**The Limerick**

**What is a Limerick?**

Limericks are one of the most fun and well-known poetic forms. No one knows for sure where the name “limerick” comes from, but most people assume it is related to the county of Limerick, in Ireland.

The reason limericks are so much fun is because they are short, rhyming, funny, and have a bouncy rhythm that makes them easy to memorize.

**The Rules of Limericks**

Limericks, like most poetic forms, have a set of rules that you need to follow. The rules for a limerick are fairly simple:

* They are five lines long.
* Lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme with one another.
* Lines 3 and 4 rhyme with each other.
* They have a distinctive rhythm
* They are usually funny.

**Rhyming a Limerick**

The rhyme scheme of a limerick is known as “AABBA.” This is because the last words in lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme. Those are the “A’s” in the rhyme scheme. The “B’s” are the last words of lines 3 and 4.

*FOR EXAMPLE:*

*There was a young fellow named Hall  
Who fell in the spring in the fall.  
‘Twould have been a sad thing  
Had he died in the spring,  
But he didn’t—he died in the fall.*

- *Anonymous*

Notice that the words, “Hall,” “fall,” and “fall” all rhyme. Those are the “A” words in the “AABBA” rhyme scheme. Also notice that “thing” and “spring” rhyme. Those are the “B” words in the rhyme scheme.

**Limerick Rhythm**

Now let’s take a look at the rhythm of the limerick. It goes by the complicated name “anapestic,” Notice, when you read or recite a limerick is that the first two lines and the last line have three “beats” in them, while the third and fourth lines have two “beats.” In other words, the rhythm of a limerick looks like this:

*da DUM da da DUM da da DUM  
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM  
da DUM da da DUM  
da DUM da da DUM  
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM*

The rhythm doesn’t have to *exactly* match this, but it needs to be close enough that it sounds the same when you read it. For example, using the limerick above about the fellow from Hall, if we emphasize the beats, it reads like this:

*there WAS a young FELLow named HALL  
who FELL in the SPRING in the FALL.  
‘twould have BEEN a sad THING  
had he DIED in the SPRING,  
but he DIDn’t—he DIED in the FALL.*

*Let’s take a look at another famous limerick:*

*There was an old man of Nantucket  
Who kept all his cash in a bucket;  
But his daughter, named Nan,  
Ran away with a man,  
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.*

*— Anonymous*

If you emphasize the beats when you read it, it comes out like this:

*there WAS an old MAN of NanTUCKet  
who KEPT all his CASH in a BUCKet;  
but his DAUGHTer, named NAN,  
ran aWAY with a MAN,  
and AS for the BUCKet, NanTUCKet.*