

Where The Sidewalk Ends

by Shel Silverstein

Teacher's Guide

Written By Matthew Jewell



CLASSROOM FAVORITES

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Selected Poem Studies

1. "The Loser" p. 25

SYNOPSIS

The narrator has lost his head. Unable to search for it because the head is the center of thought and most sensation, he sits on a rock to rest.

MEANING STUDY

Mama said I'd lose my head
If it wasn't fastened on. (lines 1-2)

These lines, which introduce the poem, reference a common expression. The expression itself is hyperbole, an exaggeration of absentmindedness or of a proclivity towards misplacing objects. The poem hyperbolizes the hyperbolic statement, following it to its implied conclusion, the loss of the head.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- What is the relationship between the poem and the picture?

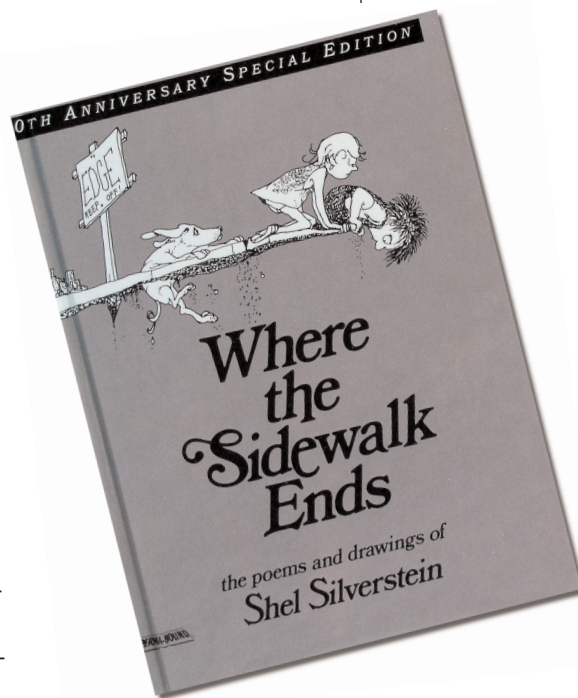
The image depicts a headless figure sitting on a head, presumably its own, implying that the "rock" on which the narrator sits is his head, but he is unable to recognize it as such because he is missing his head. The image clarifies the meaning of "rock" in the poem and adds another layer of humor to the poem, extending the joke past the loss of the head to include the resulting confusion.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem is a nonce form, following this rhyme scheme:

x
a
x
x
b
a

C2
C1
C2
C2
b
C2
C2
x
C1
x
x
B1



The sounds of "in it" in lines 8 and 14 are echoed in the "minute" of line 17. The second stanza is mostly built around a repetitive structure reflected in repetitive formulation. The lines are mostly pairs expressing 1)

the inability to search for the head 2) because of the lack of a corresponding sense organ, each pair ending in "it."

THEMES AND MOTIFS

- humor
- common expressions
- irony
- absentmindedness

2. "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set" p. 28-29

SYNOPSIS

The narrator relates the story of Jimmy Jet, who watched so much television that he eventually became a television. His chin turned into a dial, hair into antennae, brains to tubes, face to screen, ears to knobs, and he grew a cord as a tail. Now the family sits around watching him, instead of him watching TV.

Meaning Study

So we plugged in little Jim.
And now instead of him watching TV
We all sit around and watch him. (lines 18-20)

These lines end the poem, describing the end result of Jimmy's television watching and transformation. The "we" in line 18 is interesting because it extends the narrator from the singular "I" of line 1 to a plural group, probably Jimmy's family, since one assumes that Jimmy has stayed in the same house. The lines also complete the poem by completely reversing Jimmy's role from TV-watcher to watched-TV.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Describe Jimmy's transformation.

Jimmy's transformation is much like the transformations in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, based on a flaw or action and turning the character into a thematically linked object. Jimmy's case of transformation is an example of poetic justice. It also plays on the passive act of watching television. Just as Jimmy passively consumed television programs, he now passively displays the broadcasts.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem follows this rhyme scheme:

a
b
a
b

x
c
x
c

x
d
x
d

x
e
x
e

x
f
x
f

The rhyme of "screen" in line 10 with "been" in line 12 is an example of sight rhyme, since the words look alike but are pronounced differently. The references to antennae, knobs, and dials may be unfamiliar to young readers raised in the age of digital media. Of the poem's 20 lines, 9 describe his transformation. This weight adds importance to the change, but it also spreads it out, making it seem to have been a slow metamorphosis.

THEMES

- sloth
- metamorphosis
- poetic justice
- television

3. "The Farmer and the Queen" (p. 32-33)

SYNOPSIS

As a queen approaches his farm, passing on the road, a farmer asks his various animals what he should do and how he should act. Each animal responds with an onomatopoeic response based on the sound it typically makes, but which make sense in context. The queen smiles as she passes.

MEANING STUDY

"She smiled, she did!" he told the sheep.
The sheep said, "Bah." (lines 20-21)

After the queen passes, the farmer turns to the sheep and proudly exclaims that she smiled at him, to which the sheep responds with "Bah." The response is interesting first because it is the only animal noise transliterated into an interjection. "Bah" here is simply a sound of indifference, which humorously characterizes the animals' lack of excitement about human royalty. This contrast between the animals' indifference and the farmer's breathlessness generates humor.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Explain what makes the poem humorous.

The poem's humor begins at the situational level; the farmer is asking advice from his animals about proper conduct in the presence of a queen. It is highly ironic that the animals' noises, which he interprets as responses, give him sage advice. The humor comes from the situation, the farmer's interpretation of the animals' noises, the utility of their supposed advice, and the apparent indifference of the queen and animals, which contrasts with the farmer's excitement. One imagines that when the queen smiles, as she is reported to do, she is smiling in mirth.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem mostly alternates rhymed and unrhymed lines:

x
a
b
b
a

x
c
x
c

x
d
x
d

x
e
x
e

x
f
x
f

Each animal's response is transliterated into a different part of speech. The owl's hoot transliterates into an interrogative pronoun, the horse's neigh into an adverb, the wren's chirp into an adjective, the dog's bark into a verb, and the sheep's bleat into an interjection.

THEMES

- irony
- humor
- language play
- pastoral life

4. "True Story" (p. 43)

SYNOPSIS

The narrator relates a series of increasingly farfetched events. He jumps on a horse, is chased by outlaws, wild animals, pirates, cannibals and other fantastic antagonists. Eventually an eagle drops him in a boiling lake, where he dies.

MEANING STUDY

And you'll never guess what I did then—
I DIED (lines 27-28)

After surviving a series of adventures, the narrator says that he died. Two things are happening in these lines. First, the escalating danger/escape sequence is broken abruptly. Second, the narrator invalidates the claims in the previous lines, since he could not be telling the story if he had died. This one obvious falsehood unravels the rest of the poem, hence the ironic title "True Story."

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- How are the various adventures related?

The sequence of adventures hops between events and characters based on a loose chain of association. For example, "horse" summons Western genre fiction, which includes "outlaws." The wildcat's cave references back to the Western landscape and forward to caves where pirates keep treasure. Because these associations are tangential, two contiguous terms appear related, while separated terms may not.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem alternates unrhymed lines (every odd numbered line) with rhymed lines (every even numbered line). The line lengths alternate without a steady pattern. The rhymed lines are generally iambic trimeter, while the unrhymed lines fluctuate. The brevity of the final line heightens the effect of its abrupt ending.

THEMES

- unreliable narrators
- adventure
- danger/escape

5. "Hector the Collector" (p. 46-47)

SYNOPSIS

Hector the Collector collects various and sundry broken, useless, or otherwise valueless items. He loves his collection and offers to share it with "all the people." They come, look, and dismiss his treasures as "junk."

MEANING STUDY

And all the silly sightless people
Came and looked . . . and called it junk. (lines 27-28)

The poem's ending recalls the common expression "One person's trash is another person's treasure." What Hector values highly, the majority of people dismiss as worthless. The word "sightless" indicates that the narrator sympathizes with Hector's evaluation of the collection's worth. It also recalls the saying "Beauty [value] is in the eye of the beholder."

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Categorize the kinds of things that Hector collects.

Hector's collection resolves into three main types: 1) broken 2) missing pieces 3) generally considered to be valueless. Broken things include "chipped vases," "broken bricks," "cups with cracks." Objects missing pieces include "pieces out of picture puzzles," "copper keys that fit no locks," and "trains that had no tracks." Generally valueless things include "bits of string," "paper bags," and "dried-up leaves."

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem alternates rhymed with unrhymed lines. The unrhymed lines are mostly tied together by internal phonic effects, though there is no regular pattern to these. Line 5 plays on consonance: "Pieces . . . picture . . . puzzles." Several lines contain internal rhymes like "wires . . . tires" in line 7, "boats . . . float" in line 11 and "rings . . . fingers" in line 15.

THEMES

- perspective
- value
- common expressions

6. "One Inch Tall" (p. 55)

SYNOPSIS

The poem is a lyric detailing the various rigors one would undergo, were one only one inch tall. It ends by claiming that the poem took fourteen years to compose, since the poet is one inch tall.

MEANING STUDY

(This poem took fourteen years to write—
'Cause I'm just one inch tall). (lines 17-18)

Like many of the poems in the volume, "One Inch Tall" ends with a twist. The poet's claim to be one inch tall recontextualizes the former claims so that they seem to be written from experience, instead of pure speculation. The parentheses bracket off the claim, showing that it is different from the rest of the poem, although it continues the metrical and rhyme patterns of the stanza.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- How does the poem illustrate what it would be like to be one inch tall?

"One Inch Tall" uses substitutions, comparisons, and imagery to create a vivid picture of life for the extremely short. The substitutions switch a normal object for a miniature version, like "bit of fluff" for "bed" and "teardrop" for "pool." The comparisons either directly emphasize size ("flea would be a beast") or indirectly reference space by discussing duration ("To move a pen would take all night"). Vivid imagery often uses comparison or substitution, but the picture itself also communicates the feeling of smallness, like riding a worm to school.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem is comprised of three stanzas, each of which rhyme:

a
a
b
b
b
C1

The first two lines of each stanza are iambic heptameter. Lines 3-5 are iambic tetrameter. The final two lines are iambic trimeter.

Themes

- imagination
- substitution
- impossible claims
- context

7. "Where the Sidewalk Ends" (p. 64)

SYNOPSIS

The poet invites the reader to "walk with a walk that is measured and slow" to the place where the sidewalk ends before the street begins. The fantastic imagery of this place contrasts sharply with the departure point, where "smoke blows black" and the "dark street winds and bends." The path is marked with "chalk-white arrows."

MEANING STUDY

For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends. (lines 15-16)

This place where the sidewalk ends is less of a literal place and more of a state of mind. Or rather, it represents the childlike state of mind that is incapable of distinguishing the literal from the figurative. The text is emphatic that "children" mark the way to this place of imagination.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- What happens in each stanza?

The first stanza describes the place where the sidewalk ends. The second stanza begins by describing the place the poet intends to leave and segues into the third stanza, which describes the process of going there. The poem moves from 1) there to 2) here to 3) in-between.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem follows an irregular rhyme scheme:

A1
b
c
c
c
b

x
a
d
d
d
A1

e
e
e
A1

The imagery describing the place where the sidewalk ends, like the “peppermint wind” and “moon-bird,” is fantastic. In contrast, the imagery of the place the poet plans to leave is concrete: “smoke blows black” and “dark street.” Even “asphalt flowers” resolves into a concrete image, the chunks of broken asphalt that resemble flower patches in texture. This move between the fantastic and the concrete mimics the poem’s theme of moving to a “place” of imagination.

THEMES

- imagination
- children

8. “Lester” (p. 69)

SYNOPSIS

Lester is given a magic wish by a tree-dwelling goblin. With this wish, he wishes for more wishes, then wishes for more wishes with those wishes. He continues to wish for more wishes until they stack all around him, growing old in the process. When he dies, his wishes are counted and not one is missing.

MEANING STUDY

And more ... and more ... they multiplied
While other people smiled and cried
And loved and reached and touched and felt. (lines 18-20)

While the rest of the world lives their lives, Lester continues manufacturing wishes, obsessively counting them. The “smiled and cried / And loved” shows that Lester is isolated emotionally. The “reached and touched and felt” displays his physical isolation.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Are the wishes metaphoric?

The wishes in the poem are similar to money. Spending wishes on wishes, allowing them to multiply, recalls investment. Lester’s obsessive counting of his wishes reminds one of a lonely banker. Like money, the wishes are a currency, exchangeable for goods or experiences, but ultimately useless if never spent.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem follows a loose rhyme scheme:

A1
b
A2
b
b
A2
c
x
A2
c
A1
x
d
e
e
e
d
f
f
g
g
h
h
l1
l1
x
j
k
k
k
j

Several of the lines have internal rhymes like “new . . . few” (28) and “lot . . . not” (26), which creates a lilting sound. The alternation in line length stutters the poem and makes it sing-song. The constant repetition of variations of “wish,” which occur sixteen times, mimics Lester’s accumulation of wishes. Often rhymed lines continue a single thought, and breaks in the rhyme pattern indicate a new thought.

THEMES

- life and living
- unspent wealth
- fantasy
- cleverness vs. wisdom

8. “Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out” (p 70-71)

SYNOPSIS

Although she does her other chores, Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout refuses to take the garbage out. The poet details the various kinds of refuse that stacked high, spilling out and up. Eventually the trash touches the sky and stretches across the nation, the neighbors move away, and Sarah meets an awful demise in the garbage that the poet declines to describe.

MEANING STUDY

But children, remember Sarah Stout
And always take the garbage out! (lines 46-47)

In the final lines, the poet addresses the audience, presumes that they are children, and exhorts them to take out the trash. Although the majority of the poem is a semi-humorous litany of discarded items, the end playfully transforms the poem from a recitation to a lesson about responsibility. These lines contain the same rhyming pairs as the first lines, which frames the poem, bringing it full circle.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- How much of the poem is dedicated to listing and why?

The vast majority of the poem contains lists of the items that built up because Sarah Stout would not take the garbage out. The poem enacts the garbage’s accumulation by allowing the listing to dwarf the narrative, just as the trash dwarfed Sarah. Insofar as the poem is about responsibility and procrastination, the garbage is analogous to any task left undone. Shirked responsibilities tend to snowball, just like the trash.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem begins with a series of rhymed couplets. The series of couplets is broken in line 37, which ends with the unrhymed “said.” Line 38 rhymes with the final two lines, while all the lines between (39-45) rhyme with one another. The system of rhymes roughly matches the poem’s movement. The long series of rhymed couplets

matches the listing and story. The unrhymed line is the turning point where Sarah decides to take out the trash, followed by an “avalanche” of rhymed lines (seven consecutive lines with the same rhyme) in which we are told that it was too late.

THEMES

- responsibility
- procrastination
- humor

9. “The Planet of Mars” (p. 93)

SYNOPSIS

The poet relates that the people on Mars are similar to us, having the same clothes, shoes, shoe-laces, charms, graces, heads, and faces. The poem ends with a twist, claiming that though they have these things, they are not in the same places.

MEANING STUDY

But not in the
Very same
Places. (lines 6-8)

These lines are curious in their ambiguity. They may or may not refer solely to the “same heads and same faces.” “Charms” and “graces” aren’t location-specific, so it wouldn’t make sense to relocate them. The “clothing,” “shoes,” and “laces” may or may not occupy their normal places. This twist at the end of the poem is typical of many of the poems in the volume.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- How is the picture related to the poem?

The picture shows a man with his head on his bottom, illustrating the idea that they have heads and faces, just in different places. It also seems to indicate that only their heads and faces are in unexpected locations. The image adds another layer of humor by showing exactly to where the heads and faces have been relocated.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem follows a simple rhyme scheme:

a
a
b
b
b
x
x
b

Lines six and seven don’t rhyme, but the last three lines can be read as a single line, separated into pieces to create suspense with visual tension. The shoes/laces and heads/faces follow an identical pattern of specification. Laces are parts of shoes, just as faces are parts of heads.

THEMES

- humor
- speculation
- surprise

11. “Poem on the Neck of a Running Giraffe” (p. 107)

SYNOPSIS

The poet asks the reader not to laugh or make fun of him, explaining that it’s difficult to write a poem on the neck of a running giraffe.

MEANING STUDY

Please do not make fun of me,
And please don’t laugh.
It isn’t easy to write a poem
On the neck of a running giraffe.

If the poem were formatted like a standard poem, it would appear as above, a four line stanza. Read simply as text, the poem loses most of its meaning, which is highly dependent upon the visual formatting. The visual play defines the meaning of “on.” Read as simple text, “on” would refer to the place of composition. One would imagine a poet riding a giraffe while writing a poem on paper. Formatted as a visual poem, the “on” refers to the medium. The poem is literally written on the giraffe’s neck.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Discuss the visual formatting of the poem.

The poem deviates from the volume's typeface, appearing to be handwritten. It is formatted in a long column, breaking words to preserve the shape, dropping letters from one word to the beginning of the next line. The unevenness of the handwriting font gives the column an organic shape, rather than the strict lines of type. The tilt of the lines gives the impression of forward motion.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Read aloud, the poem easily resolves into four lines, the second and fourth of which rhyme ("laugh" and "giraffe"). Visually, the poem breaks the words to form a vertical column. Including spaces and the period in the final line, but excluding apostrophes, each line contains between four and seven characters. The visual orientation enacts the poem's content of writing a poem on a running giraffe's neck. In this direct relationship between content and form, it is similar to early European concrete poetry.

THEMES

- text and image
- fantasy

12. "With His Mouth Full of Food" (p. 128)

SYNOPSIS

Milford Dupree, despite his parents' various objections, talks with his mouth full of food. After numerous warnings, at which he laughs, his parents have his mouth glued shut. He ends the poem speaking through glued lips, offering a garbled promise not to talk with his mouth full.

MEANING STUDY

He never would burp or walk out in the nude,
But he talked with his mouth full of food. (lines 3-4)

The poet makes it clear that talking with his mouth full is Milford's only clear fault, that he is otherwise a normal, polite boy. However, his parents would prefer he become married or tattooed than to talk with his mouth full. That this behavior is an aberration makes it appear inexplicable. He appears to simply enjoy talking with his mouth full.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

List Milford's parents' objections to his talking with his mouth full.

Milford's mother objects that talking with his mouth full is crude and lewd. She says that not even cows do it, nor cuckoos. His father says that if it were a crime, he'd be found guilty and that he should be put in a zoo like an animal. Both are put in a terrible mood by the behavior. It is curious that the mother notes that not even animals chew with their mouth full, while the father compares him to an animal in the zoo.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Every line of the poem rhymes with every other, with the exception of the final line, though it is a distortion of "food," which would rhyme. Every odd numbered line ends with "mouth full of food." "Zoo'd" in line 15 is an interesting neologism, meaning "to be put in a zoo." The "Gnu murnood / I wun tuk win mny marf furu foog" in the final lines is a distortion of "Good morning / I won't talk with my mouth full of food," made to mimic the sounds of someone with glued lips.

THEMES

- manners
- animals vs. people

13. "The Bagpipe Who Didn't Say No" (p. 132-133)

SYNOPSIS

A turtle meets a set of bagpipes at the beach and falls in love. He asks the pipes to marry him and mistakes its lack of response to be a lack of objection. When he squeezes the pipes, they make an odd noise that he mistakes for disapproval and eventually departs when the pipes don't reply to his desperate queries.

MEANING STUDY

It was nine o'clock at midnight at a quarter after three
When a turtle met a bagpipe on the shoreside by the sea (lines 1-2)

The opening line sets the playful tone for the turtle's amorous encounter with a bagpipes. "Nine o'clock at midnight at a quarter after three" resolves into no single time. It is an impossible time for an impossible encounter, although it is interesting to note that the progression of times on an analog clock would move the hands from the nine to the twelve to the three, similar to the effect of waves on a shore. The poem's final line plays off of this self-conscious absurdity, claiming that the pipes would not deny the story.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Explain the basic misunderstanding in the poem.

The turtle mistakes the bagpipes for a female turtle. This confusion is somewhat clarified by the image, which shows the bagpipes as looking somewhat turtle-like. The turtle's questions are yes/no questions, and he understands the bagpipes' lack of response as "not no," i.e. an implicit affirmative.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The poem is divided into seven stanzas, most of which rhyme:

- a
- a
- b
- b
- C1

with the exception of stanzas 3 and 7, which insert an extra line each. The middle stanza, 4, switches the final end-word, changing "No" to "Aoooga," the only thing the bagpipes "say." "Aoooga" is presumably the noise that soggy bagpipes make when squeezed. This break in the scheme occurs in the exact middle of the poem and separates the wooing (first half) with the break-up (second half).

THEMES

- fantasy
- humor
- misunderstandings

14. "The Little Blue Engine" (p. 158)

SYNOPSIS

"The Little Blue Engine" is a retelling of *The Little Engine That Could*. The engine struggles to mount a difficult hill, chanting "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." Just as he begins to crest the hill, he slides back down and is smashed against the rocks below. The poet surmises that "THINKING you can just ain't enough!"

MEANING STUDY

which just goes to show
If the track is tough and the hill is rough,
THINKING you can just ain't enough! (lines 18-20)

The final stanza dashes the engine's hopes and the reader's expectations. The final lines are a tongue-in-cheek reversal of *The Little Engine That Could's* naiveté. This reversal is humorous partially because it is true.

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Is the engine's crash a surprise?

The engine's failure comes as a surprise for two reasons. First, the intertextual reference leads the reader to assume that the engine will succeed. Second, the poem itself indicates imminent success in the internal relations. The rhyme scheme quickens at the end of every stanza, which creates the feeling of acceleration, and the end of the penultimate stanza shows the engine poised for success, crying out "strong and proud."

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

The rhyme scheme depends heavily on internal rhymes:

- a
- a
- b/b
- c/c
- D1

The refrain is replaced in the final stanza to form a rhyming couplet:

- a
- a
- b/b
- c
- c

The switch from an initial couplet to the two lines of internal rhymes “quickens” the pace of each stanza, making it sound like it is accelerating towards the end of the poem, just as the engine makes its way to the top of the hill. The “CRASH! SMASH! BASH!” is staccato, as stark phonetically as it is surprising narratively.

THEMES

- expectation
- surprise
- hope
- realism

15. “The Truth About Turtles” (p. 169)

SYNOPSIS

The poet claims that turtles actually have long legs folded up inside their shells and that they stretch them out at night, running across hills and fields. In the morning, they fold their legs back up and crawl. The image depicts a long-legged turtle in running sneakers.

MEANING STUDY

Turtles really have long legs,
 But they don't stretch 'em out
 Until very late at night (lines 1-3)

The poem is a fantastic spurious explanation of turtles. The initial lines pair two areas of mystery for children. One cannot see inside of a turtle's shell, so it remains a place of mystery, susceptible to wild imagination. Similarly, children typically are not allowed to stay up late, so “very late at night” is a time of mystery. Silverstein's explanation is similar to Schrödinger's cats: interesting and unverifiable (from a child's perspective).

COMPREHENSION STUDY

- Compare this poem to other poems with fantastic stories or explanations.

“The Truth About Turtles” is different from other poems discussed above that contain fantastic stories or explanation because it does not betray itself. It is not explicitly self-conscious. Poems like “The Bagpipe Who Didn't Say No” and “True Story” have little nods to the fantastic nature of their contents, linguistic winks and nudges.

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

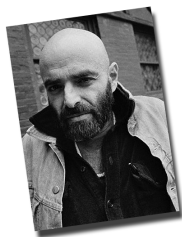
Unlike other text/image poems in the volume, the visual formatting of “The Truth About Turtles” carries little content. The arrangement does not affect the interpretation. Rather, the text is simply spaced to fit within the image. The repetition of “and” in the poem adds a breathless quality, mimicking the race to morning.

THEMES

- fantastic explanation
- mystery
- perspective

Author Sketch

Sheldon Allan Silverstein was born 25 September 1930 in Chicago, Illinois. A writer from a young age, he was also a songwriter and artist. He is best known for his popular children's books, which have been translated into over thirty languages. Silverstein first began drawing cartoons for adult audiences as a G.I. in Japan and Korea in the 1950s, when he also learned to play guitar.



He never planned to become a children's author. Early in the 1960s, he was introduced to legendary editor Ursula Nordstrom, which eventually led to the publication of *The Giving Tree* in 1964. Sales were modest at first, but the book became increasingly popular, eventually selling over five and a half million copies. Shel recalled that Nordstrom allowed him to keep the book's sad ending because "life, you know, has pretty sad endings."

Where the Sidewalk Ends was Silverstein's first collection of poetry, published in 1974. It is widely considered to be an instant classic. Two more collections followed, *A Light in the Attic* and *Falling Up*. *Attic* spent a record 182 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

In addition to writing, he was a successful songwriter. He wrote such songs as "A Boy Named Sue" for Johnny Cash, "The Cover of the Rolling Stone" for Dr. Hook, and "Unicorn Song" for the Irish Rovers. "I'm Checking Out" for the film *Postcards from the Edge* was nominated for an Academy Award in 1991. Silverstein won a Grammy Award for best children's album in 1984 for *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. He died in May 1999.

Critic's Corner

Since its release in 1974, *Where the Sidewalk Ends* has been widely admired for its zesty light verse and quirky, charismatic illustrations. Reviewers generally commented upon the poetry's phonic qualities, noting that it is "a pleasure to read aloud" and that Silverstein "has an excellent sense of rhythm and a good ear for alliteration." The poems often explore the imagination, offering fantastic explanations of quotidian events or self-consciously absurd narratives. The verse is light-hearted, poking fun at commonalities of children's lives like table manners, cliché parental expressions, and chores.

Selected Other Works

Children's/Juvenile Fiction

Lafcadio, The Lion Who Shot Back, 1963
Who Wants a Cheap Rhinoceros?, 1964
The Giving Tree, 1964
A Giraffe and a Half, 1975
The Missing Piece, 1976
The Missing Piece Meets the Big O, 1981
Runny Rabbit: A Billy Sook, 2005

Poetry

A Light in the Attic, 1981
Falling Up, 1996

Literary Recordings

A Light in the Attic, 1985
The Giving Tree, 1992

Media Versions

Audio CD/cassette

Where the Sidewalk Ends, Sony, 1976

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General Objectives

1. To read poetry aloud
2. To use and understand literary terms
3. To identify each poem's rhyme scheme
4. To note major themes and motifs
5. To contrast poems' moods
6. To characterize elements of fantasy
7. To develop reading, writing, and thinking skills
8. To expand vocabulary
9. To discuss relationships between text and image
10. To appreciate language

Specific Objectives

1. To track the sound-schemes of individual poems
2. To discuss how sound affects sense
3. To list examples of different kinds of humor in the poetry
4. To be conscious of how the illustrations inform the poems
5. To evaluate the narrators' perspectives
6. To categorize poems
7. To write poetry
8. To note uses of visual formatting
9. To identify a specific theme and find examples in multiple poems
10. To list and analyze examples of repetition

Literary Terms and Applications

Alliteration: the repetition of the initial consonant sound in a sequence of words. "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout" is a good example.

Internal Rhyme: a rhyme consisting of a word at the end of a line rhyming with a word in the middle of the line. Many of the poems use internal rhymes like "He was tired and small, and the hill was tall / And his faced blushed red as he softly said."

Onomatopoeia: a word approximating the sound of what it describes. Silverstein uses onomatopoeia in words like "crash," "whoosh," and "bang." He also uses onomatopoeic neologisms like "zang," "barroom," and "glunk."

Unreliable Narrator: a speaker whose point of view is consciously or self-consciously inaccurate or deceiving. Many of Silverstein's narrators in the poems are unreliable, slyly winking while telling of absurd events.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Internet

ShelSilverstein.com Author's official website.
<http://www.shelsilverstein.com>

Web English Teacher Includes a link to exercises for *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/silverstein.html>

Poetry

Carol Ann Duffy, *Meeting Midnight*
 Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon, *Kings and Queens*
 Sheree Fitch, *Sleeping Dragons All Around*
 Paul Fleischman, *Joyful Noise*
 Dennis Lee, *Alligator Pie, Garbage Delight*
 A.A. Milne, *World of Christopher Robinson*
 Tomie de Paola, *Tomie de Paola's Mother Goose*
 Jack Prelutsky, *New Kid on the Block*
 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Child's Garden of Verses*
 Nancy Willard, *A Visit to Blake's Inn*

Nonfiction

The New Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics, Lewis Turco
Oxford Rhyming Dictionary

Teaching Resources

Favorite Poetry Lessons: Grades 4-8, Paul Janeczko
The Poet's Pen: Writing Poetry with Middle and High School Students, Hillary Bonham Lies
Tiger Lillies, Toadstools, and Thunderbolts: Engaging K-8 Students with Poetry, Iris McClellan Tiedt
Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry, Kenneth Koch and Rod Padgett

Across the Curriculum

Drama/Speech

1. Listen to Shel Silverstein's recording of *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, reading along in your book. Discuss how hearing his reading affects your understanding.
2. Photocopy a poem and mark it for performance. Include marks for volume, pauses, tone, speed, and stress.
3. Using a voice recorder or computer program, record a reading of one of the poems with a partner.

- Using puppets or sock-puppets and a miniature set, act out the action of a narrative poem while a classmate reads it aloud.

Art

- Using photocopies of the text and images cut from magazines, make an illustrated version of selections from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Select images that illustrate each poem's theme.
- Paint or design a cover for the book.
- Draw one of the narrative poems as a comic book.
- Choose five poems that lack illustrations and draw your own.
- Using drawings, cut-outs, paintings, photographs, or any other visual media, make a mural that conveys a sense of the poetry's spirit.

Language Arts

- Make a list of examples of sound-play in the poems.
- Map out the rhyme scheme of your favorite poem, and then write your own poem in the same scheme.
- Write a short story based on one of the poems.
- Rewrite one of the poems from a different perspective.
- Write a journal entry from the perspective of one of the poems' characters.

Science

- Make a list of the types of animals mentioned in the poems. Choose five and write a paragraph about each one, detailing its main characteristics, habitat, habits, and food sources.
- Choose a poem that is scientifically untrue like "The Edge of the World" and rewrite it to be factual.

Social Studies

- Choose a poem and a culture and rewrite the poem to represent that culture. For example, what garbage would pile up in a French version of "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out?"

- Looking at a map of the world, assign poems to continents and countries based on tone, subject, narrative, characters, or landscape. For example, which poem "fits" Antarctica?

Alternate Assessment

- Read selections from Shel Silverstein's *Light in the Attic* or *Falling Up*.
- Working in pairs, take turns illustrating poems the other has written.
- Working in pairs, take turns writing poems in reaction to illustrations the other has drawn.
- Take five minutes during which every student may read out loud his or her favorite lines from any poem.

Standardized Test Preparation

VOCABULARY

1. Select a noun, a verb, an adjective, and an adverb from the book. Find and list five synonyms for each word. In a complete sentences, describe the difference between each synonym and the original word.
2. Select a poem and insert an antonym for each noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Read your new poem aloud in class.

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

1. Find examples of as many different punctuation marks as you can in the book. Write down the line in which the punctuation appears, its name, and its function.
2. Find and list examples of each of these parts of speech: verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. Select a poem and underline what you consider to be the most important words. Explain why you selected each word, what it means, and how it affects the meaning of the poem.
2. Select a poem and answer these questions:
 - Who is the speaker?
 - Who is the audience?
 - What is the poem's main idea?
 - What is the poem's tone?
 - What is the rhyme scheme?
 - Is this poem lyrical or narrative?

WRITING

1. Choose a narrative poem and rewrite the events in a prose paragraph. Include simple, complex, and compound sentences.
2. Choose two poems and compare/contrast them. Write a paragraph about each poem, their similarities, their differences, and what you learned by comparing/contrasting them.

Vocabulary

In the space provided, list five synonyms for the word.

1. Dance (v)

2. Funny

3. Gentle

4. Small

5. Groan (v)

6. Story

7. Mad (to be mad at)

8. Sorrow (n)

9. Search (v)

10. Hungry

11. Gift

12. Surprise (v)

13. Dry (adj)

14. Dark

15. Creak (v)

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Completion (30 points)

Fill in the missing words from "The Little Blue Engine"

The little blue engine looked up at the hill.
His light was weak, his whistle was (1)____.
He was tired and (2)____, and the hill was tall,
And his face blushed red as he softly (3)____,
"I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

So he started up with a chug and a (4)____,
And he puffed and pulled with might and main.
And slowly he (5)____, a foot at a time,
And his engine coughed as he whispered (6)____,
"I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

With a squeak and a creak and a toot and a sigh,
With an extra hope and an extra (7)____,
He would not (8)____—now he neared the top—
And strong and (9)____he cried out loud,
"I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."

He was almost there, when *CRASH!* (10) ____! *BASH!*
He slid down and mashed into engine (11)____
On the rocks below ... which goes to (12)____
If the track is (13)____and the hill is rough,
(14)____you can just ain't (15)____!

- _____ 1.
- _____ 2.
- _____ 3.
- _____ 4.
- _____ 5.
- _____ 6.
- _____ 7.
- _____ 8.
- _____ 9.
- _____ 10.
- _____ 11.
- _____ 12.
- _____ 13.
- _____ 14.
- _____ 15.

Part II: Accentuation (20 points)

In each line, mark accented syllables with ´ and unaccented syllables with ¨.

1. Collected bits of string,
Collected dolls with broken heads
And rusted bells that would not ring.
2. Poor Sarah met an awful fate,
That I cannot right now relate.
3. But all the magic I have known
I've had to make myself.
4. A piece of sky
Broke off and fell
Through the crack in the ceiling.
5. One sister for sale!
One crying and spying young sister for sale!

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Rhymes (20 points)

In the space provided, list five words that rhyme with the one given.

1. out

2. sail

3. sea

4. say

5. jet

6. crew

7. gold

8. swing

9. between

10. speak

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Using your completed copy of "The Little Blue Engine" in Part I, describe the poem's rhyme scheme.
2. How do the poems and pictures affect one another?
3. Categorize the poems you read into types, citing examples.
4. Choose five poems that you read and list their main ideas.
5. Summarize the story of a narrative poem that you read.

Comprehension Test B

Match these letters in the appropriate blanks. You will use this list in Part I, Part II, and Part III.

TITLES

- A. "The Bagpipe Who Didn't Say No"
- B. "The Farmer and the Queen"
- C. "Hector the Collector"
- D. "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set"
- E. "Lester"
- F. "The Little Blue Engine"
- G. "The Loser"
- H. "One Inch Tall"
- I. "The Planet of Mars"
- J. "Poem Written on the Neck of a Running Giraffe"
- K. "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out"
- L. "True Story"
- M. "The Truth About Turtles"
- N. "Where the Sidewalk Ends"
- O. "With His Mouth Full of Food"

Part I: Poem Identification (30 points)

Match the title of the poem with the descriptions of their main character or subject.

- _____ 1. slides down a hill onto rocks
- _____ 2. wishes for wishes
- _____ 3. can't search for his head
- _____ 4. the people are very similar to us with one major difference
- _____ 5. the poet says that the poem was hard to write
- _____ 6. a turtle falls in love on a beach
- _____ 7. children know the path marked by chalk-white arrows
- _____ 8. people call his treasures junk
- _____ 9. the dog tells him to bow
- _____ 10. his parents have his mouth glued shut
- _____ 11. poet claims it took fourteen years to write
- _____ 12. his ears turn into knobs
- _____ 13. they run over hills and fields until morning
- _____ 14. meets a tragic fate that the poet refuses to tell
- _____ 15. promises to marry a mermaid

Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Match titles of poems with quotations by writing the letter in the blank. Not all of the options will be used.

- _____ 1. A bit of fluff would be your bed,
You'd swing upon a spider's thread,
- _____ 2. And so it piled up to the ceilings:
Coffee grounds, potato peelings,
- _____ 3. But should I curtsy or should I cheer?
Oh, here's her carriage now.
- _____ 4. So he started up with a chug and a strain,
And he puffed and pulled with might and main.
- _____ 5. And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
- _____ 6. And then he spread them on the ground
And clapped his hands and danced around
- _____ 7. Please do not make fun of me
And please don't laugh
- _____ 8. He watched all day, he watched all night
Till he grew pale and lean,
- _____ 9. _____ Gnu murnood
I wun tuk win mny marf furu foog.
- _____ 10. And they have the same shoes and same laces
And they have the same charms and same graces

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

TITLES

- A. "The Bagpipe Who Didn't Say No"
- B. "The Farmer and the Queen"
- C. "Hector the Collector"
- D. "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set"
- E. "Lester"
- F. "The Little Blue Engine"
- G. "The Loser"
- H. "One Inch Tall"
 - I. "The Planet of Mars"
- J. "Poem Written on the Neck of a Running Giraffe"
- K. "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out"
- L. "True Story"
- M. "The Truth About Turtles"
- N. "Where the Sidewalk Ends"
- O. "With His Mouth Full of Food"

Part III: Picture Identification (20 points)

Match the description of the poem's illustration with its title by writing the corresponding letter in the blank.

- _____ 1. turtle in running shoes
- _____ 2. boy with a box full of random objects
- _____ 3. boy riding a worm with a thimble on his head
- _____ 4. turtle with a musical instrument
- _____ 5. boy sitting on his own head
- _____ 6. man addressing a group of animals
- _____ 7. girl fleeing an overflowing trash bin
- _____ 8. man with his head attached to his bottom
- _____ 9. cowboy riding a horse
- _____ 10. family watching a transformed boy

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Choose your favorite poem and explain why you liked it.
- 2. Are the poems written from the same perspective? How can you tell?
- 3. List examples of humorous explanations in the poems you read.
- 4. Who is the intended audience for the poems? How can you tell?
- 5. List examples of impossibilities from the poems.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Possible answers are listed, though responses will vary.

- boogie, caper, cavort, conga, foxtrot, frolic, gambol, hop, jig, jitterbug, leap, prance, promenade, rumba, rock, shimmy, skip, spin, step, strut, sway, swing, tango, tap, twist, two-step, waltz, whirl
- absurd, amusing, bizarre, capricious, comical, droll, entertaining, farcical, gay, hilarious, humorous, laughable, ludicrous, merry, mirthful, odd, queer, ridiculous, silly, strange, weird, witty
- benign, compassionate, considerate, docile, domesticated, genial, humane, kind, kindly, meek, mellow, pacific, peaceful, placid, quiet, soft, sympathetic, tame, tender
- diminutive, dwarf, little, microscopic, miniature, minute, petite, puny, short, teensy, teeny, wee
- bemoan, cry, gripe, grouse, grumble, keen, lament, moan, mumble, sigh, whine
- adventure, anecdote, chronicle, epic, fable, fiction, folktale, legend, myth, narrative, parable, report, tale, yarn
- angry, agitated, berserk, distraught, enraged, exasperated, frantic, frenetic, fuming, furious, incensed, infuriated, irritated, livid, raging, resentful, wild, wrathful
- anguish, catastrophe, dejection, depression, distress, dolor, heartache, heartbreak, melancholy, misery, mourning, pain, remorse, rue, sadness, tribulation, unhappiness, woe
- cast about, chase, check, comb, examine, explore, ferret, forage, hunt, inspect, investigate, look, probe, pry, quest, rifle, root, rummage, scan, scour, scout, seek, sift, track
- covetous, craving, desirous, edacious, empty, esurient, famished, greedy, hungered, insatiate, rapacious, ravenous, starving, unsatisfied, voracious
- bequest, boon, bounty, endowment, favor, grant, handout, largesse, offering, pittance, present, remembrance, souvenir, token
- amaze, astound, awe, bewilder, confound, confuse, daze, dazzle, dismay, flabbergast, overwhelm, perplex, rattle, shock, startle, stupefy, unsettle
- arid, baked, dehydrated, desiccated, dusty, juiceless, parched, shriveled, thirsty, torrid
- black, cloudy, dim, dusky, gloomy, inky, murky, opaque, overcast, shaded, shadowy, unlit
- grate, groan, rasp, scrape, scratch, screech, sound, squeak, squeal

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Completion (30 points)

- | | | |
|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1. shrill | 6. soft | 11. hash |
| 2. small | 7. try | 12. show |
| 3. said | 8. stop | 13. tough |
| 4. strain | 9. proud | 14. THINKING |
| 5. climbed | 10. SMASH | 15. enough |

Part II: Accentuation (20 points)

- Collected bits of *string*,
Collected *dolls* with *broken heads*
And *rusted* bells that *would* not *ring*.
- Poor Sarah met an *awful* fate,
That I cannot right now relate.
- But *all* the *magic* I have *known*
I've *had* to make myself.
- A *piece* of *sky*
Broke *off* and *fell*
Through the *crack* in the *ceiling*
- One *sister* for *sale!*
One *crying* and *spying* young *sister* for *sale!*

Part III: Rhymes (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Poem Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. A | 11. H |
| 2. E | 7. N | 12. D |
| 3. G | 8. C | 13. M |
| 4. I | 9. B | 14. K |
| 5. J | 10. O | 15. L |

Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

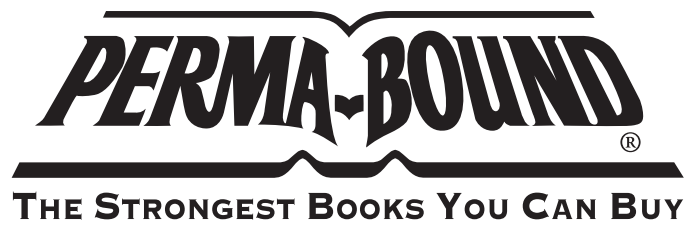
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. H | 6. E |
| 2. K | 7. J |
| 3. B | 8. D |
| 4. F | 9. O |
| 5. N | 10. I |

Part III: Picture Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. M | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. K |
| 3. H | 8. I |
| 4. A | 9. L |
| 5. G | 10. D |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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