

Making Sense

Levels

Intermediate +

Aims

Analyze syntax

Class Time

50 minutes

Preparation Time

15 minutes

Resources

Copies of
"Jabberwocky" for each
student

Coherence and parts of speech are reviewed using the nonsense words of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky."

Procedure

1. Make a copy of "Jabberwocky" with the unknown words underlined and the stanzas divided into two clearly labeled sections. Section A includes Stanzas 1-2, and Section B Stanzas 3-6. This division just about equally distributes the 28 unknown words (discounting repetition) between the two sections. The last stanza—a refrain of the first—is omitted or left to stand on its own.
2. Divide the class into groups of four or five students and call them Teams A or Teams B.
3. Provide each student with a copy of the poem.
4. Read the poem aloud.
5. Assigning Section A of the poem to Group A and Section B to Group B, ask the groups to identify the part of speech for each underlined unknown word in their section and to provide a rationale for each identification.
6. Allow 10-15 minutes of group discussion.
7. Moving around the A groups, have individual students report on their groups' conclusions. For each word, check whether or not other groups agree. If there is disagreement, lively discussion should follow. Repeat the process with the B groups.
8. When each unknown word has been labeled, have the whole class read the final stanza aloud with full dramatic effects.

Caveats and Options

1. After labeling the unknown words, students assign them meanings before being given those provided by Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*.
2. With prompts from you, students could play with the words. For example, they could try to determine how the removal of *did* affects the verbs *gyre* and *gimble*.
3. Discussion could expand to words around the unknown ones (e.g., how they know that *back* (Line 20) is not being used as a noun.
4. This is a light-hearted activity best used as a reinforcement tool. It serves as a review of, for example, tenses, linking verbs, articles, and noun modification. Most importantly, though, it empowers students. By controlling nonsense words, they see, often with amazement, the control they have of sense words.

References and Further Reading

For the works of Lewis Carroll, see

Carroll, L. (1982). *The complete illustrated works of Lewis Carroll*. New York: Avenel Books.

Carroll, L. (1982). *The Penguin complete Lewis Carroll*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.

Contributor

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