

MAKING UP WORDS

From Lewis Carroll to You



TextProject
Background Builders

Lewis Carroll: The Guy Who Made Nonsense Famous

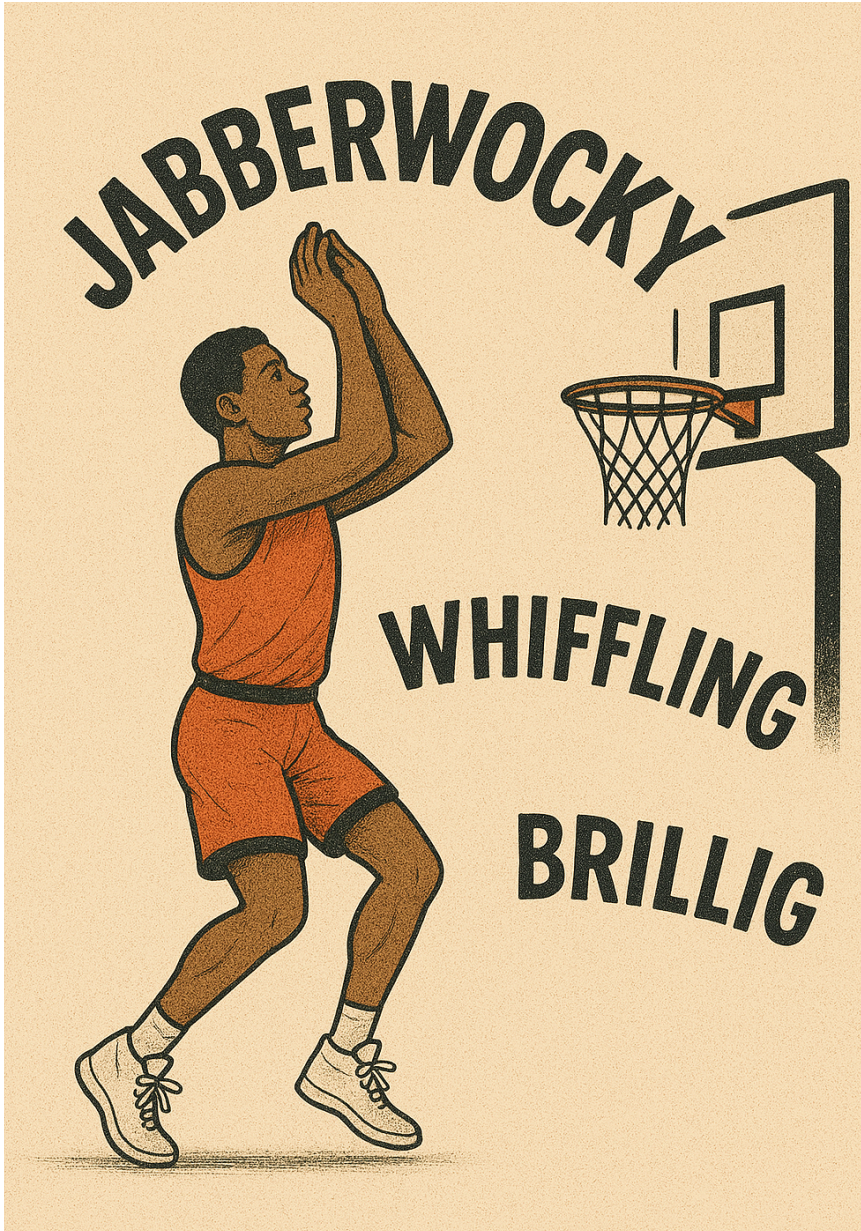
Lewis Carroll was the made-up name of a writer who wrote very weird and strange stories that totally mess with your head. In his real life, the writer was Charles Dodgson, a math professor at Oxford University. In his free time, he wrote two stories that became classic tales.

The first was Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. It was about a girl who falls down a rabbit hole into a crazy world. She shrinks and grows, meets a grinning cat that disappears, goes to a strange tea party, and meets a queen who yells "Off with their heads!" Nothing makes sense, and that's the point.

In the next book, Through the Looking-Glass, Alice climbs through a mirror into a backwards world that's set up like a chess game. She meets talking eggs, twins who disagree, and queens who run super fast but stay in the same place. The famous poem called "Jabberwocky" is part of this book. It's full of made-up words but somehow you can still understand it.



In *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice goes on an adventure involving time travel to help save her friend, the Mad Hatter, who is in the colorful outfit in the center of this picture.



This is what language play might look like if it were a sport. Carroll made up 'jabberwocky,' 'brillig,' and 'whiffing,' and 150+ years later, they're still real words. That's a win.

What is Language Play?

When you play basketball, you're moving your body—running and shooting. Language play is totally different. It's when you mess around with words to make them funny or surprising. Think of it like this: language play is playing with words the way you'd play with LEGOs. You take them apart, stick them together in weird ways, or make up completely new combinations just to see what happens.

You Already Do This!

Ever used memes? That's language play. Here are examples you may know:

"No cap" - You took a regular word (cap = lie) and flipped it to mean truth

"It's giving..." - Using a verb in a new way to describe vibes

"Rizz" - Shortening "charisma" into something catchier

Spelling things wrong on purpose is another way you play with language, like writing "smol" instead of small when you are texting. When you say "that's so slay" or "main character energy," you're doing language play. You're bending words, creating new meanings, and making language more fun. Lewis Carroll did the exact same thing 150 years ago. He just didn't have TikTok.

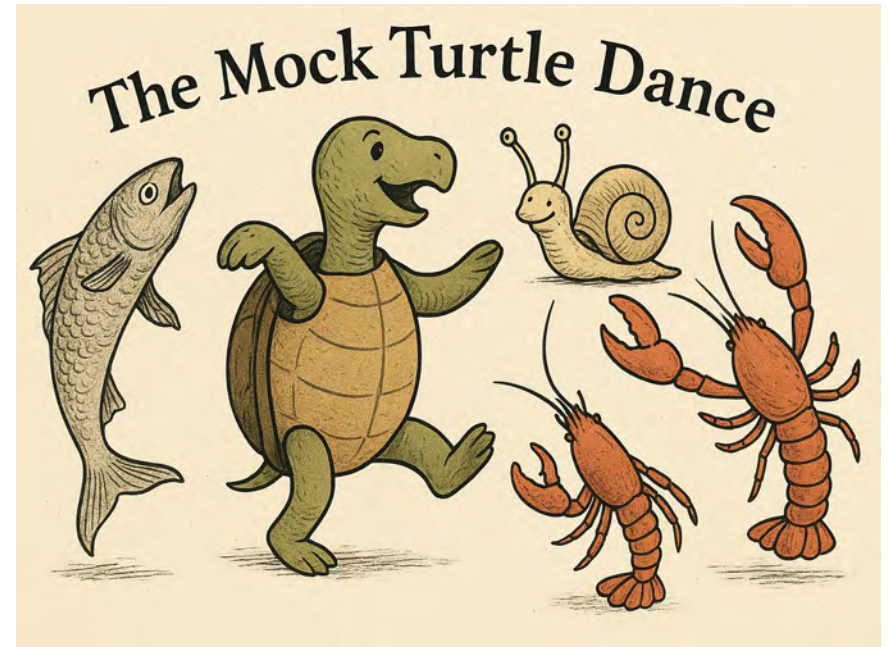
The Mock Turtle's Song

A poem called "The Mock Turtle's Song" is in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. It's about sea creatures who are having a very strange conversation on a beach.

One sea creature is a whiting, which is a small fish. The whiting is trying to get a snail to join the dance with lobsters and turtles. But the snail keeps saying, "No." He realizes that this dance might actually be dangerous. The whiting keeps making arguments to the snail that don't really make sense but sound convincing.

Carroll uses these silly sea creatures to show how sometimes friends try to talk us into risky things that seem fun but might not end well.

Even though you can't hear a melody in a book, Carroll wrote this poem with a bouncing rhythm that sounds like a song. Many musicians have set it to music over the years—even a rock band recorded a version for the 2010 Alice in Wonderland movie.



Carroll wrote this as a poem, but it's basically a song. The rhythm bounces so hard you can't help but hear the music. Some of the best poems are just songs nobody's bothered to sing yet.

Lewis Carroll Started a Trend

Way back in 1871, Lewis Carroll wrote books that were filled with made-up words and silly language. He invented words like “chortle” (a mix of chuckle and snort) and “galumphing” (clumping along heavily). People thought he was crazy, but kids loved it. Fast forward to today, and authors are still doing the same thing.

Dav Pilkey wrote the Captain Underpants series using Carroll’s playbook. He makes up ridiculous words and names like “Professor Poopypants” and creates entire languages of silliness. The books are full of jokes, weird spelling, and word play that makes reading fun.

Roald Dahl did it too in *The BFG*. The Big Friendly Giant speaks his own language with words like “whizzpopper” and “human beans.” It sounds weird but you can figure out what he means, just like Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” poem.

These authors proved that breaking language rules and playing with words makes stories entertaining. Carroll started it, and writers have been copying his style ever since because it works—silly language makes kids want to keep reading.



Just like Roald Dahl’s Big Friendly Giant in the photo, this moment deserves some wonderfully jumbled words: ‘Having a whizzpopping and gigglesome time at the parade.’



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