

DADDY FELL INTO THE POND – ALFRED NOYES : A STARTING POINT FOR A POEM

This was the first poem I remember from my primary school days. I don't think a teacher read it to us, I think I'd borrowed a book from our after school library every Monday.

Of course, it's the title that's memorable and gives the poem its comedy. In my own mind I'd pictured daddy in the pond because he was trying to rescue a cat from a tree. When I rediscovered the poem later in life there were no references to cats, ladders and trees. This had all been part of the illustration and as such, had woven itself into the poem and my subsequent memory of the poem.

That's what I love – the cartoon and comic aspect of the poem. The title says it all, draws us in and gives us that cartoon image. And that is a great starting point.

The rest of the poem does what it needs to do, the rhymes are fine and there's not much of a story (apart from the fact that the family must have been quite well off to have had a "gardener") – but it's the joy of the repeated line ...

Daddy fell into the pond!

I have a poem called *When The Wasp Flew Up My Brother's Shorts* and I always say that once you've heard the title I almost don't need to do the poem as your imagination has already done the rest.

So – let's have that as a starting point. A cartoon title where you get an immediate picture and that leads you into the poem and the subsequent ideas.

Either ...

Use the fact that daddy has fallen into the pond as a starting point ...

How did he fall into the pond?

What was he doing?

Was he playing a game?

Was it a trick played on him by his children?

Was he in his best clothes?

Think of the strangest reasons he could have ended up in the pond

All these are part of the whole story – now, fill in the gaps – what, when how, why, who etc.

You could still use *Daddy fell into the pond* as a repeated line. I wouldn't worry too much about making the poem rhyme – more that every four lines or so – repeat the funny line. Get the class to join in with it

OR ...

Think of your own comic title ...

The day that dad split his trousers
When mum spilt ice cream down her dress
Sister's in the fish tank!
Baby brother is stuck in the cupboard
The day our teacher fell in the bin
When Granddad's false teeth shot out

Once you start I'm sure the class will come up with lots of possibilities.

Again, work backwards from the punch line – fill in the story, build it up, bit by bit.

When did it happen?
How did it happen?
Why did it happen?
Who saw it happen?
What was the reaction?

Exaggerate, make it larger than life, make it as cartoon as possible.

Every so often – maybe every four lines – repeat the line.

Have fun !