

Jabberwocky

Poetry Studies for Junior High

James and Sheila Carroll, editors



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Cover illustration by John Tenniel (1820 –1914) from the poem “Jabberwocky”. Tenniel is known for his illustrations of Lewis Carroll’s works, notably *Alice in Wonderland*.

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INTRODUCTION

Prose is words in order. Poetry is the right words in the right order. -Walt Whitman

Poetry is imaginary gardens with real toads in them. -Marianne Moore

A poem begins with a lump in the throat. -Robert Frost

Learning to enjoy *and* understand a poem is the best part of studying poetry in the upper grades. By junior high a student has, hopefully, enjoyed everything from Winnie the Pooh, Robert Louis Stevenson to Robert Frost. Now the student has the maturity to explore further by asking questions such as, why has the poet selected those words, this rhythm or that metaphor?

About the Poems

In this collection you will find a range of poems. Some are literary classics, others, while part of our culture, are not considered “great art”. Each poem has something to offer. Each poem has a world of its own that the reader enters. Each poem has its own language and symbols. Think, for example, of Emily Dickenson’s cryptic “There Is No Frigate like a Book”. In a mere eight lines she takes a book and transforms it into a flying ship, a galloping horse and a chariot in words that echo still 150 years later. No essay or novel can achieve this.

Guidelines for Studying the Poems:

- Plan to read the poem at least twice, the first time silently for awareness of the rhythm and meaning, the second out loud for mastery and a deeper understanding of the meaning.
- Purchase a spiral notebook or pages that can be added to a three-ring binder to record your answers in. Optionally, you can use the computer and type your answers. Always put the title of the poem at the top of the page of your answers to study questions.
- Each poem should be narrated orally or in writing. In some cases we make of point of asking you to narrate so you will capture all the poet intends.
- Underlining helps with understanding: When answering questions that take you back into the poem, underline your answers. Of course, you can always make a copy of the page if you prefer not to use pen or pencil in the book.
- There are 32 poems, one for each week of LBC’s four-term school year. Plan to

read one poem per week. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a long poem. You may want to take two weeks to read it.

- During Flex Week you will be asked to “choose the poem you enjoyed the most from this term, read it aloud, explain fully what the poem is describing and why you like it.

A Final Note

To go further into the meaning of a poem you must slow down long enough to see and hear and taste the world the poet has created. Once you do, you will find a delight like no other.



Illustration: Sir John Tenniel

Jabberwocky

Lewis Carroll

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that
catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand;
Long time the manxome foe he
sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe. 🐉

“Jabberwocky” is from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872. It is considered by many to be one of the greatest nonsense poems written in the English language. The poem is sometimes used in schools to teach students about the use of *portmanteau*, a word whose meaning comes from the blending of two or more distinct sounds (as *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*) and nonsense words, as well as use of nouns and verbs to add meaning.



Study Questions

1. Even though much of this poem is ‘invented’ words, or *portmanteau*, it does make sense. Narrate the poem, either orally, or in writing.
2. Write your three favorite invented nouns, verbs and adjectives from the poem.
3. Think of a poem you already know that has a strong rhythm. “Jack and Jill Went Up the Hill” for example, and retell it using some of your own invented language.

Jack and Jill
Went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.

Jack fell down
And broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

4. Word search: Look up the meanings of the following words and write out the definitions that directly apply to the poem: *jabberwock* and *foe*.

The Walrus and the Carpenter

Lewis Carroll



The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright—
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,
Because she thought the sun
Had got no business to be there
After the day was done—
“It’s very rude of him,” she said,
“To come and spoil the fun.”

The sea was wet as wet could be,
The sands were dry as dry.
You could not see a cloud, because
No cloud was in the sky:
No birds were flying overhead—
There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand;
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:
“If this were only cleared away,”
They said, “it would be grand!”

“If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose,” the Walrus said,
“That they could get it clear?”
“I doubt it,” said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

“O Oysters, come and walk with us!”
The Walrus did beseech.
“A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach:
We cannot do with more than four,
To give a hand to each.”

The eldest Oyster looked at him,
But never a word he said:
The eldest Oyster winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head—
Meaning to say he did not choose
To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,
All eager for the treat:
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,
Their shoes were clean and neat—
And this was odd, because, you know,
They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more, and more, and more—
All hopping through the frothy waves,
And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.



“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”

“But wait a bit,” the Oysters cried,
“Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!”
“No hurry!” said the Carpenter.
They thanked him much for that.

“A loaf of bread,” the Walrus said,
“Is what we chiefly need:
Pepper and vinegar besides
Are very good indeed—
Now if you’re ready, Oysters dear,
We can begin to feed.”

“But not on us!” the Oysters cried,
Turning a little blue.
“After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do!”
“The night is fine,” the Walrus said.
“Do you admire the view?”

“It was so kind of you to come!
And you are very nice!”
The Carpenter said nothing but
“Cut us another slice:
I wish you were not quite so deaf—
I’ve had to ask you twice!”

“It seems a shame,” the Walrus said,
“To play them such a trick,
After we’ve brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!”
The Carpenter said nothing but
“The butter’s spread too thick!”

“I weep for you,” the Walrus said:
I deeply sympathize.’
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

“O Oysters,” said the Carpenter,
“You’ve had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?”
But answer came there none—
And this was scarcely odd, because
They’d eaten every one.” 🐚



Illustrations: Sir John Tenniel



Study Questions

1. This time Carroll gives us words we know (or can look up), but the story the poem describes is a bit nonsensical. Do a written or oral narration of the poem.
2. Imagine you are walking down the beach with a walrus. What would *you* chat about? Write a short dialogue using proper punctuation and quotation marks. Refer to the poem for examples.
3. Write two or three sentences describing why the sun might want to shine at midnight.
4. Word search: Look up the meaning of these words and write out the definitions that apply to the poem: *sulky*, *beseech*, and *sealing wax*.