

# Teacher's Notes



*It's the Sound of the Thing*

Written by Maxine Beneba Clarke

Teacher's Notes by Murray Nance

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## LEARNING OUTCOMES

### RECOMMENDED FOR

Primary-aged readers (ages 7+, grades 3+)

## THEMES

- Poetry
- Language
- Daily life

## SYNOPSIS

*It's the Sound of the Thing* is an exuberant and evocative collection of poetry for young people from Maxine Beneba Clarke, one of Australia's most innovative and celebrated poets.

This extraordinary collection celebrates the joy of language and features enticing and relatable poems about everyday life – the sounds of the block, the boredom of detention and the happenings in the schoolyard. Poems about candy, peanut butter and pets. Poems about a big brother's messy room, a grandfather's fading memory and a grandmother's garden magic.

Through haiku, sonnets, narrative verse, rhyming couplets, limericks, free verse, tongue-twisters and more, Maxine invites readers to fall in love with the wonder that is poetry.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Maxine Beneba Clarke is the author of the short fiction collection *Foreign Soil*, the memoir *The Hate Race* and the poetry collections *Carrying the World* and *How Decent Folk Behave*. Her children's picture books include the CBCA Honour book *The Patchwork Bike* and the illustrated poem *When We Say Black Lives Matter*, which was longlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal. She is currently Poet in Residence at The University of Melbourne.



## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:

### **ACELT1596 Responding to literature:**

*Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others.*

### **ACELT1791 Creating literature:**

*Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts, for example characterisation, rhyme, rhythm, mood, music, sound effects and dialogue.*

### **ACELY1679 Interpreting, analysing, evaluating:**

*Read an increasing range of different types of texts by combining contextual, semantic, grammatical and phonic knowledge, using text processing strategies, for example monitoring, predicting, confirming, rereading, reading on and self-correcting.*

### **ACELY1680 Interpreting, analysing, evaluating:**

*Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning, and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features.*

### **ACELY1682 Creating texts:**

*Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features, and selecting print, and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose.*

### **ACELA1512 Expressing and developing ideas**

*Understand the use of vocabulary to express greater precision of meaning, and know that words can have different meanings in different contexts.*

### **ACELA1525 Expressing and developing ideas**

*Investigate how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion.*

### **ACELT1614 Responding to literature**

*Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots.*

## WRITING STYLE

- Acrostic Poems
- Circular Poems
- Concrete Poems
- Found Poems
- Free Verse
- Haiku
- Limericks
- List Poems
- Poems for Many Voices
- Poems on Language and Writing
- Rhyming Couplets
- Sonnets
- Sound Poems
- Tongue-twisters



## ACROSTIC POEMS

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### Clouds (p67):

- An acrostic poem is structured when certain letters (usually the starting letter of each line) spell out another word vertically – in this case, 'clouds'.
  - Brainstorm other words or phrases you would associate with clouds.
  - Using the same structure as this poem and the starting letter of each line, experiment with creating your own acrostic poem about clouds.
- Discussion: Analysing word choice:
  - Why do you think the author described clouds as '*lazy powder-puff white*'?
  - Are clouds 'lazy'? What is this an example of? (Personification)
- Use the structure of an acrostic poem and write a poem about:
  - Yourself
  - Your teacher (check for permission first)
  - Your favourite place
  - Your favourite food
  - Your favourite time of year

## CIRCULAR POEMS

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### TikTok Dance (p34):

- Read through the first stanza ('*Dab, dab, shuffle slide ...*'). These words could be considered directions for movements. What could they look like? Can you think of a dance move or TikTok dance trend that might fit?
- The narrator teaches the dance she learned on TikTok to different people who also teach it to others. Why do you think they do this?
- Do you enjoy dancing? What's a dance move you have learned from others? What's a dance move you've taught someone else? Share your dance move.
- Can you name some popular movements or dances?
- Can you demonstrate any of the following dance moves?
  - Dab
  - Griddy
  - The Woah
  - Harlem Shake
  - The Running Man
  - The Moonwalk
  - Renegade
  - Wednesday Addams dance
- Discussion: This poem is called a 'circular poem'. What do you think it might be?
- In small groups, work together to perform this poem aloud. Consider:
  - How each stanza might be read
  - Which parts of the poem you will read or perform solo or simultaneously
  - Which parts should be emphasised
  - How actions might accompany your performance of different stanzas
  - If a rhythm track or beat might help amplify your performance.



## CONCRETE POEMS

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### Leaves (p164):

- Look at the shape of this poem. Discuss what you notice. Why do you think it has been written this way? How do you think you should read it? Practise reading the poem aloud with a partner.
- This type of poem is called a 'concrete poem'. Discuss why you think it might have this name. (Also called 'shape poetry'.)
- What other objects do you think could be used to write a concrete poem about? Brainstorm ideas with a partner.
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: Glorious, blushing, embolden, sodden, traipsed, dreary, wilting.

## FREE VERSE

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### The Way Down the Block (p4):

- '*Lappetty-lap-lap*' and '*dripetty-drop-plop*' are examples of onomatopoeia, where words are used to represent a sound. Brainstorm a list of sound words (burp, glug, snap, wheeze, etc).
- Experiment by expanding these sound words into sound word phrases similar to lines such as '*thwacketta-jump*', '*shuffle-shuff*', etc.
- What do you think 'headspins', 'jackhammers' and 'windmills' are? (Dance moves)
  - Make up a name for an original dance move that mimics something from everyday life (such as a jackhammer)
- This poem mentions 'skipping chants'. What chants do you know? Research some skipping chants or rhymes. Why do you think kids might make up a chant for skipping? Make up your own. Test it out while skipping with a rope.
- Research who Nina Simone is.
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: Swagger, asphalt, 'Double Dutch', croon

### Detention (p13):

- This type of poem is called 'free verse'. Look at the structure of the poem – what do you think the name suggests?
- What do we learn about the characters of Jackson and Mariah from this poem? Do you think Jackson and Mariah are 'bad kids'? Do you think they deserve the punishment?
- The words 'bad kids' are in italics. Why do you think this is? What do you think the author is trying to emphasise?
- We know why Jackson and Mariah are there, but not the narrator's reason for detention. What do you think the narrator's reason might be?
- Do you think this detention is helping Jackson, Mariah and the narrator fix their problems? What could be a different way the school could help them?
- Do you think detention is fair? Explain reasons for and against.
- Look at the lines '*Everyone thinks ...*' and '*Everyone says ...*'. Who do you think the narrator is referring to with 'everyone'?
- What do you think might happen if the students fiddle?
- What is a 'demountable' and why would it be hot?
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: Stifling, plaiting, detention.



## HAIKU POEMS

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### Winter (p42):

- Haiku poems have a specific structure:
  - They have three lines:
    - The first line has five syllables.
    - The second line has seven syllables.
    - The third line has five syllables.
- Analyse the structure of this poem and the other season haiku poems: 'Summer', 'Autumn' and 'Spring'. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between these poems.
- Revise different ways for counting syllables in words. Count the syllables in each word.
- Look at the word 'chocolate' in the first line of 'Winter'. How many syllables does it have? Discuss with a partner.
- Look at line three – '*The rain, seeking gaps.*' This uses personification, a technique that adds a personality to inanimate objects.
  - What does this line mean?
  - Why do you think the rain might be 'seeking' gaps?
  - Why do you think the author used personification to describe what's happening?

### Bumblebee (p68):

- Analyse the structure of this haiku poem. Count the syllables in each word.
- This poem has examples of alliteration and assonance. Research the difference and look for examples of these in the poem.
- What would these be examples of?
  - **B**lack-yellow fur-**bl**ur
  - **F**ur-**bl**ur
  - **H**overs **o**ver blue **b**lossom
  - **B**uzz-**dr**unk
  - **B**lue **b**lossom
- Choose your own insect, such as a ladybird, spider, beetle, ant, grasshopper, caterpillar, or butterfly. Brainstorm words to describe their appearance and behaviour. Experiment with composing your own haiku poem in the style of 'Bumblebee' using your brainstormed words.
  - Taking it further: Choose words for your insect to create alliteration or assonance in your haiku.

## LIMERICKS

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### Bubblegum Bubble (p91):

- This is an example of a limerick, which uses a specific structure based on syllables and rhyme. They are usually humorous in subject matter. In each stanza:
  - The first, second and fifth lines must have 7-10 syllables while rhyming (trouble, bubbles, marble)
  - The third and fourth lines contain 57 syllables, with the last words rhyming with each other (lot, pop)
  - Most limericks start with 'There once was ...'
- Read this poem aloud with a partner. Listen for the rhythm and pacing of each line.



- Write your own limerick that starts with 'There once was ...' and follow the same structure. Reading it aloud will help you hear the rhythm in each line and identify parts that might need rephrasing to fit the pattern.
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: frantic, summon, shriek.

## POEMS ON LANGUAGE AND WRITING

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### The Poet in You (p2):

- What rhyming words can you find in the poem? Where do they fall in each line? (At the end)
- Look at the first stanza:

Some people say *the sky's big and blue*.  
But you sigh *it's forever-lasting, never-ending, aqua-true*.

In each stanza, the first line contrasts with the second. Discuss the differences in word choice between the two. Why do you think word choice is important? How else might you describe the sky without using words like 'big' or 'blue'? Brainstorm other words for big and blue.

- What is a cliché?
- Investigate 'tiered vocabulary' and focus on Tier 2 vocabulary (more sophisticated language, often found in written text, uncommon in everyday conversation)
  - [https://cer.schools.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/doi/sws/schools/c/cer/localcontent/selecting\\_words\\_final.pdf](https://cer.schools.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/doi/sws/schools/c/cer/localcontent/selecting_words_final.pdf)
  - [Choosing Words to Teach - Tier 1, 2, 3 Vocabulary Department of Education and Training Victoria](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/literacy/li...)
- Go on a vocabulary hunt using books from your library. What 'Tier 2' words can you find?

### Onomatopoeia (p20):

- Before reading: What is onomatopoeia? What do you think this poem might be about? Brainstorm onomatopoeic words that might appear in the poem. Look up the definition of onomatopoeia in a dictionary.
- After reading: Check your brainstormed list of words – how many were included?
- Are there words that rhyme? Where in the stanzas do they fall?
- The poem asks the reader to 'invent words yourself' – with a partner, create some original onomatopoeic words which mimic sounds.
- Think of real or made-up onomatopoeic words for some of the following things:
  - A sneeze
  - Bouncing a basketball
  - Tossing a coin
  - Drinking water
  - A car horn
  - Eating noodles
  - The school bell
  - The sound of a sink full of water emptying
  - A fridge
  - Leaves rustling in the wind
  - A crowd at a football game
  - An ibis
- Can you think of other events that might use onomatopoeia?



## RHYMING COUPLETS

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### My Annoying Little Sister (p128):

- This poem is an example of a 'rhyming couplet' which uses four-line stanzas, with the last words in lines 2 and 4 rhyming (e.g. *cool, too* and *home, own*). Rhyming couplets are also used in sonnets and limericks. Look through the poem and identify the rhyming couplets in each stanza.
- Look at the rhyming couplets you've found. Are the words spelled the same way? What other words also rhyme with each couplet? Make a list.
- Well-known rhyming couplets include some nursery rhymes (e.g. 'Humpty Dumpty', 'Jack and Jill'). What are some other poems or nursery rhymes that use this feature?
- Do you think the narrator really thinks their sister is annoying? Why or why not? How might they really feel? Give examples from the poem.
- How old is the narrator's sister? What words from the text support your opinions? (newborn, toddler)
- How do we know that time is passing when reading the poem? What words tell us? (newborn, toddler, '*I like her chaos now*')
- Why do you think the narrator's sister is behaving in this way? How do you know?
- How does the narrator feel about their sister at the end of the poem? What changes? Give examples from the poem.
- What do you think 'annoy-mazing' means? Brainstorm other contrasting words you could combine together.
- Draft your own version of this poem about someone or something you find annoying but also amazing. Use rhyming couplets in four-line stanzas to structure your poem. Brainstorm a list of rhyming words first to help you.
- Why do you think siblings sometimes argue? Do you argue with your brothers or sisters? How do you resolve them?
- In small groups, practise ways to perform this poem. Consider:
  - How each stanza might be read
  - Which parts of the poem you will read or perform solo or simultaneously
  - Which parts should be emphasised
  - How actions might accompany your performance of different stanzas.
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: pantry, smirked, loo, scoffing, daredevil.

## SONNETS

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### Grandma's Garden (p151)

- This poem is a sonnet. Sonnets are composed of 14 lines with a rhyming pattern: abab cdcd efef gg. Compare this rhyming pattern with the poem 'Grandma's Garden'. Discuss the rhyming words.
- Make a list of all the rhyming word pairs (e.g. dreams and clean, tongue and sun, etc). Do all the rhyming pairs have similar spelling?
- Brainstorm other words to add to the rhyming pair groups (e.g. dreams, clean, beam, steam, meme, etc)
- Experiment writing your own sonnet that follows the same structure.
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: aphid, graceful, boldened, husks, pigface, linger.



## TOUNGE TWISTERS

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### Betty's Bitter Butter (page 186)

- This poem is an example of a tongue twister, and uses alliteration, assonance and rhyme to create phrases that can be tricky to read aloud. Try reading the poem to a partner.
- What is the purpose of a tongue twister?
- How many words in this poem start with the letter 'b'?
- What other tongue twisters do you know? Can you recite any? (See 'Peter Piper', 'She Sells Seashells' and 'Fuzzy Wuzzy'.)
- Does this poem make sense? Why or why not?
- Vocabulary: Research the definition of these words: bitter, battered, batted, burped.
- Brainstorm some other 'b' words. Write a four-line stanza to follow the last stanza using these new words, continuing Bobby and Betty's story.
- Choose a letter of the alphabet to base your own tongue twister around. First, brainstorm a list of words that use alliteration, assonance and rhyme. You may need a dictionary to help you with words starting with the same letter and a website such as <https://rhyming.wordhippo.com/> to assist with rhyming words.

## RELATED READING

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- *The Patchwork Bike*, Maxine Beneba Clarke
- *Fashionista*, Maxine Beneba Clarke
- *When We Say Black Lives Matter*, Maxine Beneba Clarke
- *Untangling Spaghetti*, Steven Herrick

