

## Powerful Parodies



To write a parody of a poem requires having a good knowledge of the original or it loses its point. Parodies are also fun – but how to bring this into the classroom?

Students will be familiar with the concept of parody, if not the actual term, from many facetious rhymes such as ‘When shepherds washed their socks by night’. Others are available on-line, though not as prolific as one might hope. Here’s Spike Milligan’s take on the first verse of John Masefield’s famous poem:

I must go down to the sea again,  
to the lonely sea and the sky;  
I left my shoes and socks there -  
I wonder if they're dry?

Here’s my take on Jabberwocky:

### **Jabbermockery**

Twas Thursday and the bottom set  
Did gyre and gimble in the gym.  
All mimsy was Miss Borogrove  
And the Head of Maths was grim.

"Beware the Mathematix, my friend!  
His sums that snarl. His co-ordinates that catch!  
Beware the Deputy Bird, and shun  
The evil Earring-snatch!"

She took her ballpoint pen in hand:  
Long time the problem's end she sought -  
So rested she by the lavatory  
And sat awhile in thought.

And as in toughish thought she sat,  
The Mathematix with eyes of flame  
Came calculating through the cloakroom doors  
And subtracted as he came.

She thought real fast as he went past;  
The well placed soap went slickersmack!  
She left him stunned and with the sums  
She went galumphing back.

"And hast thou got the answers, Jackie?  
Come to our desk," beamed idle boys.  
"Oh, frabjous day, Quelle heure! Calais!"  
They chortled in their joy.

Tw'as Thursday and the bottom set  
Did gyre and gimble in the gym.  
All mimsy was Miss Borogrove  
And the Head of Maths was **grim**.

To avoid copyright problems, I will only quote a few lines of Henry Beard's poem 'To a Vase' parodying Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I Love Thee'. His poem begins

How do I break thee? Let me count the ways.  
I break thee if thou art at any height  
My paw can reach...

And ends

And if someone thy shards together fits,  
I'll break thee once again when thou art glued.

I cannot recommend too highly his book 'Poetry for Cats' in which you will almost certainly find a parody of a poem your students are studying.

Once students are familiar with the idea, they could choose their own poem, perhaps from an exam anthology. Like Spike Milligan, they do not have to tackle the whole poem.

The success of a parody depends on a good knowledge of the original and therefore it does help in gaining a deeper knowledge of that poem.

Another example to finish with:

My owners kept me from terriers who were tough  
Whose masters threw sticks like spears, who tore worn clothes.  
Their teeth gnawed at bones. They ran in the street  
And climbed fences and stripped wallpaper off walls.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron  
And their jerking jaws and their breath right in my face.  
I feared the sharp coarse panting of those dogs  
Who snarled and sneered behind me on the road.

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges  
Like jackals to snatch at my fur. They dug up mud  
And I scampered the other way, pretending to bark.  
I longed to play with them, yet I was never allowed.

And remember, nothing encourages students more than their teacher having a go.

See also:

<https://missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com/2009/04/parodies-of-famous-poems.html>