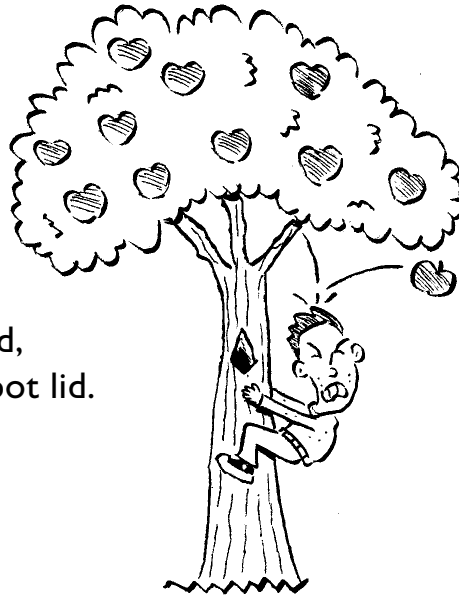


# Chants and Street Rhymes

As I went up the apple tree,  
All the apples fell on me.  
Bake a pudding, bake a pie,  
Did you ever tell a lie?  
Yes, you did, you know you did,  
You broke your mother's teapot lid.



Ooo-ah, wanna piece of pie,  
Pie too sweet, wanna piece of meat,  
Meat too tough, wanna ride a bus,  
Bus was full, wanna ride a bull,  
Bull too fat, want your money back,  
Money too green, wanna jelly bean,  
Jelly bean not cooked, wanna read a book,  
Book not read, wanna go to bed.  
So close your eyes and count to ten,  
And if you miss, start all over again.

A, my name is Abby,  
And my husband's name is Andy.  
We come from Alaska,  
And we sell aardvarks.  
B, my name is Bonnie,  
And my husband's name is Bert.  
We come from Baltimore,  
And we sell beads.

[...and so on through the alphabet]

# Chants and Street Rhymes

## Counting-Out Rhyme (like "One Potato, Two Potato")

Bumblebee, bumblebee  
Stung somebody on the knee  
Stung a pig upon his snout  
I say you are out!



## Spelling Rhyme

New York  
Knife and fork,  
Bottle and cork,  
That's the way  
You spell New York.



## Ball-Bouncing Rhyme

One, two, three, alary,  
I spy old Miss Scary  
Sitting on a dictionary  
Just like a green canary.





# Chants and Street Rhymes

## Savoring the Street-Beat of Words

**M**y first experience with a chant was on the baseball diamond across the street from my house when I was a kid. In a tight game, one of the players on our bench would begin the chant:

Up the river, down the lake,  
The pitcher's got a bellyache.

Soon we were all chanting at the pitcher, hoping that our antics would disrupt his concentration. I'm sure it was that experience that led me to write a chant many years later that included these lines:

Got the shivers, got the shakes,  
Pitcher's belly's full of snakes.

Thunder book, lightning flash,  
Pitcher's got an itchy rash.

Can you recall some of the chants from your childhood? Perhaps you remember a jump-rope rhyme, or you remember that chant you recited as you walked to school:

Step on a crack,  
And break your mother's back.

Or

Step over a ditch,  
Your father's nose will itch.

A chant is a poem meant to be recited aloud. It nearly always has a line, phrase, or pattern repeated. Such repetition gives conviction and power to a chant just as it gives rhythm and music to a poem. So it has been since our ancestors sat around the campfire reciting chants to protect themselves from marauding beasts or to strengthen themselves for battle or for hunting.

## EXPLORING THE POEM

### Finding the Power in the Chant

Since rhythm and repetition are so important to the chant, that is a good place to start your lesson. Ask your students if they are familiar with any chants or jump-rope rhymes. As they recite their chants, record them on a cassette so you can replay them together to listen to the rhythm and repetition. Make sure your students can feel the beat. As they listen, have them clap their hands or gently slap their thighs to the rhythm.

Next, give the students the Poetry Pages, and have two small groups give choral readings of the chants as the rest of the class softly claps out the rhythm. This will help everyone get the feel of the kind of poetry they are about to write.

## DRAFTING THE POEM

### Rhythm From Memory, Words From the Heart

One way to get your students started on a chant is to ask them to write their own version of their favorite jump-rope or street rhyme. If they are not rope-jumpers, they might want to try writing a version of a rhyme from the Poetry Pages. One way to do this is to keep the rhythm of the chant in mind and fill in new words to the same beat, putting the repetitions and rhymes in the same spots as in the model chant. This step requires a lot of out-loud composing, so be prepared for a classroom full of constructive chatter.

## EXTENDING THE LESSON

Since the chant must be read aloud for full effect, I suggest a program of oral presentations, complete with jump-rope demonstrations by those who have written jump-rope rhymes. Some chants work well with two students presenting the poems, one reading the body of the poem and another reading the repeating line. You might want to videotape or audiotape the presentation. Having a recording of the chants will prove helpful the next time you present this lesson, not to mention the fun you and your students will have reliving the program!

## RESOURCES

Two great books of street rhymes are *Miss Mary Mack and Other Children's Street Rhymes* (Morrow, 1990) collected by Joanna Cole and Stephanie Almenon, and *Anna Banana: 101 Jump-Rope Rhymes* (Morrow, 1989) collected by Joanna Cole. For a more international flavor, you can try *Street Rhymes Around the World* (Boyd's Mills, 1992) collected by Jane Yolen.