**Poetry from Daily Life: A poem about a tick or termite? Sure can, if the rhyme is right**

By David L. Harrison

I hope you are enjoying our Sunday column, “Poetry from Daily Life,” which provides each week the wit, wisdom, and experiences of poets and authorities on poetry. By offering such a rich mix of voices, we’re reminded of how poetry impacts our daily lives. More than fifty poets from across the United States and abroad are waiting their turn to be a guest on “Poetry from Daily Life.” Please tell others about this unique feature. I hope you’ll thank the Springfield News-Leader for making it possible.

Today I’ll introduce myself in the same way that I introduce guest columnists. I live in Springfield, Missouri and write poems, stories, nonfiction, and books for classroom teachers. I write for all ages but most often for students in grades 3-5 and I like poetry best. Two recent books that I especially enjoyed working on are "The Dirt Book" (Holiday House, 2021) and "Partner Poems and Word Ladders for Building Foundational Literacy Skills" (Scholastic, 2022). A unique fact about me is that I once skinned a 5-foot Indian cobra and tanned its hide.

**Writing Couplets**

In 1959, I sat in an auditorium in Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia to hear Robert Frost speak. At 85 and rather frail, he still thrilled us by reading his famous poems. Many of Frost’s best poems were in verse and he especially loved couplets such as those in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." In that poem he rhymed one line — “Whose woods these are I think I know” — with a next line that ended in “though.”

T. S. Eliot often used couplets in Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats, which later became the basis for the musical sensation, CATS. He rhymed one line — "With cats, some say, one rule is true:" — with a next line that ended in “spoken to.”

Ogden Nash loved writing humorous couplets. One of his most famous rhymed the line — "The cow is of the bovine ilk;" — with a second line that ended in “milk.”

I often used couplets in my own work. Here are two examples, one long, one short, from "bugs, poems about creeping things" (Wordsong, 2009).

"The termite doesn’t eat the way it should.

"It’s not its fault, its food all tastes like wood."

The other tells a short story named “A Tick’s Friends.”

"The tick has no friends.

"Therefore, my story ends."

Couplets are the most versatile form of rhyming poetry. Whatever your mood or your message, you can start with two lines that rhyme and add other rhymed pairs if you need them to complete your story. Be sure that your second line has a similar number of accented syllables, set in the same pattern, as the first.

Making up couplets is a great way to have fun while taking your vocabulary out for some exercise. Creating couplets with a partner or as a family game is even better. Tip: It helps to prepare some lists of words that rhyme with a lot of other words:

bay, bray, clay, day, gay, gray, hay, hey; blue, brew, boo, brew, chew, crew, dew, do.

One player makes up a line. Another player, or group of players, must provide the second line to rhyme with the first.

*(first voice)*

“It’s raining today.”

*(second voice)*

“Let’s stay in and play.”

*(first voice)*

“Winter’s coming, bring on the snow.”

*(second voice)*

“I love winter, ho-ho-ho!”

This year for the holidays, surprise a few people by sending them couplets you’ve written especially for them.

*David L. Harrison is the current Missouri Poet Laureate as well as Drury University Poet Laureate. His awards include the Christopher Medal and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Children’s Literature Award. To learn more, visit his website at* [*davidlharrison.com*](http://davidlharrison.com)*.*