

Age 8

Maths My Way by Carol Diggory Shields

Two plus two is twenty-two.
It's plain as day that this is true.
But teacher says she's very sure
That two plus two adds up to four.

Three plus three makes thirty-three.
That's the way it ought to be.
But teacher says the answer's six.
I don't know why. Must be a trick.

Four plus four is forty-four.
Not any less, not any more.
My teacher just can't get this straight.
She keeps on saying the answer's eight.

I give up. I'll go along.
I'll do it her way, though she's wrong.
But in my heart, I know what's true.
Two plus two makes twenty-two.

OR

**What someone said when he (she) was spanked
on the day before his (her) birthday by John
Ciardi**

Some day
I may
Pack up my bag and run away.
Some day
I may.
---But not today.
Some night
I might
Slip away in the moonlight.
I might.
Some night.
---But not tonight.
Some night.
Some day.
I might.
I may.
---But right now I think I'll stay.

Age 9

The Spinning Earth by Aileen Fisher

The earth, they say,
spins round and round.
It doesn't look it
from the ground,
and never makes
a spinning sound.

And water never
swirls and swishes
from oceans full
of dizzy fishes,
and shelves don't lose
their pans and dishes.

And houses don't go whirling by,
or puppies whirl around the sky,
or robins spin instead of fly.

It may be true
what people say
about one spinning
night and day.....
but I keep wondering, anyway.

OR

Magic Cat by Peter Dixon

My Mum whilst walking through the door
Spilt some magic on the floor
Blobs of this
and splats of that
but most of it upon the cat.

Our cat turned magic, straight away
and in the garden ran to play
where it grew two massive wings
and flew around in fancy rings.
'Oh look!' cried Mother, pointing high
'I didn't' know the cat could fly....'
Then with a dash of Tibby's tail
she turned my Mum into a snail!

So now she lives beneath a stone
and dusts around a different home –
And I'm an ant
and Dad's a mouse
And Tibby's living in our house.

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Age 10

Sister by Judith Nicholls

Tell me a story!
Lend me that book!
Please, let me come into your den.
I won't mess it up,
so *please* say I can.
When? When? When?

Lend me that engine,
that truck – and your glue.
I'll give half of my old bubble gum.
You know what Dad said
about learning to share.
Give it now,
or I'm telling Mum!

Oh, *please* lend me your bike –
I'll be careful this time.
I'll keep out of the mud
and the snow.

I could borrow your hat –
the one you've just got
said my sister.

And I said
NO!

OR

Don't Be Scared by Carol Ann Duffy

The dark is only a blanket
for the moon to put on her bed.

The dark is a private cinema
for the movie dreams in your head.

The dark is a little black dress
to show off the sequin stars.

The dark is the wooden hole
behind the strings of happy guitars.

The dark is a jeweller's velvet cloth
where children sleep like pearls.

The dark is a spool of film
to photograph boys and girls,
so smile in your sleep in the dark.
Don't be scared.

Age 11

First on the Beach by Geoffrey Dutton

One morning long before
Grown-ups had raised a blind,
I crept down to the shore
To see what I could find.

The tide must never sleep
Because, during the dark,
It rises up to sweep
The beach of every mark.

There before me lay
Shells in an endless line,
And all along the bay
No footprints showed but mine.

Sometimes they vanished when
I walked into the sea,
And then appeared again,
Most mysteriously,

As if I were the first to land
On an undiscovered shore,
Which my footprints on the sand
Captured without a war.

Grammar by Michael Rosen

The teacher said:

A noun is a naming word.

What is the naming word in the sentence:

"He named the ship Lusitania"?

"Named," said George.

Wrong, it's "ship",

Oh, said George.

The teacher said:

A verb is a doing word.

What is the doing word in the sentence:

"I like doing homework"?

"Doing," said George.

Wrong, it's "like".

Oh, said George.

The teacher said:

An adjective is a describing word.

What is the describing word in the sentence:

"Describing sunsets is boring"?

"Describing," said George.

Wrong, it's "boring".

I know it is, said George.

OR

Age 12

Clover McBreeze by Doug Macleod

Clover McBreeze had yawning disease
Which troubled her morning and night
With hardly a warning her mouth would start
yawning
Unless she had bandaged it tight.

One day in October the Queen asked her over
For afternoon tea on the lawn,
So, Clover came round with her mouth tightly
bound
And a facial expression forlorn.

"Please take off your bandage and try a ham
sandwich!"

Her Majesty said with a smile,
So, Clover obeyed and directly displayed
Her mouth hanging open a mile.

The Queen looked distressed at the sight of her
guest

Struck down by the yawning disease,
Her mouth was so wide, seven dogs jumped
inside:

A corgi and six Pekinese.

Now, poor little Clover is rarely asked over
To parties or walks in the park –
She sits all alone by the dusty old phone
Where she weeps and she yawns and she barks.

OR

Seal by William Jay Smith

See how he dives
From the rocks with a zoom!
See how he darts
Through his watery room
Past crabs and eels
And green seaweed,
Past fluffs of sandy
Minnow feed!
See how he swims
With a swerve and a twist,
A flip of the flipper,
A flick of the wrist!
Quicksilver-quick,
Softer than spray,
Down he plunges
And sweeps away;
Before you can think,
Before you can utter
Words like "Dill pickle"
Or "Apple butter",
Back up he swims
Past Sting Ray and Shark,
Out with a zoom,
A whoop, a bark;
Before you can say
Whatever you wish,
He plops at your side
With a mouthful of fish!

Age 13

Shrimping by Ian Serraillier

I take my shrimping net, wade into the pool
Right up to my shins and push. The water's cool,
Rippling round my shins; from each sandy foot
Shrimps like flying splinters dart and shoot,

They vanish into seaweed-swaying banks.
I chase behind, surprise them from the flanks,
Churning the weed above, the sand below,
Till my wooden handle's bent as an archer's bow.

I stagger to the edge to empty out my treasure,
The wonders of the deep, wave-wealth beyond
measure:
Garlands, puffs frilled like a ballet skirt,
A bunch of jellied fingers to pinch and squirt,

Ribbons of brown satin, sea shining,
Black liquorice, long laces entwining
Shells and mussel, all manner of whorls and whirls.
I'll throw them away and keep only the pearls---

The frightened shrimps stranded in the meshing,
Pale as sand, wriggling, tail threshing.
How many are there? Twenty, twenty-three?
I'll take them home to give to the cat for tea.

OR

Almost Perfect by Shel Silverstein

"Almost perfect...but not quite"
Those were the words of Mary Hume
At her seventh birthday party,
Looking 'round the ribboned room.
"This tablecloth is pink not white --
Almost perfect...but not quite"

"Almost perfect...but not quite."
Those were the words of grown-up Mary
Talking about her handsome beau,
The one she wasn't gonna marry.
"Squeezes me a bit too tight---
Almost perfect...but not quite."

"Almost perfect...but not quite."
Those were the words of ol' Miss Hume
Teaching in the seventh grade,
Grading papers in the gloom
Late at night up in her room.
"They never cross their t's just right---
Almost perfect...but not quite."

Ninety-eight the day she died
Complainin' 'bout the spotless floor.
People shook their heads and sighed,
"Guess that she'll like heaven more."
Up went her soul on feathered wings,
Out the door, up out of sight.
Another voice from heaven came-
"Almost perfect...but not quite."

The Skyfoogle adapted by Michael Rosen

There was a man
who turned up around our way once
put up a tent in the park, he did,
put up notices all 'round the streets saying
that he was going to put on show
A TERRIFYING CREATURE!!!!!!!!!!
called:
THE SKYFOOGLE!!!!!!!!!!
No one had ever seen this thing before.
The show was on for
2 o'clock, the next day.

Next day, we all turned up to see
THE FIERCEST ANIMAL IN THE WORLD!!!!!!!!!!
The man took our money at the door.
And we poured into the tent.
There was a kind of stage up one end
with a curtain in front of it.
We all sat down and waited.
The man went off behind the curtain.
Suddenly we heard a terrible scream.
There was an awful yelling and crying,
there was the noise of chains rattling
and someone shouting.
Suddenly the man came running on to the stage
in front of the curtain.
All his clothes were torn,
there was blood on his face
and he screamed:

Quick, get out
get out
get out of here,
THE SKYFOOGLE HAS ESCAPED!!!!!!!!!!

We got up
and ran out the door
and got away as fast as we could.

By the time we got ourselves together
the man had gone.
We never saw him again.
We never saw our money again either....
.....And none of us has ever seen THE SKYFOOGLE!!!!

How to Talk to Trees by Gillian Floyd

Use no words. Instead lie down
Upon the grass, beneath
The swaying boughs. Look up.
Keep looking up. Pay attention
To everything you see. Disregard
All thoughts and the sense
You should be somewhere else doing
Something else: this has its own
Significance. Do not move.
Do not care. Simply be aware
Of trees...

Until, at last,
Your mind starts growing, branching out,
Extending upwards gradually
Towards the sky, towards the sun. Feel it sprout
Leaf
On leaf
On leaf...

Let it grow
As high as it will go, as wide
As it will reach – then do
No more. Nothing.
Only stay
Right where you are, your mind
Mingling with the quiet air
And the quiet light.....Now you will find
That without really trying,
You'll be talking in a language trees
Can understand – not our language
Of words, but their language
Of peace.

Age 15

Hide and Seek by Vernon Scannell

Call out. Call loud: 'I'm ready! Come and find me!'
The sacks in the tool shed smell like the seaside.
They'll never find you in this salty dark,
But be careful that your feet aren't sticking out.
Wiser not to risk another shout.
The floor is cold. They'll probably be searching
The bushes near the swing. Whatever happens
You mustn't sneeze when they come prowling in.
And here they are, whispering at the door;
You've never heard them sound so hushed
before.
Don't breathe. Don't move. Stay dumb. Hide in
your blindness.
They're moving closer, someone stumbles,
mutters;
Their words and laughter scuffle, and they're
gone.
But don't come out just yet; they'll try the lane,
And then the greenhouse and back here again.
They must be thinking that you're very clever,
Getting more puzzled as they search all over.
It seems a long time since they went away.
Your legs are stiff, the cold bites through your
coat;
The dark damp smell of sand moves in your throat.
It's time to let them know that you're the winner.
Push off the sacks. Uncurl and stretch. That's
better!
Out of the shed and call to them: "I've won!
Here I am! Come and own up I've caught you!"
The darkening garden watches. Nothing stirs.
The bushes hold their breath; the sun is gone.
Yes, here you are. But where are they who sought
you?

OR

**Why Dorothy Wordsworth is not as Famous as her
Brother by Lynn Peters**

"I wandered lonely as a...
They're in the top drawer, William,
Under your socks -
I wandered lonely as a -
No not that drawer, the top one.
I wandered by myself -
Well wear the ones you can find.
No, don't get overwrought my dear, I'm coming.

"I wandered lonely as a -
Lonely as a cloud when -
Soft-boiled egg, yes my dear,
As usual, three minutes -
As a cloud which floats -
Look, I said I'll cook it,
Just hold on will you -
All right, I'm coming.

"One day I was out for a walk
When I saw this flock -
It can't be too hard, it had three minutes.
Well put some butter in it. -
This host of golden daffodils
As I was out for a stroll one -
"Oh you fancy a stroll, do you?
Yes all right, William, I'm coming.
It's on the peg. Under your hat.
I'll bring my pad, shall I, in case
You want to jot something down?"

Age 15-18 Poetry Championship

The Side Way Back by Phillip Gross

You're late. Take a chance up the cul-de-sac,
a short cut home. It's the side way back--
the way they tell you not to go,
the way the kids and stray cats know
as Lovebite Alley, Dead Dog Lane ...
The Council says it's got no name.
All the same...

There's sharks-tooth glass on a breezeblock wall.
There's nobody near to hear if you call.
There are tetanus tips on the rusty wire.
There's a house they bricked up after the fire
spray-canned with blunt names and a thinks-balloon
full of four-letter words and a grinning moon
cartoon.

It's a narrow and narrowing one way street
down to the end where the night kids meet.
You've seen the scuffed-out tips of their fags.
You've smelt something wrong in their polythene bags.
There's a snuffle and a scratching at a planked-up gate.
There's a footstep you don't hear till almost too late.
Don't wait.

Now you're off and you're running for years and years
with the hissing of panic like rain in your ears.
You could run till you're old, you could run till you're gone
and never get home. To slow down and walk on
is hard. Harder still is to turn
and look back. Though it's slow as a Chinese burn,
you'll learn