

# The Red Ear Blows Its Nose



Short, punchy, and clever poems, as if Shel Silverstein and Ogden Nash had a baby. Some are only two lines long. My favorite: “When livestock salesmen cannot sleep, / do they lie in bed discounting sheep?” **Wow!**  
—Jane Yolen, author of the *How Do Dinosaurs* books

What a splendid collection of poetry. Here are poems that fizz with imagination, wisdom, and an infectious exuberance at the sheer wonder of words. **Beautifully crafted and terrifically funny**, this is a book for children (and grown-ups) to return to again and again.  
—Kate Wakeling, winner, 2017 CLiPPA (UK)

You’ll feel like a “cool in-the-know one” when you read Robert Schechter’s clever collection of poems. This book will open your mind up to a world where foxes cartwheel through trombones, a horse might choose to moo, and you can dive into a lake filled with yellow puffs of popcorn. Children who are reading (and thinking) beyond their age level will love it; you will, too. **If you’re a fan of John Ciardi and Richard Wilbur and X. J. Kennedy, or Jack Prelutsky and J. Patrick Lewis and Kenn Nesbitt, you’ll want to add Robert Schechter to your list of favorite poets!**

—Janet Wong, winner of the 2021 NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children

*The Red Ear Blows Its Nose* is a **dazzling tour de force** of ingenious poems that sparkle with Schechter’s witty, wonderful wordplay. Read this book. Your brain will thank you.  
—Kenn Nesbitt, former Children’s Poet Laureate (2013–15)

Robert Schechter's poems sing with irrepressible joy. His humor, wit, and verbal dexterity make *The Red Ear Blows Its Nose* a book that both children and adults will want to read over and over and over again. He is clearly one of the most accomplished poets writing for children today.

—Valerie Bloom MBE, winner, 2022 CLiPPA (UK)

Schechter's *The Red Ear Blows Its Nose* is a masterful collection from a masterful poet. Not only does every poem take you somewhere new, spinning ideas and jokes and thoughts and dreams and facts and observations on the tip of its finger like a Harlem Globetrotter at a showing-off convention, but it does so with such surefootedness, such deft rhythm and rhyme, that the poems are joys to read aloud. They sing themselves out of your mouth and will stick in the minds of kids and grown-ups everywhere they get heard. **Schechter, it seems to me, is way up there with the great American kids' poets, a real Shel Silverstein for today's generation.**

—A. F. Harrold

It's entertaining—sometimes hilarious, sometimes beautiful, always thought-provoking—and **nothing short of brilliant.**

—Diana Murray, author of *City Shapes*, *Summer Color!* and the *Unicorn Day* series



# The Red Ear Blows Its Nose

Poems for Children and Others

BY

Robert Schechter

ILLUSTRATED BY

S. Federico



WORD GALAXY PRESS

*An imprint of Able Muse Press*

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First published in 2023 by

## Word Galaxy Press

www.wordgalaxy.com

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Schechter, Robert, 1955- author. | Federico, S., 2001- illustrator.  
Title: The red ear blows its nose : poems for children and others / by Robert Schechter ; illustrated by S. Federico.

Description: San Jose, CA : World Galaxy Press, an imprint of Able Muse Press, 2023. | Audience: Ages 7-12. | Audience: Grades 2-7.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022035887 (print) | LCCN 2022035888 (ebook) | ISBN 9781773491301 (paperback) | ISBN 9781773491349 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781773491318 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Children's poetry, American. | CYAC: American poetry. | LCGFT: Poetry.

Classification: LCC PS3619.C3384 R43 2023 (print) | LCC PS3619.C3384 (ebook) | DDC 811/.6--dc23/eng/20220805

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022035887>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022035888>

Printed in the United States of America

Cover image: *The Red Ear and Friends* by S. Federico

Cover & book design by S. Federico and Alexander Pepple

Word Galaxy Press is an imprint of Able Muse Press—at  
[www.ablemusepress.com](http://www.ablemusepress.com)

Word Galaxy Press  
467 Saratoga Avenue #602  
San Jose, CA 95129

for  
Susannah and Lincoln  
(obviously)





## *Acknowledgments*

My grateful acknowledgments go to the editors of the following publications where these poems, some in earlier versions, first appeared:

*Alabama Literary Review*: “Lights Out,” “My First Snow,” and “Reaching Six”

*Anon Two*: “My Champion Bee,” “Obviously,” “Solar Lunacy,” and “The Thing about Chickens”

*Asses of Parnassus*: “Question”

*The Best Ever Book of Funny Poems*: “What’s Mine”

*Bumbershoot*: “I’m Igserious,” “The Chorus of Doris,” “The Horse Who Said *Moo*,” and “Unlucky”

*The Caterpillar*: “Bird Talk,” “It’s All Me,” “Just Wondering,” “My Brain,” “They Say,” and “We Come in Peace”

*Cricket*: “The Breeze” and “Instrumental”

*Dirigible Balloon*: “Summer Sorcerer”

*Highlights*: “Colors,” “How High Is the Sky,” “Popcorn Dream,” “Sky,” and “Under the Rainbow”

*Ladybug*: “Reading between the Letters” and “To and Fro”

*Light Quarterly*: “Jokes Talk Back”

*One Minute till Bedtime: 60-Second Poems to Send You Off to Sleep:* “The Just-Because Hug”

*The School Magazine:* “Brain Break,” “Dancing,” “Fabulous Five,” “My Nose,” “Talking to the Wall,” “Breezy Does It,” and “Winning”

*Spaced Out: Space Poems Chosen by Brian Moses and James Carter:* “Bang!”

*The Spectator:* “Winter’s Tale”

*Spider:* “The Latest Thing”

*TygerTyger:* “The Morning Is Quiet”

*The Washington Post:* “CO<sub>2</sub>”

*Watcher of the Skies: Poems about Space and Aliens:* “Compared to What?”

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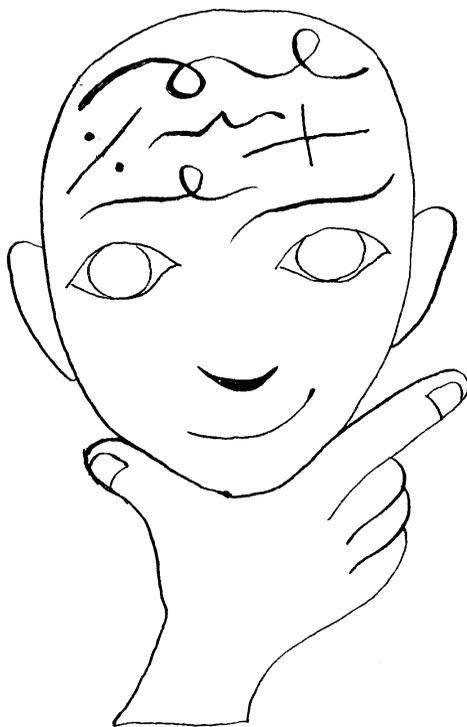
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The Red Ear Blows Its Nose



## My Brain

I'm proud of my brain.  
It's bursting with bunches  
of concepts and inklings  
and notions and hunches,  
and lots of big numbers  
it expertly crunches,  
and facts and opinions  
it nibbles and munches . . .  
all while my forehead  
so thoughtfully scrunches.

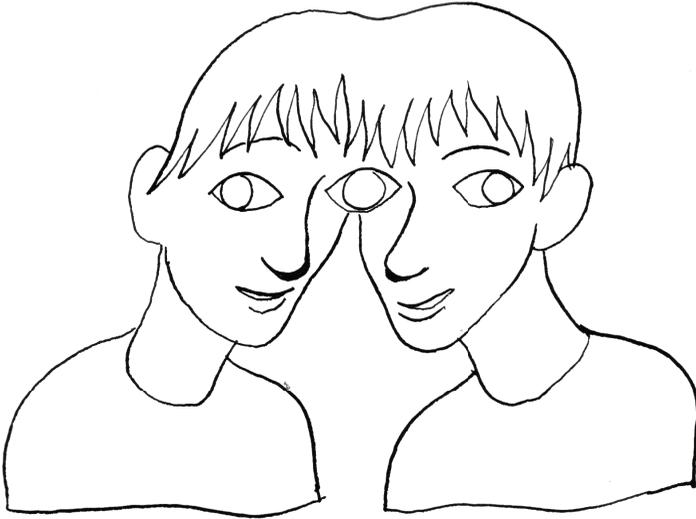


## Colors

If I could go inside your head  
and use your eyes to see,  
I wonder if what you call red  
would look like red to me.

Inside your head, perhaps I'd think  
what looks like red to you  
resembles more a shade of pink—  
or purple mixed with blue.

I cannot solve this mystery.  
Are colors just a name?  
If I were you, and you were me,  
would we see things the same?



## It's All Me

I've sometimes been someone,  
sometimes been no one,

the fast-as-they-come one,  
the lazy and slow one,

sometimes the chum one,  
sometimes the foe one,

the sit-and-be-mum one,  
the stand-up-and-crow one,

the hopelessly dumb one,  
the cool in-the-know one,

the moping and glum one,  
the cheeks-all-aglow one,

the bang-on-a-drum one,  
the volume-down-low one,

the merely humdrum one,  
the big-fancy-show one,

the I've-no-green-thumb one,  
the I-make-things-grow one,

the place-where-I'm-from one,  
the place-where-I-go one.

# Winning

Though losing  
is gruesome  
and winning  
is winsome  
I win some  
and lose some  
and losing  
I wince some

then hold up  
my chin some  
and thicken  
my skin some  
and soon  
I am winning  
and once again  
grin some



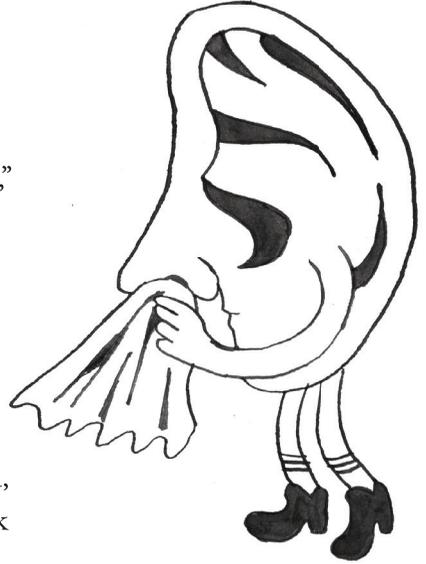
## What's Mine

Things that no one's said before  
include, "The red ear blows its nose,"  
"I noodled waffles to the door,"  
"The slipper broke my shoulder's toes,"

"But what about the squiggly spoon  
that ate a penguin's piece of pie  
beneath a buttered slice of moon  
beyond a sloppy slab of sky?"

Though almost everything's been said,  
"How sad the pizza's climbed the peak  
and cheese now tops the oyster bed,"  
are words I am the first to speak.

And surely if I say the fox  
has cartwheeled through the slide trombone  
in search of nylon bowling socks,  
these words belong to me alone.



## The Horse Who Said Moo

There once was a horse who refused to say *neigh*.  
Ask him a question, he'd answer with *moo*.  
He didn't give milk, and he loved to eat hay.  
But starting when he was a young foal, he knew,

the first time he heard a cow speak to a cow,  
that neighing and whinnying just wouldn't do.  
"Let dogs say *woof woof* and let cats say *meow*,"  
he told himself then, "but this horse will say *moo*."

Did his parents get angry? They sure did, and how!  
"We both say *neigh*, why can't you say *neigh*, too?  
Haven't you noticed that you're not a cow?"  
"Of course," he said, not with a *neigh* but a *moo*,

"but mooing alone does not make me a cow.  
Watch me! I still love to gallop and trot.  
I even enjoy being hitched to a plow!  
But do I enjoy saying *neigh*? I do not."

His parents relented. "Fine, then, say *moo*.  
Meow if you want to. Oink, roar, or bray.  
If it makes you happy, say *cock-a-doodle-doo*.  
Just be a proud horse and you need not say *neigh*."

## I'm Igserious!

If "ignoble" means "not noble,"  
it seems to me that "ig"  
should make *all* words their opposites.  
You're "small"? No, you're igbig!

For "empty," why not say igfull?  
For "dark," why not ight?  
For "ugly," try igbeautiful,  
for "left," why not ight?

I am not "dirty"! I'm igclean!  
"Embarrassed"? No, igproud!  
When I am hidden, I'm igseen.  
When quiet, I'm igloud!

Someday when I have igshrunk up  
(make that igshrunk igdown!)  
I'll be igpoor and igunknown  
(the thought makes me igfrown).

The world will igignore me then,  
since igno one will dig  
the fun I've igdeprived them of  
iglearning them to ig.

## The Chorus of Doris

If Morris's chorus is better than Boris's,  
Boris's chorus can outsing Dolores's,  
Dolores's chorus is better than Horace's,  
and Horace's chorus is better than Doris's,  
can Doris's chorus be better than Morris's?

The answer, of course, is the chorus of Doris  
has got to be worse than the chorus of Morris  
because it's no match for the chorus of Horace,  
which can't be compared to Dolores's chorus,  
which isn't quite up to the chorus of Boris,  
which can't sing as well as the chorus of Morris.

But sources assure us that Doris's chorus is  
not one to bore us, regardless of Morris's.  
Though you would enjoy a performance by Horace's,  
Morris's, Boris's, even Dolores's,  
you'd also endorse a performance by Doris's,  
provided, of course, you enjoy hearing choruses.

## Supposing You Were Me

You'd use my mouth  
to eat and drink.  
You'd use my brain  
to have a think.

If you caught cold,  
you'd blow my nose.  
To take your picture,  
I would pose.

You'd use my voice  
to raise a cheer.  
To listen up,  
you'd use my ear.

For standing tall,  
you'd use my feet.  
You'd use my tush  
to take a seat.

If I drank water,  
you would pee.  
(That is, supposing  
you were me.)



# Compared to What?

A pebble isn't all that big  
compared to stones or boulders,  
but it's a mountain to the ant  
who lifts it on his shoulders.



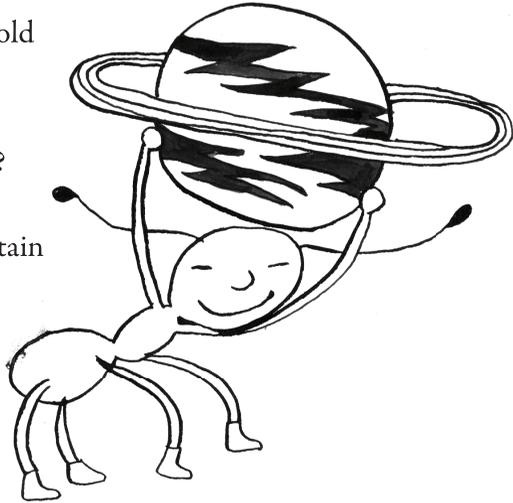
And if you were a molecule,  
an atom or a proton,  
a water drop would be a lake  
for you to sail your boat on.

An elephant is huge for sure;  
its trunk would crush your scale.  
And yet it doesn't seem that large  
if you're a humpback whale.



I've always claimed the Earth is huge,  
and no one has denied it.  
And yet the Sun alone could hold  
a million Earths inside it.

Then certainly the *Sun* is huge?  
Well no, wait just a minute!  
The star Mu Cephei could contain  
a billion Suns within it!



Can we agree Mu Cephei's huge?  
The biggest of Red Giants,  
it's dwarfed in size by galaxies!  
Believe me! This is science!

The galaxy that it calls home,  
our own, the Milky Way,  
contains a hundred billion stars.  
Mu Cephei's *one*, okay?

And though Mu Cephei dwarfs the Sun,  
is bigger and more shiny,  
compare it to the Milky Way  
and you will think it's tiny.

And so it goes. The Milky Way,  
astronomers inform us,  
although at first it may appear  
mind-bogglingly enormous,

is hardly bigger than a speck,  
when all is said and done.  
Of billions and billions of galaxies,  
the Milky Way's just one.

So when you're asked if something's big,  
say, "I will answer, but . . .  
before I do, please tell me this . . .  
Big? Compared to *what*?"



# Bang?

When the Big Bang banged  
there was nobody near it.  
No one existed  
so no one could hear it,

and there was no air  
to be anywhere found,  
nothing to vibrate  
or carry the sound.

So how can they say  
when the universe sprang  
from nothing to something  
it made a big bang?

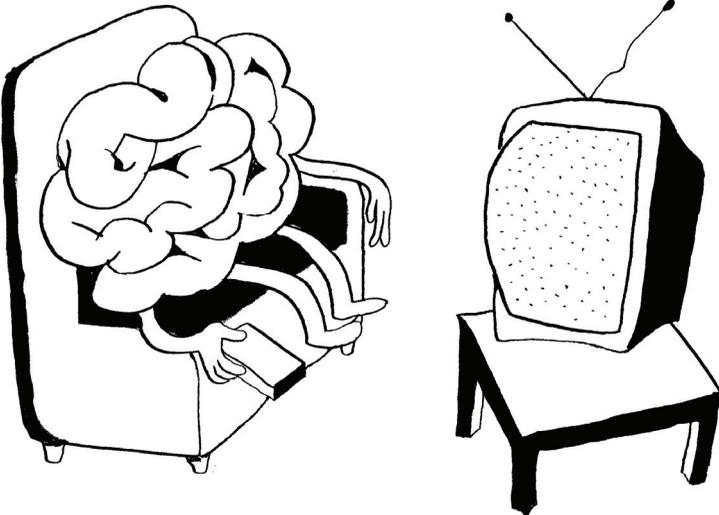
# Brain Break

It's quiet now inside my head.  
Not much is brewing there.  
My brain is on a break today,  
without a thought or care.

No inklings and no notions  
spin round inside this globe;  
silence drapes a quilt of hush  
on each off-duty lobe.

Tomorrow I might call on it  
to think a thought or two,  
to solve a riddle, turn a phrase,  
to mutter something true,

to wonder how a bird can fly,  
to ponder till I ache.  
Today, though, I won't even try.  
My brain is on a break.



# Break In

I had a thought the other day.  
But where it came from, I can't say.

Here's the scene: I'm all alone.  
The door is locked, I have no phone.

I'm sealed off from the world outside.  
You couldn't reach me if you tried.

Then all at once, between my ears,  
a sneaky little thought appears!

I'd never had that thought before,  
of that I am completely sure,

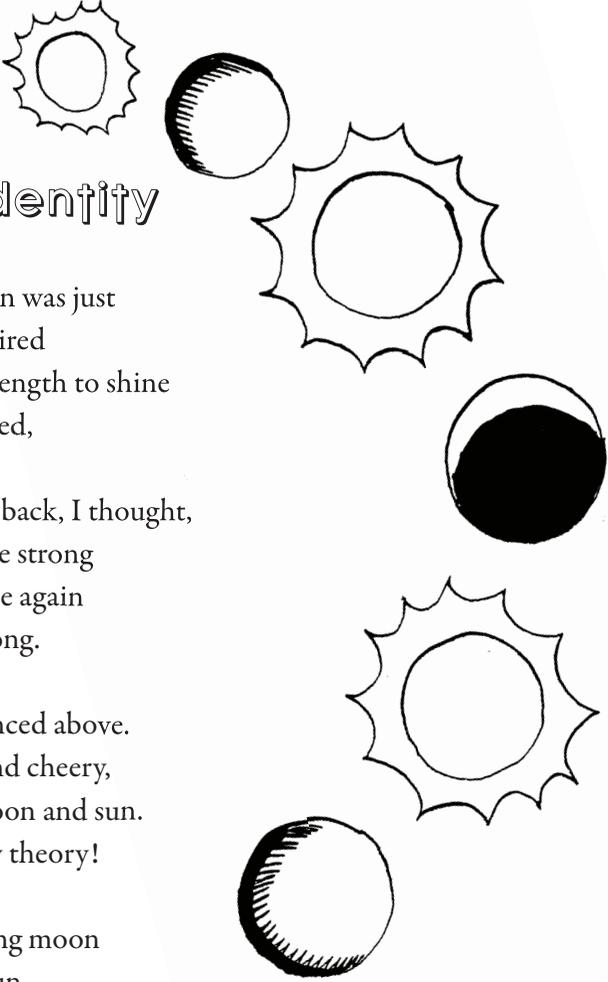
and so it makes my poor head spin  
to wonder how that thought got in.



## My Personal Brain

The world that I see  
with my eyes is so dull  
compared to the world  
that I see in my skull.  
The words that I speak  
with my mouth can't explain  
the way that I feel  
in my personal brain.





## Mistaken Identity

I used to think the moon was just  
the sun when it was tired  
and did not have the strength to shine  
but had not yet expired,

and when the sun came back, I thought,  
it was the moon made strong  
by sleep and rest to shine again  
in brilliance all day long.

But then, one day, I glanced above.  
The sky was bright and cheery,  
and I could see both moon and sun.  
Well, so much for my theory!

I later learned the shining moon  
reflects the shining sun,  
and though the sun and moon are two  
the shining is just one,

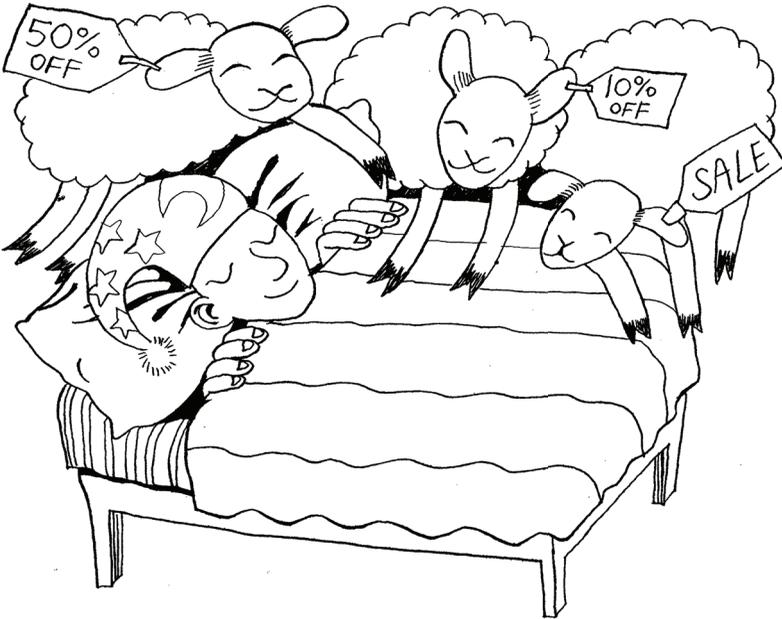
and so, it seems, what I had thought  
was sort of, kind of, right:  
our moon is just the way our sun  
shines down on us at night.

## Looking Up

The pictures I imagine there  
    would make an artist proud:  
castles, whales, and dinosaurs  
    and faces in a crowd . . .  
but sometimes when I'm looking up  
    I find I'm just as wowed  
imagining no scene at all  
    but seeing only cloud.

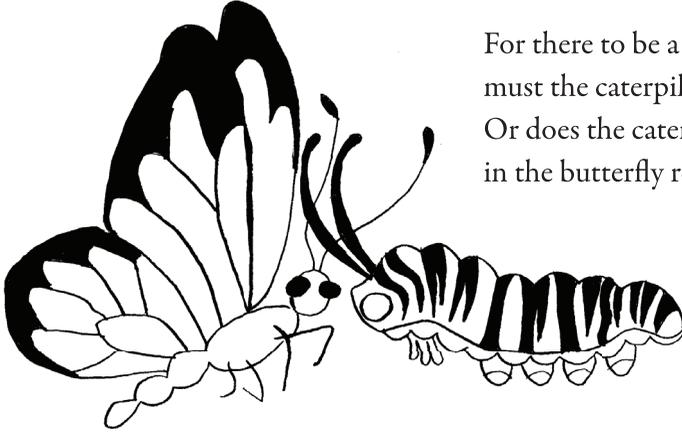
## Question

When livestock salesmen cannot sleep,  
do they lie in bed discounting sheep?



## Just Wondering

For there to be a butterfly  
must the caterpillar die?  
Or does the caterpillar brain  
in the butterfly remain?



# Not Not Dancing

I will not dance.  
    No way, no how!  
But wait! I'm on  
    my toes right now!  
My arms are swinging  
    to the beat  
which makes me move  
    my hips and feet  
and twirls me round  
    like some mad top,  
and though I try  
    my best to stop  
I do not seem  
    to stand a chance.  
The music plays.  
    I can't *not* dance!

I can't not dance  
    although I try.  
My knees lift up,  
    my elbows fly.  
My arms go out,  
    my arms go in,  
I shake my head,  
    I jut my chin,  
my shoulders roll,  
    my fingers snap,  
I slap my thigh,  
    my shoes go tap.  
I've been bewitched.  
    I'm in a trance.  
When music plays,  
    I can't not dance.

# Dopey

I'm just a dopey little poem.  
Who thought me up, and why?  
I do not have a truth to tell.  
I do not have a lie.  
I am the wind that bends no tree.  
I am the passerby.  
I live when I am said out loud,  
and when I'm not, I die.

I'm just a mouth with drying lips  
that hum a jaunty tune.  
The snoring ghost of midnight,  
the squinting ghost of noon.  
I am the shadow of the clock  
beneath a shining moon.  
I'm just a dopey little poem.  
You found me out too soon.

# Instrumental

It's just a piece of polished wood  
that holds a bunch of strings.  
It has no soul like you and me.  
It's from the world of things.  
But when an artist picks it up  
and touches it just right . . .  
that soul I said it didn't have?  
On second thought, it might.

# Reaching Six

When I was four  
I thought that five  
was oh so long  
to be alive,

but now at six,  
I can report  
the span of five  
is oh so short.

I know the span  
of six is long,  
yet seven whispers  
I am wrong,

and when I'm eight  
I guess I'll think  
that seven years  
are just a blink.

Everything changes.  
Nothing sticks.  
Today, however,  
I'm old at six.



CO<sub>2</sub>

It may strike you as strange, but it's true:  
when you breathe you breathe out CO<sub>2</sub>,  
and so it may be  
that some plant or some tree  
made a leaf from what came out of you.



# Breath

I *love* to breathe. I really do.  
Not just to stay alive.  
I'd keep on breathing even if  
I somehow could survive  
without a single taste of air.  
When all is said and done,  
I love the whoosh, I love the feel.  
To me it's just plain fun!

## Lights Out

I am abed.  
The door's ajar.  
In dreams ahead  
I'll sail afar,

adrift aboard  
a ship ashake—  
but safe ashore  
when I awake.

## Worlds

I visit worlds  
when I'm asleep,  
worlds I do not  
get to keep—  
so rich, so real,  
so true, and yet,  
I wash, I dress,  
and I forget.



# What I Think

The day is darker than the night.

The stars don't shine or glimmer.

The Sun is smaller than the Moon . . .

and colder, too, and dimmer.

The Earth is flat and does not spin.

Atoms are not small.

Gravity lifts all thing up.

You cannot bounce a ball.

Birds can't fly. They just pretend.

Flowers do not grow.

Don't believe the myth of wind.

There's no such thing as snow.

There's no such thing as rain that falls.

Gorillas are not strong.

It's what I think. It's how I feel.

Of course, I could be wrong.

## Yours Alone

I'm fabulous and wonderful!

Okay, perhaps I boast.

Be honest, though. In all the world,  
don't you love *you* the most?

Just pause a bit and think it out,  
then tell me it's not true.

You're *dazzled* by the miracle  
that you alone are you!

Your eyes can see! Your ears can hear!

You have a working brain!

There's so much going on inside  
that no one can explain!

How did you get to be yourself?

What *are* you? You're so fine!

You think the world is yours alone.  
But I think that it's mine!



# Unlucky

I'm an unlucky fella,  
there is no doubt.  
I bought an umbrella,  
we had a drought.

I bought a hanky,  
my nose didn't run.  
I bought a burger,  
then lost my bun.

I bought a spare tire,  
then got no flat.  
I bought a ball,  
then broke my bat.

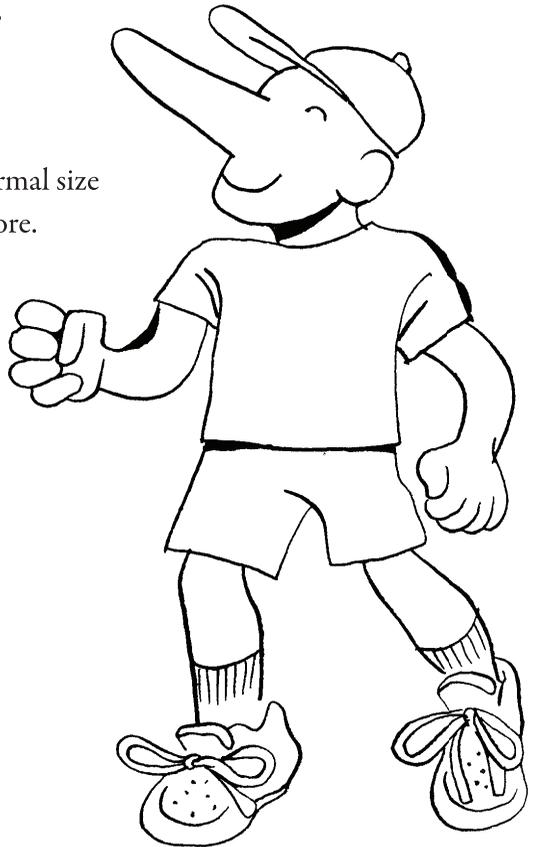
I bought a coffin.  
It's worth a try.  
With my bad luck,  
I might not die.

## Adjustable Nose

A nose that grows when I tell a lie  
is something I would gladly try,  
provided it would then retract  
whenever I spoke only fact.

I could be wrong, but when it's long  
my nose would work so well  
that I would smell a thousand scents  
a small nose could not smell,

but if I told the truth about  
the new scents I'd explore,  
my nose would shrink to normal size  
and smell those scents no more.



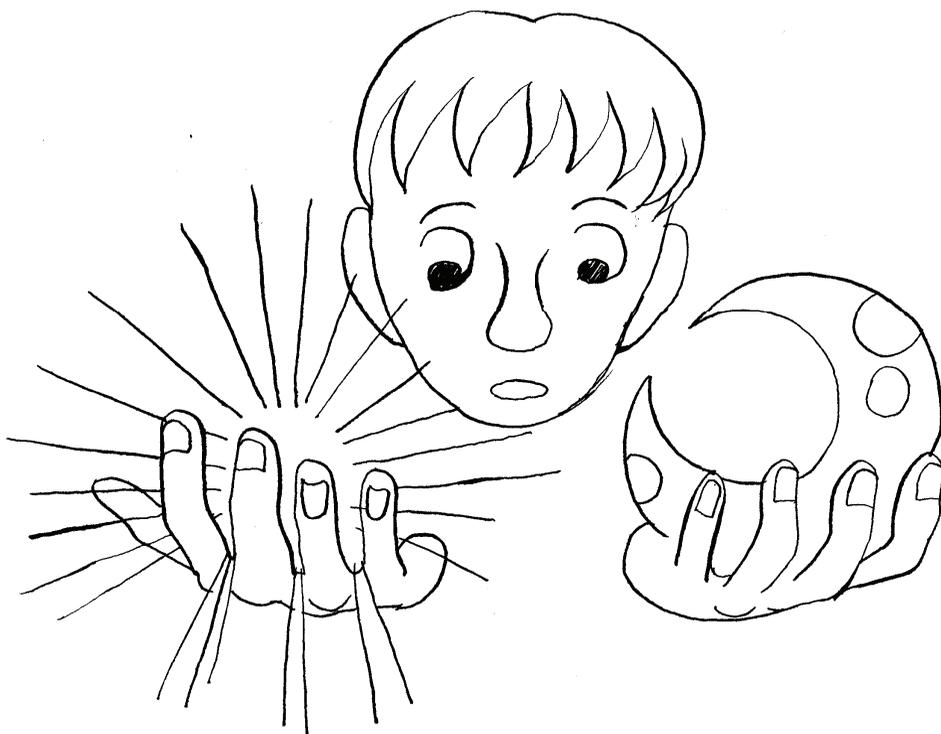
## Sky

How high is the sky?  
Good question! Yet I  
would much rather know  
not how high, but how low.  
If I stand on a chair  
with my hands in the air,  
is it sky that I'm in?  
Where does it *begin*?

## Solar Lunacy

The moon's more useful than the sun,  
though sometimes it wanes and sometimes it waxes.  
I'd pick the moon if I could pick only one  
heavenly body that spins on its axis.

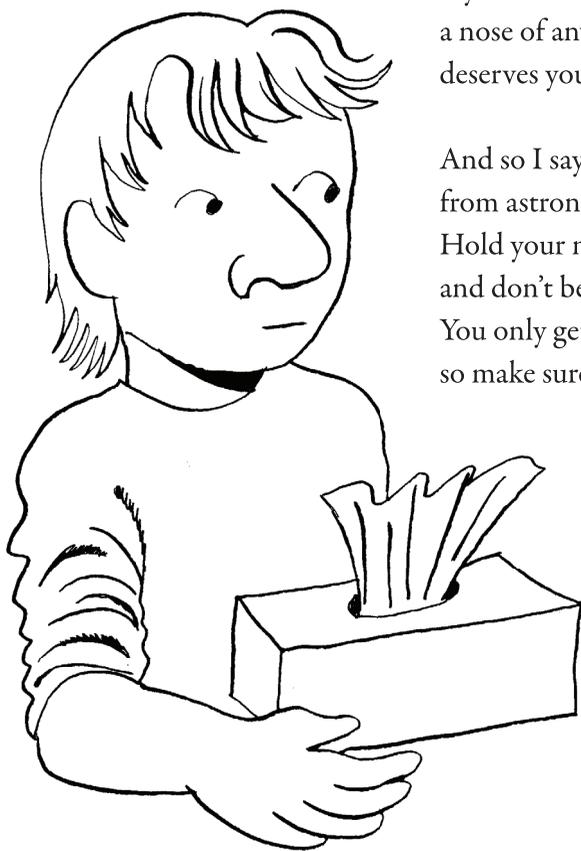
The moon shines when it's dark, and so  
it's useful in helping us find our way.  
The sun provides its warmth and glow  
when we don't need it much: by day.



## Nosy Advice

No matter that your nose may sport  
a patch of pimples or a wart,  
no matter if it's long or short,  
if you would sniffle, sneeze, or snort,  
a nose of any kind or sort  
deserves your full, complete support.

And so I say to everyone,  
from astronaut to poet:  
Hold your nose in high esteem,  
and don't be slow to show it.  
You only get one nose in life,  
so make sure you don't blow it.



## My Nose

Whoever thought up where to put  
the pieces of my face  
must have loved my nose because  
it holds a central place.

My ears are way off to the sides,  
my mouth down by my chin,  
my eyes are to the left and right  
(they twinkle when I grin),

and yet my nose, I'm proud to say,  
is like a meeting place  
for up and down, for left and right,  
and unifies my face.

It may be small. It may be little.  
Agreed, it's not that large.  
But there it sniffs, smack in the middle,  
as if it were in charge.

# Fabulous Five

*Let's hear it for the ear!*

Its every word is sound.  
To know what's coming, always keep  
your ear against the ground.

*Let's honk it for the nose!*

It sniffs at common scents.  
It learns before the eye when skunks  
have slipped inside the fence.

*Let's twist it for the tongue!*

It wags with such good taste.  
Tongues are quick to lick the bowl  
so nothing goes to waste.

*Let's focus on the eye!*

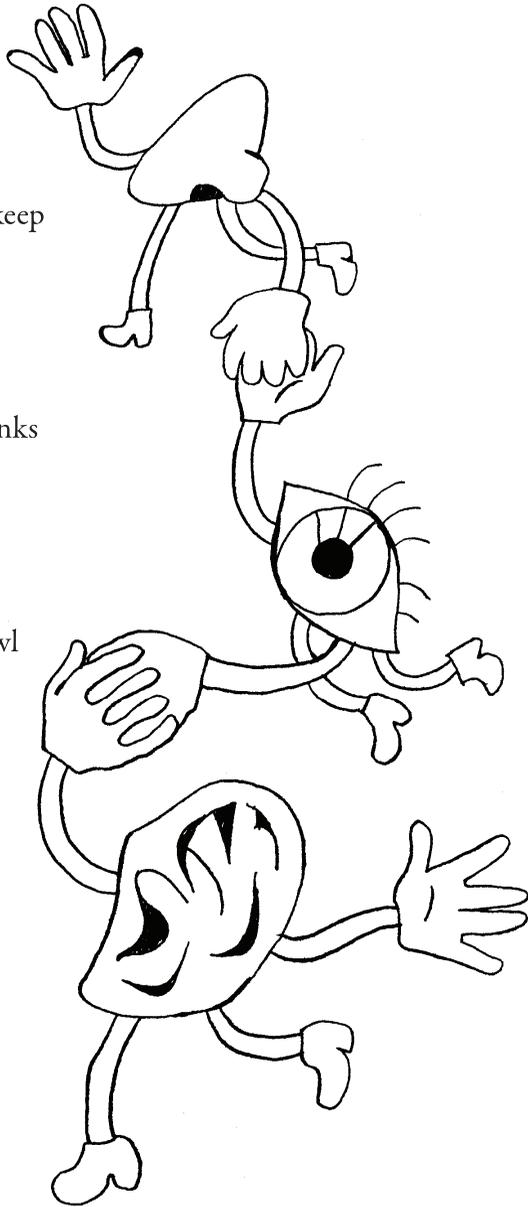
The eye is out of sight.  
But only when its lid is closed  
or on the darkest night.

*Let's feel it for the skin!*

It has the common touch.  
Without it you would not enjoy  
mom's kisses half as much.

*Let's celebrate all five!*

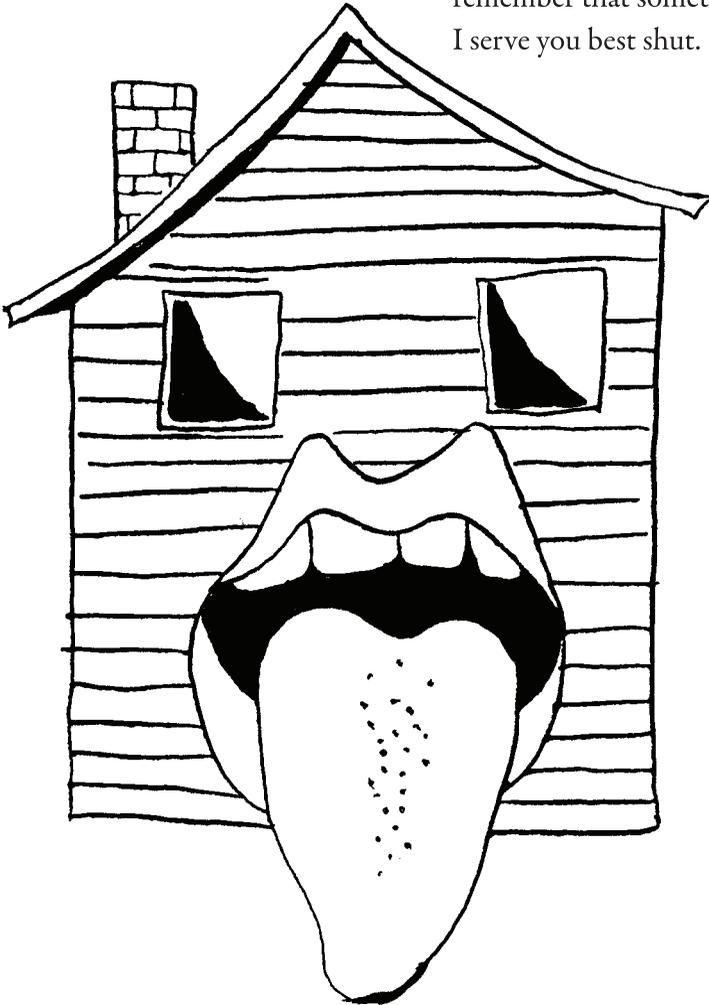
Ears eyes nose tongue and skin!  
If not for them how could we hope  
to know the world we're in?



# Mouth Mouthing Off

I am the mansion  
of your tongue,  
the castle where  
your songs get sung.

Use me for speaking  
and chattering, but . . .  
remember that sometimes  
I serve you best shut.



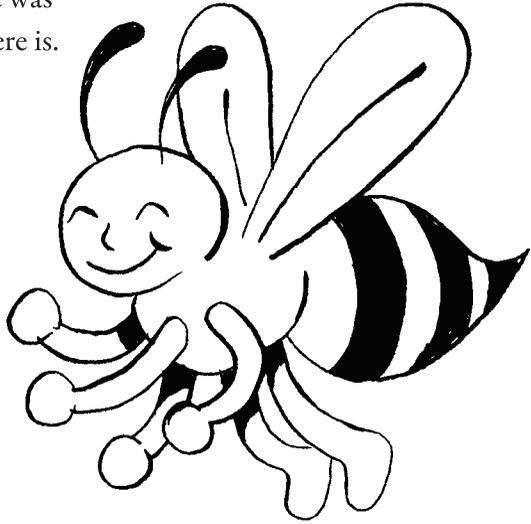
# My Champion Bee

My bee's in the biz  
of buzzing and is  
the world's greatest wiz  
at creating a buzz.  
She's the best that there was  
and the best that there is.

She zags and she zigs,  
she zips and she zooms  
on flowers and twigs  
full of zinnia blooms.  
No one asks, *Is she*  
*sufficiently busy?*

My bee's in a tizzy.  
She's making me dizzy.  
Her thorax is fuzzy.  
I love her because she  
hums without singing  
and doesn't like stinging.

Her business is buzzin'.  
She sucks from a dozen  
flowers her cousin  
the fly never was in.  
The blooms that she's chosen  
to stick her bee-nose in



are those pollen grows in  
and sweet nectar flows in.  
She hovers there, frozen,  
as if she were posin'  
but she's only sipping  
to fuel still more zipping

and zagging and zooming  
after resuming  
her dance through the blooming  
blossoms perfuming  
throughout honey season  
the garden my bee's in.





## To Be an Ant

I'd like to be a little ant  
who scurries on the ground  
and always seems in such a rush  
to get where he is bound.

There'd be a crumb upon my back  
that fell from some kid's plate,  
and though it's just a speck to him  
it's twenty times my weight.

I'd bear the heavy load with ease,  
I'd march along with pep,  
and all I'd ask of you is *Please!*  
*I beg you! Watch your step!*

## Army Ants

How can there be army ants?  
They're simply too minute.  
Though ants can march, I'm pretty sure  
they cannot wear a boot.  
They cannot stand up on two legs  
and solemnly salute.  
And I have never seen a gun  
so small an ant could shoot.

## Skin Deep

My zebra often whines and gripes  
how bored she is with having stripes.  
She says she's jealous of the leopard  
whose fur with dots and spots is peppered.

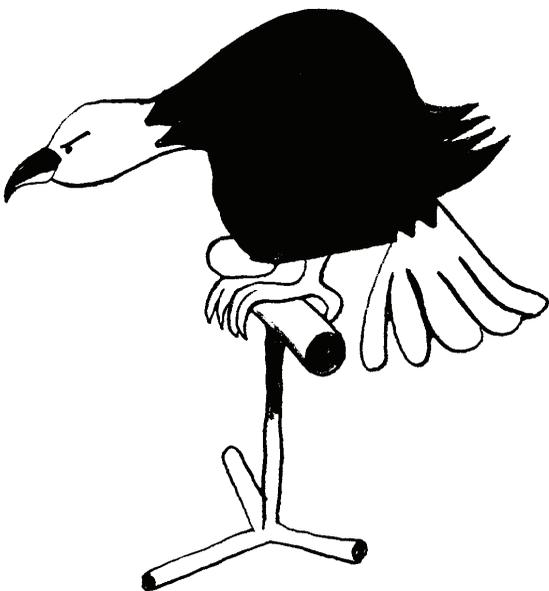
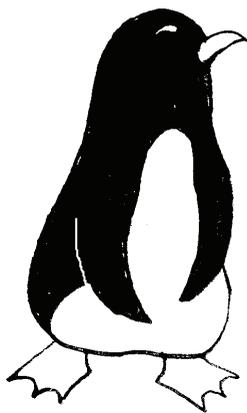
My leopard's jealous in reverse:  
he thinks that dots and spots are worse,  
and gladly he would trade them in  
to wear the stripes of zebra skin.

I tell my zebra having fur  
with stripes looks marvelous on her.  
I tell my leopard he should not  
deny the beauty of the dot.

And in the end, they both agree.  
At least, they say, they're not like me,  
without a pattern or design.  
How rude they are, these pets of mine!

## Bird Talk

The eagle said,  
“Wake up and fly!  
Be bold and give  
your wings a try!”  
The penguin answered  
with a sigh,  
“I never cared  
that much for sky.  
Sure, it’s pretty,  
vast and blue,  
but on the ground  
it’s pretty too.  
I thank you for  
your point of view,  
but I’ll do me  
and you do you.”

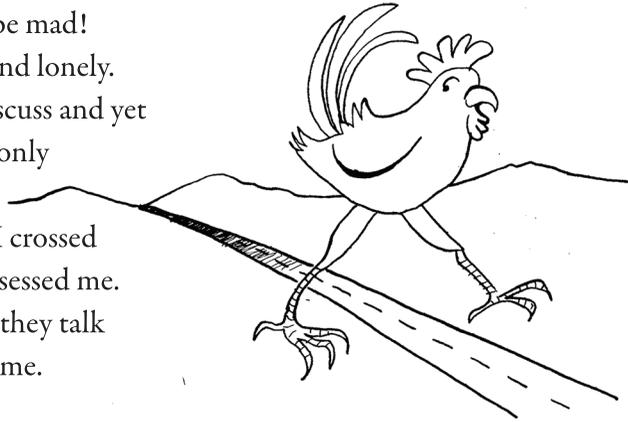


# Jokes Talk Back

## 1. *The Chicken*

Human beings must be mad!  
They must be bored and lonely.  
There's so much to discuss and yet  
they seem to want to only

chat about the street I crossed  
and wonder what possessed me.  
I guess it's better that they talk  
about me than digest me.



## 2. *The Fireman*

I'm sick of people asking me  
about my red suspenders.  
For me the question tops the list  
of conversation enders.

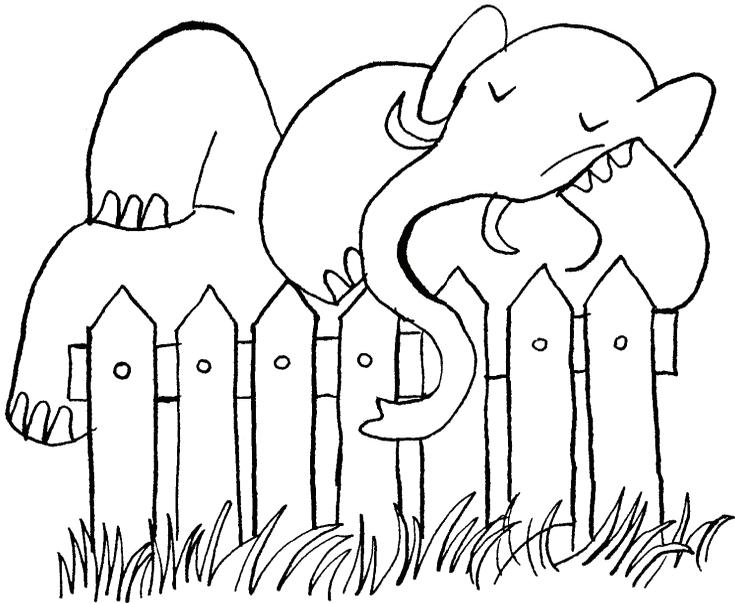
But if you want to guarantee  
a conversation stopped,  
just say I stuck my feet in flames  
to see my corns get popped.

### 3. *The Elephant*

Can you tell time? Then tell me this:  
What time is it when I  
stretch out to lounge upon a fence  
and gaze up at the sky?

You think it's time to fix the fence?  
No, my friend, you're wrong.  
I gave up peanuts, lost a ton.  
Besides, the fence is strong.

It can be any time at all.  
There's no way you can tell.  
I love to watch the sky by day  
but midnight works as well.



# Take It or Leave It

They say that it may rain today  
but the sky looks clear right now.  
Should I leave my new umbrella home  
or bring it anyhow?

I'd hate to lug the thing all day  
if there's no rain at all,  
but what if I leave my umbrella home  
and rain begins to fall?

What if I'm standing in the street  
and sneezing, sopping wet,  
saying, "Why did I leave my umbrella home?"  
I'd feel like a fool, and yet

what if it doesn't rain? I wish  
I knew a way to tell.  
I think I'll leave my umbrella home . . .  
and I'll stay home as well.



## Just a Thought

I never thought that I would think  
the thoughts I think I might have thought.  
I think the thoughts I think, but think  
they're not the thoughts I think I ought.

# We Come in Peace

Dear Earthlings,

By now you've seen our spaceships  
as they hover in your sky.  
We've traveled far to get here,  
and I guess you wonder why.

We come in peace to meet you,  
here on Earth, away from home.  
Our reasons will be clear enough  
once you have read this poem.

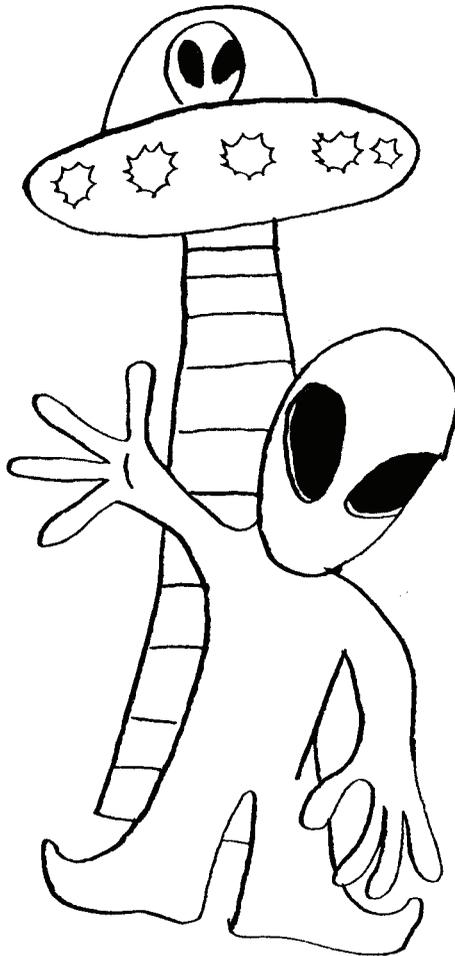
On Mars we speak a language  
that's like English, but reversed,  
so *black* is *white* on Mars  
and *good* is *bad*  
and *last* is *first*,

and when we say  
*we're sitting down*  
it means *we're standing up*,  
and when we say *the dog is old*  
it means *he's just a pup*.

*Delicious* means *it tastes like dirt*.  
*I'm thrilled* means *I am bored*.  
*Up* means *down*  
and *heal* means *hurt*  
and *hated* means *adored*.

And when we say *we've gone berserk*  
it means *we're calm and staid*.  
So when I said we come in peace  
it meant

***WE WILL INVADE!***

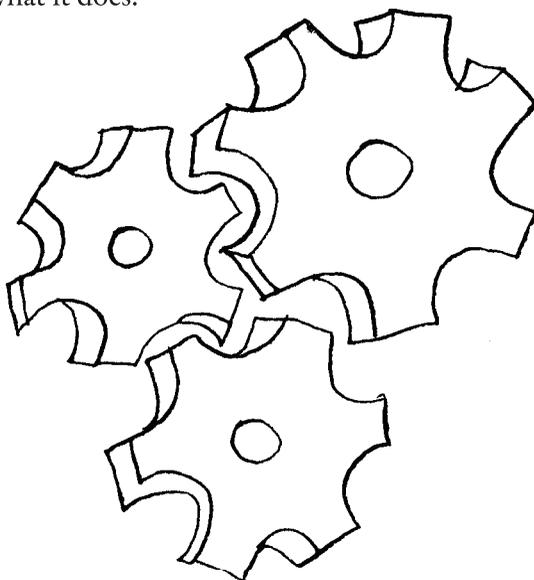


## The Latest Thing

I have invented the thingamajig.  
It looks like a whatchamacallit.  
Can you imagine a gizmo this big  
that folds up and fits in your wallet?

With buttons and switches controlled by your thumbs,  
with gears and a long metal arm,  
it does what it does as it quietly hums  
or it squeals like a burglar alarm.

The world's never known a contraption like this,  
the finest that there ever was!  
People will love it! I'm sure it can't miss!  
Too bad I don't know what it does.



## This Poem Is New

This poem is new. I made it up.  
Before I sat and wrote it,  
you could not read this poem at all,  
recite its lines or quote it.

It did not rhyme, it had no words,  
you could not sing or hum it.  
If there's a Mountain of What's Not,  
this poem was at the summit,

the King of What Had Never Been,  
to Not Yet There a hero,  
the empty space you find within  
the circle of a zero.

But now this poem exists for sure,  
so please feel free to read it!  
It's on the Mountain of What Is  
in case you ever need it.

And someday when this poem is old,  
remember that this doesn't  
mean there wasn't once a time  
when it most surely wasn't.

## Unplanned Poem

I started writing. Had no plan,  
with nothing much to say.  
What mattered was that I began.  
This poem was underway.

I kept on writing, bit by bit,  
and paid no mind to whether  
there was any sense to it.  
I threw these words together,

and suddenly, out of the blue,  
though I don't understand it,  
this poem has found its way to you . . .  
exactly as I planned it.





## Beyond Compare

A circle colored in with chalk,  
a football someone kicked too high,  
a night-light making dim from dark,  
a peephole cut out from the sky,  
an eye without the middle part,  
a head without a bit of hair,  
a canvas waiting to be art,  
a sun, except without the glare.

A clock without the moving hands,  
a coin without the royal face,  
a wheel that's given up its spins,  
a doily cut from cotton lace.

I try my best to liken it  
to something else. A loose balloon?  
But no. It's nothing but itself.  
The dizzy, lovely, perfect Moon.



## The Moon Fell Down

The moon fell down.  
It landed in the street in front of my house.  
It was much smaller than anyone had expected,  
though nonetheless beautiful  
with its thousands of craters  
and creamy color of burnished marble.

It was slightly taller than a tree  
and wide enough to block traffic in both directions.  
We gathered around it and wondered whom to call.  
The mayor? An astronomer?  
Is there a person in charge of the tides?  
My mother told me not to get too close.  
I believe I saw Neil Armstrong's footprints  
along with leftover pieces of the lunar module,  
which looked as tiny as a toy.

And later that night, when my mother wasn't looking,  
I went out front and touched the moon.  
My mother saw the dust on my fingers when I returned  
and knew I had disobeyed.

She told the moon, "You'll have to go home now."  
The moon then rose back into the sky  
where it remains to this day.

## Moon Mint

If the moon were a mint, I would open up wide,  
cramming the whole candy moon mint inside

and swallowing every last moon rock and crater.  
I wonder, though, what I would make of it later?

I guess I'd be sad when I looked up at night  
and noticed no moon shining down with its light,

but still I'd console myself greatly by thinking:  
the moon may be gone but my breath isn't stinking.

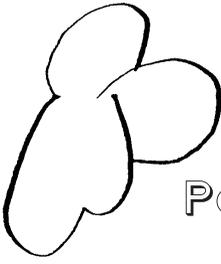


## Boredom Break

I'm very, very bored.  
I'm sitting in a chair.  
I'm bored out of my gourd.  
And I don't really care.  
I spent all day in school  
so now I can afford  
ten minutes by myself,  
magnificently bored.

Oh look, I have two thumbs.  
I'll twiddle them, I guess.  
And then I'll scratch my nose.  
I'm bored, but I confess  
it's what I want to be.  
Not always, but for now.  
I'm very, very bored,  
but loving it somehow.





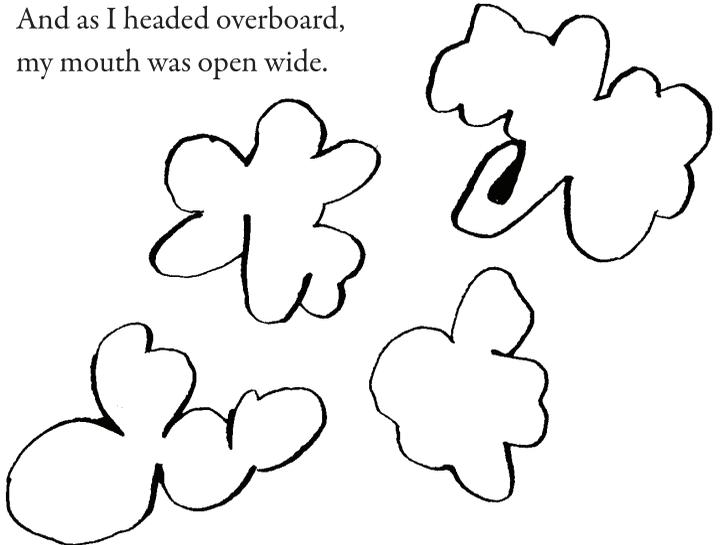
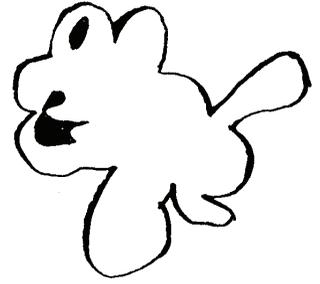
## Popcorn Dream

Last night I had the strangest dream!  
While boating on a lake,  
I felt the ship begin to crunch,  
the deck begin to shake!

The water that I sailed upon  
had disappeared somehow,  
and in its place, to my surprise,  
as I looked past the bow,

the lake was filled with yellow puffs  
on which my ship was borne!  
I scarcely could believe my eyes!  
Who popped this magic corn?

I thought of just one thing to do.  
“Abandon ship!” I cried.  
And as I headed overboard,  
my mouth was open wide.



# Not a Children's Poem

This poem is not a children's poem.

It's grown-ups who should read it.  
It offers tons of great advice,  
but kids don't really need it.

*Don't dump your garbage in the sea.*

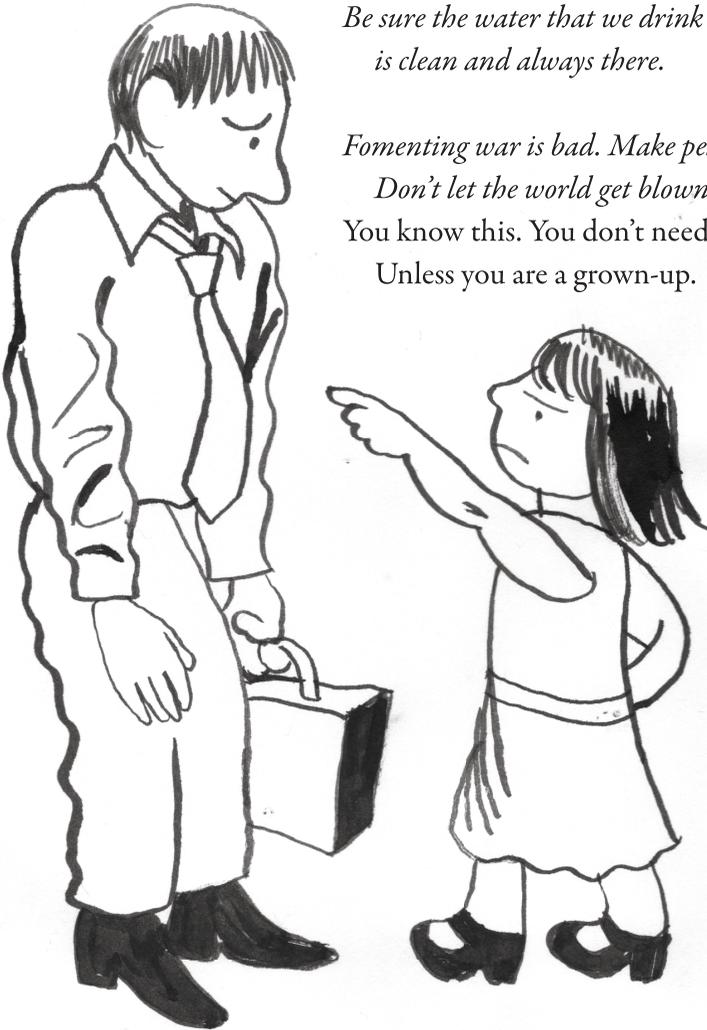
*Do not pollute the air!*

*Be sure the water that we drink  
is clean and always there.*

*Fomenting war is bad. Make peace!*

*Don't let the world get blown up.*

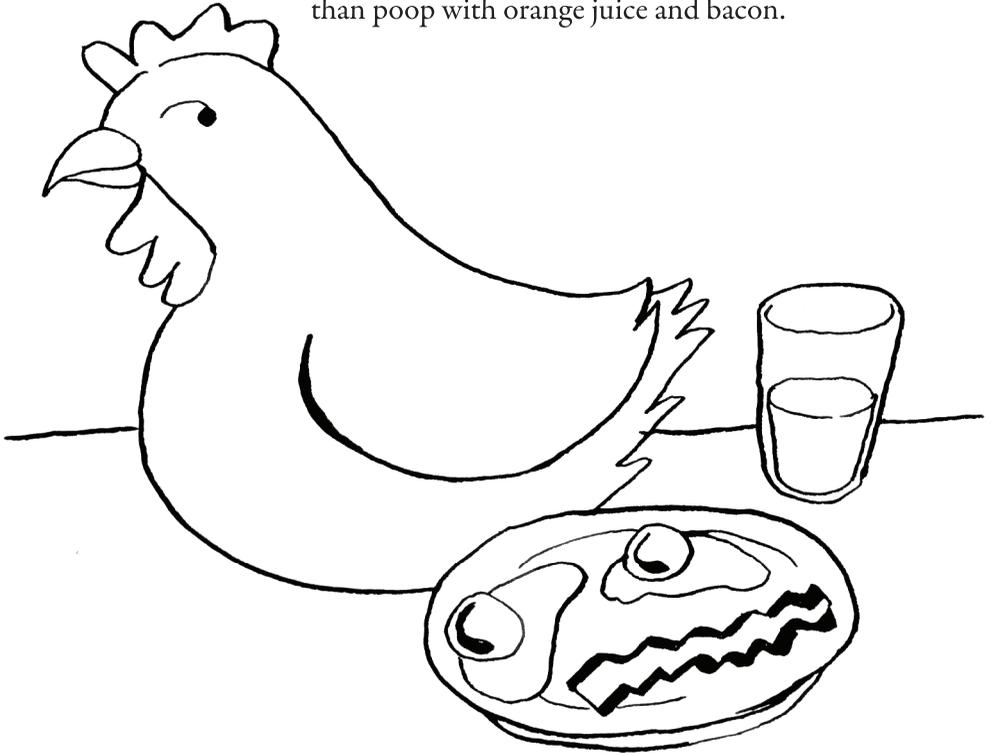
You know this. You don't need this poem.  
Unless you are a grown-up.



# The Thing about Chickens

When chickens squawking in the coop  
squat down on their chicken legs  
they're sometimes making chicken poop  
and sometimes making chicken eggs.

If you are smart you'll make darn sure  
you know which one your chicken's makin',  
since eggs will please you rather more  
than poop with orange juice and bacon.

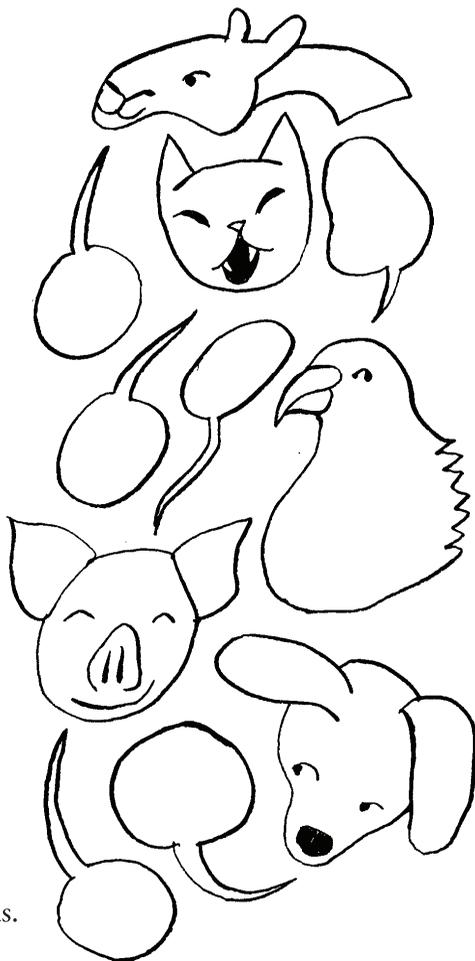


## Why Can't an Elephant?

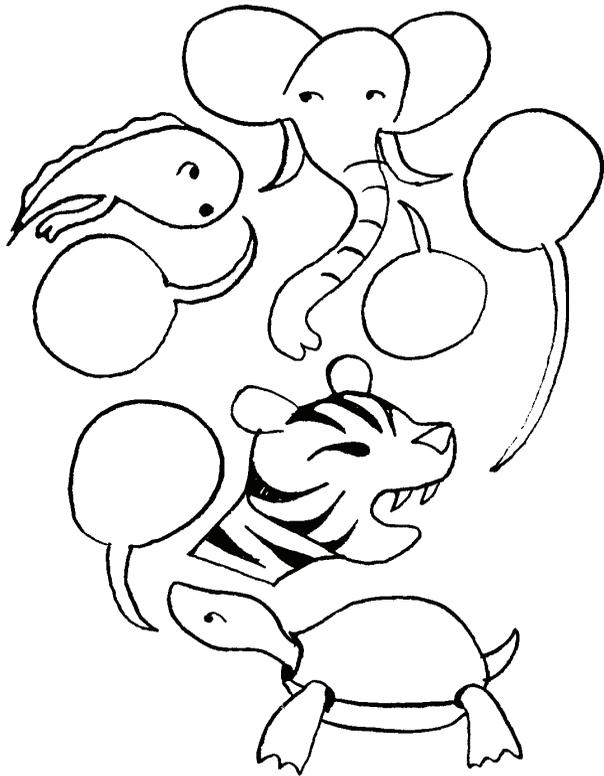
A bird purred  
though it wasn't allowed.  
Then a cat said oink  
and a dog meowed.  
A bat said neigh  
and a tiger chirped.  
But my favorite part?  
A bumblebee burped!

A bumblebee burped  
as a spider snored  
and a pig went tweet  
and a turtle roared,  
and a camel brayed  
to a sparrow's croak,  
as I mooed and laughed  
at a goat's bad joke.

I'm just being silly.  
I'm guessing you know.  
None of this happened.  
It's not how things go.  
We can't change our sounds.  
Our voices are stuck.  
Don't expect hoots  
when you speak with a duck.



But why shouldn't tadpoles  
bellow or bark?  
Why shouldn't frogs  
make a gobbly remark?  
Who made the rules up?  
Who wrote the law?  
Why can't an elephant  
quack or hee-haw?



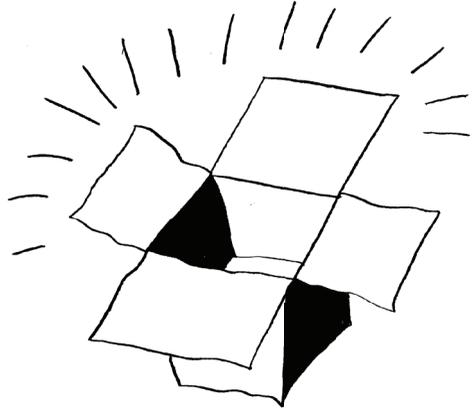
## What Am I?

I'm what's left inside the box  
when everything is gone.  
I'm what you are wearing when  
you have no clothing on.

I'm what you remember  
when you can't recall a thing.  
I'm what's left of winter  
when the calendar says spring.

I am that which you love more  
than that which you love most.  
I'm what haunts the haunted house  
abandoned by its ghost.

I am what you find between  
two surfaces that touch.  
I'm what's less than anything.  
I've never been too much.



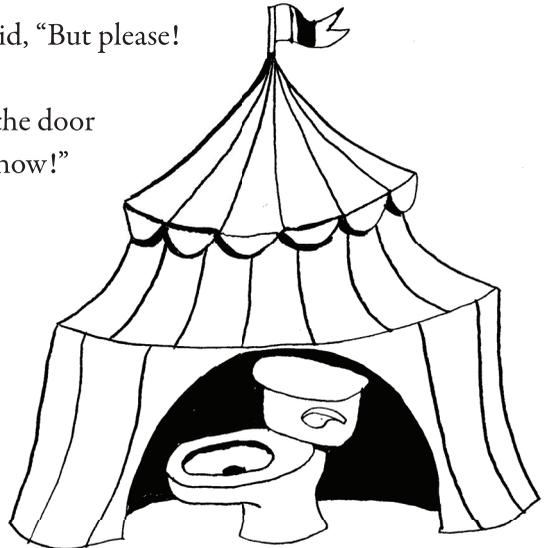
# May I Go to the Circus?

When I was only five years old,  
my mom and dad were cruel.  
They taught me words they knew were wrong,  
then sent me off to school.

One day in class I raised my hand.  
The teacher called on me.  
“May I go to the circus now?”  
I meant I had to pee,

but mom and dad had made me think  
a circus was a toilet.  
The teacher said, “I’m teaching now,  
you wise guy! Please don’t spoil it!”

I clutched myself and said, “But please!  
I really have to go!”  
The teacher pointed to the door  
and said, “Enjoy the show!”



# The Just-Because Hug

Bears will hug you 'cause they're mean,  
so watch out for their claws!  
But I don't hug you 'cause I'm nice.  
I hug you just because.

There is no rule that says I must.  
There are no "hugging laws,"  
no hidden motives to discuss.  
I hug you just because.

I do not hug you to reward  
your virtues or your flaws.  
Can you guess the reason why  
I hug you? Just because.

When life's too busy, rushing by,  
sometimes I like to pause  
and wrap my arms around you. Why?  
I hug you just because.

Just because I have two arms.  
Be glad it's not two paws!  
Just because it feels so good,  
I hug you. Just because.



# Obviously

*For Lincoln*

Does corn have a cob?  
Do birds have a beak?  
Do doors have a knob?  
Mountains, a peak?



Does your face have a nose?  
Each eye, a lid  
to open or close?  
Have you done what you did?

Does your school have a teacher?  
The sun ever set?  
Is a lion a creature?  
Is water wet?

Are clouds ever white?  
The sky ever blue?  
Do owls love the night?  
Does your daddy love you?

## Alphabet Takes

1.

Can you recite the alphabet  
the way the selfish do?  
Shout out loud the letter I  
but barely whisper U.

2.

The alphabet begins with A,  
and that seems right to me,  
but when it comes to how it ends,  
I always ask, Y Z?

3.

The letter V stood by the door  
and paused to let me through.  
I said, "But I must follow H.  
You're V. So after U."

4.

My mother says the alphabet  
real fast through S so she  
has time enough to pause a bit  
and pour herself some T.

5.

When I was taught the alphabet,  
back when I was young,  
I worried when I got to B  
that maybe I'd be stung.

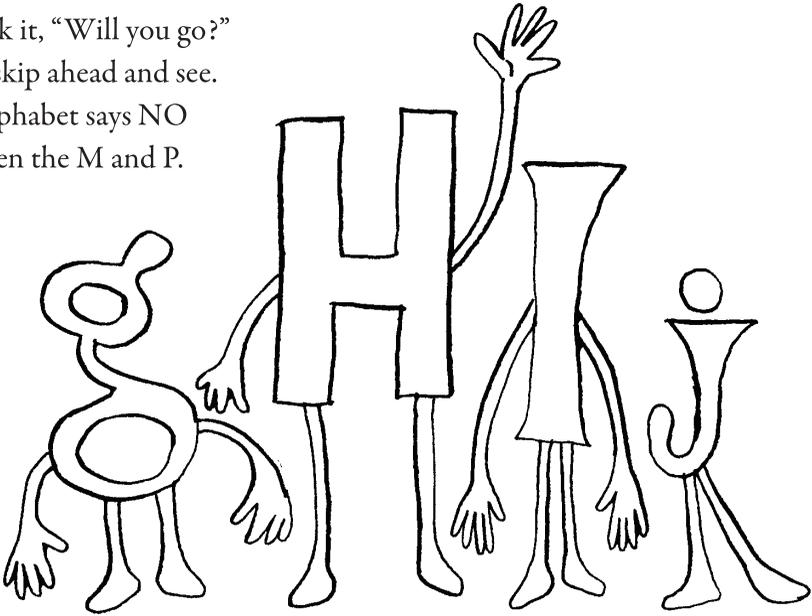
6.

A sailor says the alphabet,  
unlike you and me,  
a bit afraid that he might get  
forever lost at C.

# Reading between the Letters

The alphabet says HI  
between the G and J,  
but never says GOODBYE.  
I guess it plans to stay.

Just ask it, "Will you go?"  
Then skip ahead and see.  
The alphabet says NO  
between the M and P.



# ELEMENO

When oh when oh  
I was young  
and L-M-N-O-  
P was sung

there's something that I  
did not then know:  
there is no letter  
*elemeno!*

# Dancing

The music enters through my ears  
and runs down to my feet.  
All at once it lifts my heels  
and makes them tap the beat,  
then journeys upward past my knees  
where gracefully it grips  
the muscles that I use to make  
a swivel in my hips,

and now there is no doubt at all:  
I'm in a dancing spell.  
You only have to look at me,  
the way I move, to tell:  
I'm swaying back and forth, I twirl,  
I shimmy, bob my head.  
The music came in through my ears,  
but look where it has led!



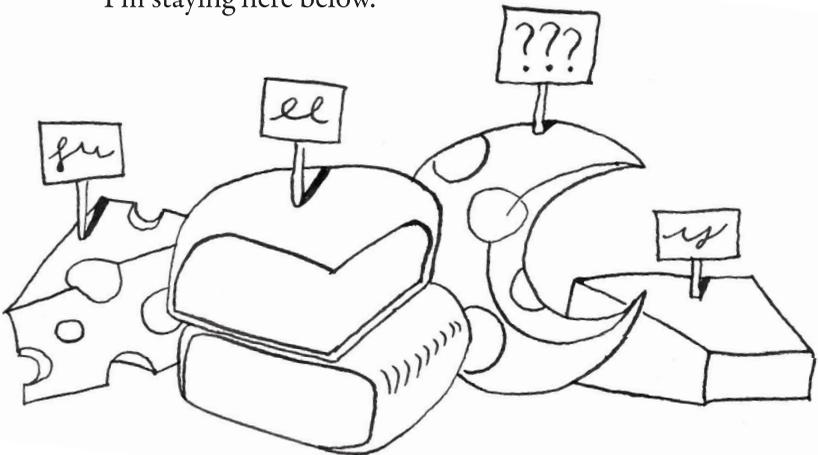
# Moon Cheese

Of *course* the moon is made of cheese,  
but can you tell me this?  
Is it made of Chèvre, Cheddar, Brie,  
or maybe Swiss?

I really need to know right now,  
since if it's made of Chèvre,  
my favorite cheese, I'm taking off  
and living there forever.

I'll pack a million crackers  
and I'll bring a tiny knife  
to smear the cheese across each one  
and live a happy life.

But if it's made of Cheddar, Brie,  
or Swiss, I will not go!  
If there's no Chèvre on the moon,  
I'm staying here below.



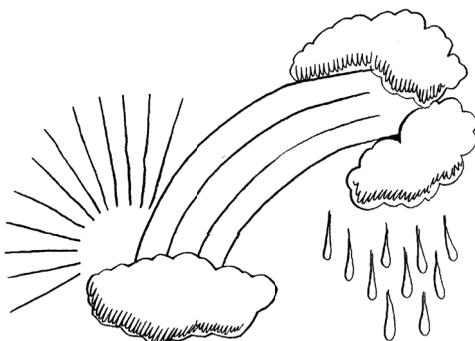
# Under the Rainbow

Under the rainbow,  
on top of the ground,  
that's where the puddles  
we splash in are found,

that's where the petals  
are sparkling with drops,  
after the downpour  
and thundering stops.

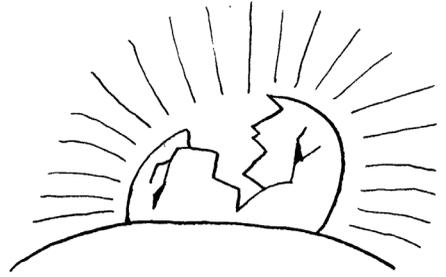
Way up above now  
the sun's broken through,  
brilliant as always,  
the sky again blue.

Don't you just love it?  
The cloudburst, and then  
sunshine and rainbows,  
the world new again?



## They Say

They say the morning's broken,  
but it looks fine to me.  
There's not a crack in all the sky,  
no damage I can see.  
The world appears as good as new,  
the sun shines just as strong.  
The grass awakes to morning dew,  
the birds resume their song.  
They say the morning's broken.  
But I say they are wrong.



They say the night has fallen.  
Will someone tell me why?  
The stars are where they were before.  
The moon is just as high.  
There are no pieces on the ground  
of what was once the night.  
And if it fell, it made no sound  
when crashing from its height.  
They say the night has fallen,  
but how can that be right?



## Thank You, Nose

It rumbles loudly when I doze.  
It sometimes strikes a snooty pose.  
And when I catch a cold, it flows.  
Yet when I stop to smell a rose,  
life's frantic hustle-bustle slows  
and such a joy inside me grows  
that from my head down to my toes  
my favorite thing on earth's my nose.

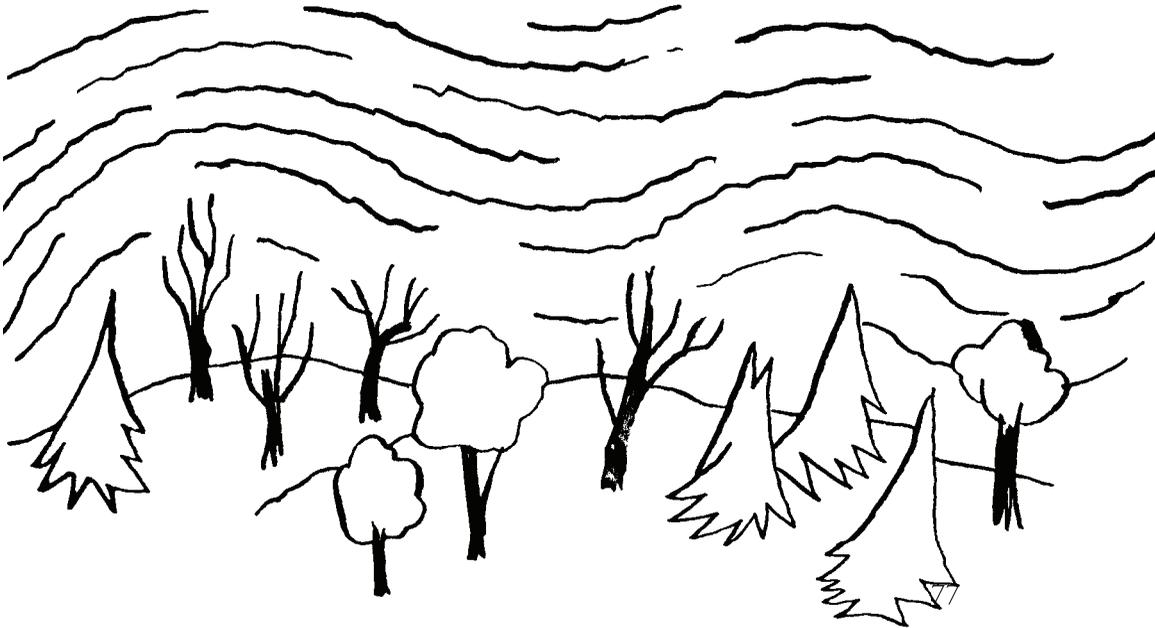


# The Thing about Breezes

On a hot summer day  
when you feel a breeze blow,  
is it saying goodbye,  
or saying hello?

Is it saying "I'm here"  
or saying "I'm gone"?  
Does it mean "I've arrived"  
or "I have moved on"?

You can't pin it down.  
A breeze will not say.  
A breeze can't arrive  
without racing away.



# The Breeze

The sail was tall above our heads.  
It billowed in the breeze.  
It launched us out beyond the pier  
to sail the seven seas.

The breeze itself could not be seen,  
a phantom made of air.  
And yet it moved our boat so fast  
we knew that it was there.

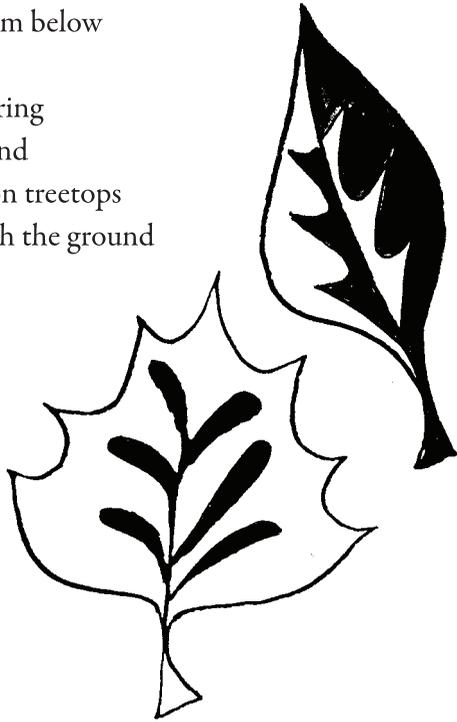
It ferried us to distant worlds  
beyond the ocean's foam,  
And then, when it was time to rest,  
it took us safely home.

## Autumn Leaves

They fall from the trees  
but a wind happens by  
so they do not head downward  
but rise to the sky

where they dance in the sun  
in a dizzying show  
of color and light  
as we watch from below

Listen, I'm hearing  
a fluttering sound  
as leaves born on treetops  
make peace with the ground



# Summer Sorcerer

I'm something of a sorcerer.

Last fall I cast this spell:

“May every leaf upon that tree  
fall down!” And down they fell!

When winter came, I then proclaimed,

“Warm weather, time to go!”

And suddenly, the air grew chill.

My yard filled up with snow.

When spring arrived, I thought it time

to test my magic powers:

“Snow, be gone! Warmth, return!”

My garden filled with flowers.

And now that summer's here at last,

my favorite spell of all:

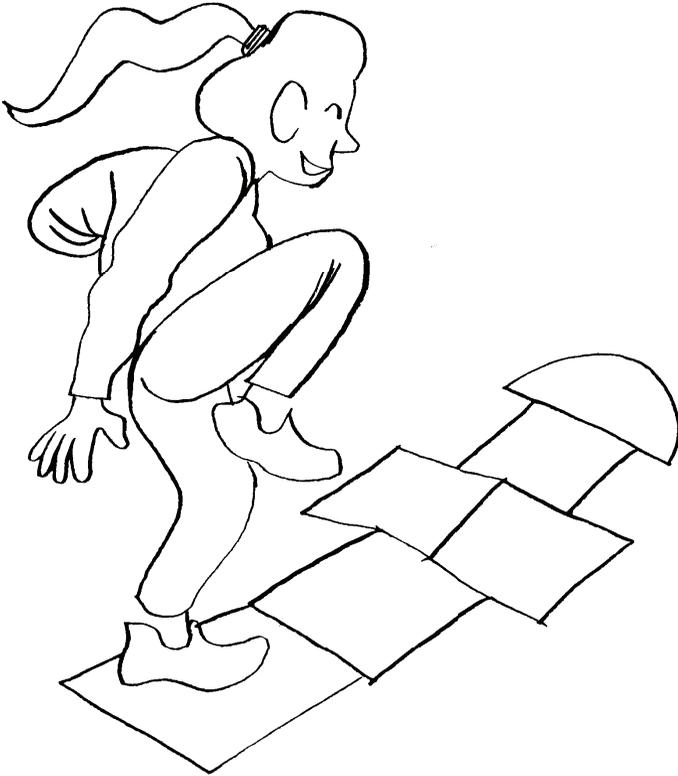
I've made new leaves for when I cast  
my spell to make them fall.



## Spring in My Step

They say there's a "spring in my step,"  
but I've always wondered how come a  
*spring* in one's step is so common,  
but never a winter or summer?

And why is there never an autumn?  
It seems like a curious thing.  
No matter the season we're having,  
my steps always think it is spring.



# The Morning Is Quiet

The morning is quiet.  
There's nothing I hear.  
I think there's a riot  
of hush in my ear,

a growl that is purring,  
a sleep without snoring,  
a monster not stirring,  
a lion not roaring,

a shaking that's steady,  
a wave that's not breaking.  
I'm rested and ready.  
It's time to be waking.



# My First Snow

Before it snows the world is gray,  
the leaves are off the trees;  
the sun won't drive the cold away  
or warm the wintry breeze;

and all the world seems pale and flat,  
a stage without a show;  
a gloomy, drab unwelcome mat.  
But wait! What's that? It's snow!

The snowflakes fill the frosty air  
and sparkle as they're swirled,  
and soon the world's not dark or bare.  
It's like a whole new world,

a world that's neither old nor gray  
but lively, bright, and new.  
They *told* me snow was beautiful.  
And now I know it's true.

## Better Late than Never

Last year the spring came early. My snowman faced his doom.  
The birds were still in Florida as trees began to bloom

and warmth returned to push aside the winter in its prime.  
Last year the spring came early. It's coming late this time.

The birds who are returning find their nesting branches bare,  
and some have never glimpsed before a snowman's coal-eyed stare.

My snowman gives the birds a wink, then melts away at last.  
The nascent blossoms burst their buds. And winter's finally past.



## The Cold Poem

This poem regrets it did not put  
a thicker sweater on.

It dreamed of spring and quite forgot  
that winter's not yet gone.

It dreamed of April's gentle sprouts  
and left without a coat.

How could it have forgotten spring  
remains as yet remote?

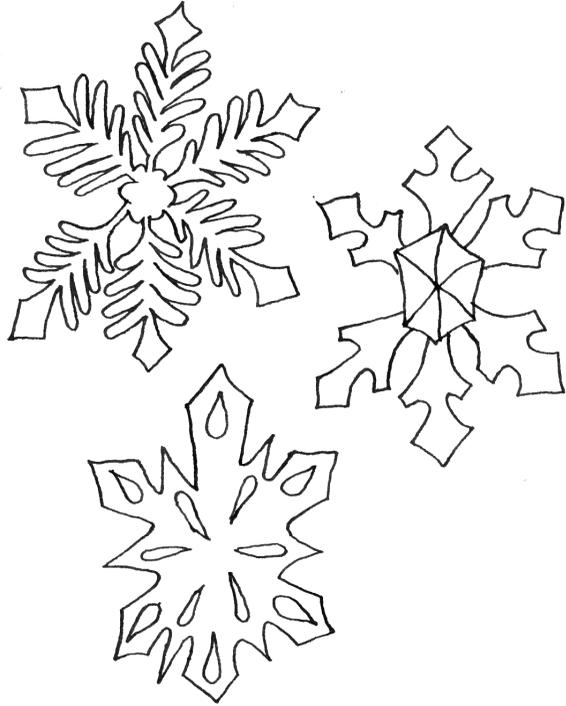
It dreamed of frost becoming dew,  
of birds returning home,  
but it forgot that dreams of spring  
can't melt a frozen poem.

## Fall and Winter

Day by day  
the daylight shrinks,  
but then just when  
the whole world thinks

the daylight's bound  
to disappear,  
help arrives.  
Winter's here.

Unlikely hero,  
how it snows!  
But day by day  
the daylight grows.



## Rondel

*Translated from the French of Charles, duc d'Orléans (1394–1465)*

The earth has shed its overcoat  
of freezing rain and drifting snow  
and changed into the lighter clothes  
the sun at last returned to sew.

The beasts and birds are thrilled to trill  
the song of sunlight's welcome glow:  
The earth has shed its overcoat  
of freezing rain and drifting snow.

On streams and rivers you may note  
the silver fabric of the season.  
People sing, and here's the reason  
sunken spirits rise and float:  
The earth has shed its overcoat.

## Dog in Winter

To be a dog in winter means  
to bark up trees that have no leaves,  
to scratch behind the ears of dawn  
while doing tricks no cat conceives,

to walk in circles every time  
you're fixing to lie down in snow,  
to listen as the half-moon howls  
to feel the earth eclipse its glow,

and yet, as it befits your breed,  
you face the ice that winter sends  
at ease within the leash of need  
that binds you to your snowman friends.

## Winter's Tale

Because it was winter, the snowflakes were glad.  
With six legs apiece, they all danced.  
They sparkled and swirled and cavorted like mad  
as the murderous springtime advanced,

and glaciers were melting, but healed when they froze,  
and branches were dreaming of blooming,  
and bears were enjoying a wintertime doze,  
and plants were for now unassuming,

when out of the dark, as the sun spewed its glare,  
there were songs that nobody had written,  
and somebody heard a young mother declare  
that her daughter had lost her left mitten.



# Riddle

Up in the sky  
you've always found me.  
The world itself  
revolves around me.

I give my light  
and you absorb it  
every moment  
of your orbit.

Be glad I do not  
disappear.  
There'd be no way  
to mark the year.

And earth, unanchored,  
would be hurled  
through cold, dark space.  
You're welcome, world.

## Summer Breeze

This poem has nothing much to say.  
I'd like to make that clear.  
If information's what you seek,  
you will not find it here.

If you are searching for a poem  
to stimulate your mind,  
I might as well be frank with you:  
this poem is not that kind.

You're reading now a piece of fluff,  
a brazen waste of time  
consisting of some random words  
and packaged as a rhyme.

It's like a little breeze that blows  
and rustles through your hair.  
It's likely that you'll soon forget  
this poem was ever there.



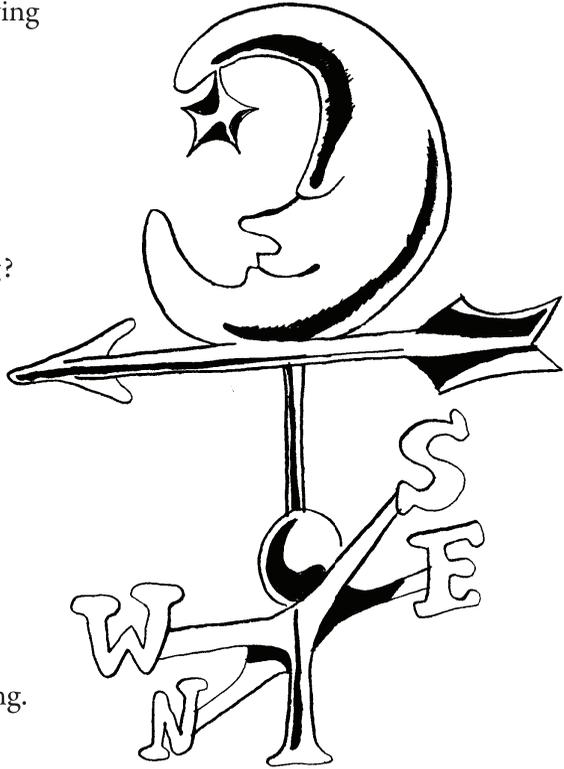
# To and Fro

A wind that's blowing  
to and fro  
is to-and-fro-ing,  
as you know,

but did you know  
what else it's doing?  
The wind is also  
fro-and-to-ing.

Fro-and-to-ing,  
to-and-fro-ing,  
winds are coming,  
winds are going.

Which is which?  
There is no knowing.  
Let's just say  
the wind is blowing.



## Breezy Does It

The breeze is a creature  
that loves loop-de-loops,  
soaring and gliding  
in daredevil swoops,

elegant cartwheels  
through nimbus-y heights,  
now-and-then friendships  
with eagles or kites,

but me? I'm a creature  
with feet on the ground,  
happy to be here  
all safe and all sound,

and though I might envy  
its antics of air,  
I love the breeze best  
when it rustles my hair.

# Reflection

I wonder why the sky is gray,  
the grass no longer green,  
and why the crystal lake takes on  
a trembling silver sheen

in which the trees along the shore  
in yellow, gold, maroon,  
leave sketches of their leaves beside  
the rippling autumn moon?





## Dawn

Night sent darkness,  
but look what the day sent:  
first thing this morning,  
a pink glow of nascent

effulgence adorning  
the waking horizon  
to give us fair warning  
the sun would be rising.

# Talking to the Wall

I'm talking to the autumn leaves.

I beg them not to fall.

And yet I know I might as well  
be talking to the wall

because in wondrous waves of red  
and purple, gold, and brown,  
the autumn leaves depart the trees  
and flutter gently down.

I'm talking to the winter snow.

I beg it not to fall.

And yet I know I might as well  
be talking to the wall

because in sheets of silver mist  
the snowflakes fill the air.

Did they not hear a word I said?  
Or did they just not care?

I tell the earth to take a breath.

Why rush? Why spin at all?

And yet I know I might as well  
be talking to the wall.

# Inside

The sun may shine,  
the breeze may blow,  
the birds may sing,  
the trees may grow,  
the sky is blue  
for all I know.  
Who cares? I stay inside.

I have my toys,  
I have my phone,  
I'm here within  
my bedroom zone.  
Though others hate  
to be alone,  
who cares? I stay inside.

Outside the door  
my puppy calls:  
*Why waste the day  
inside of walls?*  
He wants to play  
with sticks and balls.  
Who cares? I stay inside.

But then I get  
a text from you!  
*I'm in the park!*  
*Can you come, too?*  
I'd planned to stay  
inside, it's true.  
Who cares? I race outside.



# Off to Nowhere

I'm off to nowhere,  
skipping along,  
down by the lakeside,  
singing a song,

hearing the wind blow,  
tossing a stone,  
watching the ripples,  
all on my own,

thinking of nothing  
except what I see,  
except what I'm feeling,  
except being me,

down by the lakeside,  
skipping along,  
heading for nowhere,  
singing this song.



## The Last Poem in the Book

Eventually each book of poems  
must reach the final stage  
when there's just one more poem to read  
upon one final page,

and this book is like all the rest,  
and here's the proof you need.  
You'll notice once you've read this poem  
there are none left to read.





S. Federico draws,  
writes, and lives in  
New York City with  
his cat.

Robert Schechter's award-winning poetry for children has appeared in *Highlights for Children*, *Cricket*, *Spider*, *Ladybug*, the *Caterpillar*, *Blast Off*, *Countdown*, *Orbit*, and more than a dozen anthologies published by Bloomsbury, National Geographic, Macmillan, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the



Emma Press, and Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. His poems for adults have won both the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize and the X. J. Kennedy Parody Award, and his verse often appears in the Washington Post Style Invitational (where he is a former Rookie and Loser of the Year) and in the *Spectator* magazine's weekly humor competition. Robert is the editor of the children's poetry section of *Better Than Starbucks*. This is his first collection.





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