

ROLE OF LIMERICKS IN ENGLISH CULTURE AND THEIR TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPLICATIONS

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Annotation: This article examines cultural value and teaching implications displayed by the studying of English limericks by nonnative English students. Surprisingly, limericks have received little attention in teaching the English language and culture, although they represent an interesting material from the point of view of their cultural and pedagogical value. Limerick poems include different cultural and linguistic features that make them hold both historical and cultural value for the British, serving as a testament to the enduring appeal of humor and wordplay in English-speaking societies.

Key words: limerick, nursery rhymes, wordplay, literary tradition, anapestic meter, stylistic device, folk poetry

Every literary genre and style has a history of origin, and limericks having a profoundly unique literary character and numerous linguistic implications is an inalienable part of the English literary culture. A survey of the literary resources devoted to limericks vividly demonstrate why limericks are so meaningful for the English culture. Learning English from the English limericks is beneficial for both students studying in an ESL classroom and those attempting to master their English proficiency.

A limerick is a form of poetry, typically humorous, consisting of five lines. The rhyme scheme is usually AABBA, meaning the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme with each other, while the third and fourth lines have a separate rhyme. Limericks often have a bouncy rhythm and often include witty or silly content. They're commonly associated with nonsense or playful verse. Here's a classic limerick by Edward Lear (1812-1888), who was an English artist, author and poet, and known mostly for his poetry and prose and especially his limericks, which he widely popularised¹:

There once was a man from Peru,
Who dreamt he was eating his shoe.
He woke with a fright,
In the middle of the night,
To find that his dream had come true!

Limericks have several distinctive poetic and linguistic features:

a) limericks have a five-line structure, which helps give them a concise and punchy feel;

b) their typical rhyme scheme is AABBA, with the first, second, and fifth lines rhyming with each other, and the third and fourth lines rhyming with each other;

c) limericks often have a distinctive meter, characterized by a bouncy rhythm. The meter is usually anapestic, with two short unstressed syllables followed by a longer stressed syllable (da-da-DUM). This meter contributes to the light and playful tone of limericks;

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/58524966-there-was-an-old-man-of-peru>

d) limericks are known for their humorous content, often featuring wordplay, puns, or absurd scenarios. The humor can range from witty and clever to silly and nonsensical;

e) many limericks tell a brief, often absurd, story within the constraints of their five-line structure. This narrative element adds to their entertainment value;

f) limericks need to convey their message or story concisely due to their short length. This compactness requires careful selection of words and often results in punchy and memorable phrases;

g) the repetition of rhyming sounds in the first, second, and fifth lines contributes to the musicality and cohesion of limericks.

These features collectively contribute to the distinctive charm and appeal of limericks as a form of poetry. Limericks have held historical and cultural significance for the British and broader English-speaking cultures for many reasons. Limericks have long been enjoyed as a form of popular entertainment in Britain. They are often recited or sung in social gatherings, pubs, and other informal settings, providing amusement and camaraderie. Besides, they are part of the broader literary tradition of English-language poetry. While they are often associated with humor and light-heartedness, they have also been used by renowned poets and writers as a form of expression. For instance, Edward Lear's, whose limericks were well-known in the 19th century, "The book of Nonsense" consists of limerick poem which was called "Hickory, dickory dock" described behavior and habits of the King and his son and the condition of that period as well as.

Limericks are akin to folk poetry, passed down orally through generations. They reflect the wit, creativity, and humor of ordinary people, contributing to the rich tapestry of British folklore. Limericks, with their playful language and irreverent tone, have become ingrained in British cultural identity. They exemplify the British love of wordplay and satire, showcasing the nation's linguistic creativity and sense of humor. They belong to the literary legacy: British writers and poets have contributed significantly to the popularity and development of limericks.

Several writers and poets have contributed to the tradition of limericks over the years. Some notable examples include Edward Lear (1812–1888): Often credited with popularizing the limerick form, Lear wrote many limericks in his book "A Book of Nonsense" (1846). His limericks are characterized by their playful language and whimsical characters. Lewis Carroll (1832–1898) best known for "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass," also wrote limericks. His limericks often feature clever wordplay and absurd scenarios. W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) wrote numerous limericks, often in correspondence with friends and colleagues. His limericks showcase his wit and sharp sense of humor.

Many limericks have been created by anonymous authors over the years, passed down through oral tradition or shared in informal settings such as pubs and social gatherings. These anonymous limericks contribute to the folkloric aspect of the form.

Limericks continue to be written by contemporary authors and poets, both as standalone works and as part of larger collections. Some modern writers use limericks to explore social or political themes, while others focus on humor and wordplay².

² See Fred Hornaday on <https://kingoflimericks.com/limericks>

While Edward Lear is often credited with popularizing limericks in the 19th century, the form has evolved and been embraced by writers and poets from various backgrounds and time periods. It remains a beloved form of poetry characterized by its humor, wit, and playful language. Here are examples of modern authors on various themes:

1. Social Commentary:

There once was a man from D.C.,
Who dreamed of a land fair and free.
But the suits in the hall
Couldn't hear his call,
Too busy with power and decree.

2. Environmental Concerns:

There once was a planet so blue,
Where the trees whispered secrets anew.
But we plundered and pillaged,
Till nature was villaged,
Now the Earth cries for me and for you.

3. Technology and Social Media:

There once was a tweet gone awry,
Its impact reached high in the sky.
With a click and a tap,
It caused quite a flap,
In the realm where the virtual lies.

4. Love and Relationships:

There once were two hearts intertwined,
Their love like a melody, refined.
Through laughter and tears,
Across countless years,
Together, their souls were aligned.

These examples showcase how limericks can be used to explore a wide range of themes, from the serious and contemplative to the light-hearted and whimsical, by modern authors. As these limericks are examples created for various themes, they don't have specific attributed authors or publication sources. They were crafted to illustrate how modern authors might approach writing limericks on different subjects.

Learning limericks can have several teaching implications across various educational domains. Limericks can be used to teach language and literacy skills such as phonics, rhyme, rhythm, and vocabulary. Analyzing the rhyme scheme and identifying rhyming words can help reinforce phonemic awareness, while discussing the rhythm and meter of limericks can enhance understanding of poetic devices.

Writing limericks can encourage creativity and imaginative expression. Students can experiment with wordplay, humor, and storytelling within the constraints of the limerick form, fostering their ability to generate original ideas and communicate them effectively. Exploring the history and cultural significance of limericks can provide insights into the literary traditions of different societies. Students can learn about the origins of limericks, their evolution over time, and their role in popular culture, helping

them develop a broader understanding of literature and society.

Analyzing limericks can sharpen students' critical thinking skills by prompting them to evaluate the structure, themes, and underlying messages of the poems. Students can consider the purpose of each limerick, the techniques used by the author, and the potential interpretations of the poem's content. Studying limericks from different cultural backgrounds can foster cultural appreciation and sensitivity among students. By exploring limericks from various regions and traditions, students can gain insights into different perspectives, languages, and storytelling styles, promoting empathy and global awareness.

Overall, learning limericks can be a versatile and engaging educational tool with implications for language development, creative expression, critical thinking, and cultural understanding. Incorporating limericks into the curriculum can enhance learning experiences across a range of academic disciplines and promote holistic development among students.

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