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Poetry reading and writing activity: write a limerick

A guide to reading the limerick 'Don't Go, Joe' by Susanne Connolly (see poem below), exploring poetic techniques in the poem, and writing in response as a class and individually.

Getting to know the poem

Ask your class to sit with their eyes closed while you read aloud 'Don't Go, Joe' by Susanne Connolly (see below). Which parts did they like? Which bits stuck in their heads? Did they expect the ending? There are no wrong answers! Display the poem and read it again.

Limericks

This poem is a limerick. Limericks have been around since the 1700s, but they became particularly popular with the publication of Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846. They are almost always funny and cheeky. They often start with the line 'There was a young man / woman from...', like in Susanne's poem.

Limericks follow a distinctive rhythm and rhyme scheme, with lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyming together and lines 3 and 4 rhyming together. Lines 1, 2 and 5 are longer, with three stresses per line. Lines 3 and 4 are shorter, with two stresses per line.

Read 'Don't Go, Joe' all together, putting lots of emphasis on the stresses (underlined and emboldened here) to really get familiar with the bouncy rhythm.

There <u>was</u> a young <u>man</u> from Dund <u>ee</u>	(<u>3</u> stresses, rhyme a)
pre <u>par</u> ing to <u>sail</u> out to <u>sea</u> .	(<u>3</u> stresses, rhyme a)
His <u>mo</u> ther said, " <u>Joe</u> ,"	(<u>2</u> stresses, rhyme b)
I <u>can't</u> let you <u>go</u> .	(<u>2</u> stresses, rhyme b)
It's <u>dark</u> , and you've <u>only</u> turned <u>three</u> ."	(<u>3</u> stresses, rhyme a)

Playing with rhythm

The technical terms for limerick metre can be found online (there's a thorough guide at the Academy of American Poets), but it's easiest to get to grips with it through practice and playing around.

Take away the words and just say these sounds. Have fun dancing / stamping / clapping / clicking along to the beat – anything to get the feel of it in your bodies!

da DUM da da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM



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Then take each line of the poem and have fun discussing how you could change it.

- What other place names do you know that fit the rhythm of 'Dundee'?
- Now try starting the limerick with 'There was a young woman from X' – you'll need a single syllable place name instead, like 'Bude', 'Crewe', or 'Tring'.
- Sometimes a limerick might have a different number of unstressed 'da' sounds, but it will always have the same number of stressed 'DUM' sounds. So, if you start 'There was a young woman from...' you could also have a two-syllable place name that starts with a stressed syllable, like 'London', 'Chester', or 'Brighton'. It will still fit the limerick rhythm, because the second syllable is unstressed.
- (We're just playing around line by line here, but when you come to writing, bear in mind that the place name in line 1 will be your rhyming word for lines 2 and 5 as well, so you won't want anything too tricky!)
- What other things could the young man or woman be preparing to do, which would also fit the rhythm? Perhaps your character could be 'preparing to fly to the moon' or 'preparing to climb a big wall' or 'preparing to dance till she dropped'.
- What other names would fit in line 3? Any from your class?
- What happens if you change the word 'mother'? 'Father', 'sister', 'brother', 'uncle', 'auntie' and 'teacher' all have the same rhythm. But if you change the line to 'His friend said...' or 'Her aunt said...' then you will need to change the end of the line to two syllables: 'His friend said: "Oh, Paul!"', 'Her aunt said: "Just stop!"'
- What else might the mother / sister / friend / teacher etc say in the last two lines?

Class warm-up

Write a class limerick all together. For ease, you could use this structure, adapted from Susanne's poem:

There was a young pupil from [DUM]
Preparing to [DUM da da DUM]
Her friend said: "Oh, no!
I can't let you go!
[da DUM da da DUM da da DUM]"

Test each new line as you go against the rhythm of Susanne's lines, to make sure it fits.

Can you make the last line a bit of a twist – something silly, funny or unexpected? It doesn't have to be part of the friend's speech – the friend could do something to stop him/her going instead: 'And stapled her coat to the chair' or 'And whisked him away on a broom'.

Write your limerick on the board, highlighting the parts where the stresses fall. Read it out loud together, exaggerating the rhythm at first, then reading it more naturally.



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Individual writing

Once you feel like your pupils have got the hang of the limerick form, invite them to write their own. They can use Susanne's 'I can't let you go' idea or come up with an entirely new situation.

Encourage them to be creative and to redraft, scribble out and change things – poets almost never get their poems right first time and their notebooks tend to be very messy! When they're ready to write their poem up neatly, you may like to use the print-out template below. What will they choose as their title?

Explain that if you have written a poem inspired by someone else, it's important to acknowledge them – and the easiest way to do this is with a short line underneath the title (see below).

We would love to see what your pupils come up with! Email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



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Inspired by the limerick 'Don't Go, Joe' by Susanne Connolly

by



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Don't Go, Joe

A limerick by Susanne Connolly

There was a young man from Dundee
preparing to sail out to sea.
His mother said, "Joe,
I can't let you go.
It's dark, and you've only turned three."