Nonsense Poetry

KS2 LESSON #1

Created by Gordon Mcintyre.
Free use for educational purposes.

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

Illustration&design by koko rattray

NONSENSE POETRY

Creating nonsense verse encourages young poets to explore rhyme and rhythm. It is particularly effective with Key Stage 2 kids, though there is no reason why it cannot work equally well with younger and older children.

Lewis Carroll is an excellent entry point into nonsense verse for KS2 learners. Carroll wrote many nonsense poems, and in later life, drew his own illustrations. His poems are full of weird and wacky creatures, bizarre places, and wonderfully ludicrous events. You might start your introduction by reading his famous poem, *Jabberwocky*, together as a class or in small groups. Follow up questions for the reading might be:

- *Why is the poem a nonsense poem?*
- *What specific elements of the poem are nonsense?*
- *Does the poem make sense, even though it is full of nonsense?*
- *What kinds of words does Carroll substitute with nonsense words? Verbs? Nouns? Adjectives? Adverbs?*
- *What do you think the following words mean in the poem: brillig, mimsy, frumious, vorpal, whiffling?*

A nice follow-up activity to this is to ask the children to draw the main characters of the poem: the Jabberwock, Jubjub Bird, and Bandersnatch.

The same questions and drawing activity can be used for any nonsense poem based on fantastical creatures, such as *The Dong with the Luminous Nose. The Great Panjandrum Himself, The Jumblies,* or for younger kids *Once* by Michael Rosen.
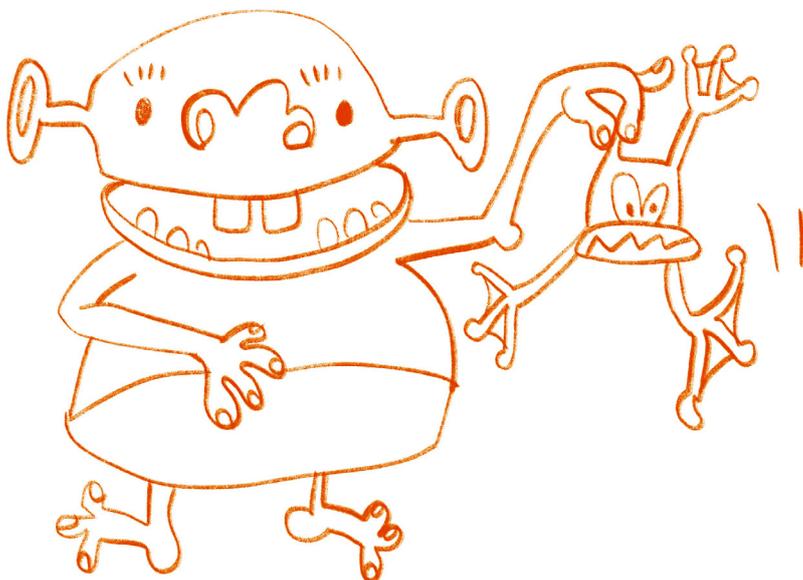
Weird and Wonderful Creatures

Nonsense poems are typically filled with weird and wonderful creatures like the Jabberwock and the Dong. Ask your class to create a weird and wonderful creature of their own. Some guidelines for creating a nonsense creature are as follows:

Choose a character type or combination of types:

- *Dangerous*
- *Bad*
- *Silly*
- *Funny*
- *Clumsy*
- *Forgetful*
- *Kind*

Decide the physical characteristics. A good way to do this is to get the class to start with a real animal as a base. For example, a tiger, a lion, a pelican, or an anteater. Then, ask them to add features from other animals, such as wings, trunks, tails, claws, etc. Finally, they can add some 'special' features, like transparent skin, luminous eyes, an extra leg, or an overlarge head.

Once they have drawn their creature, the children should choose a name for it. The name should be as funny as possible. They can try combinations of words that sum up their creatures: a tiggyphant, an octodog, a bunnyranna, etc. They can then combine the character they have chosen with the name of their creature to make a title for their poem.
Alliteration works well for nonsense poem titles, so encourage them to use it.

- *The Kindly Crocogator*
- *The Terrible Tiggyphant*
- *The 'Oribble Octodog*
- *The Silly Sabre-Toothed Spitfire Dragon*

Ask your children to then decide:

- What their character eats and drinks.
- Where their character lives and sleeps.
- Who their character's friends are.
- If their character is happy or sad, and why it is happy or sad.

Follow-ups:

- Get your children to introduce their creatures to the class.
- Pair your children and get them to colour one another's creatures.

Fantastic Journeys

The narrative in a nonsense poem can be driven by any one of several devices:

- *A journey*
- *A strange meeting*
- *An adventure*
- *A party*

The journey is a particularly popular narrative device for this kind of poetry
(e.g. *The Owl and the Pussycat*).

Ask your class to brainstorm weird and wonderful reasons their nonsense character might want to embark on a journey. Here are a few suggestions to get them going:

- To munch a monstrous muffin
- To meet the queen of clubs.
- To learn to speak Mandalorian.
- To capture the King of the Crocogators.

Then get the children to decide how their character will travel: in a bus, on a hoverboard, on a pogo stick, by teleportation, etc. Encourage the children to include a starting point, stopping off points, and a destination in their journey. Though not too many stopping off points, or the poem may start to turn into a short story!

Of course, magical journeys always have magical events. Ask the children to think of two or three magical events that happen on their creature's journey. If necessary use the following as examples of what you want:

- Lost his toes.
- Met a mermaid called Mindy.
- Got stuck in a jar of marmalade.
- Fought with a feisty frying pan.

Finally, get the kids to decide the outcome of the journey:

- Does it have a happy or a sad ending?
- Does their creature achieve its goal?

Follow-ups:

- Get the children to use the information they have to sketch a plan for their poem. Encourage them to limit their poem to a maximum of four to six verses.
- Check through the children's plans, offering advice and suggestions.

Writing a Nonsense Poem

By this point, the children should have the main character for their nonsense poem. They should also have some fun facts about their creature (e.g. What it eats, where it sleeps, etc.). In addition, they should have an outline of the journey that their character undertakes. The next step is to turn this information into a nonsense poem. Putting their story into verse is the part that children find the most challenging. But with nonsense poetry, the rhyming element of the poem is made a whole lot easier by the fact that if they cannot find a word to rhyme, they can create their own nonsense words.

For example:
- A slurrbert called Herbert who liked to eat sherbet
- A Wornie called Bernie went on a Journey
- The hungry Jumbubber who ate a plumplubber

A good exercise here is to ask the children to create a list of real words that rhyme with the name of their imaginary creature (e.g. Ernie Journey; Herbert Sherbet). Then to supplement their list with some rhyming nonsense words.

Kids tend to find it easier to come up with rhymes when they are working with a set verse structure. If your kids are struggling to create a verse, you might suggest something like the following structure to get them up and running.

A slurrbert called Herbert,
Who lived in the land of Glogg.
Liked to eat toads by the big bucket loads,
And sleep in a big, slurpy bog.

In this structure, you have a rhyming pair in line 1 and another in line 3. While the last words of lines 2 and 4 are also a rhyming pair. Of course, you can also introduce simpler rhyming schemes here, such as AABB or ABAB.

When the pupils have all their ideas and their plan ready, get them to attempt the first line of their poem. For stronger children, you can give them free rein. But for students who are having difficulty, you may wish to provide them with some basic scaffolding (next page).

Having the first line written down is normally a great confidence booster. At this point, tell your class to go for it and complete the first verse. Though you should explain to the children that their work is just a first draft, and there will be opportunities later to rework their poem.

Follow-ups:
- Get the children to read their verses to the class or to one another.
- Read a cross-section of examples to the class.
- Get the kids to swap poems and write the next verse for somebody else's poem.
- Get kids to introduce somebody else's magical creature into their own poem.

Once the first verse has been crafted, encourage the class to complete their poems. Here, you should suggest that they use the same rhyming structure as in verse 1, but not insist upon it. The point here is to allow the class to give free rein to their imaginations.

A _____ called _____ who liked to _____.

A _____ called _____ who went to _____.

A giant called _____ took a fast _____ to _____.

There once was a _____ called _____,

who bought a one-way ticket to _____.

Nonsense Poetry Worksheet

Nonsense poems are often about magical creatures that live in strange places and go on amazing journeys.

Create a Magical Creature

Think of two or three different animals ....

Combine different features of your animals to create a magical creature of your own
(e.g. Elephant's trunk, duck's feet)

....

....

Give your magical creature a nonsense name (e.g. a Slurrbert, a wonkle)

....

Give your Creature an Identity

Answer the following questions:

Where does your creature live? (e.g. in a cardboard box, Inside Vesuvius)

....

What does your creature eat and drink? (e.g. Goonoo berries, Guamp)

....

Where does your creature sleep? (e.g. in a slurpy swamp, on a giant pink pillow)

....

Does your creature have any strange habits?
(e.g. Picking her popple, dancing the fandango on one leg)

....

Describe an Amazing Journey

Where does the journey start? (Londonpool, Sillyville, Curdlistan)

....

Where does the journey end?
(52 Bong Street, On top of Mount Everest, in a caravan in Wales)

....

Why does your character go on an amazing journey?
(to find love, to look for his mum, to rescue a wonkle called Wim)

....

....

Does your character meet anybody on her journey?
(The Queen of the Bunny Zombies, an octopus with nine legs, a kangeroloby called Clint)

....

....

What amazing things happen on your character's journey?

....

....

....

....

....

....

Choose a Rhyming Structure for your Verse

Decide the rhyming structure of your poem. In this kind of poem, it is better to keep the rhyming structure as simple as possible.

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.

Write your Poem

Now write your poem:

- Let your imagination run free.
- Adapt ideas from other poems (all writers do this).
- Try to stick to the same rhyming scheme for each verse (AABB, ABAB).
- Don't worry if your poem is not perfect the first time round (They never are). There will be plenty of opportunities to edit and improve it.

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

HAVE I GOT IT ?

Success Criteria : Nonsense Poetry Writing

I will create an imaginary creature.

I will give my imaginary creature a name.

I will describe my imaginary creature.

What it eats and drinks.

Where it lives.

Strange habits it has.

I will describe an amazing journey my creature takes.

Where the journey starts and ends.

Why my character goes on the journey.

What happens on the journey.

What happens at the end of the journey.

I make my poem playful and funny.

I will create my own nonsense words.

I will use a simple rhyming scheme, like AABB or ABAB. .

I will use alliterations where I can.

I will let my imagination run free.

I will read my poem to my teacher and my classmates.