

## The “Swamp Beat” - Rhythm in Verse Lesson Plan

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Your students can learn about rhythm in verse using Kristyn Crow’s picture book, *Bedtime at the Swamp*. *Feel the Swamp Beat!*

**Student Level:** K – 4 (Can be adapted for almost any elementary school grade)

**Purpose of the Activity:** In language, rhythm is a cadence produced by a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Rhythm occurs in all forms of language, but is particularly important in poetry and verse. This lesson could supplement a beginning poetry curriculum, but works well with any kind of language or reading instruction. A study was conducted in London which found that children with dyslexia and other reading delays often had difficulty perceiving rhythm in words and sounds. The “Swamp Beat” activity can help strengthen a child’s ability to hear rhythm patterns in written text. It’s fun and engaging, and it promotes interest in reading. Some children are hands-on active learners, and this suits their learning style.

**Required Materials:** *Bedtime at the Swamp*, a picture book by Kristyn Crow, illustrated by Macky Pamintuan, published by HarperCollins, 2008. (Purchase/Order from Amazon.com, Borders, BookSense, Barnes and Noble, etc.) Children may use rhythm sticks, shakers, drums, tambourines, crow sounders, rain sticks, or just their hands and feet to make the rhythm sounds. If Kristyn Crow visits your school, she will provide all the rhythm instruments for your class to use and she’ll direct the activity! *Heads-up:* There will be some noise!

**Time:** 30 Minutes

**Lesson Activity:** Read *Bedtime at the Swamp* aloud to the students, having them “echo” the refrain in the book. Read it a second time, having the students clap a steady beat. Explain that the steady beat is like a heartbeat; it keeps on going at an even pace. Ask students to raise their hand if they play a musical instrument at home. Just as there is rhythm in music, language, especially poetry, also has rhythm. Then pass out the instruments (optional), guiding the children first in keeping a steady beat to the book’s text, and then breaking into “parts” for the refrain. For example:

**BEDTIME AT THE SWAMP:** (Rhythm is highlighted in first stanza)

I was sittin’ by a swamp just hummin’ a tune

With the fireflies dancin’ ‘neath the fat gold moon

When off in the distance was a splashin’ sound

So I stood on my tippy-toes and looked around.

I heard:

Splish Splash	(Shakers, tambourines, or finger snaps)
Rumba-Rumba	(Crow sounders, sand blocks, noise makers, or feet stomping)
Bim Bam slapping)	(Hand drums, claves, triangles, rhythm sticks, or desk/thigh)
BOOM!	(Tom Toms, Conga drums, cymbals, or claps)

(Repeat)

**More Suggestions for Teachers:** For preparation or additional practice, read verse to the class and have them clap or snap to a steady beat. Start by singing the words as the children clap, then speak the same words *without* singing. Have the students keep the rhythm by clapping in regular intervals (not on every syllable). Here are some examples (the first stanzas show the steady beat with highlights, below). Next, have the children keep the rhythm of the words, by clapping or tapping to EVERY syllable. You could then have half the class keep the steady beat, and half the class keep the beat to the rhythm of the words, at the same time.

Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead:

Ding Dong! The Witch is dead.

Which old Witch? The Wicked Witch!

Ding Dong! The Wicked Witch is dead.

Wake up – sleepy head,  
rub your eyes, get out of bed.  
Wake up, the Wicked Witch is dead.

I Went to the Animal Fair:

I went to the Animal Fair

The birds and the beasts were there.

The big baboon by the light of the moon

Was **combing** his **auburn hair**.

You should have seen the monk  
He sat on the elephant's trunk  
The elephant sneezed and fell on his knees  
And that was the end of the monk  
The monk, the monk, the monk.

Old Dan Tucker:

**Old Dan Tucker** was a **mighty man**.

He **washed** his **face** in a **frying pan**.

He **combed** his **hair** with a **wagon wheel**, and he

**Walked** with a **toothache** in his **heel**.

.  
Get out the way, old Dan Tucker.  
Get out the way, old Dan Tucker.  
Get out the way, old Dan Tucker.  
You're too late to eat your supper.

Here's verse from another rhythmic picture book, by Margaret Mahy:

### *17 Kings and 42 Elephants*

**Seventeen kings** on **forty-two elephants**

**Going** on a **journey** through a **wild wet night**,

**Baggy ears** like **big umbrellaphants**,

**Little eyes a-gleaming** in the **jungle light**.

**Seventeen kings** saw **white-toothed crocodiles**

**Romping** in the **river** where the **reeds** grow **tall**,

**Green-eyed dragons**, **rough** as **rockodiles**,

**Lying** in the **mud** where the **small crabs** **crawl**.

**Supplemental Activities:** For older students, write lines of verse on the board (or pass out handouts) and have the students draw an “X” over the words/syllables where they hear a beat, or emphasis. Explain that these are stressed syllables, and those without an “X” are unstressed. How many beats do they hear per line? You could also help them determine the stressed syllables in their spelling words or their names. Sometimes it helps to demonstrate how funny it sounds when the wrong syllables are stressed. Older students can also be asked to write a structured poem with two, three, or four stresses (beats) per line, or it may be easier to write a poem to the rhythm of a familiar song, like Old MacDonald. For very young students, just helping them find the beat in different samples of verse is a good exercise.

**Advanced Students:** Have students write three (3) examples of each rhythm unit below.

In the English language, the most common units of rhythm are:

The **iamb**, consisting of two syllables, only the second accented (as in "good-bye")

The **trochee**, two syllables, only the first accented (as in "window")

The **anapest**, three syllables, with only the third stressed (as in "Halloween")

The **dactyl**, one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed (as in "beautiful")

The **spondee**, two consecutive syllables that are both stressed (as in "not now")