

# THE WORD DANCER

by Maxine Rose Schur

## Resources & Activities

**Play with Words!** It's fun playing with words. Words are great toys—you can play with them in so many different ways.

**Make up Riddles with Homophones**—Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. Common homophones are *no and know, whole and hole, reign and rain, hare and hair, steal and steel.*

Mistress Plummety Peache cleverly uses homophones when she sings an incantation for Snit. The second time she sings it to him, the incantation sounds exactly the same as the first time but the meaning is completely different as shown below.

### First Incantation

*"Before us now you will heal!  
Before us now you will no pain feel."*

VS

### Second Incantation

*"Before us now, you will heel!  
Before us now you will know pain!  
Feel!!!!!"*

Lots of riddles are based on homophones. *Here are three:*

**1** Why did the bread have holes?  
Because it was whole wheat.

**2** How did the man learn to  
drive the ice cream truck?  
He went to sundae school.

**3** What do you call two pairs?  
A pear pair.

Can you make up a riddle with homophones? Here's a short list to get you started:

- pain, pane
- navel, navel
- foul, fowl
- peak, peek

- feet, feat
- whine, wine
- waist, waist
- meet, meat

- sale, sail
- pale, pail

## *Awesome, Actual Alliteration—*

Alliteration happens when words that start with the same sound (not just the same letter) are used repeatedly in a phrase or sentence. The author uses alliteration in *The Word Dancer* to make the words sound funny. **Here are some examples:**

*“Glutt got gold!” “Greasy. Grubber.” Mistress Peache cried, “Grimy. Grinning Grottesque. Grasper.” “Gross and greedy too,” the creature howled*

*“...provision of a private yet practical nature”*

*Drink the drink! All dribbles and drops!*

Try writing some funny sentences with alliteration--- using the same sound but not necessarily the same letter in a sentence. **And, here’s a fun video where you can learn more about alliteration: Alliteration is cool!**

## *Make Rhymes!*

You’ll find lots of rhymes in *The Word Dancer*. Rhyming is a wonderful way to play with words. Try your hand at making up simple poems. **Here’s a good way to get started. Create a quatrain which is a 4-line poem.**

1. The first day of school

2. On a hot, sunny day

3. \_\_\_\_\_ *<write a phrase that rhymes with “school”>*

4. \_\_\_\_\_ *<write a line that rhymes with “day.”>*

Or simply try writing a four-line poem in which the first and third lines rhyme and the first and fourth lines rhyme. **Here’s an example from the American poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay:**

*My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!*

A four line poem or part of a poem is called a quatrain. But a quatrain can rhyme in several different ways. For example, another way in which a four-line poem can rhyme is to have the last words of the first two lines rhyme and the last words of the last two lines rhyme. **Here’s an example you may know...**

*’Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there*

***Can you write a poem in this way? Try it- you might be surprised to see what you come up with!***

## *Find Funny Words*

*The Word Dancer* contains many unusual, funny-sounding words that are real. **Here are just some of them:** moll buzzer niffing, niddering, natterjack, moppet, looby, jargoggled. It's fun to say words that sound funny. What words do you think sound funny? Sometimes the more you say a funny word, the funnier it sounds. What do you think is the funniest-sounding word?

## *Make Up Words*

Sometimes writers make up their own words. One of the greatest writers of all time, William Shakespeare, made up 1700 words! In the sixteenth century he made up many words that we commonly use today such as gossip, eyeball, bedroom, downstairs, skim milk, and worthless. Here are some words the author of *The Word Dancer* made up "Bunion-headed beasts, real-feeling, beblubberment, The Wordless Void, Jeopardous Wood, the hush-hush, starillion, rhymedy, small-minded souls.

You too can make up your own words. It's not hard. Just think of a word you already know like "happy" or "eat" or "dance" and see if you can come up with your very own word for it then use it in a sentence.

## *Use Similes*

A simile is a comparison of one thing to another using the word "like" or "as." Here are some similes you'll find in *The Word Dancer*, Dumb *as* a hammered nail, pretty *as* a prisoner, a misshapen head *like* a puzzle piece, Cutting across the floor sharp *as* a knife, teeth were yellow *as* a rodent's and its breath foul *as* rotting meat, leaping *like* a colt, Sunlight shone *like* poured gold. She was *as* a wind-whipped tree.

**Create your own similes by filling in the blank below with a descriptive word:**

1. She sat as still as a... \_\_\_\_\_
2. They looked tired as... \_\_\_\_\_
3. Her voice sounded like a... \_\_\_\_\_
4. They were as slow as... \_\_\_\_\_
5. He looked like... \_\_\_\_\_

## *Name Your own Characters*

The characters in *The Word Dancer* have funny names; Mistress Plummety Peache, Snit, Lord Ugsome Slyme and Gryme, the Featherflump Tweeds and King Goodliwink. Each character's name suggests what that character is like.

**If you hadn't read the book, do you think you could have guessed their characters by their names. If so, tell why.**

Many books have characters with funny, memorable names such as those in the *Harry Potter* series. Perhaps the author who created the funniest character names was the 19th century writer, Charles Dickens. He enjoyed coming up with odd names that hinted at their characters such as: Pip, Mr. Bumble, Uriah Heep, Ebenezer Scrooge, Fezziwig, Tiny Tim and Wackford Squeers.

*It's fun to make up funny names.*

Try making up some funny names for a character who is:

- Stingy \_\_\_\_\_
- Mean \_\_\_\_\_
- Timid \_\_\_\_\_
- Clever \_\_\_\_\_
- Snobbish \_\_\_\_\_

## *What is a Fantasy Novel?*

Fantasy is a kind of fictional story that includes things that don't exist in the real world. This fantasy world of a story includes things like magic or life from other worlds. Well-known fantasy novels to enjoy are *Harry Potter*, *Tuck Everlasting*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Amari and the Night Visitors*, *The Borrowers*, and *Redwall*.



## *Herbal Remedies*

Mistress Plummety Peache gathers plants which she uses to make medicine, what she calls her healing potions. Plants have been used for healing for thousands of years and are still used today. For example, chamomile is used for relaxation, ginger for nausea, and mint for a sore throat. About 350 years ago, a doctor named Nicholas Culpepper treated poor people in London for free. He treated them with medicines he made from hundreds of plants and wrote a book about their healing qualities. Today his book, *Culpeper's Herbal* is still widely read. It has been updated and is still a helpful book on understanding the healing qualities of plants.

## *Name Calling—a kind of bullying...*

A lot of name calling goes on in *The Word Dancer*! Snit calls Mistress Plummetry Peache “Peach Pit” and he calls Wynnfrith, “Losefrith.” Mistress Plummetry Peach calls Glutt, “Greasy Grubber,” and calls Snit, “Master Snot.” The warden calls Mistress Plummetry Peach “Bothersome Hag” and calls Wynnfrith a “Moll Buzzer” which is an old word for a pickpocket.

In real life, you know that if anyone calls you a name, it hurts. Name-calling is a kind of bullying to make you feel bad about yourself. People who bully or name call may think they're being funny or cool. **If someone makes fun of your name or calls you a name, here are some things you can do:** If you feel safe, tell the person to STOP the name calling. Say you don't like it and that it isn't funny. If you don't feel safe with the person who's doing it, go to a teacher, parent or someone in authority and let them know what is going on. Whatever you do, don't call the other person a name too and don't let it continue.

## Glossary

**Leper**—a person who has leprosy, a contagious skin disease that can cause deformity

**Guffaw**—a loud laugh

**Courtier**—a servant at the court of a king or queen.

**Larder**—a cool room made of stone where food is kept cool

**Drawbridge**—a bridge over a moat that is raised up by chains to prevent anyone coming in and let down to allow entering

**Moat**—a deep wide trench around the walls of a castle usually filled with water

**Discombobulation**—confusion

**Shamble**—to move in a slow, shuffling way

**Formidable**—very large or powerful

**Henchmen**—someone who is loyal to, and works for an evil leader

**The stocks**—a wooden structure in a public place to which criminals were fastened by their feet or hands in the past

**Moppet**—a small, sweet child

**Poppet**— a young girl

**Lore**—knowledge and stories about something

**Shroud**—a cloth in which a dead person is wrapped for burial

**Bloomers**—loose-fitting, knee-length underpants women and girls used to wear

**Incantation**—the use of words as a magic spell

**Sallow**—unhealthy pale or yellow color, usually describing a person's face

**Buttery**—a room for storing wine, liquor and sometimes, oil and food.

**Foiled**—prevented from doing something bad

**Anointment**—the act of putting sprinkling holy oil on king or queen as part of the coronation ceremony

**Mongrel**—a dog of an unknown breed

**Scepter**—a staff carried by rulers that symbolizes their power

**Concoction**—a mixture of different ingredients

**Void**—a completely empty space

**Troubadour**—person who told stories and poems through song and who often performed at court

**Damsel**—a young, unmarried woman

