

# 2 Truly Amazing Talents



## TALKING ABOUT THE THEME

Look at the picture on pages 66–67. Read the title.

1. Where does the action take place?
2. What talents do the people have?
3. What talents do you admire?
4. What must you do to develop a talent?
5. What do you think the selections in this unit will have in common?

### Other Books About Amazing Talents

*Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane* by Pamela L. Travers. Delacorte, 1982. This story is a continuation of the adventures of the Banks family's unconventional nanny.

*A Show of Hands: Say It in Sign Language* by Mary Beth Sullivan and Linda Burke. Addison-Wesley, 1980. The book provides a good introduction to sign language and its importance.

*Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975. The Tuck family knows the secret of a spring that prevents aging. They must deal with the fact that others have learned their secret.

*The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1960. Chester Cricket takes up residence in a subway station and becomes a celebrity when people hear his magnificent concerts.

## Focusing on “Fast on Their Feet”

### Think and Read

- ▶ Talk about stories or nursery rhymes you have read that begin with *There once was . . .* or *Once upon a time . . .* Talk about the types of characters you met in those stories. Ask your classmates about stories they have read.
- ▶ Read the title on page 70. Look at the pictures. Think about your discussion of stories.
  - Who seem to be “fast on their feet”?
  - How do the people looking on react to them?
  - What do you think the selection will be about?
- ▶ Get ready to read three limericks. Read to find out who the characters are, where they are from, and what amazing talents they have. Notice how the rhythm and the rhyme make the limericks seem funny or silly. Think about what you would add to this chart.

Who?	Where?	What?

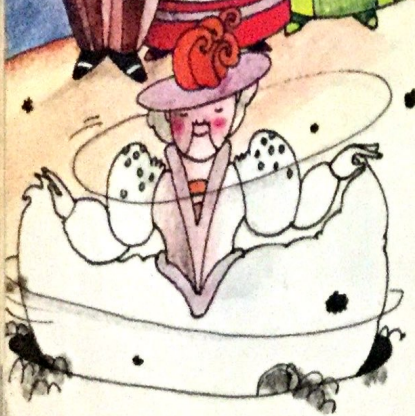
Now turn the page and read “Fast on Their Feet.” Then you will talk about what makes a limerick funny.

# Fast on Their Feet

Three limericks

There was a young lady of Bright,  
Whose speed was far faster than light.  
She set out one day  
In a relative way,  
And returned home the previous night.

— A. H. Reginald Buller



There was an Old Lady of Chertsey,  
Who made a remarkable curtsy;  
She twirled round and round,  
Till she sank underground,  
Which distressed all the people of Chertsey.

—Edward Lear



There was a Young Girl of Majorca,  
Whose Aunt was a very fast walker;  
She walked seventy miles,  
And leaped fifteen stiles,  
Which astonished that Girl of Majorca.

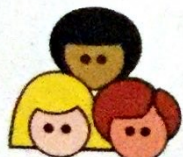
—Edward Lear



## Think and Discuss

Think about the three limericks. Fill in details to finish the chart on page 69. Then answer the questions.

1. Use your chart. What characteristics are shared by the three main characters?
2. What are some of the truly amazing talents described in this selection?
3. In the third limerick, the place name *Majorca* is rhymed with the word *walker*. What might this tell you about rhyming in limericks?
4. What other place names and words are rhymed to make the reader laugh?
5. Do you think these poems would be funny if they did not rhyme? Explain why they would or would not.
6. How would you describe the rhythm in these poems?
7. How could the rhythm of a poem make a reader laugh?
8. From studying these three selections, what would you say are some necessary elements of a limerick?



WORK IN A GROUP

Think of funny rhymes. Think of geographic names, such as cities, countries and rivers. What are some geographic names that rhyme, or "just miss" rhyming, with your own names? Talk about what your classmates could rhyme with their names.

# Learn About POETRY

Writing Quatrains by Myra Cohn Livingston

Think of some of the old songs, verses, and rhymes that you remember best. Why do you remember them so well? There may be several reasons—perhaps they are fun and easy to say, and maybe they are written in a four-line pattern called a *quatrain*. You may wish to know that the word quatrain comes from the Latin word *quattor* (KWAH•tor) meaning "four." *Cuatro* (KWAH•troh) in Spanish also means four.

The quatrain is often a complete verse by itself, like the rhyming quatrain below.

As I was standing in the street,	A
As quiet as could be,	B
A great big ugly man came up	C
And tied his horse to me.	B

There is a rhyming pattern in this quatrain. To find it, look at the last word in each line and at the letter beside it. We use letters to label the sounds of these end-words so that we can describe and talk about the rhyming pattern. In line 1 the word *street* has a sound you can call A. In line 2 the word *be* has a different sound than *street* so it is labeled B. Line 3 ends with *up*, a still different sound, so it is called C. But the *me* in line 4 rhymes with *be* in line 2, so it is called B also. The pattern for this rhyming quatrain is A–B–C–B.

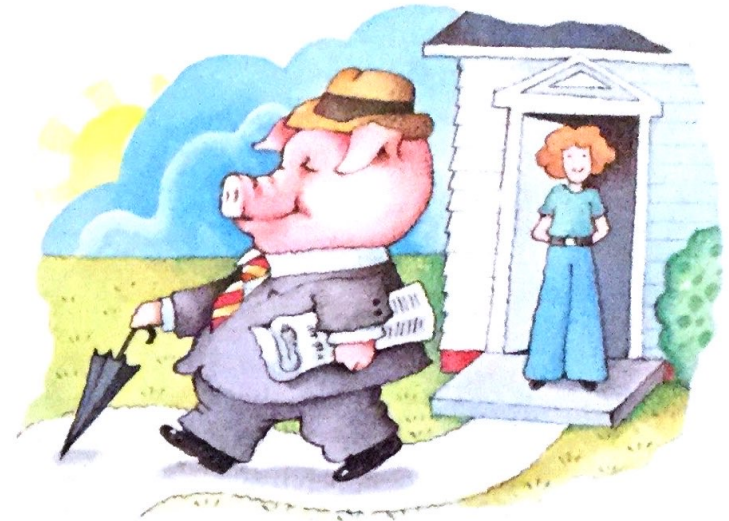
Although A-B-C-B is the rhyming pattern poets use most often in writing a quatrain, there are many others. Notice the pattern that X. J. Kennedy uses in this verse from his poem "Hickenthrift and Hickenloop."

Hickenthrift and Hickenloop	A
Stood fourteen mountains high.	B
They'd waded the wind, they'd have to stoop	A
To let the full moon by.	B

In lines 1 and 3, the last words rhyme (*Hickenloop* and *stoop*), so they are both called A, just as *high* in line 2 and *by* in line 4 rhyme and are called B. This pattern is called A-B-A-B and is a little harder to write than the A-B-C-B pattern.

There are a number of rhyming patterns you can use in a quatrain. The following three quatrains use patterns that are different from the two patterns you've learned about. Can you tell the rhyme pattern for each one? (The answers are upside down on the next page.)

1. I went to the animal fair.  
The birds and the beasts were there.  
The big baboon, by the light of the moon,  
Was combing his auburn hair.



2. I had a little pig, his name was Ben,  
He learned how to count from one to ten.  
I dressed him up to look like a clerk  
With a collar and a suit and sent him to work.
3. O what's the weather in a Beard?  
It's windy there, and rather weird,  
And when you think the sky has cleared  
—Why, there is Dirty Dinky.

The third quatrain above, which has a more unusual pattern, is from Theodore Roethke's poem "Dinky."

(Answers: 1. A-A-B-B-A; 2. A-A-B-B-A; 3. A-A-A-B)

In each quatrain in that poem, the first three lines (A) all rhyme, and the last line (B) is repeated throughout the poem.

It is possible also to write a quatrain with no rhyming words, like this part of the poem "Which" by William Stafford.

Which of the horses  
we passed yesterday whinnied  
all night in my dreams?  
I want that one.

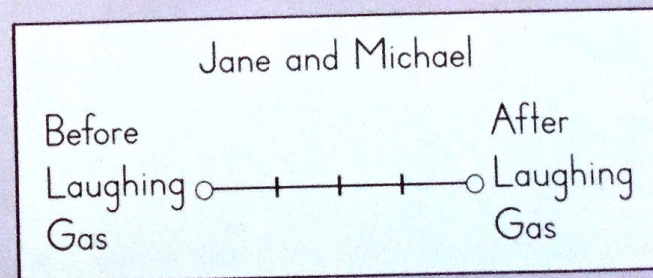
Quatrains offer many possibilities for your own writing. Quatrains can be funny or serious. If you like to write riddles, the quatrain is a good pattern to use for these. If you want to write poetry, just one quatrain can make a whole poem, or you can put together two, three, or many quatrains into a much longer poem. You can even use quatrains to tell a story, as Ted Hughes does in his poem "My Aunt Dora." Because they can be used alone or in many combinations, quatrains are the "building blocks" of poetry.

When you do write your own quatrain, keep in mind that, whether or not you use rhyme, you will always need *rhythm*. To keep a good rhythm, try to use about the same number of syllables in all of the lines and say your verse aloud. You'll be able to hear if a line seems too short or too long for all the others.

## Focusing on "Laughing Gas"

### Think and Read

- ▶ Think about a time when you laughed at everything, whether or not it was funny. Also try to remember a time when you or your classmates had the giggles. Discuss what causes people to catch the giggles from others.
- ▶ Look at the pictures in this story. Think about what might cause people to laugh. Read the title and the introduction on pages 78–79. Then look again at the people in the first picture.
  - Who do you think these people are? Why do you think this?
  - What do you think they are doing?
  - What do you think "Laughing Gas" might do to these people?
- ▶ Get ready to read a story about two children who get filled up with Laughing Gas. As you read, think about how Laughing Gas changes their behavior. Think about what events you would add to this time line.



Now turn the page and read "Laughing Gas." Then you will talk about the effects of Laughing Gas.