

Rhyming Our Way into Poetry

The Quarrel

I quarreled with my brother,
I don't know what about,
One thing led to another
And somehow we fell out.
The start of it was slight,
The end of it was strong,
He said he was right,
I knew he was wrong!

We hated one another.
The afternoon turned black.
Then suddenly my brother
Thumped me on the back,
And said, "Oh, come along!
We can't go on all night—
I was in the wrong."
So he was in the right.

Eleanor Farjeon

Before the printing press, bards wove rhyme and patterns into their stories to make them memorable. Popular songs, most rap songs, and many poems continue this trend today. Nursery rhymes, intended for the ear, have been repeated for centuries. Many poets use sophisticated rhyming schemes to effect emotional twists and surprises in their writings.

Today's poets for children often save rhyme for humorous themes or for rhythmic verse. We enjoy reading rhyming poems chorally as the whole class joins in, following the invisible bouncing ball as the rhythm drives us forward.

Many teachers discourage their students from writing rhymed poems, however. English vocabulary has relatively few words that rhyme and for beginning writers, using rhymed words in poems too often leads to the clichéd and banal banging of words, like "fight" and "might," or "love" and "dove." A few words in English are thought to have no perfect rhyme: orange, sugar, radio and elephant.

It is helpful for children to notice how rhyme works through reading and hearing different selections with different types of rhyme. They might note the repetition of a sound falling at the end of a line, rhymes buried within a poem, or the occasional rhyme used sparingly to give power to a poem.

- Children can write short two-line nonsense verses for a class book. They can brainstorm a list of unrelated rhyming words, pairing unusual, humorous words. Perhaps they could use the names of characters from TV shows as a basis for their rhymes. They may want to explore rhyming dictionaries in composing their own poems.
- Using different anthologies, children can search for unusual rhymes, words that rhyme in different ways ("the blowing wind, the busy mind"), rhymes inside lines, rhymes that don't seem to work, the rhyming words with the most syllables, and poems that use the same rhyme scheme, for example, *a b a b*.

Rhyming Time

The Hen

The hen is a ferocious fowl,
She pecks you till she makes you _____ .

And all the time she flaps her wings,
And says the most insulting _____.

And when you try to take her eggs,
She bites large pieces from your _____.

The only safe way to get these,
Is to creep on your hands and _____.

In the meanwhile a friend must hide,
And jump out on the other _____.

And then you snatch the eggs and run
While she pursues the other _____.

The difficulty is, to find
A trusty friend who will not _____.

- Fill in the blanks of the poem above. How many different rhyming words can you discover for each blank? You might use a rhyming dictionary.
- Make a class list of all the suggestions. Are there any words with more than one syllable?
- You can work in small groups for this next activity. First, select one or two poetry anthologies. Then, find a poem with an obvious or heavy rhyme.
- Now, work in your groups to prepare a "game poem." Using "The Hen" as a model, omit various rhyme words.
- Present your "game poem" aloud or on an overhead projector transparency. Let your classmates fill in the blanks.
- Which were the most unusual words that your classmates found?
- *Class Puzzle:* Can you find rhymes for these words? (It may take two words to make a rhyme.)

hippopotami

television

poetry

thunder

tangerine