

BBC Teach: Writing and Performance Poetry Live Lesson – Laughable Limericks

Here's more information on limericks – a great way to start writing poetry; fun and short, the limerick is a type of poem anyone can handle!

A Timeline of the Limerick

11th Century

Limericks may have first appeared in medieval France and came to Britain with travelling minstrels. There is an 11th century manuscript with a very limerick-like poem in it which supports this theory.

16th Century

Shakespeare used limericks in Othello, King Lear and The Tempest. Here's the one from Othello (Act II, Scene iii):

And let me the canakin clink, clink
And let me the canakin clink,
A soldier's a man.
A life's but a span.
Why, then, let a soldier drink.

19th Century

The limerick form took off after the publication of Edward Lear's **A Book of Nonsense** in 1846. Inventing limericks became a popular pastime as many newspapers ran limerick writing competitions.

18th Century

Irish soldiers going home after the War of the Spanish Succession took this form of poem to Ireland and this is when it became associated with the town of Limerick, hence the name! In 1776 limericks featured in the book **Mother Goose's Melodies** and from then were forever linked with nursery rhymes. **Hickory Dickory Dock** is a limerick!

How to Write a Limerick

Limericks have a fairly fixed form:

- five lines
- AABBA rhyme scheme, so lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyme and lines 3 and 4 rhyme.
- It has a lively rhythm called an anapestic meter which normally translates as 9 syllables in the first two lines, 6 in lines 3 and 4 and then back to 9 for the last line although this does vary.
- Most limericks start with 'There once was a from.....' and the last line is often funny or quirky.

Most limericks are playful or silly and sometimes complete nonsense. Edward Lear wrote a whole book of limericks, here's one:

There was an Old Man who supposed,
That the street door was partially closed;
But some very large rats,
Ate his coats and his hats,
While the futile old gentleman dozed.

Ideas for Limericks

- your dog
- your favourite food
- your worst smell
- your craziest dream
- your school

Have a go:

Follow the rules above to write your own limerick – make it as silly as you like!