

Limericks

by Paul Ashe

Level: Advanced

Target age: Teenagers and above

Time needed: 40 minutes

Aim: To introduce the framework of a limerick (short humorous poem) and provide practice in writing limericks.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student.

Warmer

Write the following limerick on the board.

*If you catch a chinchilla in Chile
And cut off its beard, willy-nilly
You can honestly say
That you have just made
A Chilean chinchilla's chin chilly.*

Read it out to your students and ask them what it is about. Ask them to read it aloud to each other in pairs to get a feel for the rhythm. If you do not know what the rhythm of a limerick is like, you can listen to it on the onestopenglish web page for this lesson.

Tell the class it is a special type of poem called a limerick and that in this lesson they are going to look at how they are formed and perhaps try to write one themselves.

Main activity

1. Hand out one copy of the worksheet per student. Ask students to read the two limericks at the top of the page.
2. Once they have done this, divide the students into pairs and ask them to complete Activities 1 to 4. Once all pairs have finished conduct feedback as a class.

Key:

1. A limerick has five lines.
2. The rhyme pattern is b: aabba.
3. Both statements are true.

3. Now ask the pairs to complete the text with an appropriate word which will tell them the possible origin of limericks.

Key:

Some people say that/- the limerick was invented by soldiers returning from France to the Irish town of Limerick in the 1700s.

4. Activity 5 requires students to match the definitions with some of the literary devices used in limericks.

Key:

hyperbole = deliberate exaggeration for effect
onomatopoeia = a word which sounds like the thing it represents

idiom = an expression with a fixed meaning different from the individual words

pun = a play on words

5. Ask pairs to try and complete Activities 6 and 7 together. Then conduct open class feedback to see how each group completed the limerick in Activity 7. One possibility could be using the words *leg, ice* and *beg* in that order.

Follow-up activity

As a follow-up students could write their own limericks either together or individually for homework.

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What is a limerick?

Read these two limericks and answer the questions below to find out.

There was a young lady from Niger,
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They came back from the ride
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

A poet whose friends called him Steve
Once showed quite a will to achieve
His skill grew so strong
That his poems grew long
And he sadly was forced to abbrev.

- How many lines does a limerick have? _____
- Do the lines rhyme? If so, what is the rhyme pattern?
 - a b a b a
 - a a b b a
 - a b b a a
- Now try humming the limerick with exaggerated intonation. Notice the rhythm and the beats in each line. Are the following statements true (T) or false (F)?
 - Lines 1, 2 and 5 have between seven and ten syllables
 - Lines 3 and 4 have five to seven syllables

4. Now complete the gaps in this sentence about the origins of limericks.

Some people say _____ the limerick was invented _____ soldiers returning _____ France to the Irish town _____ Limerick in _____ 1700s.

5. Limericks are meant to be funny. They often contain the following devices. Match the word with its definition.

hyperbole	an expression with a fixed meaning different from the individual words
onomatopoeia	deliberate exaggeration for effect
idiom	a play on words
pun	a word which sounds like the thing it represents

6. The last line of a good limerick contains the **PUNCH LINE** or 'heart of the joke.' Say the following limericks out loud and clap to the rhythm.

As 007 walked by
He heard a wee spider say, "Hi."
But shaken, he shot
It right there on the spot
As it tried to explain, "I'm a spi ..."

There once was a man from Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket;
But his daughter, named Nan
Ran away with a man --
And as far as the bucket, Nantucket.

7. Now try completing the following limerick.

There once was a woman named Meg,
Who accidentally broke her _____.
She slipped on the _____,
Not once, but thrice,
Take no pity on her, I _____.