

## Rhyme, Rhythm, and Pattern

### What are rhyme, rhythm, and pattern cognitive tools?

Rhyme, rhythm, and pattern are potent tools for giving meaningful, memorable, and attractive shape to any content. Their roles in learning are numerous, and their power to engage the imagination in learning the rhythms and patterns of language—and the underlying emotions that they reflect—is enormous. They are important in learning all symbol systems, like mathematics and music, and all the forms of knowledge and experience that we code into symbols.

### How can we employ rhyme, rhythm, and pattern in teaching?

**Topic:** Properties of the Air

**Subject Area:** Science

**Cognitive Tool:** Rhyme, Rhythm, and Pattern

It doesn't take long to use key information about topics and create a rhyme or chant. Consider the following example for properties of the air:

The air is empty, the air is clear;  
You can walk right through it without any fear.  
Except for those gazillions of muons from the sun,  
And endless decayed skin floating round for fun,  
And blobs of pollen bobbing up and around,  
And piles of radio waves that turn into sound.  
There's viruses and bacteria ready to get you,  
And tons of crunched up fly-poop—yuckie-yoo!  
The air is full, it's a massive stew.

**Topic:** Cultural similarities and differences

**Subject Area:** Social Studies

**Cognitive Tool:** Rhyme, Rhythm, and Pattern

Students might compare the different sounding rhythms and patterns of simple greetings in various languages. There is great variety in the kind of tone, intonation etc. employed in different greetings. Alternatively students might look at the different “beats” associated with different forms of poetry or music.

**Topic:** Multiplication

**Subject Area:** Mathematics

**Cognitive Tool:** Rhyme, Rhythm, and Pattern

Students can identify number patterns in a standard multiplication table, using colors to mark the chart they will end up with visual patterns. Student learning of their times table may also be increased if clapping or stamping patterns are employed.

### **Why do rhyme, rhythm, and pattern engage our imaginations?**

All oral cultures had to pressure their store of knowledge into living minds. Consequently, the techniques that aided memorization were socially of great importance. If something—a healing herb, a technique for digging some rare root—was forgotten, it was gone forever. All oral cultures discovered that rhyme, rhythm, and pattern were effective tools in aiding memorization. If you ask an English speaker today how many days there are in the month of March, they will most likely recite in their minds the old rhyme: “30 days hath September; April, June and November, All the rest have 31...”. They will recognize that March has 31 and not bother going on to the part of the rhyme that describes February’s peculiarity. Such a rhyme is a rare holdover into literate times. If we forget the rhyme today, we can always consult a calendar. In oral cultures a great deal of lore would be preserved in forms of patterned sound, most commonly structured within a story to increase memorability further. The recitation of sacred myths, which contain much of the most important lore of any oral society, would commonly be done to the rhythmic tapping of a drum, or to a simple stringed instrument, or even to slapping a hand against a thigh.

Patterned sound helps to embed lore and ideas in the minds of hearers. This basic patterning is a small-scale form of a larger patterning, in which rhythms of despair and hope, of fear and release, of oppression, resentment, and revolt, of youth and age, and so on, are caught and reflected in language. That is to say, our emotional lives are also patterned, and we can use language to echo those emotional patterns in its rhythms. We might be wise to recognize that rhyme and rhythm pervade our language and lives. And what rhyme and rhythm are to the ear, so there are other forms of patterning that engage the eye and other senses.

In the imaginative classroom we will expect more attention to be paid to rhyme, rhythm, and pattern in all areas of the curriculum. If the teacher is able to put in the few minutes it takes to frame a verse, or create a clapping or stamping pattern, a brief rap or basic song in which content is contained, the students can be then invited to improve it, or to do their own on the same topic. Apart from enhancing their language skills, such an activity will reinforce their understanding of whatever topic they are learning.