

Rhyme Time

An Upper KS2 Activity by Roger Stevens

- alliteration
- assonance
- consonance
- rhyme



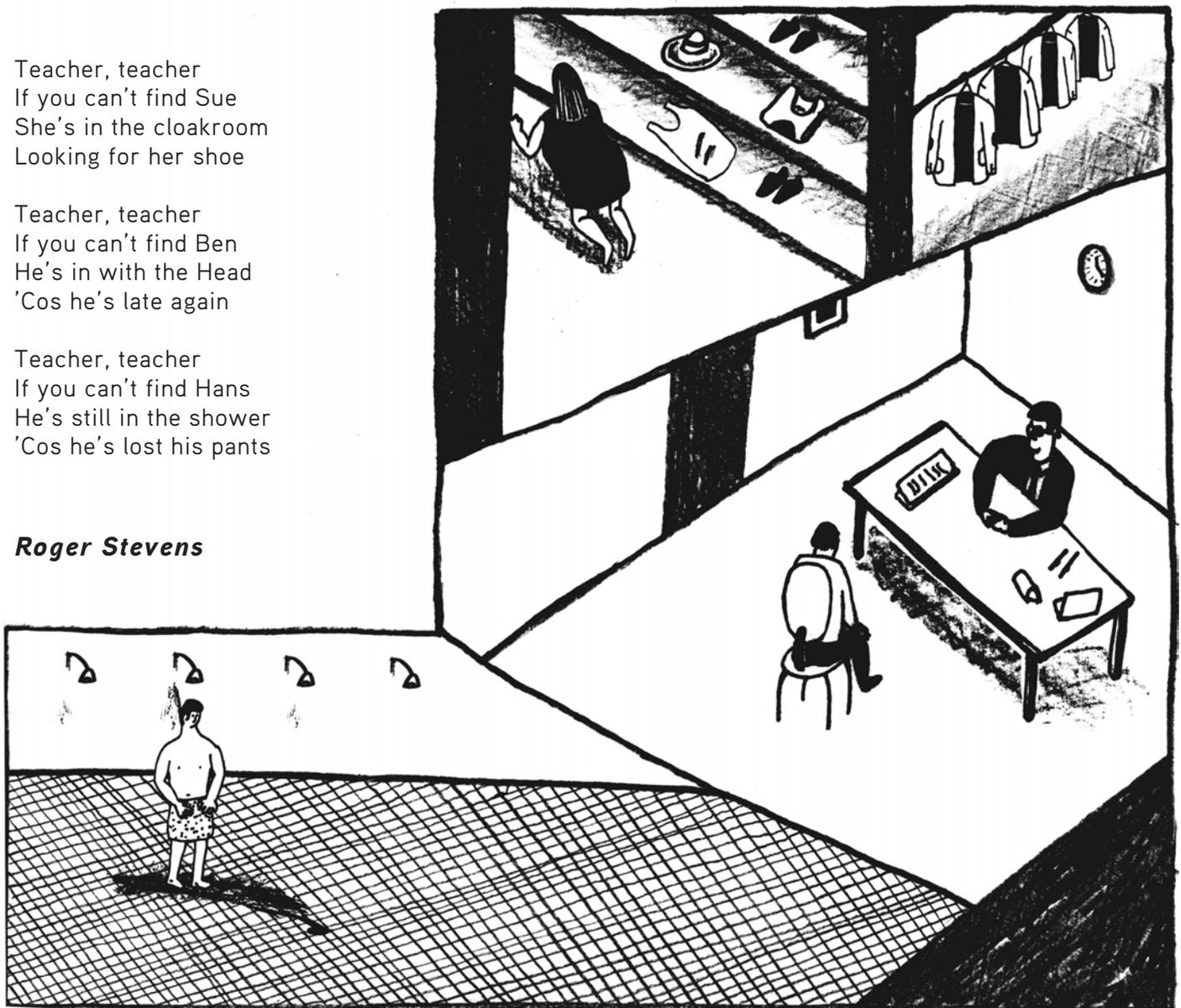
Teacher, Teacher

Teacher, teacher
If you can't find Sue
She's in the cloakroom
Looking for her shoe

Teacher, teacher
If you can't find Ben
He's in with the Head
'Cos he's late again

Teacher, teacher
If you can't find Hans
He's still in the shower
'Cos he's lost his pants

Roger Stevens



First published in *Beware! Low Flying Rabbits* by Roger Stevens (Macmillan Children's Books, 2011). Reproduced by permission of the author.

Children love rhyming and do it naturally while they play. So when they come to write poems it takes very little to encourage them to find rhymes. In fact, the teacher's task might be to rein them in! Children often get carried away and will not only try to make poems rhyme when rhyming is not appropriate or necessary, but will also choose some pretty peculiar words, that have little bearing on the poem's subject matter, just because they rhyme.

Children (and indeed adults) enjoy reading poems that rhyme. But writing rhyming poetry is actually quite difficult. I have divided this activity into two parts. The first is a fun, rhyming activity that demonstrates a very useful technique. The second takes a look at rhyme in all its guises in more depth.

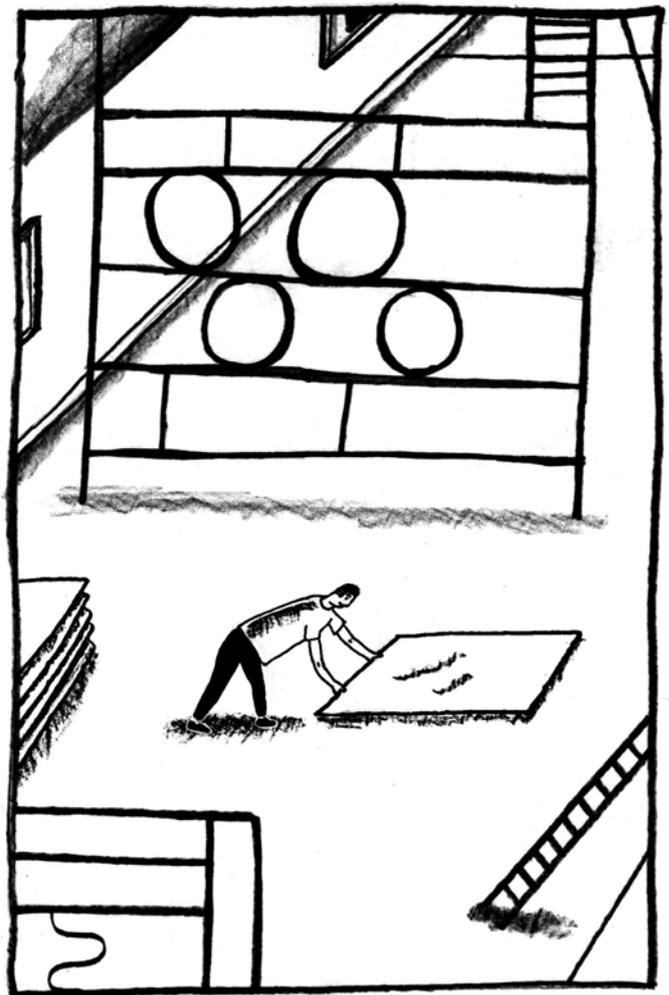
Part One

The last line of a rhyming poem is usually the most important. It's the one you remember as you finish reading. But so often young writers choose a final line that lets their poem down. I call this The Clunky Last Line Syndrome. But it can be avoided. I'll show you how.

Getting started

Don't reveal my poem, 'Teacher, Teacher', yet.

Explain how the last line of a rhyming poem can often let the poem down. Explain that it's sometimes easy to write three brilliant lines but then have real difficulty finding a rhyme that works well for the fourth line. And that you should never use a word that doesn't really work. If you do, you'll end up with a clunky poem, or one that makes no sense, or one that just sounds contrived – as if you've tried too hard to find a rhyme. Explain that you will be sharing a secret



with the class. A trick technique that poets use.

Tell the children that they are each going to write a funny, rhyming, four-line verse. And the last word of the second line will rhyme with the last word of the fourth line.

Discuss as many reasons as you can think of for someone to be missing from the classroom. For example, they could be on an errand for the teacher, they could be looking for the class hamster who has escaped, they could be helping the school secretary or they could be standing outside the Head's door, in trouble. Explain that this is going to be a fun poem – and encourage them to use their imaginations to think up some funny reasons.

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Choose one of the suggestions and write it on the board as two lines (like the last two lines of the verses in my 'Teacher, Teacher' poem above).

For example you might have:

*She's in the hall
Putting the PE mats away*

Ask your pupils to write their own ideas in the same way. They should not be thinking of rhymes yet.

Now read them the 'Teacher, Teacher' poem.

Ask the class to think of a name that rhymes with the last line of their verse, and write their poem in the style of 'Teacher, Teacher'. Your example on the board could be:

*Teacher, teacher
If you can't find Jay
She's in the hall
Putting the PE mats away*

Your children should all have what we have, a basic verse. But like most first drafts, it still needs working on. Look for obvious things that might be improved. Jay is often a boy's name, so in our poem on the board we need to change 'she' to 'he'.

Get your students to check that the rhythm of their poem is right by reading it out loud. The flow is important. In our example you can hear two beats (or stressed syllables) in each of the first three lines. '**T**eacher, **t**eacher, if you **can't** find **J**ay'. Alter the last two lines to fit the same rhythm.

Your verse could now be:

*Teacher, teacher
If you **can't** find **J**ay
He's **in** the **h**all
Putting **m**ats away*

That sounds much better. Now the poem rhymes naturally, makes sense and has a good rhythmic flow. It tells a little story. Check that your pupils have done the same with their poems.

The important thing here is to make sure the children understand that you've taught them how to make a better sounding rhyme. If you'd gone for: 'who's in the hall putting mats away, look teacher, it's Jay', then it sounds like you've contrived a name to fit your rhyme. But now you know how to avoid Clunky Last Line Syndrome.



POET'S TIP

The trick is always to think of the last line first. And then find your rhyme. This is how I wrote 'Teacher, Teacher'. I thought of the pupils' names last, so that I could make them rhyme with what was going on. Read everyone this poem then see if they'd like to flex their rhyming muscles with a 'Teacher, Teacher' version of their own. You could also change the theme of the poem and write about best friends, pets or places – anything where the second line can end with a name.



Jenny

The blind dog on the pebble beach
snuffles the grey-green savoury air
cocks her head
to the salt splash of the sea.

The boy in the red jacket
chooses a stone
marks it with a cross
throws it in a high arc
black against the sky
hears it fall. Clatter.

The blind dog by the sea
runs, ungainly,
all lop-sided listening
left ear leaning
to that last limestone chatter.

The blind dog on the beach
finds the place –
hoovers her soft muzzle over the heap
sniffs and sifts the scents
searches
finds the one she knows.

Jan Dean



Poem to be published in *The Penguin in Lost Property* by Jan Dean and Roger Stevens (Macmillan Children's Books, 2014).
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Part Two

At first glance Jan Dean's poem does not appear to be a rhyming poem. But interestingly it does rely very much on rhyme and other similar devices. This activity looks at identifying half rhymes and other types of sound pairings, showing your students how to use them in their own poetry.

Getting started

Do not show the children Jan Dean's poem yet.

Explain that the children are each going to write a poem about a particular animal, maybe a pet or a relative's pet, and their relationship with it.

Start by asking the children to write down words, phrases, thoughts about this animal. Everything should be written down very quickly without too much deliberation; they are simply getting together some facts and ideas.

While they are writing, throw out some suggestions to encourage them. Describe the animal: its size, colour, length of hair. What is its temperament: is it placid, angry, anxious, calm? How does it move? Where did it come from? How do you get on with it? Is there anything unusual about it?

Ask them to arrange some or all of the words they have written into short phrases one underneath the other, to resemble a poem. Reassure them that they've not finished yet. These pieces are the bare bones of a poem.

Now share Jan Dean's poem with the class.

Assonance

Assonance can be described as 'vowel rhymes' where similar vowel sounds are repeated: e.g. motor boat.

Consonance

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds. It's like alliteration, but doesn't necessarily occur at the start of a word: e.g. the 'T' sounds in 'pitter patter'.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is when a word makes the sound of the thing it is describing: e.g. drip.

Discussing 'Jenny'

Read the poem out loud, at least twice. The meaning of a poem can be hard to grasp in one go; on a second or third reading you will hear things you missed the first time. The children will also begin to get a feel for the sound of the words.

Ask the pupils if this is a rhyming poem. The obvious answer is 'No'. Agree that this is true, if you're listening only to the ends of the lines, but suggest that there are, in fact, lots of rhymes and other sound pairings in other parts of the poem. These play an important role in the way the poem works.

Ask everyone to identify what is at work in the poem. Here are some suggestions:

- Actual rhymes. There are a few. For example, head/red, sea/ungainly, clatter/chatter.
- Alliteration. The poem is full of alliteration. In verse one, for example, blind/beach, grey-green, salt/splash/sea.
- Assonance. There are lots of vowel rhymes here. For example, in verse two, stone/throws, jacket/black/clatter.

- Consonance. For example, in verse three, last/ limestone – followed by the slight suggestion of the soft ‘T’ in listening.
- Half rhymes and part rhymes. As you begin to study the poem you begin to see and hear half rhymes, part rhymes and near rhymes. For example, grey and savoury.

Now find out how the children feel the rhymes in the poem help its mood and the impact it makes. For example, do the ‘S’ sounds that run through the poem suggest the sound of the sea? You might also want to discuss other effects, such as onomatopoeia and repetition.

Writing the poem

Now ask the children to return to their own poems and, using what they have learned from ‘Jenny’, to create internal rhymes. They should write as many rough drafts as they like, but concentrate on the language of the poem, changing, adding to or improving as they think fit.

They can extend lines, incorporate different ideas, add more words or even start again from scratch. But all the time they should be aware of rhyme.

When pupils are satisfied with their poems ask them to share with the class.



POET'S TIP

Think about adventures you have had with pets. I wrote a poem about our old dog Shelley who *loved* water and would always shake herself over sunbathers on the beach. Another time she couldn't climb out of a rock pool and nearly drowned. And once she escaped and we found her trying to round up sheep on a Welsh hillside. I'm getting the idea for another poem now...



Now Try This

Rhyming poems

‘Down Behind the Dustbin’ by Michael Rosen from *Wouldn't You Like To Know* by Michael Rosen (Puffin, 1981). ‘After the Summer’ and ‘Garden Shed’ by Roger Stevens from *What Rhymes With Sneeze?* by Roger Stevens (A&C Black, 2012).

Animal poems

‘Guilty’, ‘Our Dog’s Tail’ and ‘My Dog’ all by Brian Moses from *A Cat Called Elvis* by Brian Moses (Macmillan Children’s Books, 2012).

Classic poems with intricate rhymes

‘Cargoes’ by John Masefield from *A Time to Speak and a Time to Listen*, Ed. Celia Warren (Scholfield & Sims, 2013). This excellent book also has a companion teacher’s volume.

Alternatively, ‘From a Railway Carriage’ by Robert Louis Stevenson and ‘Ozymandias’ by Percy Bysshe Shelley are good examples and both found in *The Works*, Ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan Children’s Books, 2010).