

IS IT A MINK ALL DRESSED IN PINK?

Antoinette Gagné

It's a mink
All dressed in pink
Skating on the rink
And having a drink.

Short four-line rhyming poems with illustrations can be introduced in the ESL classroom to provide variety and a change of pace. The poems are frequently humorous and the visual cues facilitate comprehension. They can be incorporated in activities which help students expand their vocabulary, learn new language functions and structures, and acquire intonation and stress patterns.

Rhyming poems can involve both teachers and students in a creative process. They can be adapted for use with learners of all ages and of different levels of ability.

Procedure

Show students an illustration and read the accompanying model poem. Then, using a different illustration, have students brainstorm for rhyming words and try to create a poem. Following this, have students compare their poem with the model poem for the illustration. At this point students can be engaged in choral reading with emphasis on correct pronunciation, stress and intonation. In the case of elementary school children who have not yet begun to read in English, the lines can be taught orally using the illustrations to indicate the sequence of rhyming words. Students can create their own poems for an illustration as a group, in pairs, or individually.

As an alternative to the above procedure, have students write poems without the aid of a visual stimulus, then illustrate them. The drawings and poems can be displayed in the classroom. The teacher can also make copies of the better ones to share with other classes.

Following are some examples of poems written by teachers for use with Cree children learning English (see Figure 1 for illustrations). They were collected during a methodology course which I gave at the James Bay Eeyou School in Chisasibi, Québec.

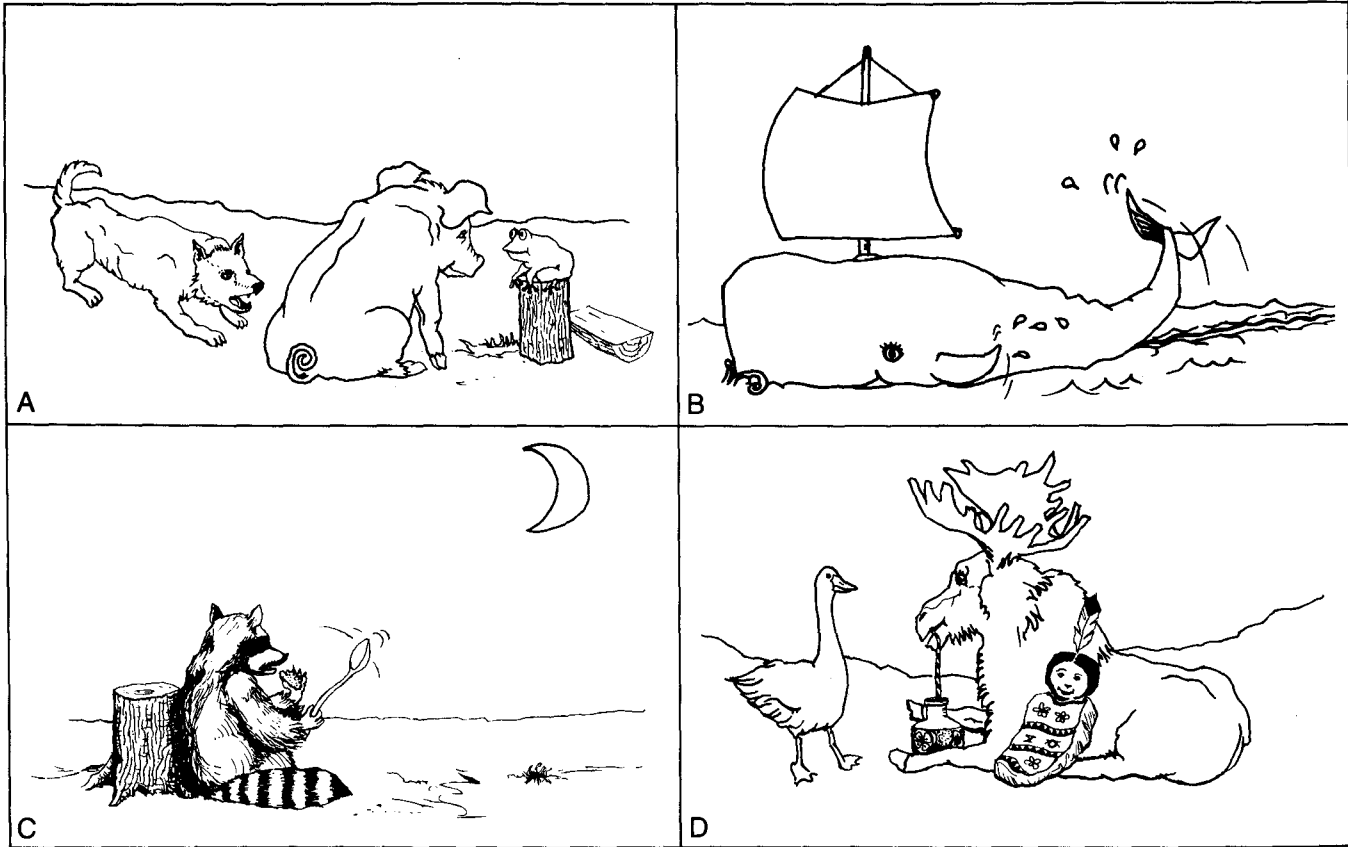


Figure 1. Illustrations for rhyming poems. (Illustrated by Jean-Claude Beaulac)

- A) It's a dog
Barking at a hog
Looking at a frog
Sitting on a log.
- B) It's a whale
Swimming with a sail
Wiggling its tail
And leaving a trail.
- C) It's a raccoon
Looking at the moon
Playing with a spoon
And eating macaroons.
- D) It's a little papoose
With a friendly moose
Drinking juice
Looking at a goose.

THE AUTHOR

Antoinette Gagné is a professor at McGill University in the Department of Education in Second Languages. She has given numerous workshops on ESL methodology, particularly games, songs and communicative activities in the ESL classroom. She has recently completed a series of workshops with Cree teachers in James Bay, Quebec.

