

GeoStory
MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

The Walrus and the Carpenter

A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk through Lewis Carroll's poem

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"The Walrus and the Carpenter," a silly and surprisingly [morbid poem](#) by [Lewis Carroll](#), was published in 1865. It was a part of the book *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*, a sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The poem is a [narrative](#), or story, told by the annoying twins Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The GeoStory "The Walrus and the Carpenter . . . And National Geographic", above, provides the entire text of the poem. It also includes a walk through the poem, with an image and map accompanying each [stanza](#), and in many cases individual lines. The images are either literal representations or metaphors of a line in the stanza.

Use the GeoStory to better understand [metaphors](#) and other literary devices. Metaphors are figures of speech or visual representations in which a term is applied to something it could not possibly be. "Students have an appetite for learning," for example, is a metaphor. Students don't actually have an appetite for anything except food!

Carroll uses a number of other [literary devices](#) in "The Walrus and the Carpenter." A series of possible discussion questions about the literary devices used in the poem is provided in the following tab, "Questions." The discussion topics progress from the simplest to the most difficult.

QUESTIONS

- "The Walrus and the Carpenter" is a narrative poem, meaning it tells a story. What are the key events in the narrative?
There are **four key events** in "The Walrus and the Carpenter."
 - The Walrus and the Carpenter ask the oysters to take a walk.
 - Most of the oysters accept.
 - The group stops walking.
 - The Walrus and the Carpenter eat the oysters.

- Alliteration is the literary device of using the same letter or sound at the beginning of closely connected words. The first line of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" uses alliteration: "The sun was shining on the sea." What other lines of the poem use alliteration?
There are **several examples of alliteration** in the poem:
 - And then they rested on a rock (stanza 10)
 - Of cabbages and kings (stanza 11)
 - A dismal thing to do (stanza 14)
- Personification is the literary device of giving human characteristics to plants, animals, or objects. (Personification sometimes called anthropomorphism.) Carroll uses personification in describing the Walrus: He speaks, walks, and eats like a person.

Besides the Walrus, what other examples of personification can you find in "The Walrus and the Carpenter"?

Everything from the sun to the sand is personified in the poem! For example:

- the sun shines "with all his might" (stanza 1)
- the moon shines "sulkily" (stanza 2)
- the doomed young oysters are "eager for the treat" (stanza 8)
- A simile is a literary device that simply compares one thing to another, usually using the linking words "like" or "as." "The Walrus and the Carpenter" has two famous, silly similes in one line. Can you spot them? Stanza three begins "The sea was **wet as wet** could be, the sands were **dry as dry**." Carroll uses similes to compare the thing to itself!
- Rhyme is the repeating of a sound (or several sounds) in one or more words. Each of the 18 stanzas in "The Walrus and the Carpenter" has its own set of three rhyming words. Identify the rhyming words in each stanza.

Rhyming words, in order:

1. might, bright, night
2. sun, done, fun
3. dry, sky, fly
4. hand, sand, grand
5. year, clear, tear
6. beseech, beach, each
7. said, head, bed
8. treat, neat, feet
9. four, more, shore
10. so, low, row
11. things, kings, wings
12. chat, fat, that
13. need, indeed, feed
14. blue, do, view
15. nice, slice, twice
16. trick, quick, thick
17. sympathize, size, eyes
18. run, none, one

- A poem's rhyme scheme is its pattern of rhyme. Each ending line of a rhyming poem is identified by a letter. Rhyming words share the same letter. For example:

Mary had a little lamb (A)
Its fleece was white as **snow** (B)
And everywhere that Mary went (C)
The lamb was sure to **go** (B)

"Mary Had a Little Lamb" has a simple **ABCB** rhyme scheme. Can you identify the rhyme scheme of "The Walrus and the Carpenter"? (It isn't as hard as it seems!)

The poem's rhyme scheme is **ABCBDB**:

"The time has come," the Walrus said, (A)
"To talk of many things: (B)
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax— (C)
Of cabbages—and kings— (B)
And why the sea is boiling hot— (D)
And whether pigs have wings." (B)

- A poem's metre is its rhythm. Like many poems, "The Walrus and the Carpenter" uses iambs to create its metre.

An iamb is simply an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: *duh-DUM*.

Iambic meters are usually broken into how many iambs the poet puts in a row. Iambic trimeters are three iambs in a row: *duh-DUM, duh-DUM, duh-DUM*. Iambic pentameters are five in a row: *duh-DUM, duh-DUM, duh-DUM, duh-DUM, duh-DUM*.

"The Walrus and the Carpenter" is written in rhythms of seven iambs. What do you think this is called?

The poem uses **iambic heptameter**. ("Hepta" is "seven" in ancient Greek.)

• "The Walrus and the Carpenter" is a type of ballad. Can you sing it?

Of course you can! It uses the same phrasing as "Amazing Grace," "The Ballad of Gilligan's Island," and "America the Beautiful."

A ballad is simply a fourteenner, a poem written in iambic heptameter. (Fourteeners have fourteen syllables—two iambs in seven meters.)

"The Walrus and the Carpenter" is easiest to sing if you *just sing the first four lines of a stanza*. Try it with the tunes above: "Amazing Grace," "The Ballad of Gilligan's Island," or "America the Beautiful."

*The time has come, the walrus said
to talk of many things
Of shoes and ships, and sealing wax
of cabbages and kings*

or

*Oh beautiful, for spacious skies
for amber waves of grain
for purple mountains majesties
above the fabled plain*

VOCABULARY

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
alliteration	<i>noun</i>	literary device of using the same letter, sound, or sound group at the beginning of closely connected words.
anthropomorphism	<i>noun</i>	attributing human characteristics to other organisms or inanimate objects.
ballad	<i>noun</i>	poem or verse often set to music, originally composed of a poem with the metre of iambic tetrameter followed by iambic trimeter.
characteristic	<i>noun</i>	physical, cultural, or psychological feature of an organism, place, or object.
Elizabethan	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with the reign or time period of Elizabeth I of England (1558-1603).
iamb	<i>noun</i>	in poetry, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: <i>duh-DUM</i> .
Lewis Carroll	<i>noun</i>	(1832-1898) pen name of British author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.
literally	<i>adverb</i>	exactly what is said, without exaggeration.

literary device	<i>noun</i>	technique or method a writer uses to structure their work or produce an effect, such as metaphor or hyperbole.
metaphor	<i>noun</i>	word or phrase used to represent something else.
metre	<i>noun</i>	rhythmic arrangement of syllables in a line of poetry.
morbid	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with death or dying.
narrative	<i>noun</i>	story or telling of events.
personification	<i>noun</i>	attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects.
poem	<i>noun</i>	written or spoken composition notable for its beauty or rhythm.
rhyme	<i>noun</i>	word that has the same ending sound as another word.
rhyme scheme	<i>noun</i>	pattern of rhyme.
simile	<i>noun</i>	literary device where two things are directly compared to each other, usually using the words "like" or "as."
stanza	<i>noun</i>	part of a poem, marked by a certain number of lines or syllables.



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