

Nonsense Poetry

KS1 LESSONS 1, 2, 3

Created by Gordon McIntyre.
Free use for educational purposes.

*Based on the book
"Something Must Rhyme with Orange?"
#smrwo*

Illustration&design by koko rattray

Writing Nonsense Poetry #1

Children at this point are probably not aware that many nursery rhymes are in fact nonsense poems. Explain this fact, and give some examples:

- *Hey Diddle Diddle*
- *This Old Man*
- *Frog went a Courting*
- *There Was An Old Woman Who Lived In a Shoe*

Discuss with the children what makes these poems nonsense poems.



Characters often do things they cannot do in the real world.

- The cow jumped over the moon.
- An old woman lives in a shoe.
- A frog rides a horse with a pistol and a sword.



They contain nonsense words and phrases

- *Hey Diddle Diddle, ...*
- *With a nick nack paddy wack ...*



They are playful and funny.



They use simple rhyme schemes: AABB, ABAB.



They often use repetition (*Hey Diddle Diddle*).

AABB:

*Twinkle twinkle little star
Are you just a chocolate bar?
Up above the world so high
Like a Mars bar in the sky.*



ABAB:

*Now it is night
Let us begin
To give them a fright
Out of their skin.*



Changing an Existing Poem

Draw the children's attention to *Pussy Cat Pussy Cat*. This is a simple AABB four-line poem with two questions and two answers.

*Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been? [question]
I've been to London to visit the Queen. [answer]
Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you do there? [question]
I frightened a little mouse under her chair. [answer]*

Then tell the children that you are going to use the structure and rhyme scheme of *Pussy Cat Pussy Cat* to write a new poem.

Start with line 1. Tell the class you are going to change the animal. Get suggestions for a new animal and make the change.

Sly old fox, sly old fox . . .

Continue with line 1. This time take suggestions for a new question.

Sly old fox, sly old fox, what have you done?

Then move on to line 2.

Here ask your class what the answer to the question in line 1 might be. Remind the children that the last word of the answer must rhyme with the last word of the question.

I've bought a new dress to go to the prom.

Next, move to the question in line 3. Here you want suggestions for the second question.

Sly old fox, sly old fox, why did you do that?

Finally, ask the children for the answer to the question in line 3.

Again, remember to remind the children that the answer must rhyme with the question.

To dance with a rooster who wore a top hat.

When you are done, read your poem aloud to the children.

Sly old fox, sly old fox, what have you done?

I've bought a new dress to go to the prom.

Sly old fox, sly old fox, why did you do that?

To dance with a rooster who wore a top hat.

Follow-ups:

- Get the children to change the animal in the poem, change the questions and change the answers, and come up with new nonsense verses based on *Pussy Cat Pussy Cat*.
- You can also try changing other well-known nonsense poems in the same way we changed *Pussy Cat Pussy Cat*. The following nursery rhymes are good examples of nonsense verse, and are relatively straightforward and easy to change.
 - *There Was An Old Woman Who Lived In a Shoe*
 - *Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater*
 - *Pop goes the Weasel*
 - *There was an Old Lady who Swallowed a Fly*
- Get the children to read their nonsense poems to one another or to the whole class (Explain that poetry is meant to be read aloud.)
- Read particularly good examples to the class.

Writing Nonsense Poetry #2

Use the following facts to introduce nonsense poetry to your class.

- Nonsense poetry is as old as storytelling itself
- It became very popular in the Victorian period through writers like Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear.
- Nonsense poems often contain weird and wonderful creatures and characters. The Jabberwocky, The Jubjub Bird, Mr. Borringe, The Dong with the Luminous Nose.
- In nonsense poems, characters often do things they cannot do in the real world. Jump over the moon, Run away with a spoon, Build a nest in a beard, Live in the nest of an owl.
- **In nonsense poetry, the writer can make up his/her own funny words.** *Fruminous, Floofy, Zozzled, Whiffle.*

Draw attention to the fact that some popular children's nursery rhymes are examples of nonsense poetry. Present *Hey Diddle Diddle* to the class on the board or screen. Read the poem to the class.

*Hey, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon
The little dog laughed to see such fun
And the dish ran away with the spoon.*

Ask the children what parts of the poem they think are the nonsense elements.

- A cat plays a fiddle?
- A cow can jump over the moon?
- A dog can laugh?
- A dish and a spoon can run away together?

Next, get the children to change aspects of the poem, keeping the structure and the rhyme scheme. There are no end of possible variations here. But here is an example you can use to get the class into the swing of things.

*Hey diddle, duddle, a big dirty puddle
The bear bought a new pair of shoes
The white rat squelched in a barrel of mud
And the driver danced a tango with the screws.*

Follow-ups

- Get the children to read their nonsense poems to one another or to the whole class (Explain that poetry is meant to be read aloud.)
- Read good examples to the class.

Writing Nonsense Poetry #3

Explain that nonsense poets often make up their own words for objects, people, animals, and even for descriptions and actions. Introduce Michael Rosen's *Once* as an example. Read the poem to the children or watch Michael Rosen perform it. Ask the children what they think the poem is about. Get them to retell the story.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CelwbH4PZS0

Next, provide printouts of the poem to the class. Get the children to highlight all the nonsense vocabulary (e.g. Gom, ping pong pee, Berrible, etc.). Ask the children to make up a nonsense creature of their own. Get them to draw the creature and give it a name. Then get them to say where their creature lives, what it eats, where it sleeps, etc. When they have their drawing and information ready, tell the class that they are going to write a poem about their creature. Give them the example of *The Slurrbert* to inspire.

A Slurrbert called Herbert, [The creature]
Who lived in the land of Glogg. [Where it lives]
Liked to eat toads by the big bucket loads, [What it eats]
And sleep in a big, slurpy bog. [Where it sleeps]

Draw attention to the simple rhyming scheme that the poem uses. But make sure the children know that they can use whatever rhyming scheme that they want. Or, if they are struggling to create rhymes that they can create a non-rhyming poem. Provide scaffolding, as below, if needed.

When the children have written their verses, get them to read them to each other, and to the class. At this point, tell the children to let their imaginations go, and write additional verses for their nonsense poems. Tell them it doesn't matter how strange or funny their poems are. Nonsense poetry is meant to be strange and funny! If children are struggling for ideas for subsequent verses, you might suggest the following, which are typical themes in nonsense poems:

- *An amazing journey*
- *A terrible ordeal*
- *A strange meeting*



Follow-ups:

- Get the children to read their nonsense poems to one another or to the whole class (Explain that poetry is meant to be read aloud.)
- Read good examples to the class.
- Create poster-sized illustrated poems.

A called

Who lived in

Liked to eat

And sleep in a



HAVE I GOT IT ?

Success Criteria : Nonsense Poetry Writing



I will read *Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat*.

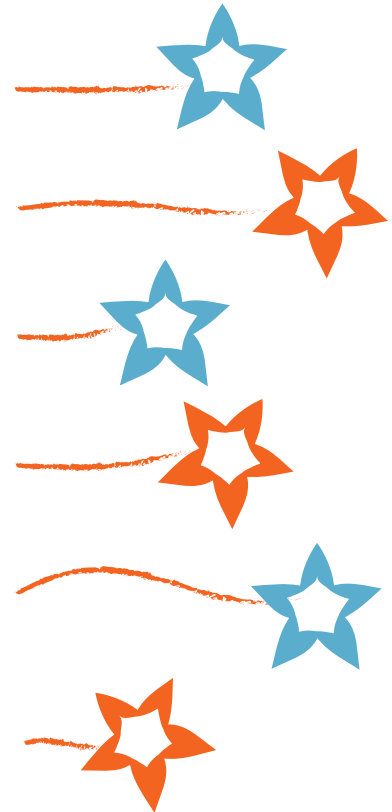
I will change the animal in the poem.

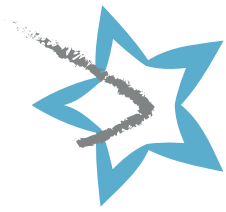
I will change the questions.

I will change the answers.

I will read my poem to my classmates.

I will choose another nursery rhyme and change the words.





HAVE I GOT IT ?

Success Criteria : Nonsense Poetry Writing

I will read *Hey Diddle Diddle*.

I will change the words to *Hey Diddle Diddle*, but keep the rhyme scheme.

I will read my version of *Hey Diddle Diddle* to my classmates.





HAVE I GOT IT ?

Success Criteria : Nonsense Poetry Writing



I will read *Once* by Michael Rosen.

I will highlight all the nonsense words in *Once*.

I will create a nonsense creature of my own.

I will draw my nonsense creature, and give it a name.

I will say where my nonsense creature lives,
what it eats, and where it sleeps.

I will write a poem about my nonsense creature.

I will read my poem to my classmates.

