

Covering Your Bases: Rhyming, Ordering, and Recapping

by [Sarah Sahr](#)

Summer in the northern hemisphere brings baseball to so many nations: Japan, the United States, Panama, Belgium, and a slew of others. Growing up in the States, baseball was a huge part of my life, as was the great American poem “Casey at the Bat,” by Ernest Lawrence Thayer. This poem is a great introduction to poetry due to its very clear meter and rhyme. Maybe when the lesson is finished, you could take your class outside and hit a few baseballs...

Materials: Cut-out lines of “Casey at the Bat” poem.
Audience: Advance beginner, secondary, or adult (This lesson could work for primary students when learning about rhyming words. Just do the introduction as a warm-up and then let the children watch the YouTube link.)
Objective: Students will be able to retell the story of “Casey at the Bat” in a short narrative.
Outcome: Students will organize lines of a poem into the correct order. Students will also answer questions by using evidence found in the poem.
Duration: 50–65 minutes

Lesson Preparation

In this lesson, student groups will each receive the poem “[Casey at the Bat](#),” stanza by stanza, cut into line strips. For the purposes of this lesson, we’ll say that we have five groups of students, though the number of groups you have will vary. For five groups, you’ll need to print five copies of the poem.

Because you are giving the poem to students stanza by stanza, to keep everything organized, print each stanza out on a different color of paper, if possible. (“Casey at the Bat” has 13 stanzas.) For five groups, print the first stanza five times on blue paper, the second stanza five times on green paper, and so on.

Next, cut each stanza out and assemble the different stanzas into a single poem. Then cut each stanza into lines; mix each stanza up and paper clip the pieces of paper together. It might be best to rubber band each stanza of the poem together so you have bundles. You should have five stacks of thin slips of paper, in multiple colors, each stanza paper-clipped together, and the entire poem (13 stanzas of different colors) rubber banded together.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Organize students in groups of three to four. Review rhyming. If you’d like to make a competition of it, you can give the class words and ask groups how many rhyming words they can come up with.

Next, ask students if they know what a poem is. I’m guessing one or two people in the class do. Give a quick definition of *rhythm* and *rhyme*, *line* and *stanza*. If you’d like, give a quick example of a nursery rhyme:

Humpty-dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty-dumpty had a great fall...

Information (5 minutes)

Explain to students that you are going to give them four lines of a poem. These four lines will create a stanza. Each group will have to organize the stanza based on the rhyming words found at the end of each poem. Here's how they should go about it:

1. First, match the two lines of the that rhyme based on the words at the end of the line
2. Organize the stanza, which two lines come first? Which come last?

As a class, organize the first stanza together, each group working with the line strips at their tables. Once complete, ask them:

- What is this poem about? (Hopefully, someone will say "baseball.")
- Next, ask students, how do you know? (Hopefully, they will say because of the word "bat" in the title, or the word "inning" in line 2.)

As you move forward with this lesson, you can give students two stanzas of lines, to challenge them; just make sure to give the stanzas in order. If you have students organize more than one stanza at once, make sure the stanzas stay in the correct order. This is easy to keep straight by simply listing the color of each stanza on the board.

Group Work (30 minutes)

Hand out the next stanza of the poem. If you think it is necessary, do this one together as well. However, if your groups are ready to complete this task independently, allow them to do so. Most important, at the end of each stanza, check to make sure the lines are in the correct order. Then, ask a question regarding the stanza and ask for the evidence that supports the answer. Here are some questions you could ask (please reword to meet the proficiency levels of your students):

- Stanza 2: Who did the fans want at bat?
- Stanza 3: What are the names of the other two batters mentioned?
- Stanza 4: Where were Blakey and Flynn?
- Stanza 5: Did Casey go to bat?
- Stanza 6: Explain the emotion/feel of the fans.
- Stanza 7: What was Casey feeling?
- Stanza 8 & 9: Did Casey hit the ball?
- Stanza 10 & 11: How do the fans feel about the umpire?
- Stanza 12 & 13: What happened?!

Once all the stanzas are aligned, have students read the poem aloud in their groups, alternating turns. As a class, have a short discussion on how this poem makes them feel. If appropriate, you could introduce new vocabulary like: *confidence*, *hope*, *disappointment*, *arrogance*, etc.

Closure (5 minutes)

Have students retell the story of Casey. Does this poem have a happy ending? If you were a fan of Casey's team, would you be happy?

Additional Links

If you'd like to go a bit further with "Casey at the Bat," the internet is full of learner activities that will meet the needs of any age group, any proficiency level. Enjoy!

[Cartoon](#) (not the poem... just fun to watch)

[Readers' theatre](#)

[Audio recording](#) (This YouTube recording is done by James Earl Jones. His voice is just so wonderful to listen to.)

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