**Poetry from Daily Life: Remember any schoolyard rhymes? Those were poems you memorized**

By Kate Coombs

*This week’s guest on Poetry from Daily Life is Kate Coombs, who lives in Bountiful, Utah. Kate began writing when she was seven or eight years old and was first published in 2006. She confides that her first poem was oral. “I asked my mom: ‘What will I be, when I’m through with 3?’ I did not like the answer. I wanted to skip 4 so I could go to kindergarten.” Kate has written poetry collections, picture books, middle grade fiction, and rhymed board books, but first and foremost is a poet. She says that her newest project is always her favorite. That includes a recent poetry collection called "Today I Am a River" about imagining yourself as different things in nature (April 2023). A unique fact about Kate? She is one of seven ethnically diverse adopted children. ~ David L. Harrison*

**The poetry you didn’t know you memorized**

It used to be that stories weren’t written down, they were told and passed down orally. Thanks to the invention of written language and Gutenberg’s printing press, today’s stories and poems are mostly written. But the oral tradition persists in surprising places. You yourself have memorized some poems and didn’t even know it: jump rope rhymes!

Do you remember? Here’s the one that first popped into my head:

Cinderella, dressed in yella,  
Went upstairs to kiss her fella.  
By mistake she kissed a snake,  
How many doctors did it take?  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6…

Maybe your reaction to this jump rope rhyme is “That’s not how it goes!” And you’re right, because the words are altered as they are passed down, not family to family like Grimms’ fairy tales were, but kid to kid on playgrounds all over this country and beyond. Which means the words are a little different in different places.

How does this relate to writing poetry? Well, jump rope rhymes are a good example of rhythm, meter, and beat. What’s more, small sections of poetry are measured in feet, and just watch those feet jump! You don’t have to memorize any of this for a test, but you might like to see how poems work when they use different rhythms, or meters.

Keep in mind that words have accented (strong) syllables and unaccented (weak) syllables. For example, “purple” has an accented and then an unaccented syllable: PUR-ple. “Banana” has an unaccented, an accented, and an unaccented syllable: ba-NA-na.

There are five types of poetic feet. Here are just two, each illustrated by a word:

**Trochee**: one stressed syllable, one unstressed syllable (one strong, one weak). For example, “pencil” (PEN-cil). This is the meter used in “Cinderella,” and there’s a reason for that. Notice how the first syllable thumps like feet going down and the second syllable is light as the feet go up in the air. “CIN-der-EL-la DRESSED in YEL-la…” Watch that rope twirl!

**Iamb**: one unstressed syllable, one stressed syllable (one weak, one strong). For example, “relax” (re-LAX). This is the meter you hear in Shakespeare’s plays. It is said to sound the most like ordinary conversation and even heartbeats.

The other part of this equation is how many feet are in a line. “Cinderella” has four trochees per line, which is called tetrameter. Shakespeare’s lines are usually written in pentameter, or five iambs per line. Here’s a line from Romeo and Juliet with the five feet separated out: “But, SOFT!/what LIGHT/through YON/-der WIN/-dow BREAKS?”

A lot of poetry these days is written in free verse, which doesn’t stick to a steady, repeated rhythm of meters and beats. It has its own kind of beauty. But some everyday poetry we’re all familiar with, like song lyrics and jump rope rhymes, use meter, along with rhyme.

Of course, you may never write jump rope rhymes, but you can hop and skip down memory lane with them. And maybe you can buy a jump rope for a child in your life. You don’t need to teach kids these small poems, though. They will learn them in the grand oral tradition of the playground.

*Kate Coombs has written more than 30 books for kids, including four poetry collections. Living in Utah, she appreciates the mountains and the deer in the backyard when they’re not eating her plants. You can visit Kate’s website at* [*www.katecoombs.com*](https://www.katecoombs.com/)*.*