
Jack Prelutsky

It's Raining Pigs & Noodles
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Q. How did you start writing poetry?

A: It was an accident. When I was in my early twenties, I had visions of being an artist. I spent about six months inventing and drawing imaginary animals that simply popped into my head...creatures with eleven heads, with elastic bodies, or with hundred-foot-long tongues. After I'd produced about two dozen pen and ink drawings, one evening I decided that they needed poems to accompany them. I still have no idea where that notion came from, but it took me about two hours to produce verses for these creatures. A friend suggested that I show these poems and drawings to an editor, and with some apprehension I did. The editor, Susan Hirschman, did not think much of my illustrations, but she told me that I was a natural poet and encouraged me to keep writing. She published my first book, and now, more than thirty-five years later, she's still my editor.

Q. Your most recent book, *It's Raining Pigs & Noodles*, is your fourth collaboration with illustrator James Stevenson. Is writing these collections different from writing for a poetry picture book?

A: Actually, it's our fifth collaboration. Before *The New Kid on the Block*, we came out with *The Baby Uggs Are Hatching*, a collection of imaginary animal poems, some of which were based on those incipient verses I'd concocted years earlier. There's not too much difference between writing a picture book and writing a collection of a hundred poems or so, except that the bigger books take a lot longer to do.

Q. Which poets and/or authors do you admire?

A: When I began writing, I didn't read any other children's poets...I didn't want to be influenced until I'd found my own voice. Now I read them all. I hesitate to name any poets in particular, as "favorite" questions have always been difficult for me and make me a bit uncomfortable. I'm always afraid that I'll leave someone out. I've been influenced by poets as diverse as Dylan Thomas, Lewis Carroll, and Edgar Allan Poe. Interestingly enough, many of the people who have influenced me the most have not been poets. I love creating surprise endings, as O. Henry did in his short stories, and you are apt to find the sort of antic humor exhibited by comedians such as Sid Caesar and the Marx Brothers manifested in my poems.

Q. Many of your poems are about strange creatures-snutterwudds, doddies, wibbles, yubbazubbies, to name a few-how do you invent such zany characters?

A: Frequently I have no idea. However, some of them are ways of expressing my feelings, moods, or sentiments, while others grow out of fragments of language. For example, a friend had a license plate which had the letters UGG followed by three numbers. I found the word "ugg" to be very appealing...it sounded to me like a combination of the words "ugly" and "egg"...soon there was a poem. On another occasion, I was gluing up some bookshelves I'd just built, when the phone rang, and I rushed to answer it. Later, I realized that I'd accidentally kicked over the glue bottle, and a sizable amount had found its way through the newspapers I'd used to cover the carpet — it was a gloppy mess. The carpet was a total loss, but the situation wasn't. Some of the glue looked to me like strange creatures oozing through my living room, and I was inspired to write "Song of the Gloopy Glopplers"...it's in *The New Kid on the Block*.

Q. What makes writing for children fun, and why do you think kids respond so well to poetry?

A: We all need ways to express ourselves, and poetry is one of mine. Writing gives me the opportunity to explore ideas, play with language, solve problems, use my imagination, and draw on my own childhood. Frankly, writing poetry for children is plain old fun, and I consider myself blessed to have such a delightful career. Children seem naturally drawn to poetry — it's some combination of the rhyme, rhythm, and the words themselves. Poetry seems to sink into us the way prose doesn't. I can still quote verses I learned when I was very young, but I have trouble remembering one line of a novel I just finished reading.

Q. What can we look forward to next?

A: Lots! There's going to be a book of poems about a simply awful ogre, illustrated by Paul Zelinsky, and a book of very peculiar poems about very peculiar creatures that Peter S's is illustrating. I've also written a third book of nursery rhymes, in the style of *Ride a Purple Pelican* and *Beneath a Blue Umbrella*: It's called *The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders*, and it will be illustrated by Petra Mathers. Currently, I'm working on a book of scary poems from outer space, a book of funny poems about school, some lullabies, and a collection of around-the-year holiday poems.

Q. What do you like to do when you are not writing about bridges made of bananas, gargoyles, or preposterpusses?

A: Plenty! I'm never bored. I'm inventing word games, writing music, playing them, gardening, woodworking, making found-object sculpture, collecting books and frog miniatures, taking photographs and printing them in the darkroom, learning computer graphics, cooking, eating out, going to concerts and the opera, and spending time with friends. I probably left something out.