

Tyrannosaurus Was a Beast

Dinosaur Poems by Jack Prelutsky
illustrated by Arnold Lobel

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Kathleen Greenholdt

A Perma-Bound Production



Synopsis

This collection of humorous poems presents a fun and engaging introduction to poetry for young people. Each poem describes a particular dinosaur, and this information is supplemented by charts in the back and front of the book to give children a thorough lesson in dinosaurs.

Biographical Sketch

Jack Prelutsky was born in New York City in 1940, and he attended Hunter College, which is now part of the City University of New York. His career has taken him from the stage, as an opera singer, to poet and translator. He published his first book in 1967, and he has written many children's books of humorous verse. He has also translated German and Swedish children's poetry to English. Mr. Prelutsky resides in Seattle, Washington.

Critic's Corner

Tyrannosaurus Was A Beast was written in 1988. The funny poems within are educational in the scientific sense, but they also present a variety of verse forms. The humor is at a child's level and is sometimes reminiscent of the simple jokes that young people tell to one another. *Children's Literary Review* says, ". . . many credit Prelutsky with winning early converts to poetry through his exuberant rhymes and outrageous nonsense." (Volume 13, Page 161, Gale Research Company, 1987.) The subject of the book, dinosaurs, is thoroughly covered in the sense that many types of dinosaurs, the definitions of their names, their actual sizes, the geographical habitats, and periods of existence are discussed.

Objectives

1. To introduce young people to the art of poetry
2. To learn about dinosaurs

Class Discussion

1. The poems in this book are about many kinds of dinosaurs. What are the names of each of these beasts, and how can we identify them from the rhymes and illustrations?

Tyrannosaurus ("*Tyrant Lizard*") Ruler of the dinosaurs ("It ruled the ancient out-of-doors"); meat-eater ("and slaughtered other dinosaurs"); large; walked on long hind legs; big, sharp teeth; short arms

Brachiosaurus ("*Arm Lizard*") very, very large ("but stand with its head in the treetops," "it hadn't the need to be clever and wise, /no beast dared to bother a being its size," "if Brachiosaurus were living today, no doubt it would frequently be in the way"); plant-eater ("it nibbled the leaves that were tender and green"); slow mover ("Brachiosaurus was clumsy and slow"); long neck; walked on four legs

Leptopterygius ("*Partially Finned*") an extinct porpoiselike marine animal with four limbs that worked like paddles ("was an insatiable ichthyosaur"); meat-eater ("anything captured by Leptopterygius/ never was seen in the sea anymore," "so I am grateful that Leptopterygius /isn't around to go swimming with me"); large fangs; swam fast; large ("big as a city bus")

Stegosaurus ("*Plated Lizard*") not to be feared ("Stegosaurus was a creature uncontentious and benign," "Stegosaurus often wound up as a snack"); plant-eater ("never causing any other creature woe"); pointed plates up and down its spine; walked on four legs

Deinonychus ("*Terrible Claw*") meat-eater ("it pounced on its victims and swallowed them raw," "Ferocity was its predominant trait,/its habits were purely predacious," "it ate what it caught and caught what it ate," "to eat us like cream cheese and jelly"); smaller than some of the other dinosaurs ("Large dinosaurs quaked when this monster came near/to stuff them inside of its belly"); had sharp claws ("Deinonychus was named for its terrible claw"); walked on two legs

Ankylosaurus ("*Stiffened Lizard*") had a hard, protective outer covering ("Ankylosaurus was built like a tank,/it tended to be an inedible meal," "It was armored in front, it was armored behind"); was able to hurt predators ("its tail was a cudgel of gristle and bone"); plant-eater ("nibbling on plants with a mouthful of pegs"); walked on four short legs

Diplodocus ("*Double Beam*") walked on four legs ("on four massive thundering feet"); long, winding tail ("a serpentine tail"); slow moving ("Diplodocus plodded along," "Diplodocus never could move very fast/because of its ponderous size"); very tall ("and watch with its skyscraper eyes"); plant-eater ("it couldn't go far without taking a bite," "for it was surrounded by ravenous foes," "Diplodocus never could move very fast")

Coelophysis ("Hollow Form") a good hunter and meat-eater ("Coelophysis was a hunter/with efficient teeth and claws," "its vision was uncommon,/and its legs were fast and strong"); walked on two legs; long neck; long tail; narrow head; sometimes eaten by Phytosaur ("and the hunter made a morsel/for a mighty Phytosaur")

Phytosaur ("Plant Lizard") meat-eater (ate Coelophysis); resembled a crocodile

Triceratops ("Three-horned Face") three horns on its face that protected it from meat-eaters ("and two as long as spears," "impervious and strong," "Triceratops fought valiantly,/and vanquished every foe"), walked on four legs, plant-eater ("it dwelled near scores of carnosaurs,/and yet it had no fears")

Corythosaurus ("Helmet Lizard") plant-eater ("munching as it went about," "it had a duckbill on its face," "had no semblance of defense"); helmetlike head, but not useful for defense ("it had a helmet on its head,/it could have used some brains instead"); walked on two long legs; moved easily ("Corythosaurus moved with grace")

Allosaurus ("Different Lizard") meat-eater ("its teeth were sharp as sabers," "made mincemeat of its neighbors," "and when it caught its quarry,/it tore it open, back and front," "and using teeth and talons,/it stuffed itself with tons of meat,/and guzzled blood by gallons"); walked on two legs; short, wide head

Iguanodon ("Iguana-tooth") plant-eater ("we wish you could have stayed," "you were a gentle kind"); walked on two legs

Quetzalcoatlus (named after the Aztec Indian feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl) a flying reptile ("Quetzalcoatlus once mastered the skies,/a reptile in aerodynamic disguise"); largest flying animal; long cranelike neck; long, pointed bill; wide, fifty-foot wingspan

Seismosaurus ("Earthshaking Lizard") giant dinosaur (adjectives: "enormous," "tremendous," "prodigious," "stupendous," "titanic," "colossal," "monumental"); long neck; walked on four legs; long tail

2. When did the dinosaurs live?

The charts in the back and front of the book show the time periods during which the dinosaurs roamed the earth.

The dinosaurs lived from 225 million years ago through 65 million years ago. This general age is called the Mesozoic era. The time preceding the Mesozoic is called the Paleozoic era, and the time following the Mesozoic is the Cenozoic. These time periods are all identified in terms of geological science.

During the Paleozoic era, the first fish and first land life appeared. Reptiles came into formation at the end of this period.

The Mesozoic era featured the rise and fall of the dinosaurs. The first birds, mammals, and flowering plants also appeared during this time.

The Cenozoic era includes the present. It is during this period that our modern plants, animals, and insects developed. The formation of primitive to modern humans also occurred in this era.

The Mesozoic era is subdivided into three eras. The Triassic period lasted from 225 million through 190 million years ago. The Jurassic period was from 190 million through 135 million years ago. The Cretaceous era was from 135 million through 65 million years ago. Following is a chart showing the dinosaurs that lived in each of these periods:

Triassic	Jurassic	Cretaceous
Coelophysis	Allosaurus	Ankylosaurus
Leptopterygius - - -	Leptopterygius - - -	Leptopterygius
	Brachiosaurus - - -	Brachiosaurus
	Diplodocus - - - - -	Diplodocus
	Seismosaurus	Corythosaurus
	Stegosaurus	Deinonychus
		Iguanodon
		Quetzalcoatlus
		Triceratops
		Tyrannosaurus

3. The poems in the book are written in different forms of rhyme and rhythm. Let's look at some of these verse forms.

Teach your students about feet, meter, and stanzas. Following are a few "poetry brush-up lessons" to assist you in teaching your students. For more help, consult The Norton Anthology of Poetry, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Couplet: *A couplet contains two rhyming lines with the same number of syllables. A poem may include several couplets.*

Quatrain: *A quatrain contains four lines, and rhyming patterns vary.*

Octave: *A stanza containing eight lines.*

Stanza: *A group of lines in a poem, often set off from the next stanza with a space. A stanza is similar to the "paragraph" of a narrative.*

Meter: *The rhythm of a poem made up of types and number of feet.*

Catalexis: *When one or two unaccented syllables are not present at a line's end. Often used with dactylic or trochaic patterns.*

Iamb: *A poetic foot containing an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable*

Trochee: *A foot containing an accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable.*

Anapest: *A foot containing two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable.*

Dactyl: A foot containing one accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables.

Usage examples:

Tyrannosaurus poem iambic tetrameter (four feet)
one stanza - quatrain
rhyme: aabb

Leptopterygius poem dactylic tetrameter
three stanzas - quatrains
rhyme: abcb
catalexis used

Deinonychus poem anapestic tetrameter
three stanzas - quatrains
rhyme: abab

Coelophysus poem trochaic tetrameter
two stanzas - octaves
rhyme: abcbdefe

Seismosaurus poem trochaic tetrameter
two stanzas - quatrains
rhyme: abcb

p. 17
serpentine
ravenous
ponderous

winding
very eager for satisfaction
heavy and clumsy

p. 21
carnosaurs
impervious
valiantly
vanquished

meat-eating dinosaurs
unable to be broken through
courageously
conquered

p. 23
duckbill

a snout of a dinosaur shaped like a duck's bill and used for eating plants

p. 25
sabers
mincemeat
quarry

swords
completely destroyed
something that is being hunted
claws

p. 29
aerodynamic
animate

something that can fly
moving

p. 31
prodigious*
stupendous*
titanic*
colossal*
monumental*

*extremely large

Meaning Study

Following are some general vocabulary words found within the poems.

p. 7	perpetual vacuous	continual empty
p. 9	ferocious insatiable morsel	fierce unable to be satisfied a small amount
p. 11	uncontentious benign nectarine	not likely to cause a fight harmless a small type of peach
p. 13	predominant predacious	most common preying on animals
p. 15	fortress inedible miniscule cudgel	a protective place unable to be eaten tiny club

Activities

- Using the dinosaur charts in the front and back of the book, draw a large time line on white butcher's paper indicating the Paleozoic, Mesozoic (Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous), and Cenozoic periods. Have students create watercolor representations of the types of dinosaurs who lived during these various time periods, and glue the dinosaur illustrations beneath the correct periods of time.
- With modeling clay, re-create the dinosaurs discussed in the book. Scale down the dimensions in the front of the book so that students can see how the dinosaurs "measure up" to one another.
- Visit a natural history museum to see reconstructed skeletons of actual dinosaurs and diagrams of prehistoric environments.
- Using the verse forms presented in the book, ask each student to write a short collection of poetry using each type of verse. The collection should address only one topic so that the student will gain an understanding of the functions of different types of rhythms and rhymes. Have your students illustrate their poems, then bind them with folders or construction paper covers.

5. Locate other children's poems and set them to music or have your class dramatize them in skit form.
6. Find some examples of the works of famous poets (such as Poe, Longfellow, and Sandburg), and read them aloud to the class. You may wish to find appropriate background music to "create the mood," and use props or hand and facial movements to make the classics come alive.
7. Popular music is often written in rhymes that can be found on album jackets and sleeves. Read some of these songs aloud to the class, then play the songs so that students can see how poetry is used today. Rap music is the most obvious employer of poetry, but other pop forms provide less obvious examples of rhyme.

Other Children's Poetry Books by the Author

The New Kid On The Block, 1984

Nightmares: Poems To Trouble Your Sleep, 1976

The Queen of Eene (Junior Literary Guild Selection), 1978

Ride A Purple Pelican, 1986

The Sheriff Of Rottenshot, 1982

Other Books About Dinosaurs

Digging Up Dinosaurs by Alike, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1981

Dinosaurs Walked Here by Patricia Lauber, Bradbury Press, 1987

The News About Dinosaurs by Patricia Lauber, Bradbury Press, 1989

Test

Dinosaur Knowledge

Match the following dinosaur names with their descriptions.

Diplodocus	Predacious dinosaur with a short, wide head
Tyrannosaurus	Helmet-headed dinosaur
Stegosaurus	Slow, extremely large dinosaur
Triceratops	Small dinosaur with claws
Ankylosaurus	Dinosaur with three horns
Allosaurus	Porpoiselike dinosaur
Quetzalcoatlus	Dinosaur with a hard, protective covering
Corythosaurus	Dinosaur that could fly
Deinonychus	Dinosaur that had pointed plates up and down its spine
Leptopterygius	Ruler of the dinosaurs

Multiple Choice

Complete each sentence with the letter of the correct word in the space at the left.

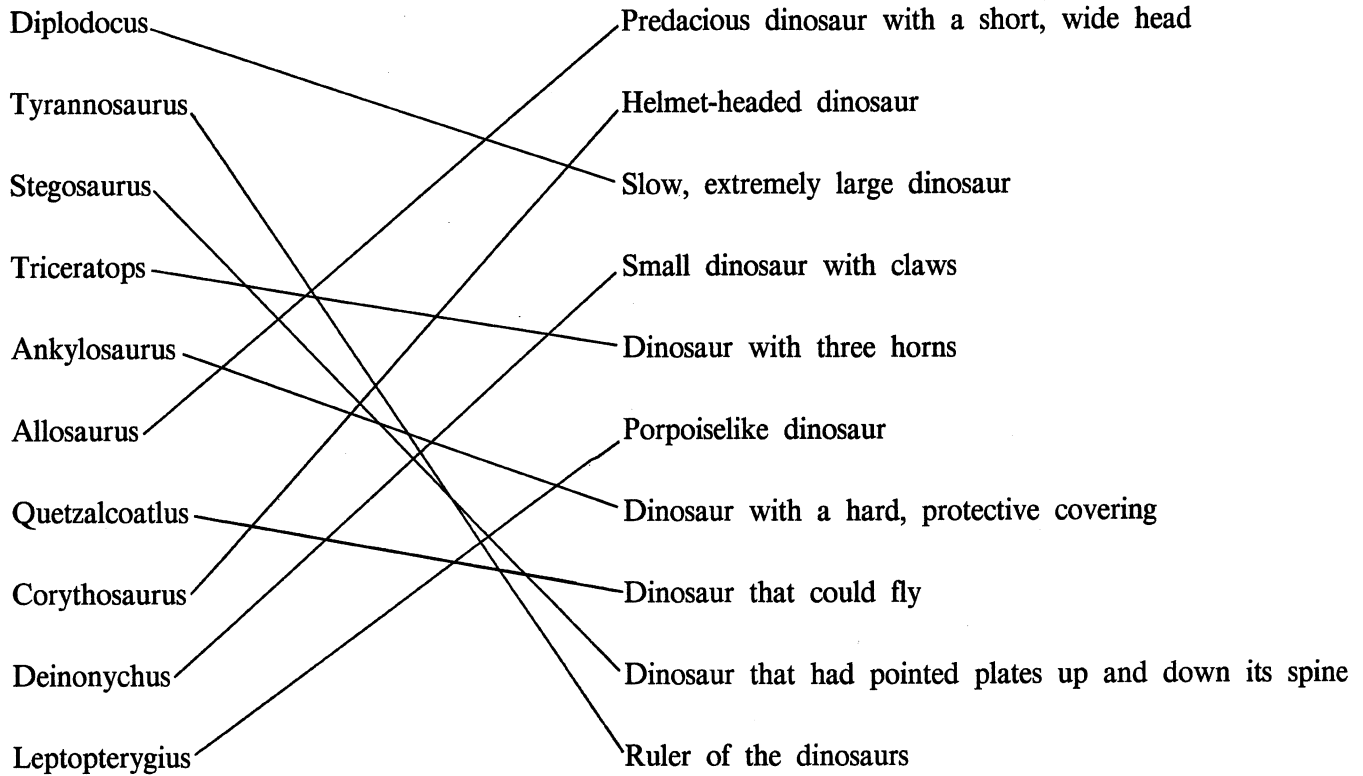
- _____ 1. The dinosaurs lived during the _____ era.
A. Cenozoic B. Paleozoic C. Mesozoic
- _____ 2. Duckbill dinosaurs ate _____
A. plants B. other dinosaurs C. fish
- _____ 3. The first dinosaurs appeared _____ million years ago.
A. 65 B. 190 C. 225
- _____ 4. Most of the dinosaurs lived during the _____ period.
A. Cretaceous B. Jurassic C. Triassic
- _____ 5. The era in which we currently live is called the _____ period.
A. Cenozoic B. Paleozoic C. Mesozoic
- _____ 6. Meat-eating dinosaurs ate mainly _____
A. fish B. other dinosaurs C. birds
- _____ 7. The era of time before the dinosaurs lived is called the _____ period.
A. Cenozoic B. Paleozoic C. Mesozoic
- _____ 8. _____ was the dinosaur named after an Aztec god.
A. Quetzalcoatlus B. Tyrannosaurus C. Ankylosaurus
- _____ 9. The dinosaur whose name translates as "Double Beam" is _____
A. Triceratops B. Diplodocus C. Iguanodon
- _____ 10. "Plated Lizard" is the meaning of the name _____
A. Deinonychus B. Coelophysis C. Stegosaurus

Poetry Comprehension

Using any subject as the basis for a poem, write a one stanza quatrain using iambic tetrameter or pentameter (five feet). The rhyme scheme should follow the abab or abcb pattern. Next to your poem, indicate which rhyme scheme and meter you have used.

ANSWER KEY

Dinosaur Knowledge



Multiple Choice

1. C
2. A
3. C
4. A
5. A
6. B
7. B
8. A
9. B
10. C

Poetry Comprehension

Answers will vary.



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