

USING LIMERICKS TO PRACTISE THE RHYTHM OF ENGLISH

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Level: grade 6 to adult

Time: a minimum of one class-period, but can be increased by doing the optional activities

Aims:

- to acquaint students with the rhythm of English (recurring stressed and unstressed syllables)
- to give students practice in producing stressed and unstressed syllables
- to acquaint students with an English verse-form used for non-serious purposes
- to give students practice in scanning texts for specific information and in reading carefully once the information has been located.

Resources/ materials:

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick_\(poetry\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick_(poetry)) (encyclopedia article with facts about limericks)
2. <http://www.harbeck.ca/Reg/limerick.html> (enables students to write their own limericks)
3. <http://www.math.fsu.edu/~mesterto/Unscramble/limericks.html> (limericks, some of which require knowledge of idioms and English culture and are suitable for advanced classes)
4. <http://www.freewebs.com/grahamlester/classics.htm> (many based on word-play and suitable for advanced classes)

5. http://theblarneywell.com/silly_limericks.htm (mainly about animals, suitable for younger students)
6. <http://home.earthlink.net/~kristenaa/nice/> (30 pages of limericks, some of which do not scan)

Possible problems:

1. Many limericks are dirty or indecent. For this reason, it is not advisable to ask teenage students to type *limericks* into a search-engine. They will probably enjoy what they find, and they will undoubtedly increase their knowledge of slang and colloquial English quite considerably, but you may end up in trouble with parents and school-principals if the youngsters recite bawdy limericks at home.
2. For the same reason, limit the amount of time students are given to find the answers to the questions on Worksheet One and/or correct as soon as the first pair has found the right answers.
3. Activity c) in the pre-stage can be carried out only in classes in which students have room to circulate.

Procedure

Before class. Go to the last four websites in the list above and find limericks which would be suitable for your class. If you have between 26 and 30 students, you will need six limericks; if you have between 21 and 25, you will need five, and so on. In large type, print out the limericks double-spaced and then cut them up into lines.

For the optional activity, take another limerick and cut it up into phrases, three for lines 1, 2, 5 and two for lines 3 and 4. Make as many copies as there are groups in the class.

1. Pre-stage

- a) Ask students if they know what a limerick is. Put an example on the board or overhead projector. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. The students are usually struck by the rhythm. Ask them to define/describe a limerick--number of lines, rhyme-scheme, rhythm.
- b) At this point, you may wish to do one or more of the activities found in the worksheets below, depending on the students' level and the time available.
- c) Give out the cut-up limericks, one line per student. Any left-over lines can be placed on the teacher's desk for consultation. (Make sure that the left-over lines are all from different limericks.) The students walk around the room trying to find the people who have the other lines of their limerick. Then they rearrange the lines to make the limerick, taking missing lines from the teacher's desk if necessary. Completed limericks can be written on the board, written on sheets of paper and posted on the walls, or recited to the rest of the class.
- d) (Optional activity) Give each group the chopped up limerick and ask them to reassemble it. (This activity takes less time than you would expect.)
- e) Give a copy of Worksheet One to each group of five (or less) students. In their groups, students try to come to a consensus on what the right answers are to the questions on the worksheet. (5 minutes maximum.) In the meantime, the teacher draws the following chart on the board (assuming there are five groups) and gives a copy of the chart to a student if the class is not taking place in the computer lab.

Question/Group	1	2	3	4	5
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					

The teacher asks each group for their answer and records the answers on the chart. The student does the same thing on his/her chart.

2. While-stage (30 min)

- a) The students now are divided into pairs and go to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick_\(poetry\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick_(poetry)). They are given 5-10 minutes to try to find the answers to the questions on Worksheet One. When the time is up, the teacher corrects the worksheets with the class. The scores are then tallied to see which team had guessed the most correct answers.
- b) The students then go to <http://www.harbeck.ca/Reg/limerick.html> and answer the questions on Worksheet Two. Sheets can be corrected in class or handed in at the end of the class.
- c) Using one sentence/phrase from each line, each pair makes up the **most sensible** limerick they can and gives it a title.

Using one sentence/phrase from each line, they then make up the **silliest** limerick they can and give it a title.

3. Post-stage (5 min.)

- a) Write out/Print out the limericks. Students write their names on the back of the sheets. Post the sheets on the wall under *Sensible Limericks* or *Silly Limericks*. The class votes for the best limerick in each category.

Note

If you are using this lesson-plan primarily for pronunciation-practice, the compound nouns found in the answers *sweetheart*, *bluejay*, *hearsay*, *heartburn* are excellent for introducing or practising primary/secondary stress and the up-down intonation patterns found on compound nouns at the end of a sentence.

e.g. əSWEETÆ

æheart

WORKSHEETS

Worksheet One

1. Limericks are called *limericks* because they were first written in the town of Limerick, in Ireland.

a) definitely true b) probably true c) probably false d) definitely false

2. The first poem in limerick form is thought to have been written approximately when?

a) 1400 b) 1600 c) 1750 d) 1900

When was the word *limerick* first used to describe this type of poem?

a) in the early fourteenth century b) at the start of the seventeenth century

c) in the eighteenth century d) in the last decade of the nineteenth century

3. Who popularised the form?

a) William Shakespeare b) Tom o' Bedlam c) Edward Lear d) Ogden Nash

4. Approximately how many limericks did this person write?

a) 200 b) 500 c) 1,000 d) 5,000

Worksheet Two

1. Go to line 1.

a) Find a word which means *boyfriend, girlfriend*.

b) Find the names of two birds.

2. Go to line 2.

a) Find a word which means *stories, rumours*.

b) Find a word for something you ride on in the snow.

- c) Find an expression which means *sex*. [(Omit with younger students.)]
3. Go to line 3.
- a) Find a word for an ingredient in granola. [or porridge]
 - b) Find a word or expression which means *excellent*.
 - c) Find an expression which means *became fiancés*.
4. Go to line 4.
- a) Find a word which means *partner, companion*.
 - b) Find a word which means *ate too much*.
 - c) Find an expression which means *becoming...heavier*.
5. Go to line 5.
- a) Find a word which means *no*.
 - b) Find a word which means *became excited*.
 - c) Find a word which means *indigestion, a burning sensation in the stomach*.
6. Now find the name(s) of
- a) a town in the U.S.
 - b) a city in India
 - c) a country in the Near East
 - d) two places in Canada

NOTE 1: Whitehorse and Yellowknife exist in Canada, but not Yellowhorse.

NOTE 2. These words have been chosen with French-speaking students in mind.

You may wish to add more words or use different ones.

Optional Worksheets

I. Fill in the blanks

asked balanced fell floor fork
once peas pork schoolboy slices

I _____ met a _____ in York,
Who _____ his _____ on his _____.
When they _____ on the _____,
He _____ for some more,
To go with his _____ of _____.

II. Fill in the blanks (focus on grammar)

(With this exercise, you can either dictate the limerick or leave the students to figure out the words themselves depending on their level.)

_____ Halloween _____ Quebec,
_____ man _____ outside _____ deck,
When _____ surprise
_____ dropped _____ skies,
_____ vampire _____ made _____ neck.

(Cultural note: in North America, houses are often decorated for Halloween (October 31) with pumpkins, witches, spiders, spiders' webs, gravestones, skeletons, etc. Vampires also belong to this tradition.)

Original limerick:

One Halloween in Quebec,
A man was outside on his deck,
When to his surprise
There dropped from the skies,

A vampire which made for his neck.

III. Scrambled Limericks (Advanced)

Instructions: The lines in the following limericks have gotten into the wrong poem. Rearrange them so that the limericks make sense. Line 2 should stay as the second line, line 3 as the third line, etc., but in a different limerick.

There was a young scholar called Cy,
On her neighbours she wanted to spy.
To the pilot she said,
The embarrassed cook fled,
And hanged his own self with his tie.

A farmer decided on Skye,

But something went strangely awry.

She hid in the shed,

With a pain in her head,

Great knowledge they seemed to imply.

A certain young lady called Di

To give matrimony a try.

The books that he read,

She blushed brilliant red,

And the doctor came past by and by.

One day a good cook made a pie.

Whose marks were abnormally high.

She took to her bed,

Oh dear Captain Fred,

Thus they caught the old woman so sly.

There was a young lady called Vi,

Decided she wanted to fly.

When the time came to wed,

The things that he said,

And the guests threw it out with a sigh.

There was an old lady from Rye,
Who was so abnormally shy,
The crust was like lead.
But they found her instead.
I'd love to see earth from the sky.

A nosey old woman did pry.
Who was sure she was going to die.
If one word she said,
He clean lost his head,
And looked 's if she wanted to cry.