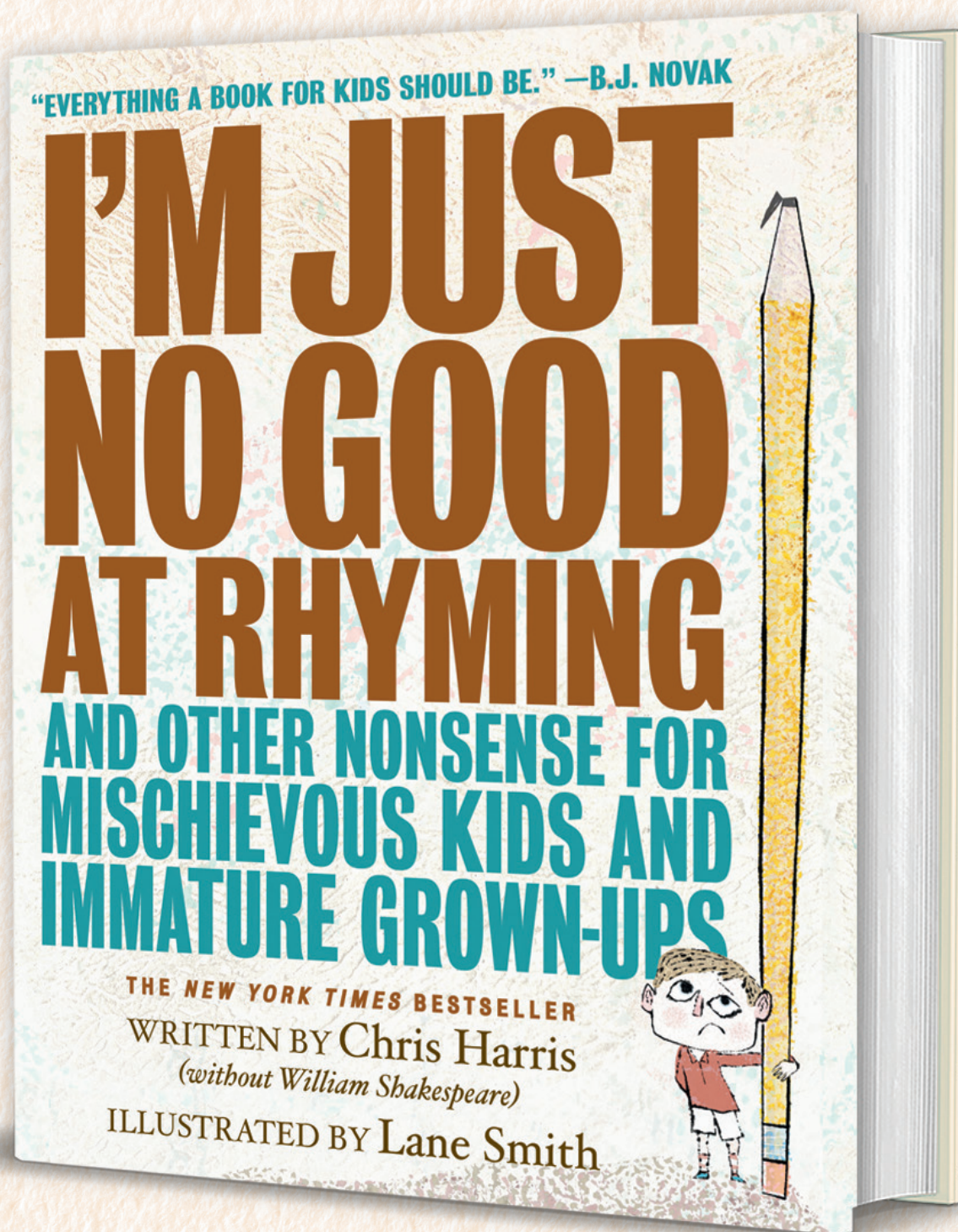
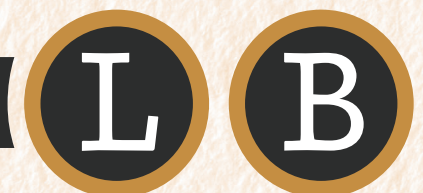


LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

educator's guide | ages 6 & up



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using poetry and humor for rigorous instruction

Educators are very familiar with the term “rigorous,” but this does not have to be synonymous with “boring.” Rigor is about helping students connect to learning in new ways, placing them in their zone of proximal development, but with the support they need to be successful. This guide provides suggested activities that are designed to gradually transfer responsibility from teachers to students. At times there may be a need for a short mini-lesson, but the majority of the learning occurs as students take ownership and discuss, critique, curate, and create. The best part, of course, is that they are doing all of this while enjoying the rich variety of literacy experiences contained in *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming and Other Nonsense for Mischievous Kids and Immature Grown-ups* by Chris Harris, illustrated by Lane Smith.

comprehension connection

Companion Guide of Background Knowledge

In the poem “Sometimes I Don’t Want to Share,” there are references to *The Little Red Hen* and *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. Ask students to summarize these stories. Students should first create full summaries, then refine their summaries until they can share the central message of each story in just a sentence or two. Then ask them to explain how their familiarity with these stories adds to their understanding of “Sometimes I Don’t Want to Share.” Brainstorm a list of other information, vocabulary, or experiences that might be helpful for understanding the poem. Students may identify that having a sibling, knowing about the political system of socialism, or knowing the meaning of vocabulary words such as “reprobate” would aid comprehension. After discussion, create a class companion guide of information (including summaries of *The Little Red Hen* and *The Ant and the Grasshopper*) that would help a reader more deeply understand the poem. As an extension, students may want to choose another poem from the compilation and create a companion guide for it as well!

vocabulary

“Alphabet Book (by the Laziest Artist in the World)”

The illustration for each letter in “Alphabet Book (by the Laziest Artist in the World)” is the same very simple drawing. The process of assigning a word that begins with each letter of the alphabet to the same drawing stretches the imagination and can help build vocabulary. Challenge students to create their own very simple drawing (a basic shape is best) and then to make an alphabet book using “Alphabet Book (by the Laziest Artist in the World)” as a mentor text. Students may want to work with a partner or in a small group for this project. Students should share their finished projects with the class and discuss the process they went through. Did they all have the same challenges? Were some letters easier than others? Were some drawings better suited to the project than others? Reflect as a class.

“My Dessert Tummy”

Many of the poems in *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming* are full of rich vocabulary words. In “My Dessert Tummy,” there are a number of synonyms for holes or spaces. Encourage students to create a poster showcasing hole-related vocabulary. Begin by discussing the vocabulary words (listed below) and defining them. Then students should draw a picture of their dessert tummy (based on how they visualized the poem), showing caverns, caves, chambers, etc. They should label these and then create a key with the definitions. Students may want to integrate technology by using a software program to label the picture and hyperlink the definitions. Cave and hole vocabulary from the poem includes cavern, cave, alcoves, crannies, chamber, shaft-way, tunnels, havens, nooks, cave-ins, fissures, crevasses, corridors, burrows, grottoes, potholes, pits, crawlways, hallways, cul-de-sac, rooms, stalagmites, and niches. Challenge students to use as many of the vocabulary words as possible in their drawings.



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"The Shortest Anaconda in the World"

The shapes described in "The Shortest Anaconda in the World" may be unfamiliar vocabulary for students, but they may recognize them when illustrated. Encourage students to use dictionaries or online sources to determine the meaning of "ouroboros," "caduceus," and "torus." The visual of ouroboros (snake eating its tail), caduceus (two snakes intertwined on a staff—like the medical symbol), and torus (ring-shaped doughnut) will help students more deeply understand "The Shortest Anaconda in the World." In addition, there are other vocabulary words that will be important for students to know. Challenge students to create an illustrated vocabulary guide for the unfamiliar words. Discuss how visual representations of the words helped them understand the poem.

author's craft

Literal vs. Figurative

Many poems have two meanings: a literal meaning and a figurative meaning that might be inferred by looking at the metaphors and other poetic devices. Read Robert Frost's famous poem "The Road Not Taken" and discuss its meaning. Ask students to identify both the literal meaning and the figurative meaning. Next, have them read "Two Roads" by Chris Harris. Discuss whether the speaker in "Two Roads" is interpreting "The Road Not Taken" literally or figuratively. As an extension, ask students to find poems that can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Create a space to display these poems and students' interpretations of them.

Prefixes and Suffixes

The suffix "able" is added to words to show that something can be done. Find words from the poem "Nothing Is Impossible" that contain this suffix (e.g. crossable, flossable, tossable) and ask students to define these words. Make sure they notice that some of the "able" words in the poem (e.g. lossable) are not real words, but it is still possible to understand the author's

meaning because of the suffix "able." Encourage students to find examples of other words with the "able" suffix and create a bulletin board display. Add to the display over time by studying new suffixes and finding examples. As an extension, the class may want to study prefixes from the poem "Unipede." "Centi," "milli," and "uni" are examples of prefixes that give readers definite clues about word meanings. If students know that "centi" is a hundred, "milli" is a thousand, and "uni" is one, then they will understand the poem. Encourage students to create a word bank of other words that begin with "centi," "milli," and "uni." They might extend their list to include "bi," "tri," and "quad" as well.

About the Student

Most books have an "about the author" section, dedication, table of contents, acknowledgments, and sometimes even an index, but students often skip these. Encourage students to carefully read these sections in *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming*. Then ask them to use the "about the author" page written by Chris Harris and Lane Smith as a model to create their own "about the author" section for any paper or project they are working on. As an extension, they may also add acknowledgments, a table of contents, etc. in the style of *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming*.

Annotated Collection of Students' Favorites

The ability to curate and critique content are important skills for students. With more than a hundred poems in *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming*, there are plenty of poems to choose from. Challenge students to choose their five favorite poems from the collection and to create a presentation highlighting their choices. Students should summarize each poem, explain why it is among their favorites, and creatively present their choices. They should have clear reasons to back up every choice and be prepared to verbally defend these reasons. After all students have presented, discuss as a class any themes that emerged. Did more students choose silly poems rather than serious poems? Was there an even balance between silly and serious? Did students have similar reasons behind their choices? As an extension, ask

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I'm Just No Good at Rhyming

students to reflect on the process of curating and critiquing. Why is it important to be able to curate and critique? How does this project help prepare students for the future?

Annotated Collection of Adults' Least Favorites

Using the same curating and critical-thinking skills as in the previous project, ask the whole class to collaborate on a collection of the top five poems they think adults would *not* like as much as kids. Students should use a shared writing process to summarize their choices and to explain their reasoning. As an extension, ask students to conduct a survey to test their thinking. Students should provide a selection of poems from *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming* to a sample of adults and then survey those adults, asking which poems are their most and least favorites. Challenge students to present their findings and to determine whether or not the class predictions of least favorites were accurate.

writing

"I'm Just No Good at Rhyming" Riddles

The poem "I'm Just No Good at Rhyming" is hilarious because it quickly becomes obvious that the poet really does know how to rhyme, but he uses rhymes at the wrong times. He sets up several riddles that could be answered with a rhyming word. Ask students to use this format to create their own collection of rhyming riddles with both a rhyming answer and an answer that makes sense but does not rhyme. For example:

It's something eaten by a fish, and on a hook it will squirm.

Answer A: I know...a minnow!

Answer B: No, a worm.

How many examples can students create? They may want to make a class book of all their rhyming riddles.

Are Grown-Ups Better?

The poem "Grown-ups Are Better (1)" lists a number of tasks grown-ups are better at, but also lists some things that children are better at. Similar ideas are echoed in the poem "Just Be Yourself." Give students the opportunity to practice their argument writing by asking them to respond to the following question: Do you think it is more important to be good at the grown-up things or the kid things mentioned in the poem? Students should make a clear claim and support it with solid reasoning. Discuss as a class. What do they think is the author's opinion?

Outdex Creations

In the back of *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming*, there is a list of titles that were not included in the book. The author refers to this as an "outdex." Ask students to choose any of the titles and to create their own poem, short story, saga, illustration, interpretive dance, or other creative representation to match the title. Host an event, such as an author's tea or open mic night, to allow students to share their creations. As an extension, students may want to write persuasive letters to Chris Harris and Lane Smith detailing why their outdex creations should be included in the next edition.

Practicing Poetry Technique

Ask students to write a poem using any one (or a combination) of the following techniques.

- **PERSONIFICATION:** Using "Just Because I'm a Turkey Sandwich Doesn't Mean I Don't Have Feelings Too, You Know" as a mentor text, students should pick an inanimate object and write a poem from its point of view.
- **CONCRETE POETRY:** Using "How the Fourth-Grader Communicates," "The Duel," "Trapped!," and "Infinity Poem" as examples, ask students to write a poem with a shape that is integral to the poem's meaning or message. Challenge students to write a poem using just individual letters, without words.

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I'm Just No Good at Rhyming

- **REIMAGINING CLASSIC POEMS:** Using "Two Roads" as a mentor text, provide the first several lines of other classic public domain poems that may be unfamiliar to the students and have students compose their own endings. After reading the students' versions, read the original endings. Students can compare and contrast the originals with the new versions and discuss which they find more effective, and why.
- **PARADOX:** After using "A Short Saga" to teach the definition of paradox, have students hunt through the collection to find other examples. Students can create their own paradoxical phrases, poem titles, or entire poems that use paradox as a centerpiece.

"The Little Hurts"

"The Little Hurts" is a serious poem about persevering through difficulties. It is also an example of a word family poem. Each student can try to make their own version by choosing another word family, such as "op," "ack," "at," etc. Have students begin by simply listing words that would fit into a particular word family. Then challenge students to write their own poems using the same meter as "The Little Hurts." Share as a class. Was it more difficult than they anticipated?

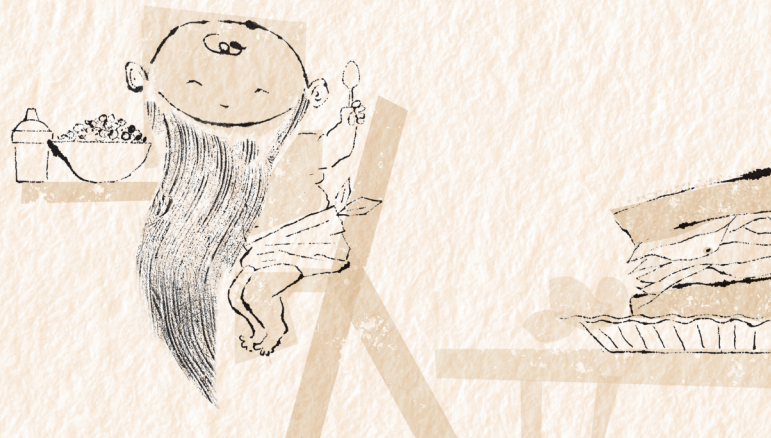
social studies

Geography Collage

In "Island of Toby" and "The Shortest Anaconda in the World," there are many geographic locations. Each student should choose one place mentioned in these poems, research that place, and then create a visual collage of it. The collage should include a map that clearly shows the place's geographic location and at least five other visual representations of the place, which might show the habitat, animals that live there, the country flag, or fun facts. Some place names mentioned in "Island of Toby" include Tahiti, Nairobi, the Arctic, the Gobi Desert, Roosevelt Lake, and Lake Okeechobee. Place names from "Shortest Anaconda" include Uganda, Chile, Manila, Rwanda, Tonga, Montana, and Kenya.

What's in a Name?

In "Disneyland Had Nothing on This Place," the park named after Walt Homeworkallday is closed down even though it had some of the best waterslides and rides. In the world of advertising, names matter. There are many examples of businesses that started out with one name and then changed to another. For example, Google was originally called BackRub, Best Buy was Sound of Music, Pepsi was Brad's Drink, and SUBWAY was Pete's Super Submarines. While none of those original names is as off-putting as Homeworkallday Land, they still show how a catchy brand name is important. Give students the opportunity to see this for themselves. Begin by showing examples of different kinds of advertisements and discuss how advertising companies use research to develop new products or new marketing promotions. Depending on the developmental level of the students, this may also be an opportunity to introduce some basic statistics instruction, such as determining sample sizes. Divide students into groups and give each group a "product" to advertise. It can be any common object, such as a paper clip, tape dispenser, pen, etc. Then ask students to come up with new names for their products. Each group should think of one name they believe will be very appealing to customers and one name that might not be as popular. Then they should create two ads using the media form of their choice (video, poster, audio, etc.). The two advertisements should be identical except for the name of the product. Have the students survey a group of consumers, asking them to watch or look at the two advertisements and then choose which product they would be more likely to purchase. Discuss the results as a class. Were the students surprised by the results? What did they learn from the experience?



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I'm Just No Good at Rhyming

Robert Frost's Social Media Profile

One of Robert Frost's most famous poems is "The Road Not Taken." The poem "Two Roads" is a humorous reaction to Frost's poem. Give students the opportunity to learn more about Robert Frost with this poet study project. Begin with Frost's famous poem and have students discuss its meaning. Then explore some of Frost's other poems. Ask students to analyze his poetry and to discuss what they notice about his style and the themes in his work. Then ask students to either read a biography about him or learn about his life in another way. Once students have a general understanding of Robert Frost, ask them to think about what Frost's social media profile might look like if he were alive today. What kinds of pictures, comments, and quotes would he post? Who would be on his friends list? Which pages would he "like"? Then divide students into small groups and have each group design a social media profile for Robert Frost. All groups should be prepared to explain the choices they made, using details from their research to support their thinking.

dramatic arts

A Word That Speaks a Thousand Words

Using the poems "If You Ever Have to Memorize a Poem of Twenty Lines or More, This Poem is a Pretty Good Choice" as inspiration, students choose one word and then "perform" it. Ask the students to consider what other stage directions could be given beyond the ones in the original poem. Students can guess the stage direction that the performer is trying to convey. Or, have the class write emotion words on scraps of paper; each student will draw a word from a hat and perform that word in a way that expresses the emotion.



science

Category Hunt

The ability to sort according to attributes is a foundational science skill. Looking for similarities and differences is one way in which we make sense of the world. Give students the opportunity to practice their sorting skills using the poems in *I'm Just No Good at Rhyming*. Ask students to find and list all of the poems that fit into the following categories (or develop different categories as a class). Students should be prepared to explain their reasons for categorizing each poem. Many poems fit into more than one category. This may be an independent or paired activity. Here are some category ideas:

- Poems that require the reader to see it (e.g. "The Duel")
- Serious poems (e.g. "You'll Never Feel as Tall as When You're Ten")
- Silly poems (e.g. "Unfair Riddle #1")
- Poems with paired rhyming stanzas (e.g. "A Cold Air Balloon")
- Poems in which almost all final words rhyme (e.g. "The Little Hurts")
- Poems that do not rhyme (e.g. "I'm Just No Good at Rhyming")
- Poems that mention real places (e.g. "The Shortest Anaconda in the World")
- Poems that work best as performances (e.g. "If You Ever Have to Memorize a Poem of Twenty Lines...")
- Poems that show interaction with the illustrator (e.g. "I Do Not Like My Illustrator")
- Poems that reference other poems in the book

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math connection

Learning About Number Systems

In the poem "Eight," the main character never learns the number eight and therefore counts differently than everyone else. Introduce students to counting with number bases other than the traditional base-10 system. Students can figure out what different numbers mean in different bases, starting with the book's page numbers.

art connection

Illustrator's Scream

The illustration paired with "Sometimes I Don't Want to Share" is based on *The Scream* by Edvard Munch. Show students the original painting and ask them to compare and contrast the painting with the illustration. What elements are similar? What parts are different? Does the lack of color in the illustration change the tone? Challenge students to create their own versions of Edvard Munch's famous work, using either the original or Lane Smith's illustration as a guide.

character education

Stepping Outside the Door and Outside Comfort Zones

In the opening poem, "The Door," readers are asked if they are going out or staying in. Ask students to think about a goal they would like to achieve that is a bit outside of their comfort zone. Then ask students to write letters to themselves encouraging them to try. Set up a jar inside the room, close to the door. After their letters are written, have students take turns dropping them into the jar and then stepping through the door. As students drop their letters into the jar, they may share their goals with the class or choose to keep them private. At the end of the year, return letters to the students and ask them to reflect on whether or not they were able to meet their goal.

How to Tame Your Whydoo

The poem "The Whydoo Inside You" suggests that deep down, everyone has the urge to do mischievous things, but successfully controlling those urges (the "Whydoo") is what is important. Sometimes, though, it can be difficult to maintain self-control. Making a class bulletin board of "Ways to Tame the Whydoos" is a playful yet helpful way to share strategies for self-regulation. Have students imagine what a Whydoo might look like and each create an illustration. Ask students to write one suggestion for self-regulation below their illustration. Students might come up with ideas such as counting to ten before acting, countering negative thoughts with positive thoughts, walking away from the situation, etc. Display ideas and illustrations on a bulletin board and encourage students to refer to it when they might need to be reminded of ways to tame their Whydoos.



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scavenger hunt question guide

While individual poems lend themselves to project-based learning, this collection of poetry and mischief may also be read through as a book. In fact, only careful readers of every page will be able to answer the following questions. Use this guide to challenge students to read the whole book carefully!

1. What can one buy at a lemonade stand stand?
Where does one buy a lemonade stand stand?
2. Who numbered the pages in the book? How does knowing this help you understand the page-numbering system? Use details to thoroughly explain your answer.
3. Ask someone who has not read the book all the way through to tell you if they notice anything wrong. (Did they notice the page numbers?) Ask adults and kids. Who was more likely to notice the numbering system?
4. Is it true that nothing is impossible? Explain. If you ask your teacher this question, what might he or she say?
5. If your bed is broken, who (or what) most likely broke it? Use details from the book to explain your reasoning.
6. What are two facts shared by the "scientist" in the book?
7. What happens if you approach Chris Harris and ask him the question, "Schneeples?"
8. What is the "new bad word"? What do you need to do in order to be able to read it? Do you think this will work? Why or why not?
9. Do you think Leo helped create this list of questions? Why or why not?
10. Why is "I Love Quiet" such a funny poem? Explain.
11. Who did Lane Smith mention in his dedication? What is odd about this?
12. Why is it important to read every page of this book?



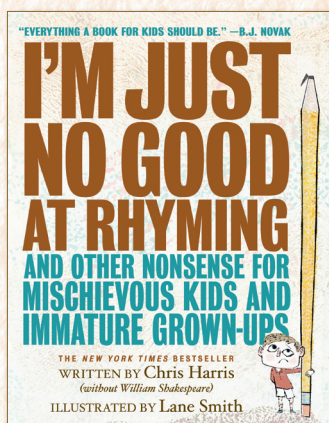
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about the book

Chris Harris's debut poetry collection molds wit and wordplay, nonsense and oxymoron, and visual and verbal sleight of hand in masterful ways that make you look at the world in a whole new wonderfully upside-down way.

This entirely unique collection offers a surprise around every corner, from the ongoing rivalry between the author and illustrator, to the mysteriously misnumbered pages that can only be deciphered by a certain code-cracking poem, to the rhyming fact-checker in the footnotes who points out when

"poetic license" gets out of hand. Adding to the fun, Lane Smith, bestselling creator of beloved hits including *It's a Book* and *The Stinky Cheese Man* and *Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, has spectacularly illustrated this extraordinary collection with nearly one hundred pieces of appropriately absurd art. It's a mischievous match made in heaven!



HC 978-0-316-26657-4

Also available as an ebook

praise for the book

★ "The inspired and inspiring sense of play knows no bounds." —*Kirkus*

★ "Loaded with over-the-top raucousness...The whole production is a worthy heir to Silverstein, Seuss, and even Ogden Nash."

—*Publishers Weekly*

★ "A surefire winner for reading aloud or for snickering with under the covers. Every library will want to add this to its poetry collection."

—*School Library Journal*



This educator's guide was prepared by Dr. Jennifer McMahon, education consultant.

about the author



Chris Harris is a writer and executive producer for *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Great Indoors*, and a writer for *The Late Show with David Letterman*. His pieces have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *ESPN*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and on NPR. He is also the author of the anti-travel guide *Don't Go Europe!* He lives in Los Angeles.



Lane Smith wrote and illustrated *Grandpa Green*, which was a 2012 Caldecott Honor book, and *It's a Book*, which has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. His other works include the national bestsellers *Madam President* and *John, Paul, George & Ben*, the Caldecott Honor winner *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, *Math Curse*, and *Science Verse*, among others. His books have been *New York Times* Best Illustrated Books on four occasions. In 2012 the Eric Carle Museum named him an Honor Artist for lifelong innovation in the field of children's books, and in 2014 he received the Society of Illustrators Lifetime Achievement award.