

# The Muddlehead

Poem

<p>✧ Explain the question and the students can discuss with partners or in class what cartoons or humorous shows they enjoy on TV, particularly Laurel and Hardy or Mr Bean.</p>	<p><b>Get Going!</b></p>
<p>✧ This poem, <i>The Muddlehead</i>, by Samuil Yakovlevich Marshak, writer, translator, memoirist, and author of children's books, is a delightful description of a man who gets muddled about everything. The poem is written in five stanzas, with a refrain (a couplet) running through the poem after each stanza:</p> <p>'What a muddlehead was he, That man who lived in Petushkee!'</p> <p>✧ Stanzas 1, 2, 3 and 5 each have four lines with a rhyme scheme of a a b b. Stanza four is in two parts: the first part, like the other stanzas has four lines with the rhyme scheme of a b a b. The second half of stanza four has seven lines with a different rhyme scheme: The first two lines have 'spoonerism', a mix-up of first letters of words, and has no rhyme; the next three lines have a rhyme of a b a, and also contain a 'spoonerism'; the last two lines are rhymed again like a couplet.</p> <p>✧ The poem opens with a couplet introducing Mr Muddlehead, where the poet says he knew a man from Petushkee who was 'as muddleheaded as he could be'. In the first stanza, the poet begins to tell us more about this person. The first thing we notice about anyone is what they look like, what they wear. And the poet tells us that the man wears mixed up clothes – his mittens are on his feet, he has forgotten his collar and has tied his tie around his waist! And that brings the poet to the refrain, because he is surprised at the muddlehead.</p> <p>✧ In the second stanza the poet notices what the muddleheaded man does when he steps out and other people see him. When 'he went about', people told him that he had his coat on 'inside out' and that he was wearing a saucepan on his head in place of a hat! And once again the refrain says what a muddlehead he is.</p> <p>✧ The third stanza shows the man having his lunch. He absentmindedly scratches the slice of bread, and the butter, that should have been spread on it, is spread instead on his own head! He should have put his walking stick in the rack and got into bed. Instead, he puts his walking stick into the bed and stands himself in the rack! The poet exasperatedly repeats the refrain.</p>	<p><b>Read and Enjoy</b></p>

	<p>✧ And then in the next stanza, the poet narrates an incident that shows how far the muddleheaded man has gone into a state of confusion. One day, says the poet, Mr Muddlehead walked up to a tram and got into it 'sprightly'. The conductor thought he would pay, since he looked so bright and alert. Instead, Mr Muddlehead said, "Parding your beggon, Kister Monductor, I'm off for a week's vacation; I stop you to beg your cramway bar as soon as we reach the station." He meant, "Begging your pardon, Mister Conductor, I'm off for a week's vacation. I beg you to stop your tramway car as soon as we reach the station!" It was all lost in a series of spoonerisms. The conductor thought he was mad, because he had seemed fine when he got on the tram but was talking absolute nonsense now, and he was so terrified that he could not sleep that night! And then the poet repeats the refrain, amused by the Muddleheaded man's behaviour.</p> <p>✧ In the last stanza, the poet follows the Muddlehead. He rushes into the first café he finds and asks for a one-way railway ticket. Then he dashes off to the railway ticket booth and orders "a slice of tea and a cup of bread"! The man has gone beyond spoonerisms and is so muddled that he not only mistook a café for the ticket booth and vice versa, he even forgot that tea was served in a cup and bread in slices! His order was all topsy-turvy. The poet ends with the refrain, totally amused and exasperated.</p>
<b>Read and Understand</b>	✧ Exercises A, B and C: Read and explain the questions and answer them orally. Then ask the students to write the answers. Check and assess their work individually.
<b>Appreciating the Poem</b>	<p>✧ Explain what are spoonerisms using the given instructions and examples. Also share the spoonerisms in the poem.</p> <p>✧ Exercise A: Do this orally, using the poem's explanation given in 'Read and Enjoy' above.</p> <p>✧ Explain what is a refrain from the 'Read and Enjoy' section above as well as the instructions given.</p> <p>✧ Exercise B: This can be explained as has been given above.</p>
<b>Write Well</b>	✧ Exercise A: Discuss in class.
<b>AIL Activity</b>	✧ Exercise A: Discuss and ask the students to draw whatever they find funny.