

# Runny Babbit Returns Educators' Guide

Includes classroom activities and ideas for teaching  
this never-before-published

billy sook (*silly book*) by Shel Silverstein!



## About the Book

Readers will relish Shel Silverstein's riotous verse in this sequel to *Runny Babbit*. Once they learn how to decipher Silverstein's zany poems, they will see that each poem tells a tiny tale about Runny Babbit or one of his wacky woodland friends. Silverstein's silly spoonerisms and crazy crew of characters will amuse readers of all ages.

## Before Reading

Read the opening poem aloud: "Way down in the green woods/ Where the animals all play./ They do things and they say things/ In a different sort of way..." (p. 3). Discuss Runny Babbit's language so that the students will know how to solve the spoonerisms. Discuss how each poem tells a very short story, and ask the students to think about which poems are their favorites.

## Classroom Activities

**Malk to Te!** Pair the students and challenge them to have a conversation in Runny Babbit language by speaking in spoonerisms. This is sure to create lots of laughter in the classroom!

**What's Really Going On?** Young readers must infer what is happening in many of the poems. Ask the students to interpret why Runny is home from school early in "Runny's Day Bad" (p.14), why Runny says, "I rust jemembered, I have some things to do" (p.20) in "Runny Weets a Mitch," or why Gillip Phiraffe would rather "kneep the kot" (p.33) in "Runny Wants to Help." Check for understanding as you share these poems with the class.

**Create a Comic.** Silverstein uses a lot of dialogue in these poems. Have students choose two of the characters from this collection, and have them create a comic strip depicting actions and conversations between the two characters.

**Rhyme Race.** Read aloud several of the poems, and ask students to tell you which words rhyme. Ask them if all of Silverstein's poems rhyme, and why they think he chose to use rhyme in his poetry. Then divide the class into teams of 3-5 students. Assign each team a common word that has many rhymes (such as "bake," "hat," "will," "sight," or "hand") and challenge the teams to list as many rhyming words as possible in 3-10 minutes (depending on the age of the students). The team with the most words wins. A variation of this activity would be to allow only nonsense words!

**Put Pen to Paper.** Discuss Silverstein's illustrating style. Ask students to identify what feelings Silverstein conveys through the characters' eyes or other small details in his illustrations. Then ask the students to write a poem and illustrate it in Silverstein's style, using only a black pen or thin black marker. Encourage them to add tiny details to their own drawings.

**Punctuate It.** Point out how Silverstein uses hyphens, ellipses, apostrophes, and parentheses to add voice and mood to his poems. Ask the students to try using one or more of these punctuation marks in their own poems, and to note how their poems change when using this punctuation.

**Runny Rewrite.** Have the students choose one of the poems in this book and rewrite it using the correct language. Then have each student reread the poem aloud to a partner both ways, first in Runny Babbit language, and next in correct English. Have students ask their partner which way they prefer the poem to be read and why.

**Get a Job!** In "Runny Laints for Pove" (p.4), Runny Babbit is a painter. In "Tragic Micks" (p.27), Runny considers becoming a magician, and in "Runny the Bannoncall" (p.62), Runny's job is to be shot out of a cannon. Ask students to think about what job they would like to have when they are grown up. Have them write why they would choose this job, and ask them to include an illustration.

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**Now You're Talking!** Ask the students to explain how Runny Babbit's language works. Discuss other ways to play with words, such as speaking in Pig Latin (removing the first letter of a word and adding it to the end of the word along with "ay"). Pair students and challenge them to come up with a different way to play with words, and then have them talk to each other in this newly invented language.

**Get into the Act.** Ask the students to choose a poem to act out for the rest of the class. For each poem chosen, one student should read the poem aloud while another student (or students, depending on how many characters are in the poem) acts it out.

**It's All about Me.** The poems in this collection show Runny Babbit doing what he loves to do, including painting, snorkeling, dancing, swinging, planting, and playing music. Ask students to create a word web with their name in the center, and then surround their name with circles. In each circle, students should record an activity that they enjoy doing. They can also add an illustration inside or outside each circle.

**Partner Poetry.** Put students in pairs and have them choose a poem to read aloud, alternating lines as they read. The challenge of maintaining the rhythm and fluidity of the poem will help students focus on fluency, collaboration, listening, and speaking, while also having fun!

**What a Character.** Reread these poems aloud to the class and ask them to suggest character traits to describe Runny. For example, after reading "Runny Laints for Pove," the students might suggest Runny is creative or artistic. In "Runny Jakes a Tump" (p.11), Runny can be called brave or adventurous. In "Runny Wants to Help," he is friendly and helpful. After the class has developed a list of character traits, ask them to choose a trait that describes themselves or someone they know and then write about why this person embodies the trait.

**Under the Banner.** A birthday banner hangs from the trees in "Bappy Hirthday" (p.60) as Runny celebrates with his friends. Give small groups of students a large piece of paper and ask them to create a sign or banner to display in the classroom. They might even choose to use Runny's language, such as designing an "Our Clonderful Wass" banner!

**Take My Word for It.** Runny Babbit speaks in spoonerisms, but you can challenge the students to play with words in a different way. Each student must say a word that starts with the last letter of the previous word. For example, if one student says, "car," then the next person could say "rabbit," and the next might say, "talk," and so on. For even more of a challenge, choose a category that all words must belong to, such as food words or animal names.

## Host a Poetry Party!

After reading *Runny Babbit Returns*, as well as Shel Silverstein's other poetry collections (including *Runny Babbit*, *Every Thing On It*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *Falling Up*, and *A Light in the Attic*), celebrate Silverstein by planning a Poetry Party. Ask students to select their favorite poems to share with their classmates, with other classes in their school, or at an event held for students' parents and siblings. All students should practice reading their poems expressively, and older students should also memorize them. Costumes, masks, backgrounds, and props can be designed to enhance the experience. In addition, students can share poems they have written themselves. The shared poems can be collated into a Poetry Party anthology that students can continue to read long after the event has ended!



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