

Let Me Help You

# Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write  
Stories for Kids*

*Lesson 10*

**SLICE OF LIFE  
RHYME**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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# Slice of Life Story

Slice of life is the no-man's-land of fiction writing—with no rules, no why's, no wherefore's.

## Anything goes

**Slice of life stories “drop the reader into a situation that has a history. The history propels the story, and the story either ends the history or starts a new history. In some cases, the story makes it clear that the history is inescapable no matter what the character who owns it does, and that nothing short of death is going to modify it or end it.”**

(Rich DeMarinis  
The Art and Craft of the Short Story  
pp. 27-28)

**It opens anywhere.** It closes anywhere. It goes anywhere. Look, Ma, no rules.

But the slice of life story brings its history front stage to the footlights. You start in the middle of a day, of an action, of a trial, of a kiss. You will leave the story whenever you want. Death will certainly end it. But who wants it to end?

Who cares?

The writer doesn't, you say?

Oh, yes, he does. Don't kid yourself. Sure, on the one hand there are no rules. But on the other, all the rules in the book meet here.

You start anywhere in the narrative you wish. You go as long as it takes to score a point. Then you end it once that's done. You don't need closing action; you just stop. Lights out! Story's over!

**But it's not easy. You've got to keep your reader hooked.** All you know about heightening tension and drama you bring to bear here. All you know about tenderness and compassion—here. All you know about character strength and uniqueness—right here.

Do you know how to build suspense? Try it on a no-place kind of opening. So you've mastered creating problems and hinting at solutions desired? Here, you're on stage. Curtain's going up.

**You're out in front of the audience. What are you going to do?**

Will you go funky? Gonna bring out the gimmicks? The dialects? The ade-noids?

Slice of life goes deep. The story seems like nothing but nothing. Here come the people. They're raising the window shade. The window's open. Listen to what they say. Watch what they do. Oh-oh. They're leaving now. Where'd they go?

But the impression left lasts. You've met authentic characters in "actual" settings. This is life as it is—no complicated situation, no long and slow rising action, no artfully contrived crisis, no climax bringing many threads into focus, no solution to any problem.

**Now, just because there is no formula doesn't mean there is no crisis, no climax.** You can have these in slice of life as you let things "happen." But you are coming on stage in the middle of an act, and you stay for just a brief amount of time. You don't have all the time in the world. The reader must be satisfied when the characters leave, satisfied that he now knows all he really needs to know.

Many Old Testament narratives are slice of life stories. There's nothing ostentatious there. The curtain goes up on ordinary people—but the significance is penetrating, even eternal.

Eve is in the garden. She's tempted. She eats. Adam eats. What could be more natural?

**But the consequences? Devastating.**

Chapter by chapter through Genesis

and Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles you have a succession of slice of life stories where violence and treachery, triumph and glory, death and grief stalk a family and then a nation.

Ordinary people do ordinary things; but irony, symbolism that often becomes typological, and levels of meaning and significance make this a Book of Books for all people.

**Want to know how to write slice of life? It's all there.**

## Pilate

*(Set the scene, time, place)*

**Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.**

*(Describe the problem)*

**Pilate then went out unto them, and said, "What accusation bring ye against this man?"**

**They answered and said unto him, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee."**

**Then said Pilate unto them, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."**

**The Jews therefore said unto him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."**

**Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Je-**

sus, and said unto him, “Art thou the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered him, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?”

*(Identify what’s at stake)*

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

Pilate therefore said unto him, “Art thou a king then?”

Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

*(Force an immediate decision)*

Pilate saith unto him, “What is truth?”

And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews and saith unto them, “I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?”

Then cried they all again, saying, “Not this man, but Barabbas.”

Now Barabbas was a robber.

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.

And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they smote him with their hands.

Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, “Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.”

Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe.

And Pilate saith unto them, “Behold the man!”

When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify him, crucify him.”

Pilate saith unto them, “Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.”

The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.”

*(Antagonist backs off—a weakling)*

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, “Whence art thou?”

But Jesus gave him no answer.

Then saith Pilate unto him, “Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?”

Jesus answered, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.”

*(Move toward confrontation)*

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, “Behold your King!”

*(Confrontation)*

But they cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him.”

Pilate saith unto them, “Shall I crucify your King?”

The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.

And he, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,

**JESUS OF NAZARETH  
THE KING OF THE JEWS**

This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.

Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, “Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’”

*(Open end)*

Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

###

Perhaps by putting the steps of the problem and solution structure in place over various sections of these verses I am forcing a contrivance on the slice of life.

This structure doesn’t need a confrontation. It doesn’t need any kind of immediate decision with someone backing off a weakling or a failure.

In this passage, Pilate is forcing questions on the Prisoner. We know, actually, he, Pilate, is the one on trial.

But putting the labels on different sections of the passage does highlight the fact that this is drama. There is a problem that needs solving.

The doubts and fears of all the years were met in Him that night.

There is no need for an introduction; nor is there a need for an ending. You can’t say the last line of this sec-

tion is either upbeat or downbeat. “What I have written I have written.”

Slice of life has power.

It’s an art form for craftsmen.

In **THE CHOSEN BABY** by Valentina P. Wasson (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1977) you have a young couple seeking to share their home with children. They adopt first a baby boy, then a baby girl.

The narrative is ordinary life—no suspense, no plot. It tells the adoptive procedure in story form.

**YOUR TURN:** Do you know a couple who have tried to adopt a child? Sometimes they must go overseas to get one. Tell their story—with sympathy.

In **CORNROWS** by Camille Yarbrough (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1979) Sister and Brother love to hear Mama and Great Gramma tell stories while they braid cornrows in the children’s hair. They tell stories of their Yoruba ancestors in Africa and explain the significance of cornrow symbolism.

**YOUR TURN:** What do women talk about while they brush a young girl’s hair? If you have this ritual in your home, record the conversation some night and then write it up. It is better if those being recorded don’t know it. You must tell them later.

In **OCTOPUS** by Evelyn Shaw (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) an octopus is blocked by falling rocks from returning to her cave home.

She searches for another. It’s time for her to lay her eggs.

She does so, taking care to block her new cave so fish don’t eat the eggs.

The babies hatch and shortly leave the cave to take up an independent life of their own. The story has a little

suspense in that we want the heroine to find a new home.

This is a “Science I Can Read” book. Each sentence has the subject of the verb at or near the beginning of all 144 sentences. The average length of the sentences is about six words.

**YOUR TURN:** You tell a science story in simple language. Notice, this author used 144 sentences. Don’t think one page is enough.

**WASHDAY** by Susan Merrill (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) is a nostalgia story, beginning with “When I was a little girl, washday was my favorite day.”

She tells how the family would help gather the clothes and sheets, wash them in the washing machine, and take them out to the clothes line. She would help her mama hang the sheets and then she would run through them.

One day a storm came, and they had to rush the laundry inside.

The book ends that after supper they helped one another make the beds. Mama told them not to forget the hospital corners. The children tried to get all the blankets smooth without any wrinkles.

She loved getting in bed with clean sheets. She smelled the green grass smell and warm sun smell. She loved to snuggle down deep and listen to the rain beat on her bedroom window. What for many was work, she found to be fun.

**YOUR TURN:** See the warm, friendly tone in the writing? Make sure your prose sings like that. Attention to facts and feelings keeps this from being a “goody-two-shoes” kind of story where everything is nice-nice-nice. Can you have a Christian child enjoy doing dishes? Vacuuming? Helping around the house, yard, garage, attic, the neighbors?

In all of these, the story contains no real plot. We are not contriving anything. We're just presenting the normalcy of life.

We do need to know the main characters early. We need time of day, and we need setting.

Since there's no goal, we don't need to hint at the conclusion we desire.

But we're not to be aimless.

Our slice of life should have significance to *someone*.

In **BUS RIDE** by Nancy Jewell (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978), Janie takes a bus ride alone, leaving Mama and Papa in the city and going into the country to meet Grandpa. A friendly stranger, Mrs. Rivers, gives her assurance during the trip.

**YOUR TURN:** You could write about a boy leaving his home town and going up to Jerusalem to observe a Feast. As he walks, friendly people give him assurance he's going in the right direction. Don't make a stranger the Savior because we don't want to put a story in children's minds about Him that isn't biblically true.

In **DREAMS** by Ezra Jack Keats (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), after supper Roberto puts a paper mouse he made at school on his window sill.

Late at night, he can't sleep.

Looking out his window, he sees a dog has ambushed Archie's cat.

Roberto's sleeve brushes the mouse off the sill and its descending shadow scares the dog off.

Comes morning, Roberto still dreams.

**YOUR TURN:** A child wakes in the night and sees someone in trouble. Something he does, in Roberto's case accidentally, solves the problem. Your child could

waken in the night and see someone breaking into the church next door. His shouts scare the villain off.

**WALLS ARE TO BE WALKED** by Nathan Zimelman and illustrated by Donald Carrick (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977).

Library of Congress summary: The short distance between school and home offers an hour of adventure for a young boy.

The text, one sentence long with a series of adverb clauses beginning with "because," gives the 17 delightful reasons—swings, kites, balls, clouds, weeds, spaceships (dandelion hairs), sidewalk cracks, bugs, butterflies, girls, lunch boxes forgotten, walls, trees, birds' nests, streams, cats, dogs—why it takes Jimmy Jarnigan, 6, one hour to walk the three blocks home from school.

**YOUR TURN:** This is a wonderful book and it's all one sentence. See how long a story you can tell in one sentence. You can best string it out with a series of parallel adverb clauses or participial "ing" phrases (swinging, pulling, running, skipping).

**FANCY THAT** by Pamela Allen (Orchard Books, New York, 1987) and illustrated in watercolor by the author uses short declarative sentences beginning with "at the bottom of our garden is a red tin shed" to lead us to a hen sitting on eggs on straw in a small square box where, to the amazement of white leghorns and eventually herself ("Fancy that!"), she hatches six eggs.

**YOUR TURN:** Work through the details slowly to take us from here to there to find a surprise. You can change "Fancy That!" to "Imagine that!" or "See that" or "Would you look at that!" once you arrive at the surprise.



In **GRANNY AND ME** by Robin Ballard (Greenwillow Books, New York, 1992) and illustrated in watercolor by the author.

Annie, who identifies herself (“This is me, Annie, and this is my grandmother”), tells the things they like to do together: ride in her car, go to the beach, bake cookies, dress up, look at family photos. Four pages identify photos of unusual people in the family. Six pages show photos of Annie’s antecedents. As they put the pictures away, Granny gets her camera out for a picture, they eat cookies and go to bed. Page one had “I like the things we do together.” Page 24 has “I love the things we do together.”

**YOUR TURN:** You can personalize a story for a relative like this by telling all the things the two of you do together. Draw pictures even if you are no artist (some people don’t think Grandma Moses was much of an artist). You can never tell what editor might like your work. Include things that center on the Lord Jesus.

**THE HALF BIRTHDAY PARTY** by Charlotte Pomerantz and illustrated by DyAnne DeSalvo-Ryan (New York: Clarion Books, 1984) begins with: “One day, when Daniel’s sister Katie was six months old, she stood for the first time.”

Because she was half a year old, Daniel decided to give his sister a half birthday party. He told each guest to bring half a present. One brings one slipper, another one ear ring. She gets half a cake. Daniel gives half a moon.

“Daniel,” his mother whispered, “is it true that you knew all along that you would give Katie a half-moon?”

A little smile crossed his face. “It’s

half true,” he said.

**YOUR TURN:** This story plays on words at the end to find its charm. All families enjoy parties. Write one of them into a story of yours like this. Tell the reason everyone came and share what each one brought. Tell what and how games were played and who won. Include grace at the table before the cake and ice cream are served.

**THROUGH MOON AND STARS AND NIGHT SKIES** by Ann Turner with pictures by James-Graham Hale (Harper and Row, Publishers, 1990).

Library of Congress summary: A boy who came from far away to be adopted by a couple in this country remembers how unfamiliar and frightening some of the things were in his new home before he accepted the love to be found there.

First sentence: Let me tell the story this time, Momma.

The story he tells is of the adoption of a foreign child, himself—how he had pictured his new home and family before he came. He had flown through night skies to find they were all true. The publishers call it a “tender story of a very special kind of love.”

**YOUR TURN:** Missionary kids have this same kind of experience when they leave their home far away and come back to the States for school. Usually they stay with relatives, sometimes close family friends. All feel new and all miss their family.

**THE MOON COMES HOME** by Mary Jo Salter, illustrated by Stacy Schuett (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989)

Library of Congress summary: On the trip home by car from Grandmother’s house, a young child observes the moon.

First sentence: Tonight, when we stepped out from Grandmother's house, the moon floated above her lawn—a circle like an eye the night would never close.

Written by a poet and full of figures of speech—especially similes and metaphors—the book details the impressions a child has when discovering the omnipresence of the moon in the night sky.

**YOUR TURN:** Editors, all well educated, respond to well written prose that contains such similes as the one in the first sentence. Remember a simile compares two things using “like” or “as” while a metaphor uses neither (He was a bull in a china shop). Collect figures of speech when you find them. Keep your mind and heart open so you can concoct them. Write your impressions (when and where) when you first noticed the moon following you home.

**MARA IN THE MORNING** by C. B. Christiansen, illustrated by Catherine Stock (New York: Atheneum, 1991)

Library of Congress summary: Moving quietly around her house, Mara listens to peaceful sounds of the early morning.

First sentence: Mara wakes up early. The house is still.

The child loves “the silent, soothing music of the morning” and moves through the house to the kitchen. She sees her parents, brother and cat asleep and does not disturb them. As she reads a picture book, her mother comes, wearing a “butter yellow bathrobe” and carrying hot chocolate. The two sit together listening to the “silent, soothing music of the morning.” The author uses sibilants (s words) and labials (tongue words) and many

words beginning with m.

**YOUR TURN:** Let your character get up early in the morning at your house and enjoy everything he/she sees and hears—especially the things the Lord has made.

**SAYING GOODBYE TO DADDY** by Judith Vigna (Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman & Company, 1991.)

Her daddy has been killed in an auto accident. Young Clare lives through the family's grief, goes to the funeral and the grave site. She finds it hard to say goodbye. In time, her mother's love and nearby reminders of Daddy help Clare to accept life's dark side and to feel safe.

**YOUR TURN:** Accepting tragedy is part of the life of many children, especially those who must live through a divorce or a parent at war. Tell sympathetically the story of a child who must cope with a rent heart. Let him/her find comfort in knowing the Lord is near.

**STINA'S VISIT** by Lena Anderson (translated from Swedish) with 16 double-page watercolor illustrations by the author (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1991).

Stina, visiting her grandfather at his island home, visits Mr. Stretchit (grandfather's life-long friend) on his birthday. Overjoyed that someone remembered, Mr. Stretchit tells stories from his sea-faring youth. He gives Stina the tub he sailed home in when his ship was sunk. Next day, Stina tries it out but cannot understand how Mr. Stretchit had managed to fit in it.

**YOUR TURN:** A child visits a friend of her grandfather's, someone he has known for a long, long time. Stories of the way God led in days gone by will be told and a gift may be given. The child may or may not understand the gift but is thankful to have it.

**SNOW DAY** by Moira Fain (New York: Walker and Company, 1996).

Library of Congress summary: Although Sister Agatha Ann asks her to write a poem, Maggie wants to draw it instead; a day of playing in the snow resolves the dilemma.

First sentence: Sister Agatha Ann was the toughest teacher in the whole school.

Sister punishes Maggie Murphy for smearing ink on her desk. She must write a poem due the next day. Maggie plays that night and fears the next day's punishment. Next day is a snow day—no school. Sister Agatha Ann and other nuns join the children in sleigh riding. The next day Maggie sings her poem as she draws a picture on the blackboard.

**YOUR TURN:** She's been naughty. She's being punished. She gets a reprieve—snow day. She sings her assignment and wins praise. Not every naughty child escapes this easily. But it's winsome when she does.

**BIG MEETING** by Dee Parmer Woodtor and illustrated by Delores Johnson (New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996).

Library of Congress summary: A church family, scattered all over, travel to the South to attend "Big Meeting" at the Bethel A. M. E. Church where they worship and get together to eat and renew old ties.

First sentence: Big Meeting! It happens the third week in August, in some places the second, when people get together Down Home.

Told in first person by Ethelene, who likes being called Sweet Pea, the

story explains all the happenings when former parishioners of the Bethel A. M. E. Church return for a reunion. Visitors testify how far they've come. After the meeting, they take a short cut home through the cemetery and then have a big lunch. After a week more of vacation, Ethelene's family heads north for home.

**YOUR TURN:** Tell what happened at a church dinner you attended. Tell who brought what. Tell how the little children edged into the front of the line and handled all the food, touching all the cookies before deciding on one—much to the distress of the older ladies. There are many homey things to mention that occur regularly at church functions. Include names (made-up ones) and describe their owners.

**TANYA'S REUNION** by Valerie Flournoy with pictures by Jerry Pinkney (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers (Penguin), 1995).

LofC summary: When she and her grandmother go to help with preparations for a big family reunion, Tanya learns about the history of the farm in Virginia where Grandma grew up.

First sentence: It was Saturday. Baking day.

The reader meets Tanya's relatives—at home before the trip and in Virginia on the family farm. The story tells what Tanya learned about her grandmother's life growing up.

**YOUR TURN:** This is a wonderful way to keep family history in the minds of grandchildren not yet born when we were growing up. Include how folks were saved and their laments over those who didn't want the Savior. Tell where the family came from and what sorts of work they did. Such a book would be a treasure in any home.

**THE GENTLEMAN AND THE KITCHEN MAID** by Diane Stanley and illustrated by Dennis Nolan. (New York: Dial Books for Young

Readers, 1994).

An art student goes to a gallery to copy a masterpiece in an attempt to learn the technique of the master painter who created it. When she leaves, the pictures talk about her.

We learn the gentleman in the picture she is copying has fallen in love with the kitchen maid in another picture hanging nearby.

The art directors move the kitchen maid to another room. The artist paints the kitchen maid into the picture of the gentleman so the two can be together.

**YOUR TURN:** Your character can go into an art gallery to tell the guards about the Lord Jesus. The pictures could talk about Him after hours.

**THE BEAR** by John Schoenherr. (New York: Philomel Books, 1991.)

A bear cub awakens one morning and finds his mother has deserted him. He searches, hungry, but he cannot find her. His attempts to find food fail until he learns to catch fish. He grows and scares off the bear who had threatened him earlier. At book's end, he is big and fat and ready for winter—"and anything else."

**YOUR TURN:** Let your animal have a consciousness of God as he gets turned out of the family and must learn to make it on his own.

**THE MATS** by Francisco Arcelana, illustrated by Hermes Alegre (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: Marcelina's father comes home from a trip to Manila with beautiful hand-made sleeping mats for each member

of his large family, including the three daughters who died when they were very young.

First sentence: For my family, Papa's homecoming from his many inspection trips around the Philippines was always an occasion to remember.

The story is narrated by Marcelina, the daughter.

**YOUR TURN:** Usually, when a family member comes home from a long trip, he/she will bring something for each member of the family who stayed at home. Tell one such time from your memory or tell what a missionary who stayed in your home gave you on departure. Mine gave me a string of lions' teeth I still have decades later.

**DON'T CUT MY HAIR** by Hans Wilhelm. (New York: Scholastic Inc. 1997.)

LofC summary: A little dog is afraid to get a haircut but finds that he looks "cool" with short hair.

First sentence: I don't want a haircut.

In 74 words, in 16 sentences the story shows how a puppy recovers from a hated haircut by wearing dark glasses and a cap and getting his dog friends to wish they looked cool, too.

**YOUR TURN:** Someone doesn't want something that is good for him/her. It may turn out to be the best thing that could have happened. Medicine when we have a cold, homework when we have a test, having to get home early when others can stay out late can be the best thing to happen.

**THE SNOWY DAY** by Ezra Jack Keats (New York: Puffin Books (Viking) Press, 1976).

Library of Congress summary: The adventures of a little boy in the city on a very snowy day.

First sentence: One winter morning Peter woke up and looked out the window.

On a snowy day, young Peter walks, plays, pretends in the snow. At night he dreams the snow has gone. But next day he goes out to walk again, this time with a friend across the hall.

**YOUR TURN:** This ordinary day happens in the life of all children. We retell it factually as it happened (perhaps to you) and find it has lots of charm people enjoy. The youngster who lives across the hall adds warmth and friendship to a cold, snowy day.

**LITTLE CLIFF AND THE PORCH PEOPLE** by Clifton L. Taulbert, paintings by E. B. Lewis (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: Sent to buy special butter for Mama Pearl's candied sweet potatoes and told to get back lickety-split, Little Cliff is delayed as all his neighbors come down off their porches and tell him they want to contribute their own ingredients.

First sentence: Little Cliff lived in a big frame house with his great-grandparents, Poppa Joe and Mama Pearl.

One neighbor gives fresh grease, another vanilla, another nutmeg and all three come at suppertime to sample what Mama Pearl cooks in her magic skillet.

Last sentence: And Little Cliff ate along with them.

**YOUR TURN:** This is the story of just one errand. Take your child through the neighborhood and have the folks come home with him to sample the barbecue in the making. This could be the story of the boy going home who gave up his loaves and fishes.

**SOME FROG** by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Scott Medlock (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1998).

Library of Congress summary: Billy is disappointed when his father doesn't show up to help him catch a frog for the frog-jumping competition at school. But the one he and his mother catch wins the championship and Billy begins to accept his father's absence.

First sentence: Tomorrow our class is having a frog-jumping competition.

The story shows Billy, desperate that his father come and help him, searching for a frog to enter the contest.

His mom catches the frog that wins.

Billy hopes maybe next year his father will come.

**YOUR TURN:** This has all the winsomeness of sought-for father-love. Many boys grow up these days without a father in the home and many spend their lives in one way or another looking for the one who was never there.

**GOING FOR OYSTERS**, written and illustrated by Jeanie Adams (Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman and Co., 1991).

Library of Congress summary: An Australian aborigine family spends the weekend fishing and looking for oysters, and they almost forget their grandfather's warning about the dangers of the eastern swamp.

The story has details of getting ready, going, fishing, swimming, eating, boating, returning with a large salmon caught.

**YOUR TURN:** We have a family picnic with all the members there. We're told all about their activities of the day and about their big catch. Christian families have this same experience. Their story can include the references to the Lord God that we all make as we are casually together. Let us readers enjoy the normalcy as well as the faith of the family as it plays together. We need books with more of this to encourage our youngsters and show unbelievers what they are missing.

**Slice Of Life Research**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Library of Congress Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

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First Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

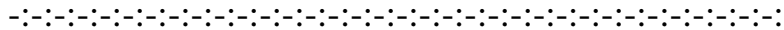
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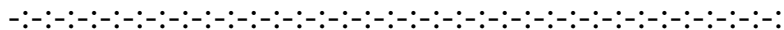
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*Let's Tell a*

# Story in Rhyme

A story in verse has rules that it has to follow, but  
it can be all sheer

**FUN!**

**Poetic rhyme has been used—surely since time began—to tell stories and facts and feelings and—there's no limit to what these verses can tell.**

Among my treasures is a picture postcard of the surf at Asbury Park, N.J., dated September 13, 1941. My late grandfather Peter Petersen Wahlstad, a Norwegian immigrant artist/editor wrote me these verses harking back to summer vacations when the two of us walked the boardwalks in stormy weather and clear:

**Behold a view romantic  
Of glorious old Atlantic,  
It's towering waves gigantic  
In manner almost frantic  
Bombarding Jersey's shore!  
Too bad it is you can't, Dick,  
(Though I am sure you want,  
Dick,)  
With joy extravagant-ic  
Revisit scenes of yore.**

That poetic strain has come down

through the family. From my earliest childhood, when I was not only a nuisance to my late sister Jeanne but also a very bladder-uncontrolled wet nuisance, she penned the following immortal lines:

**My mother is a mermaid;  
My father is a quail;  
My brother is a wet-pot;  
My name is Abigail.**

--Leslie Jeanne Bohrer, age 7

But, usually, editors cringe when they open a manuscript of a story in verse. Most would-be poetic story tellers know so little about the rules of the game. They think if the last words of lines sound alike everything should be all right.

That's not the case.

A story in verse need not have significance. It can be all sheer fun. But it should have structure. If it is meant to be in rhyming couplet, then every succeeding pair of lines will rime without variation.

If it has a pattern of line endings—a b b a—as limericks have, then it

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should be consistent throughout its length in following its pattern.

There are all sorts of riming patterns—a b a b or a b c b or a b c a.

Or a b c a b c or a b c c b a.

The poet may even originate his own pattern as much as he likes; we only ask him and her to be consistent.

The pulse beats per line should also be consistent. Accents fall on syllables, usually on the long vowels that say their name, but not always.

An-ti-PAS-to and phi-lo-DEN-dron take it on short vowels as do countless other words.

In va-ri-A-tion, the accent falls on the long a.

**Poets need** to pay close attention to their pulse beats and not violate them. If you establish a pattern of 4/3/4/3 pulse beats in your four consecutive lines, keep to it.

My sister's poem, above, has two pulse beats per line: My MOTHER is a MERmaid. My FATHER is a QUAIL,

Poets also need to be very conscious of the number of syllables in each line of rhyming verse. If you are doing a b c b, the number of syllables in both b's should be the same. Count out

**“Mary had a little lamb.  
Its fleece was white as snow.  
And everywhere that Mary went  
The lamb was sure to go.**

Both b lines have the same number of syllables.

Now, it's true that where the spirit of the poem is so compelling that an

editor cannot refuse it, he may overlook the strictures of the composition. But this is an exception. Editors require craftsmanship from poets writing stories in verse.

**Readers** want originality, heart, new light, depth, fresh impressions, new experiences, new perceptions, unusual figures of speech.

Poems don't even have to rhyme. They can have rhyming patterns (meters) and pulse beats (accents) without a rime in sight. Then it would be better not to confuse things with even an occasional rhyme.

Poet, keep it clean.

Sometimes, though, there is originality in inconsistency. Sometimes, the overreaching effect is charm rather than academic excellence. When that happens, we might excuse some breakdown in rhythm or pattern or rhyme scheme.

**BUT THAT IS NO EXCUSE FOR LAME VERSE.**

**An excellent** text to consult if you have poetic aspirations is **SOUND AND SENSE** by Laurence Perrine (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.). The author chops finely through the essential ingredients of good poems—figurative language, tone, meaning, pattern—and inferior ones.

He says that the latter are characterized by over-indulgence in sentimentality, rhapsodic flights of rhetorical expression and didactic preachments.

**“If a poem is to have true excellence,” Perrine writes, “it must be**



**in some sense a ‘new’ poem; it must exact a fresh response from the qualified reader—make him respond in a new way.”**

Poems appeal to children. They love Dr. Seuss. They love the rollicking lilt. They love the mood of mystery they experience from “The Goblins’ll Get You If You Don’t Watch Out.”

They love the story poems of Longfellow.

**Poems appeal** to readers of all ages—love poems, death poems, songs, sagas. The works!

So we look for Christian writers to give us stories in verse that are of unusual perfection and significance. A poem is a work of art. Each word must be chosen deliberately. It must be the right word in the right order to convey meaning and emotion.

Put Bible stories into verse.

Loizeaux Brothers have published “Two by Two,” a story in verse of Noah and the ark. They published “I See Four,” a story in verse of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Both books are by Mildred Krentel and they are excellent—even if out of print.

**Whether** we write nonsense, epic dramas, narratives, limericks, parodies, couplets or songs, let’s write with all our powers—as craftsmen for Christ.

A great one B. B. Sutcliffe, a giant of the faith and a teacher in the 1940s at Multnomah School of the Bible, penned this one that is full of doc-

trine:

**“He was who He was  
Because He did what He did.  
He did what He did  
Because He was who He was.  
If He had not been who He was  
He could not have done what He did.  
And if He had not done what He did  
He could not have been who He was.”**

Your library shelves will have a number of books of stories in rhyme. They’re wonderful to read aloud to children because they get the sound of good language in their ears.

Some are whimsical like **BECAUSE A LITTLE BUG WENT KA-CHOO** by Rosetta Stone (New York: Random House, 1975). The rhyme is loose in spots but the rhythm is there.

An avalanche begins to roll when a bug sneezes. A seed drops and hits a worm who gets mad and kicks a tree that drops a coconut that hits a turtle that falls and splashes a hen who kicks a bucket that sails into a house and fastens on Farmer Brown’s head whose wife calls the police who . . . Whew! It goes on and on in Dr. Seuss style.

Some poems tell a story of sheer fun.

Others have a moral tucked into their adventure.

**YOUR TURN:** What fun you can have doing a story like this. You drop an acorn and see what damage you can do! But be sure to make it all rhyme.

One thing to remember in rhyme is never use the same rhyme sound twice. If you use the “boy” and “toy” sound once, you will not use “coy” and “joy” later on. Amateurs do things like that.

**ELLA** by Bill Peet (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964) is an elephant. In 101 rhyming couplets we meet her as a circus performer extraordinaire.

Spoiled from all the attention she gets, she loses her temper when she’s put to work. She runs off and is captured by a farmer who puts her to harder work than she’s ever known.

The following spring she escapes and rejoins the circus, much the wiser.

Each line of ELLA has four accented pulse beats.

**YOUR TURN:** I wonder if she was an adolescent elephant. Hey! Notice how poetic “adolescent elephant” is. Think what you could do with that!

Some poems like **IF I BUILT A VILLAGE . . .** by Kazue Mizumura (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971) are in free verse where there is fluidity not rhyme. This one is also whimsical.

**“If I built a village  
Upon a hill  
Along the river  
In the woods . . .”**

The author then tells of the nice things that rabbits, trout, and owls enjoy.

If she built a town in a place with valleys and lakes and forests, she would keep field mice, geese, and

deer safe in their habitats.

If she built a city that was by the sea and dug beneath the ground that rose high against the sky, she would have whales, moles, and eagles to enjoy.

The story ends with a simple round-up that if “I” build my village, town, city, it would have people in it who would enjoy the little live things that live around them in the land of their home.

**YOUR TURN:** We Christians have new eyes that see nature in a new light. In the hymn, “I Am His and He is Mine,” we have verse two:

**“Heav’n above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen!  
Birds with gladder song o’er-  
flow,  
Flow’rs with deeper beauties  
shine,  
Since I know, as now I know,  
I am His and He is mine.”**

(Wade Robinson, 1838-1877)

**EVERYONE ASKED ABOUT YOU** with the text by Theodore Faro Gross and illustrations by Sheila White Sampton (New York: Philomel Books, 1990).

A repeating poem addressing Nora Blue tells her that at school, at a baseball game, at Mount Pike, on the ocean floor, around the world and in the whole universe “everyone asked about you.”

She retorts asking why everyone didn’t come to her door to tell her

themselves.

The last pages picture everyone at her door.

**YOUR TURN:** This one picks up on a familiar phrase we all use. Other phrases like “Everybody’s doing this” and “Everybody’s wearing this” could be given this same kind of treatment. But would it please the Lord? That needs to be considered, too.

**THE TIMEKEEPER**, written and illustrated by Anna Riphahn. (Kansas City, Mo.: Landmark Editions, Inc., 1996.)

First stanza:

**This story is written  
In verse and in rhyme,  
But cannot begin with  
“Once upon a time.”**

Library of Congress summary: When a mysterious stranger arrives in a chaotic land without time, he separates nights from days and minutes from hours only to find that people remained dissatisfied.

Workers wanted shorter hours.  
Farmers wanted longer ones.

Students wanted shorter hours.  
Teachers wanted longer ones.

It wasn’t until “Mother Nature” divided time into seasons and lengthened and shortened days accordingly were workers and farmers satisfied.

**YOUR TURN:** Take a controversy where no one is happy with the way things are. Perhaps the classroom is a mess from day to day because the custodian thinks the teacher and students should pick up their own papers and the teacher and students think the custodian is paid to do that. Have the principal ask, “What would the Lord Jesus do?” And let that bring a solution to the problem.

**FIREFLIES, FIREFLIES, LIGHT MY WAY** by Jonathan London and illustrated by Linda Messier (New York:

Viking, Penguin, 1996).

Library of Congress summary: A lively rhyming text that features fireflies, beavers, turtles and other animals celebrates the interconnectedness of the natural world.

A succession of 13 rhyming couplets (7-syllable first lines and 10-syllable second) uses a repetitive statement device in each one—“lead me to the place where . . .” to point us to a lagoon where a boy can safely play with the animals.

**YOUR TURN:** You could do this with the Christmas story and use it on your Christmas cards. You would want to use another repetitive statement than the one Jonathan London used

**A BASKET FULL OF WHITE EGGS** is a book of riddle poems by Brian Swann and illustrated by Ponder Goembel (New York: Orchard Books, 1988).

The book includes sayings from different lands that are written as poems and illustrated.

An Aztec riddle shows a boy putting a pajama top over his head.

The poem reads: We enter by three doors. We exit by one.

**YOUR TURN:** Unless you have access to the riddles of other lands, this is a hard one to duplicate. You might take the riddles your youngsters use.

**THE ELEVENTH HOUR** by Graham Base (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1988).

A riddle poem names all the guests who will come to a birthday party featuring 11 games and a fabulous feast.

The reader must figure out who are at the feast at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour by analyz-

ing the clues given throughout the story and in the illustrations.

First sentence: When Horace turned Eleven, he decided there should be some kind of celebration.

“For my friends,” he said, “and me.

**“For though I’ve been the age of eight**

**And nine and six and seven,  
This is the very first time that  
I’ve ever been eleven!”**

YOUR TURN: What can you do with a birthday celebration?

**Why don’t you pick nine or six  
or maybe even seven  
and see what you can do this year  
to point your child to heaven.**

**OH, THE PLACES YOU’LL GO**  
by Dr. Seuss (New York: Random House, 1990).

In iambic tetrameter (four accents per line), the “you” character sets off to see “Great Places.”

The poet mixes his trochees, dactyls and anapoests (these are the poetic feet where the accents play) with abandon.

**You’re on—your own  
And you know—what you know.  
And you—are the guy  
Who’ll decide—where to go.**

YOUR TURN: You can send your character off to see the world with a rollicking poem of four-line verses. Keep the pace and don’t break your rhythm. You break the pace when you add extra syllables.

### **THE CHARGE OF THE WHITE BRIGADE**

(By Dick Bohrer with apologies to Alfred Lord Tennyson and apologies to you be-

cause I’ve used this poem in another lesson already)

**A little way,  
A little way,  
A little way onward,  
And into the rabbit hutch  
We thoughtfully wander.  
While in the rabbit hutch,  
We the little hares will touch.  
Bunnies bewildered!  
Into the rabbit hutch—  
Don’t jounce them overmuch!  
Not as though the bunnies knew,  
They’re to be butchered.  
Theirs not to make reply;  
Theirs not to reason why;  
Theirs but to multiply!  
For we are enhungered.  
Rabbits to the right of me!  
Rabbits to the left of me!  
Rabbits in front of me  
Snuggle up warmly.  
Coily they look at me.  
Then my sharp knife they see.  
Frightened, they turn and flee!  
Into the rabbit hutch  
Scurry six hundred.  
When shall the memory fade  
Of that dark red bloody blade?  
It makes me wonder.  
But honor the attempt I made  
To raise bunnies unafraid.  
Valiant six hundred!**

I recited that in senior assembly in high school and all through college. For some reason, people laughed.

YOUR TURN: Take a well known poem and write a parody. Keep enough of the original in so that people recognize that it is a take-off.

I wrote the next one when I was a graduate student at the University of Southern California.

### BIG JOE

The piercing scream knifed high  
above the roar that filled the house.  
The crowd, as one, fell hushed that  
night, like talon-pincer mouse.

The men and boys, ten thousand  
strong, that cheered the favorite on  
Sat tense, electrified, and heard a  
deaf-mute spider's song.

Jet black he'd stood before the  
fight, black skin, black trunks,  
black eyes.

The referee, "Black Widow,"  
called; but Big Joe heard no cries.  
He saw the moving mouths of those  
whose bodies massed the hall  
Like vultures lined up row on row  
to wait their victim's fall.

He saw King Blood upon his throne,  
ten thousands at his feet,  
Whose mothers' sons like nothing  
more than see "a black man beat."  
His trainer pushed him forward so  
he'd know the time had come  
To fight the favorite, dancing now  
upon the canvas drum.

He met the boxer, met the ref, and  
saw his eyelid wink;

He saw the People's Choice wink  
back and grin around the rink.  
Rounds one and two were fought to  
draws; round three the favorite  
won.

Round four the crowds stood on  
their seats; the slaughter had be-  
gun.

Round five the black head jerked  
and bobbed; the dancer placed his  
blows.

The drawn black face would blos-  
som red right where the Midas  
chose.

Hate leaned behind the "crusher"  
blow, aimed, thrown to end the  
brawl.

A piercing scream knifed high  
above the cheers that filled the hall.

The roar, a flood of new-heard  
noise, broke through the virgin ear,  
The death-meant blow had given  
birth; the deaf was made to hear.  
Ten thousand screaming, red-eyed  
fans that cheered the favorite on  
Sat tense, electrified, and heard the  
deaf-mute spider's song.

The tapering scream, the racking  
sobs were heard among the eaves;  
The spider edged around the web  
and feared the silent leaves.

The thousands, knowing, restless  
grew, yet knew the bettor's odds;  
They worshiped money, fight, and  
blood and knew no other gods.  
King Blood leaned forward on his  
throne;

Ten thousands roared for fight.  
The referee rang the bell for six; the  
favorite centered right.

But Big Joe hugged his corner post,  
fear ravaging his face.

He heard the shrieking of the mob;  
he heard his heartbeat race.

His trainer wrenched him from his  
post and pushed him in the ring.  
The favorite jabbed him in the eye  
to hear the spider sing.

**Around the ring in slow retreat  
black pawn the red king fled;  
He held his arms about his face,  
sheltering his head.**

**A feint, a lowered arm; a blow; a  
cry; a laugh of hate.**

**The fist that flung a boxer down  
slammed shut a mute's ear-gate.  
The vultures, screeching, flapped  
their wings, King Blood had won  
the prize.**

**The referee, "Black Widow,"  
called; but Big Joe heard no cries.**

This poem is not one of my favorites; I have reservations about including it in this study. But it fully illustrates how you can tell a long story in rhyming verse and carry it off.

This poem is certainly no bedtime story for a four-year-old, but older children could read it. They are at an age where they can understand man's inhumanity to man.

I was in third grade when all the boys in the room followed me home from school in a line down the block so they could beat me up. I understand the weakling heart.

Other stories in rhyme include the following:

**THE JUDGE** (an untrue tale) by Harve Zemach and illustrated by Margot Zemach (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969) presents a progression of prisoners who come before a judge all bearing the same rhymed report that a monster is on its way. The judge sends each to jail with

such rhymes as "Lock him up and throw away the key. He can't fool me." The monster then appears and eats the judge.

**YOUR TURN:** Kids like this kind of story too where the judge gets repeated warnings which he ignores and then gets eaten up by the monster who comes. You can do this. Your prisoners could be little turkeys talking to a big turkey at Thanksgiving, ants in a watermelon patch, boys saying, "My Daddy's gonna beat your Daddy up."

### **HIPPITY HOP, IT'S BABY BOP**

By Deborah Wormser and illustrated by June Valentine-Ruppe (Allen, Texas: Barney Publishing, 1995).

In rhyming couplets where almost every noun ends in "ety" or "ity," Baby Bop jumps in the air, rides her horse, puts on her shoes and sockety-socks, puts on her hat, pats her cat, rides her trike, plays store, cleans the floor, dusts, rockety rocks, plays with her dolls, cooks. Now she's so tired, she could droppity-drop.

**YOUR TURN:** This is cute in its forcing on every word the same suffix. You could do it with another suffix like *olliky* and see how it comes off. Trouble is, this is so cute no one will want another like it.

**DEMI'S OPPOSITES** by Demi (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1987)

The author has used short poems and drawings of birds and animals to illustrate opposites in English: over and under, open and shut, noisy and quiet among others. The author sends young readers on searches for half-hidden specimens. Under "Awake/Asleep" is the poem:

**Two lesser red pandas  
Awake in a heap . . .  
Upon their poor father**

### Who's still fast asleep.

**YOUR TURN:** This is the same kind of rhythm we found in the ABC books by Wanda Gag and Celestino Piatti. The poet has found in these opposites grist for his mill. We need to be awake to possibilities that lie waiting everywhere in our language.

**WHAT'S WHAT? A GUESSING GAME** by Mary Serfozo and illustrated by Keiko Narahashi (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, Simon and Schuster, 1996).

Library of Congress summary: Illustrations and rhyming text provide examples of what is soft and hard, warm and cold, wet and dry, long and short and light and dark. It describes how a puppy is all these things at once.

The first half of the book answers questions like "What's hard?" with three-line haiku-like verses with four syllables in the first line and a rhyming couplet in six syllables per line for the second and third line. The second half deals with the items mentioned in the summary in the same fashion.

**YOUR TURN:** You can take an animal and ask questions about each part of it. You can arrange your verses as you wish regarding the number of syllables per line. All we ask is that you be rigidly consistent and that you marvel at the creative brilliance of the Lord Jesus who made it all.

**NATHANIEL TALKING** by Eloise Greenfield and illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist (New York: Black Butterfly Children's Books, 1988).

Reflections of a boy's life in the black community are the subjects of the several "rap" poems in this book.

In the first sentence, Nathaniel B. Free stands up and identifies himself

and says he wants to talk about his philosophy

### About the things I do And the people I see

They will all be told in the words of Nathaniel B. Free, he says. He ends with "That's me."

**YOUR TURN:** With this rap, every b line rhymes with its a line. Underline the b and the a. This is a style you can play with because it is rap and no one will object. Your lines are short. I used rap in my Beanpole book *Volleyball Spy* as the villains were planning while sinking baskets in the gym to drug the girls volleyball team with lemonade. There the rhymes were in couplets and each pair had seven or eight syllables:

"Need to find some stim-u-lation."

"Need to make them a sen-sation."

"Need to open up their eyes."

"Need to give them a surprise."

"Need to help them raise their grade."

"Sugar, joy juice, lemonade."

**HUGE HAROLD**, written and illustrated by Bill Peet (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961).

Summary: Poor Harold Rabbit grows into an enormity that attracts hunters from everywhere. They chase him, finding him eventually in a farmer's barn. That farmer not only protects him, but he also redirects him. He becomes a champion steeple-chase trotter and wins the praises of the crowds.

The poem, in riming couplets of 11-syllable lines, begins with "When Harold the rabbit was tiny and small/His feet started growing and that's about all." It ends, "For rabbits you see aren't affected by fame/No matter what happens they're always the same."

**YOUR TURN:** Practice with 11-syllable lines. Use them to retell a Bible story. “When Naaman the leper was covered with sores . . .” “When Matthew Collector was counting his tax . . .” and you can use “When David the shepherd was feeding his sheep.”

**THIS IS THE STAR** by Joyce Dunbar with pictures by Gary Blythe (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1996).

Library of Congress summary: A cumulative presentation which uses rhyme to describe the night of the birth of Christ.

First sentence: This is the star in the sky.

Last sentence: Still shines the star in the sky.

Built on the pattern of the old, old story, “This is the House That Jack Built,” the poem—in rhyming couplets—chronicles the events of The Night.

Each page adds another event to the story and repeats all that has gone before.

Included are the star, the shepherds, the angels, a donkey “and his precious load,” the stable, the inn, an ox, the manger, the wise men and the Christ.

**YOUR TURN:** You, too, can use the structure of “This is the House That Jack Built” to design a book and tell a story. Use this, too, on Bible stories. Balaam might make a good subject for you or Rebecca at the well as Abraham’s servant approaches.

**FROG WENT A-COURTING** by John Langstaff with pictures by Feodor Rojankovsky (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1955, 1983). CALDECOTT AWARD.

In riming couplets four feet long (*dit dit daw/dit dit daw/dit daw/dit*

*daw*), we learn how the frog courts and then marries a mouse.

A cat breaks up the wedding ceremony.

**“So the frog and the mouse they  
went to France,  
And this is the end of my ro-  
mance.”**

**YOUR TURN:** Can we write nonsense rimes for Christian kids? I don’t know why not.

Each of the following story/rhymes should by now suggest ideas that you can use without my having to make suggestions. The goal of this book is to make it easy for you to glean story ideas from books already in print. You are not stealing their story. You are using the same structure they used. That’s why we have so many makes and models of cars and laundry soap and carbonated drinks.

**PARCEL FOR STANLEY**, written by Ian Whybrow and illustrated by Sally Hobson (London: Levinson Books, Ltd.).

In an irregular rhyme scheme but always a b c b, Stanley and his friends (a cow, a fire engine, a duck and a cat invite the queen to tea shortly after Stanley, the rabbit, receives a parcel containing a book, a baton and a top hat.

The queen asks what each one can do. Stanley does tricks.

**YOUR TURN:** Everything revolves around the parcel. All the animals want the Queen to share its treasures. All the kings of the Old Testament received gifts. How can you share those treasures?

**THE WAITING PLACE**, written and illustrated by Marc Sutherland (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.,



1998).

Library of Congress summary: When he has trouble falling asleep, a young boy imagines all kinds of amazing things going on in his bedroom.

In four-line verses of usually 8-9-9-8 syllables (a b c b) we learn what imaginary things go through the mind of a boy.

There are 14 stanzas. He reflects that it's hard to wait in bed on sunny mornings when there's so much to get up and do.

**YOUR TURN:** Many people plan their day before they leave their mattress. But one of the followers of Christ couldn't plan his day because the Lord Jesus was constantly being held up, stopped, challenged, debated, asked to heal. So many things were happening he couldn't get what he had to do done.

**BOOK** by George Ella Lyon with paintings by Peter Catalanotto (New York: DK Publishing, Inc. 1999).

Library of Congress summary: This poem compares a book to a house, a treasure chest, a farm and a tree full of leaves.

The poem, written in free verse, invites the reader to love the beauty and freedom that both words and books can bring.

**YOUR TURN:** Invite your reader to love the beauty and freedom that the Bible can bring.

**ONE MONKEY TOO MANY** by Jackie French Koller, illustrated by Lynn Munsinger (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: Adventurous monkeys have a series of mishaps and escapades involving a bike, a canoe, a restaurant, and a hotel.

In four-line riming couplets, one monkey rents a bike but another hops on and they end up in a ditch.

Two monkeys rent a golf cart and three wreck it.

Three monkeys rent a canoe and four sink it.

Four monkeys take a table and five have a food fight.

Five monkeys rent a room, but six end up in a pillow fight.

**YOUR TURN:** No matter what you plan, one more always barges in. With monkeys it's hilarious. With relatives or neighbors it may be something else. If it's a juvenile sleep-over, you can count on its being every bit like these monkeys as you can want.

**CAT HEAVEN**, written and illustrated by Cynthia Rylant (New York: The Blue Sky Press, Scholastic, Inc., 1997).

Written in four-three-four-three beats in an a b c b verse, the poem tells the privileges of cats in Heaven—floating cat toys and catsup, angels who pet and sing, mounds of fish.

They can sleep on God's bed and in His lap.

**YOUR TURN:** I know this is making God too familiar, but cats will do that to a place once you let them in. I know we'll be spending centuries adoring our wonderful Lord, but one wonders what would happen if mice or spiders were let in.

**LOW DOWN LAUNDRY LINE BLUES** by C. M. Millen, illustrated by Christine Davenier (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: While one sister sits around moping, the other tries to find a way to cheer her up. The one who is sad tells her sister to not try to cheer her up. She

feels as down and lonely as an empty laundry line.

**I've got those hangin' round  
I've got those draggin' down  
I've got the low-down laundry line  
blues.**

**YOUR TURN:** This rime scheme has a b c b d d e for its pattern. This seems to lend itself to the mournful tune sister uses to cheer people up. Try it.

**LITTLE MISS MUFFET'S  
COUNT-ALONG SURPRISE** by Emma Chester Clark (New York: Doubleday Books for Young Readers, 1997).

A series of limericks set to "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey."

Along comes one spider, two lemurs, three magpies, foxes, pussycats, poodles, bears, puffins, gibbons, crocodiles.

They've come to celebrate Miss Muffet's birthday.

**YOUR TURN:** This is simply an expansion of a familiar nursery rime. You could have Jack jump over more than a candlestick. You could enlarge on the diet of Jack Sprat and his wife who could eat no lean.

**A CHURCHMOUSE CHRISTMAS** by Barbara Davoll (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1994).

In a parody of "The Night Before Christmas," a church mouse participates in the church's Christmas by carving a mouse from a small piece of birch. It ends with a message—that a mouse can't give Jesus his heart "like mommies and daddies and small folk like you." It encourages the reader to give Jesus his heart.

**YOUR TURN:** Use another kind of animal and retell the same story in verse. Let this animal worship the Lord in its own way.

**IN THE TALL, TALL GRASS** by Denise Fleming (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991).

A succession of four-word couplets describes what happens in the tall, tall grass as caterpillars, hummingbirds, bees, birds, ants, snakes, moles, beetles, frogs, rabbits ("hip, hop, ears flop"), fireflies and bats do their thing.

**YOUR TURN:** See what you can do with four syllables in each line as you describe what animals do in their homes or as they eat or as they watch the world.

**A REMAINDER OF ONE** by Elinor J. Pinczes and illustrated by Bonnie MacKain (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995).

This is a rhyming poem in 11-syllable lines.

Library of Congress summary: When the queen of the bugs demands that her army march in even lines, Private Joe divides the marchers into more and more lines so that he will not be left out of the parade.

To get 25 soldiers to march in even lines and not leave him to walk alone, a "brainy bug-soldier," Private Joe, thinks if they would add one more line to the two they now have, he wouldn't be the remainder of one. But he's left out.

They make three lines of eight. He is still left.

They make four lines of six and he is still left.

Not until they make five rows of five does he get to march in rank.

That pleases the queen.

**YOUR TURN:** It's always fun when you can work a math problem into a story. You could do a reverse of this one where a stubborn queen insists on lines of five

and your hero, the sergeant, wants to lead the pack—alone.

**THE SIGN OF THE SEAHORSE**  
(A Tale of Greed and High Adventure in Two Acts) by Graham Base  
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992).

First two lines:

**“Above the ragged reefs they  
soared, exquisite and serene,  
Through slanting shafts of  
sunlight,  
Tiny jewels of blue and green.”**

Deep sea inhabitants of a coral reef  
must abandon their Seahorse Café

when leaking oil makes it uninhabitable.

The good creatures learn an unscrupulous grouper has devised a plan to earn big bucks selling lots on the new reef.

Good eventually triumphs over evil and the evil become the menial servants of the good.

Base’s illustrations are marvelous.

**YOUR TURN:** Develop a love for lovely adjectives and nouns if you are going to write descriptive poems. Some poets must comb dictionaries to come up with their unusual words. Graham Base finds beauty in familiar ones.

**Research Sheet**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Kind of Story \_\_\_\_\_

Kind of Rime Pattern: \_\_\_\_\_

Fresh Impressions: \_\_\_\_\_

Unusual Figures Of Speech: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Measure Of Excellence: \_\_\_\_\_

A Sample: \_\_\_\_\_



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