hit them hard.
- Roald’s mother finds out – he will move to a boarding school in England at the end of the school year.

Chapter 7 – “Going to Norway”

- Every summer from the ages of 4 to 17, Roald and his family went to Norway for the summer holidays.
- Ten people made the journey with a load of luggage.
- Train to London, taxi to another train station, train to Newcastle, taxi to the docks, boat to Oslo (2 days), taxi to hotel. One night in Oslo and a family reunion with his mother’s relatives.
- Description of Bestemama and Bestepapa, great feast.
• How to skaal.

**Chapter 8 – “The Magic Island”**

• Another day’s travel by boat to reach an island called Tjome.
• Description of Norway’s fjords and islands - no beaches but big rocks.
• Description of big breakfasts
• Into the boat – when they were younger to a small bit of beach, when they were older to different islands (hundreds of them, some very small) – with shipwrecked boats, wild raspberries, mussels and long haired goats.
• Fishing – water is deep, 200 feet of fishing line.

**Chapter 9 – “A Visit to the Doctor”**

• Unpleasant memory – 8 years old.
• Roald and his mother walk half an hour to the doctor’s house. The doctor cuts out his adenoids without anesthetic – and he walks home. Wow.

**ST PETER’S 1925-9 (age 9-13)**

**Chapter 10 – “First Day”**

• Roald goes to a boarding school in England. It is called St. Peter’s School, and it is in a county called Somerset, in a seaside town called Weston-Super-Mare. Near where Mrs. D. went to school.
• From the sea-front, it is possible to look 15 miles across the Bristol Channel and see Cardiff in Wales.
• Taxi with mother to paddle steamer (boat) to cross the Bristol Channel.
• Describes clothes he takes, inside of his trunk (big box for clothes).
• Describes what a tuck-box is (for food) – the boys need food from home.
• Describes other treasures kept in a tuck box.
• Describes the school – about 150 boys. It is the first time Roald has slept away from home. The headmaster is compared to a shark. Roald cries.

**Chapter 11 – “Writing Home”**

• Sunday morning, everyone spends an hour writing a letter home, then they go to church. The letters were censored (checked by the headmaster) for contents – but the spelling was never corrected in the letter itself.
• Roald got into the habit of letter writing and wrote his mother at least once a week for the next 32 years until she died.
• Roald talks about the last conversation he had with his mother before she died (many years later in 1967).
Chapter 12 – “The Matron”

- The Matron is a woman in charge of the dormitory floor – all the boys are scared of her. Matron could send you down to the Headmaster at any time for misbehaving – and you would get caned on the spot.
- Matron doesn’t seem to like little boys much.
- The sugar trick on Matron – all the boys stick together.
- The dormitory, and the rules for bedtime are described.
- Roald always sleeps facing his family home.
- Tweedie – the boy who snores, what Matron does to him

Chapter 13 – “Homesickness”

- Roald is so homesick he pretends to have appendicitis in order to be sent home. He watched his older sister and noted her symptoms; they removed her appendix on the nursery table of his house!
- It works, Roald gets to go home, but his doctor at home knows he is faking. He is allowed to stay home for 3 days but told not to do it again.

Chapter 14 – “A Drive in the Motorcar”

- Roald is so happy to be home for the holidays. The freedom is wonderful.
- The family has a new car, and they go for a ride in the car. Roald’s ancient (very much older) half sister is driving. There is a terrible accident – Roald’s nose is cut almost completely off. It is sewn back on at the nursery table where his sister had her appendix removed!

Chapter 15 – “Captain Hardcastle”

- Captain Hardcastle is the master (teacher) that Roald is most afraid of. Captain Hardcastle is described. He doesn’t like Roald.
- How the boys do prep (homework) is explained – only 2 boys raise their hand to speak in 4 years.
- Roald gets caught talking. He is accused of cheating and lying also, and he gets a stripe, which means he will be caned by the Headmaster. The headmaster doesn’t want to hear the real story. Roald is caned 6 times.

Chapter 16 – “Little Ellis and the Boil”

- Roald has the flu, and even with a temperature of 100, the doctor sends him back to school.
- Ellis has his boil lanced (broken) – scary.

Chapter 17 – “Goat’s Tobacco”
• Roald’s ancient half sister brings the man she will marry to Norway for the family vacation.
• The family all play a big trick on this man.

REPTON AND SHELL -1929-36 (age 13-20)

Chapter 18 – “Getting Dressed for the Big School”

• Roald is given the choice to go to either Marlborough or Repton (2 famous boys schools) – he chooses Repton, 140 miles away because it is easier to say. He is exactly 13 when he leaves.
• Big description of the uniform that he has to wear – Roald feels ridiculous, but his mother points out that in England people love uniforms and strange clothes.
• His mother will go to London with him and put him on another train – but she has been told that she can’t go any further than that with him.

Chapter 19 – “Boazers”

• A boazer is a prefect – and they had a lot of power over the younger boys. They could punish you for a great many different things. Your only choice was whether you wanted ‘four with the dressing gown on, or 3 with it off’ (hits with a stick or cane).
• After being hit the other boys often wanted to look – and different prefects would be admired for the speed or the accuracy of their hits.

Chapter 20 – “The Headmaster”

• Roald talks about his headmaster – who later became a Bishop, and then Bishop of London, and then Archbishop of the whole country - who later even crowned the Queen. Roald remembers him for the terrible beatings he would give the boys.
• Roald questions why some masters gave such terrible beatings, why should masters and older boys be allowed to hurt small boys?
• Because this headmaster was also a clergyman (priest) – Roald began to question religion and God, how could a person of God hurt a child?

Chapter 21 – “Chocolates”

• Cadburys – the chocolate manufacturer; would deliver free chocolate bars to the boys in the school to test. The boys would rate the chocolate bars from 1 to 10, and write down comments on each bar.
• Roald realized that many chocolate companies had inventing rooms – and this idea, together with his imagination led to his book Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Chapter 22 – “Corkers”
• Roald has a math master who never taught. Instead he did many other things – the best one was to say that someone had farted!

Chapter 23 – “Fagging”

• A Fag is a servant of an older boy, sometimes a prefect (called a Boazer).
• The boy who was Head of House, had 3 fags, he checked work.
• A House Boazer could make any Fag in the house do work – he would call out ‘Faaaaaaag’ – and the last small boy there would do the work.
• A Boazer named Wilberforce made Roald be his bog-seat warmer (Roald had to sit on the toilet seat to warm it up for him.

Chapter 24 – “Games and Photography”

• Roald was good at games, especially at – Fives and Squash-racquets.
• Roald was Captain of Fives and Captain of Squash-racquets, he had a lot of responsibilities and power.
• Most Captains automatically became Boazers (prefects) – but the authorities (administration) did not think Roald would be a good Boazer – they thought he was unpredictable and couldn’t be trusted. Roald agreed, he couldn’t beat the smaller boys, he would let down the whole system of Fagging.
• Besides sports – the other thing Roald enjoyed at school was photography. Roald’s art master, Arthur Norris, helped him put on an exhibition as Roald was very good. Roald later won prizes and medals.

Chapter 25 – “Goodbye School”

• Roald’s mother asked if he wanted to go to Oxford or Cambridge – Roald decided he wanted to go straight to work, for a company that would send him far away. Africa was 2 weeks, and China 5 weeks by boat.
• Roald got into Shell, who only accepted the very best.
• That summer, instead of going to Norway, he joined an exploring society who made a trip to Newfoundland. It was a hard trip.
• Roald spent two years with Shell in England being trained. He says that it was easy going to work compared to writing. A writer’s life is much harder, he needs a lot of discipline, and he has to be creative and imaginative.
• Roald is told he has been posted to Egypt, a good post, but he really wants to go to Africa – and he does, for 3 years – he is just 20 years old.
• He learned a lot in Africa, then the Second World War started and Roald joined the Royal Air Force where he became a fighter pilot.