

# The News

## Michael Rosen

### Objectives

- To discuss the nature of nonsense poetry and how it turns what we think of as everyday life and language upside down to create new and strange meanings
- To write a simple nonsense poem through the technique of repetition and juxtaposition of unlikely phrases

### Introduction

Since his very early work one of Michael Rosen's strengths as a poet has been his ability to engage readers of all ages with his topsy-turvy nonsense rhymes and jingles; 'Down behind the dustbin/ I met a dog called Ted/ Leave me alone he said/ I'm just going to bed'. These are often based in real-life situations and contain real-life elements (dogs, dustbins) but are somehow more strange and always more funny than we know. His two recent books of nonsense poems display this ability again and again. Children need very little encouragement to engage with writing which sets the natural order of things upside down.

### Resources needed

- Poetry Archive recording of Michael Rosen reading ['The News'](#) (Scan QR code)



## Teaching sequence of activities

### Starter

Play recording of the poem to the class once. Take responses. What did you notice about the poem? Did it remind you of anything? Are the words it uses similar to anything else we hear in daily life? Play the poem a second time. What else do you notice about the poem, especially the way it sounds? Why is it a funny idea to think of a pair of shoes being important enough to go on the news?

### Development

Take suggestions about extremely ordinary things which might feature on an imaginary TV channel. These could be pets, family members, items of clothing, or objects from around the house. Instead of mimicking the poem directly it might be a good idea to allow the energy of the daftness of the chosen object to direct where the poem goes. Usually I would advise against trying to make the poem rhyme, but in this instance, the fact that we are trying to create nonsense seems to necessitate its use. Write a shared poem as a class, taking suggestions from the children as you go.

Put the children into mixed ability pairs. The task is to write a nonsense poem, the idea of which is to make an ordinary object or thing appear extraordinary because of the context of being on the news. For children who struggle with the transcriptional aspect of writing they have the safety net of working with a more confident partner; and more able children are stretched by organising the rhymes and ideas into some sort of (but not too much) sense.

### Plenary

What has each group learned:

- About writing nonsense poetry? Is it easier or harder than they thought?
- About using rhyme? When is it not a good idea to use rhyme in the same way as this? Why does the rhyme enhance our enjoyment of the poems?

Children from each group to share work and comment on each other's work.

## Extension activities

### Reading /discussion:

Discuss the effect of repetition and rhyme in the poems '[My Friend Elsie](#)' and '[The Great Big Hole](#)'.

**Writing composition:** Write other poems which employ repetition of simple phrases as in the poem '[Riding down to Boxland](#)'. All of these poems are available at [www.poetryarchive.org](http://www.poetryarchive.org)

### Variations

For a different opener to a lesson on Rosen's nonsense poems play the Archive recording of '[Yesterday](#)'. One way of getting the children to enter into this world where 'anything goes' is to stop short half way through the final line of the poem, leaving a space for them to fill in the rhyme. By the end (the final word of the poem) they should be nicely warmed up to accept and engage with the idea that anything can happen.

### Further reading and listening

Play other poems by [Michael Rosen](#). Many of them start with simple phrases and build on them, either for comic effect or for more poignant meditations. Try listening to other nonsense poems such as '[The Land of the Bumbly Boo](#)' by Spike Milligan or explore repetition and rhyme with '[Walking with my Iguana](#)' by Brian Moses. All of these poems are available at [www.poetryarchive.org](http://www.poetryarchive.org)