

Sing a Song of Sixpence: The Untold Story!

A shared-reading script using both prose and poetry,
loosely based upon the old nursery rhyme,
"Sing a Song of Sixpence".

Reading Parts: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, King, Queen, Maid, Knave.
Chorus Readers: A Flock of Blackbirds, All Royals and Palace Staff

TEACHER NOTES: "Sing a Song of Sixpence" is a well known English nursery rhyme, coming at least from the 18th century.

HISTORY: The rhyme's origins are uncertain; two main competing theories circulating on the Internet are: (1) The nursery rhyme first appeared in Volume II of Tom Thumb's Pretty Song Book, published around 1744, and almost certainly is older than that. It was written, perhaps by the literary critic George Stevens, to satirize the poetry of Henry James Pye, the British Poet Laureate from 1790-1813. Certainly Byron plays on the rhyme in the scornful Dedication of his Don Juan to the next Laureate, Robert Southey. (2) Adding to the confusion, information posted on the Lost Legends section of Snopes.com indicated the rhyme was originally used by Blackbeard's pirates to attract new members. This theory has been accepted by some as the real origin.

In its analysis of the same rhyme, **The Straight Dope** states: "According to the **Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes**, an Italian cookbook from 1549 (translated into English in 1598) actually contains a recipe "to make pies so that birds may be alive in them and fly out when it is cut up." The ODNR also cites a 1723 cook who describes this as an earlier practice, the idea being that the birds cause "a diverting Hurley-Burley amongst the Guests."

Agatha Christie's 1953 Miss Marple mystery, A Pocket Full of Rye, features the rhyme.

In Three Stooges 1947 short feature Sing a Song of Six Pants, the trio plays tailors who fight a bank robber's gang.

The above information can be found online at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sing_a_Song_of_Sixpence

King, Queen, Maid, and Knave enter, stand in a line facing the audience, and read/recite the following nursery rhyme together. Each reader wears a sign displaying the name of his or her character. For example: KING, QUEEN, etc.

King, Queen,
Maid, Knave: Sing a song of sixpence,
 a pocket full of rye.
 Four and twenty blackbirds,
 baked in a pie.

Maid, Knave: When the pie was opened,
 the birds began to sing.
 Now, wasn't that a dainty dish
 to set before the king?

King: The king was in his counting house,
 counting out his money.

Queen: The queen was in the parlour,
 eating bread and honey.

Maid: The maid was in the garden,
 hanging out the clothes,

King, Queen,
Knave: When down came a blackbird
 and pecked off her nose!

Maid rubs nose and cries out:

Maid: Ouch!

Readers break from line and now move to assigned positions. King, Queen, Maid, and Knave stand behind music stands in center of reading area. They stand with their backs to the audience. The music stands hold their reading scripts.

Narrator 1 enters and stands on one side of the music stand line, Narrator 2 enters and stands on the other side. They face the audience, hold their reading scripts in their hands, and wear signs displaying their roles: NARRATOR.

The Flock of Blackbirds fly in noisily, ("Caw, caw. Caw, caw") and sit on the floor in front and to each side of the music stands holding their reading scripts in their hands. They face the audience. Each wears a sign that says BLACKBIRD.

When all readers are in position, the reading begins:

Narrator 1: Early one Monday morning, a royal king went to his counting house and found it filled with silver dollars. He was delighted to have saved so much money!

(Substitute "loonies" above and below for Canadian version).

Narrator 2: The queen and palace staff were eating breakfast in the courtyard below. A flock of blackbirds nested in the trees nearby.

Flock of Blackbirds: Caw, caw. Caw, caw!

Narrator 2: The king ran to a window and called out.

King quickly turns to face audience, mimes running in place, then stops, looks out over his music stand at birds sitting on the floor in front of him, then at audience, and calls out:

King: My bank is filled with dollars!

Queen turns to face audience.

Queen: How nice for you dear. What will you buy?

Flock of Blackbirds: Four and twenty bumbleberries
Baked in a pie!

It's the only thing to buy.
Caw, caw! Bumbleberries
Baked in a pie!

Knave turns to face audience.

Knave: Good idea. I love bumbleberry pie.

Maid turns to face audience.

Maid: I will cut it open and serve it to the king.

King: And I will eat each gooey bite of every slice you bring.

All Royals and
Palace Staff: Sing a song of dollars.

King: Dollars, yes hooray!

Flock of Blackbirds: But save a few in case we have a rainy, rainy day.

Narrator 1: The king didn't listen to this advice. He got carried away. He spent all of his dollars on twenty four bumbleberry pies.

Narrator 2: The palace cook told the king she had no room to store that many pies in the pantry. So, she gave most of them away to the hungry townspeople.

Knave: The king was not happy. His money was gone and he had little to show for it.

King: Talk about a blue Monday.

King, Queen, Maid, and Knave turn backs to audience as birds read the following:

Flock of Blackbirds: Cheer up king. No more sorrow. Let's look forward to tomorrow!

Narrator 1: On Tuesday morning the queen checked her purse and found it crammed with quarters.

Narrator 2: She was delighted to have saved so much money! The king and staff were drinking tea on the palace patio, so she ran to the window and called out.

Queen quickly turns to face audience, mimes running in place, then stops, looks out over her music stand at birds sitting on the floor in front of her, then at audience, and calls out:

Queen: My purse is crammed with quarters!

King turns to face audience.

King: How nice for you dear. What will you buy?

Flock of Blackbirds: Four and twenty bumbleberries
Baked in a pie!
It's the only thing to buy.
Caw, caw! Bumbleberries
Baked in a pie!

King: Hey, I've already bought that!

Knave turns to face audience.

Knave: It's true, it's true.

Maid turns to face audience.

Maid: A copy-cat's not funny.

Queen: Don't worry. I'll go shopping, But I'll buy bread and honey.

All Royals and
Palace Staff: Sing a song of quarters.

Queen: Quarters, yes hooray!

Flock of Blackbirds: But save a few in case we have a rainy, rainy day.

Narrator 1: The queen didn't listen to this advice. She got carried away. She spent all of her quarters on enough bread and honey to feed an army.

Narrator 2: The palace butler knew the bread would soon grow mould, so he ate all of it as quickly as he could.

Knave: The queen was not happy. Her money was gone and so was her bread and honey.

Queen: Talk about a terrible Tuesday.

King, Queen, Maid, and Knave turn backs to audience as birds read the following:

Flock of Blackbirds: Cheer up Queen. No more sorrow. Let's look forward to tomorrow!

Narrator 1: On Wednesday morning the maid checked her sock and found it was stuffed with dimes. She was delighted to have saved so much money!

Narrator 2: At that moment, the maid was in the garden hanging up the clothes. Everyone else was sunning near the flowerbeds. She turned and called out.

Maid quickly turns to face audience, looks out over her music stand at birds