

# LIMERICKS

A limerick is a five-line poem written with one couplet and one triplet. If a couplet is a two-line rhymed poem, then a triplet would be a three-line rhymed poem. The rhyme pattern is a a b b a with lines 1, 2 and 5 containing 3 beats and rhyming, and lines 3 and 4 having two beats and rhyming. Some people say that the limerick was invented by soldiers returning from France to the Irish town of Limerick in the 1700's.

Limericks are meant to be funny. They often contain hyperbole, onomatopoeia, idioms, puns, and other figurative devices. The last line of a good limerick contains the PUNCH LINE or "heart of the joke." As you work with limericks, remember to have pun, I mean FUN! Say the following limericks out loud and clap to the rhythm.

A flea and a fly in a flue

Were caught, so what could they do?

Said the fly, "Let us flee."

"Let us fly," said the flea.

So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

-Anonymous

You will soon hear the distinctive beat pattern of all limericks. The rhythm is just as important in a limerick as the rhyme. Try completing this limerick.

There once was a pauper named Meg

Who accidentally broke her \_\_\_\_\_.

She slipped on the \_\_\_\_\_.

Not once, but thrice

Take no pity on her, I \_\_\_\_\_.

limericks have remained popular over the years. Limerick poems can often be of a funny or even a bawdy, or dirty, subject. The history of limerick poems is detailed below and due to the location of Limerick in Ireland the Irish Limericks are often found to be the most popular. Is the Limerick a form of poetry or are limericks just childish rhymes? The defence of the Limerick is also covered in this section.

### **A Form of Poetry? Limerick Poems? Limericks the genre?**

The form of poetry referred to as Limerick poems have received incredibly bad press and dismissed as not having a rightful place amongst what is seen as 'cultivated poetry'. The reason for this is three-fold:

- The content of many limericks is often of a bawdy and humorous nature.
- A Limerick as a poetry form is by nature simple and short - limericks only have five lines.
- And finally the somewhat dubious history of limericks have contributed to the critics attitudes.

### **Limericks - The History**

Variants of the form of poetry referred to as Limerick poems can be traced back to the fourteenth century English history. Limericks were used in Nursery Rhymes and other poems for children. But as limericks were short, relatively easy to compose and bawdy or sexual in nature they were often repeated by beggars or the working classes in the British pubs and taverns of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The poets who created these limericks were therefore often drunkards! Limericks were also referred to as dirty.

### **Where does the term 'Limerick' come from?**

The word derives from the Irish town of Limerick. Apparently a pub song or tavern chorus based on the refrain "Will you come up to Limerick?" where, of course, such bawdy songs or 'Limericks' were sung.

### **Limericks - The form**

Limericks consist of five anapaestic lines.

Lines 1, 2, and 5 of Limericks have seven to ten syllables and rhyme with one another. Lines 3 and 4 of Limericks have five to seven syllables and also rhyme with each other.

### **Limericks - A Defence - Shakespeare even wrote Limericks!**

Admittedly the content of Limericks can often verge on the indecent, the dirty, or even the obscene, but they make people laugh! Limericks are easy to remember! Limericks are short and no great talent is necessary to compose one - Limericks are a form of poetry that everyone feels happy to try (especially when inebriated!). Limericks as a form of poetry has survived the test of time dating back for centuries! And whilst the poetic and literary skills of Shakespeare are not necessary for the composition of a limerick the great Bard himself did in fact write limericks which can be found in two of his greatest plays - Othello and King Lear.

### **The Limericks of Edward Lear - Limericks are Fun!!**

Edward Lear's Book of Nonsense included the poetry form of Limericks. His work with limericks were, however, was not in any way indecent and this particular book proved to be extremely popular in the nineteenth century and this was contributed to by the humorous magazine Punch which started printing examples of limericks leading to a craze by its readers. The first edition of Edward Lear's Book of Nonsense was published by Thomas McLean on 10th February 1846. There were altogether seventy-two limericks in two volumes which sold at 3s 6d each. These limericks have proven to be extremely popular with children

## Some examples of Limericks

There was a young girl from Rabat,  
who had triplets, Nat, Pat and Tat;  
It was fun in the breeding,  
But hell in the feeding,  
When she found she had no tit for Tat.

--

'Tis a favourite project of mine,  
A new value of pi to assign.  
I would fix it at 3,  
For it's simpler, you see,  
Than 3 point 1 4 1 5 9

A macho young swimmer named Dwyer,  
Really liked playing with fire.  
One night in the dark  
He swam with a shark,  
And his voice is now two octaves higher

**Now try yourself!!!!**