

Runny Babbit

Celebrate Shel Silverstein's *Runny Babbit: A Billy Sook* with lessons and activities created just for you from HarperCollins Children's Books!

Set the Stage

Kick off an author-and-genre study by finding out what students already know about Silverstein and his work.

Ask: What are your favorite Shel Silverstein books and poems? How would you describe Silverstein's work to someone who has not read it?

Introducing . . .

Share *Runny Babbit* with your class. Read poems aloud. Have fun! Play with the language. After reading a few poems (which will have students laughing as they try to untangle Runny's funny words), reread the introduction (p. 4). It explains the animals' unusual language. Ask students to restate this explanation in their own words.

Ask: How is Runny Babbit's way of speaking different from the way we speak? Why do you think Shel Silverstein made his characters speak this way?

Lost in Translation?

Have students translate "The Funny Family" (p. 6) into everyday speech. Copy the poem onto posterboard. Post for students to see. Next to the poem post blank posterboard. Read the poem one time all the way through. Then call on students to translate the poem line by line. Write the translation on the blank posterboard. (As an alternative, you may wish to have students translate with the help of Post-it notes. Simply write the correct letter(s) on Post-it notes and place them over the mixed-up letters.) When you're through, read both poems, side by side. Compare and contrast.

Ask: When translated, does the poem's meaning change? What about the mood? What effect does Silverstein achieve by switching the first letters of some of the words?

Bonus: Have students select their own *Runny Babbit* poems to translate. Students should copy poems into their writing journals or onto blank sheets of paper and write the translations alongside.

Lesson Up!

Engage students in a conversation about the writer's craft with this series of mini lessons:

A. Form

Ask: What is poetry? Encourage students to think about how poetry looks and sounds and how it makes them feel.

Ask: What makes a poem different from a story? Record responses onto posterboard. Compare and contrast a poem and a short picture book to illustrate the difference between the two forms.

B. Rhythm

Like music, Shel Silverstein's poems have a rhythm all their own. Read aloud, the beat rolls off the tongue. Demonstrate by displaying a *Runny Babbit* poem on posterboard or with an overhead projector. Read the poem aloud and have students clap along, keeping time to the beat of the spoken word. Read and clap the entire poem all the way through. Next time take it slow. Have students clap each line one by one and count the numbers of syllables. What pattern do students notice? Try this exercise using the work of other poets.

Ask: How does the rhythm change? What effect does the rhythm have on your reading of the poem?

C. Rhyme

As students have probably discussed in the first mini lesson, poems often rhyme. (Though there's no rule that says they must!) Shel Silverstein uses rhyme throughout *Runny Babbit*. Examine three *Runny Babbit* poems—"Runny's Hand-New Brat" (p. 9), "Runny's Hew Nobby" (p. 24), and "Runny's Heading Rabbits" (p. 43)—and find the rhyme pattern in each. Copy the poems on posterboard and read them aloud. Repeat.

Ask: What is the rhyme pattern in this poem? (Abcb, for example.) Have students model their own poems on one of these rhyme schemes.

Collecting Shel

Create a Shel Silverstein poetry collection in your classroom. Other HarperCollins titles include *Falling Up*, *A Light in the Attic*, and *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Display the books prominently. If students have Silverstein books at home, encourage them to bring them into class. During reading time, have students select a Silverstein book to read independently or as partners. At the end of the period, have a group discussion about students' reading.

Ask: What poems did you especially enjoy and why? What books would you recommend? Have students write book reviews and compile them in a class newsletter.

Share the Love

Invite a class of younger students to your room for reading time. Have students buddy up and provide a selection of Silverstein books to read.

Take It to Heart

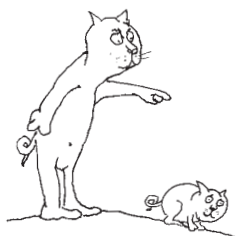
Have students select their favorite *Runny Babbit* poems to memorize. Students should copy the poems into their writing notebooks and practice reading them until they have committed them to memory. When they are ready, have students take turns reciting their poems in class. Encourage students to speak clearly and loudly so others can hear them.

Caught in the Act

Explain to students that Shel Silverstein was also a performer, in addition to being a writer and an illustrator. In honor of Silverstein's love of theater, have students work in partnerships or small groups to act out *Runny Babbit* poems. Students should create scripts so other people can act out the poems as well. Good poems to act out include:



Ploppy Sig Reans
His Cloom (p. 15)



Calley At's
Kittle Litten
(p. 46-47)



The Kungle
Jing (p. 55)



Runny Loes to
Gunch (p. 71)

More than one voice is represented in these poems. In "Kugs and Hisses" (pp. 16-17) readers hear from a narrator and two characters. Here is an example of how this poem-play might be written and performed:

Narrator: Runny said . . .

Runny: "I'm lonesome, I feel so glad and soomy. I need some kugs and hisses—
Now, who's gonna give 'em to me?"

Polly Dorkupine: "I will,"

Narrator: . . . said Polly Dorkupine.

Polly Dorkupine: "'Cause you're as cute as a rug in a bug."

Narrator: Said Runny . . .

Runny Babbit: "Well, I'll kake the tiss, But never hind the *mug*."

Book Party!

Top off your Shel Silverstein study by hosting a poetry reading. Invite other classes to hear your students read aloud. Make your room festive by hanging *Runny Babbit* posters around the room. Design and distribute invitations. Make *Runny Babbit* bookmarks as party favors.