

The Duck and the Kangaroo



POEM TEXT

I

1 Said the Duck to the Kangaroo,
 2 'Good gracious! how you hop!
 3 Over the fields and the water too,
 4 As if you never would stop!
 5 My life is a bore in this nasty pond,
 6 And I long to go out in the world beyond!
 7 I wish I could hop like you!
 8 Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.

II

9 'Please give me a ride on your back!'
 10 Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.
 11 'I would sit quite still, and say nothing but "Quack,"
 12 The whole of the long day through!
 13 And we'd go to the Dee, and the Jelly Bo Lee,
 14 Over the land, and over the sea;—
 15 Please take me a ride! O do!'
 16 Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.

III

17 Said the Kangaroo to the Duck,
 18 'This requires some little reflection;
 19 Perhaps on the whole it might bring me luck,
 20 And there seems but one objection,
 21 Which is, if you'll let me speak so bold,
 22 Your feet are unpleasantly wet and cold,
 23 And would probably give me the roo-
 24 Matiz!' said the Kangaroo.

IV

25 Said the Duck, 'As I sate on the rocks,
 26 I have thought over that completely,
 27 And I bought four pairs of worsted socks
 28 Which fit my web-feet neatly.
 29 And to keep out the cold I've bought a cloak,
 30 And every day a cigar I'll smoke,
 31 All to follow my own dear true
 32 Love of a Kangaroo!'

V

33 Said the Kangaroo, 'I'm ready!
 34 All in the moonlight pale;
 35 But to balance me well, dear Duck, sit steady!
 36 And quite at the end of my tail!'
 37 So away they went with a hop and a bound,
 38 And they hopped the whole world three times round;
 39 And who so happy,—O who,
 40 As the Duck and the Kangaroo?.



SUMMARY

The Duck exclaims to the kangaroo that it is very impressed with the kangaroo's ability to hop over land and water, seemingly without the need to stop. The Duck explains that its own life in the pond is boring and that it wants to explore the world. It could fulfill its dream if it could hop like the Kangaroo.

The Duck asks the Kangaroo for a ride on the Kangaroo's back. The Duck promises it would sit still and only quack all day. The Duck proposes traveling to places like the Dee and the Jelly Bo Lee, crossing land and water in the process. The Duck repeats its polite plea for a ride on the Kangaroo's back.

The Kangaroo explains to the Duck that it will need to consider the Duck's proposal. While it might be a source of good luck for the Kangaroo, the Kangaroo does have just one concern: to speak plainly, the Duck's wet, cold feet might make give the Kangaroo rheumatism (joint inflammation) if they are on the Kangaroo's back.

The Duck explains that it has thought of this concern already and has purchased four pairs of warm socks that fit its webbed feet well. The Duck has also purchased a cloak to stay warm and plans to smoke a cigar every day, all so that it may ride along with its dear friend, the Kangaroo.

The Kangaroo announces that it's ready to leave that night. The Kangaroo urges the Duck to sit on the end of the Kangaroo's tail to achieve the best balance possible. The Duck and the Kangaroo take off hopping and they travel around the world three times. There is no one as happy as the Duck and the Kangaroo.



THEMES



FRIENDSHIP AND COMPROMISE

Lear's poem focuses on the relationship between the

Duck and the Kangaroo, as the Duck convinces the Kangaroo to carry the duck on its back. The Kangaroo's willingness to accept this unlikely companion and the duck's eagerness to ensure the Kangaroo's comfort under this arrangement paves the way for the fully-blossomed friendship of the final stanza, in which the two hop "the whole world three times round," none so happy as this odd couple. Through their relationship, the poem suggests the ability of friendship to transcend any and all difference—so long as friends are willing to compromise and support each other.

The Duck's pitch to join the Kangaroo evolves over the course of the poem, shifting from focusing solely on its own wants to making a case for why it would be a worthy companion. At the start, the Duck expresses its desire to ride on the Kangaroo's back as stemming from envy of the Kangaroo's abilities: "I wish I could hop like you! ... Please give me a ride on your back!" As the poem continues, however, the duck offers arguments for why the Kangaroo should accept the Duck's proposition: "I would sit quite still, and say nothing but 'Quack!'"

By the fourth stanza, the Duck has somewhat changed its tune further still, suggesting that its eagerness to climb aboard to the Kangaroo's back is not simply because the Duck wants to see the world but also "to follow my own dear true / Love of a Kangaroo." Rather than simply using the Kangaroo as a vehicle to get out of the pond, the duck now argues that the Kangaroo is a "dear true love." This all suggests that the duck understands that friendship is about more than personal fulfillment, and depends on a genuine appreciation of another person (or, in this case, animal!).

Indeed, in "The Duck and the Kangaroo," friends are willing to make concessions to support one another. At the start of the poem, the Kangaroo fears that the Duck's proposed plan will be parasitic: in other words, the duck will benefit, but the Kangaroo will only catch a cold. Yet not only is the Duck willing to accommodate the Kangaroo's need for a dry back, but the Duck has already thought ahead to the Kangaroo's comfort, purchasing socks to keep the Kangaroo's back warm. The Duck also plans to bring along a cloak and cigars to supplement the warmth of the socks. The Kangaroo, meanwhile, is willing to make an even bigger change in plans to help the Duck: the Kangaroo ultimately agrees to carry the Duck on its tail as they travel around the world. The Kangaroo even instructs the Duck on how best to maintain its balance as they travel, reflecting the Kangaroo's similar willingness to consider the needs of someone else.

By the end of the poem, *both* animals are deliriously happy with the arrangement and in one another's company, each benefitting from the companionship. As the Kangaroo says, "To balance me well, dear Duck, sit steady!": the two animals, despite their differences, can now balance each other on their shared journey specifically because they have taken care to consider the other's needs. That both the Duck and the

Kangaroo ultimately find great joy in their partnership reflects the value of friendship—and, it follows, of being willing to compromise.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-7
- Line 8
- Lines 10-11
- Lines 12-13
- Lines 14-17
- Lines 19-26
- Lines 22-24
- Lines 28-33
- Lines 29-31
- Lines 34-35
- Lines 37-42
- Line 39
- Lines 43-44



WANDERLUST AND FREEDOM

The Duck makes a momentous proposal to the Kangaroo—that is, to ride on the Kangaroo's back—because it longs for an escape from its home pond. The Duck recognizes that the Kangaroo, because of its physical abilities, has been able to explore the world, and the Duck longs to experience that liberty. The world beyond the "nasty pond" comes to represent that ultimate freedom. As such, until the Kangaroo empowers the Duck to leave the pond, the Duck cannot be truly free. Only by having the freedom of movement and the opportunity to see the world can the Duck's longings—or the longings of any confined and constrained person (or talking animal)—be fulfilled.

The beginning of the poem sets up the experiences of the Duck and the Kangaroo in opposition to one another: the Duck's "life is a bore in this nasty pond" and it never gets to leave its environment, while the Kangaroo has the ability to hop "over the fields and the water too ... out in the world beyond." The Kangaroo has the unfettered liberty of journeying as it pleases, while the Duck—trapped by its own physical limitations—can only dream of that freedom.

In the second stanza, the Duck imagines what it would be like to travel with the Kangaroo, hoping that they will journey "to the Dee, and the Jelly Bo Lee, / Over the land, and over the sea." This language echoes the Duck's description of the Kangaroo in the opening stanza ("Good gracious! how you hop! / Over the fields and the water too"), demonstrating the Duck's desire for a way out of the pond that will let it overcome all boundaries, whether land or sea.

Both characters find ultimate happiness when they are able to see the world together. In the final stanza, the pair have "hopped the whole world three times round," the Duck living its

dream of traveling beyond the pond and experience genuine freedom for the first time.

It's worth noting that the poet's own nomadic lifestyle may undergird the Duck's desire to see the world: Lear traveled throughout Europe, predominantly as a landscape painter, from the age of 25 in 1837 until he settled in Italy in 1880. The Duck's fierce desire to "go out in the world beyond" suggests the poet's own yearning for an escape from the "nasty pond" where he grew up.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 5-7
- Lines 14-15
- Lines 39-40
- Lines 41-42



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

*Said the Duck to the Kangaroo,
 'Good gracious! how you hop!
 Over the fields and the water too,
 As if you never would stop!*

The first line of "The Duck and the Kangaroo" instantly establishes the dialogue form that will continue throughout the poem, with the narratorial voice announcing who is speaking before handing the rest of the stanza over to the Duck's own words.

These opening lines launch the reader into the story in medias res—that is, right in the middle of the action. The characters receive no introduction, but Lear's use of the definite article and proper nouns ("the" Duck and "the" Kangaroo) suggests that these will be the only representatives of their species present in the poem. The world is sculpted on a small scale in these opening lines—just two creatures in conversation with each other—even as the Duck longs to see the world expand.

In these first lines, the Duck describes the Kangaroo's perpetual motion. The use of [caesura](#) (the exclamation point in line 2) to break up the Duck's first line emphasizes the Duck's awe but also underscores the Duck's central problem: unlike the Kangaroo, free to hop as it will, the duck constantly faces physical limitations that slow it down, represented, in this case, by the punctuation that immediately pauses the duck in its tracks. Meanwhile, the [alliterative](#) "Good gracious! How you hop!" creates a bouncing sensation (especially when read aloud), sonically depicting the Kangaroo's action. These opening lines also set up the rhyme scheme that will continue for the rest of the poem (each stanza beginning with an ABAB rhyming pattern, in which alternating lines exhibit full, [perfect](#)

[rhymes](#)).

This clear rhyme scheme contributes to the poem's feeling rather like a nursery rhyme. This feeling is echoed by the meter—which is *mostly*, though not *strictly*, [anapestic trimeter](#) with some [iamb](#)s tossed in throughout. Substitutions occur even in these first four lines of the poem:

Said the Duck | to the Kang- | aroo,
 'Good gra- | cious how | you hop!
 Over the | fields and | the wa- | ter too,
 As if | you ne- | ver would stop!

Note how the final [foot](#) of line 1 is actually an iamb ("aroo"), as are all the feet of line 2; this da-DUM rhythm comes into play at the same time that the Kangaroo is mentioned, and seems to reflect the hopping of the Kangaroo. Meanwhile, a [dactyl](#) opens line 3, with the initial, bold stress of "over" again subtly reflecting the content of the line: the Kangaroo boldly bounces over everything in its path, including the meter! This continues with the [trochee](#) of "fields and" before falling back into iambs (the **water too**, / **As if you ne-**) and finally finishing with the expected anapest ("-ver would stop!").

Finally, note how line 3 also has an extra foot, making it a line of [tetrameter](#). Again, this reflects the freedom of movement of the Kangaroo—whose hopping expands its world beyond that of the Duck's little pond, just as the meter of this line expands past the expected number of syllables.

LINES 5-8

*My life is a bore in this nasty pond,
 And I long to go out in the world beyond!
 I wish I could hop like you!
 Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.*

In the second half of the first stanza, the Duck explicitly defines the strong desire that will propel the rest of the poem: "I wish I could hop like you!" The Duck's lament also introduces one of the poem's central themes of wanderlust and the personal freedom that escape from the pond represents. The Duck sets up a clear contrast between the physical abilities of each creature and the limitations of their respective environments as a result. The Kangaroo has, at least, the physical potential to go "out in the world beyond"—whether the Kangaroo has gone much farther than the fields surrounding the ponds at this point is not entirely clear—but the Duck, unable to hop, has no choice but to remain in the pond.

Line 5, meanwhile, is the only information the reader learns about the Duck's life in the pond—the rest of the poem is entirely aspirational, describing the life the duck hopes to live if the Kangaroo agrees to the Duck's plan. What makes the Duck's life "a bore"? Why is the pond so "nasty"? The Duck never answers these questions, but it seems likely that the unpleasantness of the Duck's life is not because of real

discomfort in the pond but because of the Duck's awareness of the liberty that other creatures possess. The pond, with which the Duck presumably has no other known environment to contrast, derives its nastiness from its very state of *not* being somewhere else. Without observing the Kangaroo's freedom, perhaps the Duck would not have been able to envision the world beyond the pond or to recognize its desire to hop like the Kangaroo.

The steady, [perfect rhymes](#) continue, while the poem's content is again reflected by the meter here: line 6, like line 3, has an extra syllable (11 in total) and ends with an [iamb](#)—making it a line of [tetrameter](#) rather than [trimeter](#). In other words, it's appropriate that a line about longing to explore "the world beyond" is literally a longer line of poetry!

And I long | to go out | in the world | beyond!

LINES 10-13

'Please give me a ride on your back!'
Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.
'I would sit quite still, and say nothing but "Quack,"
The whole of the long day through!

At the start of stanza II, the Duck launches into its proposal to the kangaroo, clearly a plan that the Duck has spent time formulating. The opening line of the first stanza ("Said the Duck to the Kangaroo") now shifts down a line, which helps to create a sense of urgency in the Duck's suggestion: it has spoken up before the narrator can even announce whose turn it is to talk.

Before the Kangaroo has had a chance to respond, the Duck quickly launches into its vision for the journey, beginning with an explanation in line 11 for how non-invasive its presence would be. The Duck makes the humorous promise that it would "say nothing but 'Quack.'" Part of the humor of the line derives from its length—it's visually and metrically longer than any line left, undermining the Duck's vow of silence:

I would sit | quite still, | and say no- | thing but
"Quack"

The line's [sibilance](#) (sit, still, say) is rather ironic—sibilance, with its hushed /s/ sound, is often used to evoke a quiet, whispering tone; here, however, it suggests that the Duck's excitable, dense verbosity may overwhelm its intention to be silent.

The [anthropomorphized](#) creature can clearly say a great deal more than "quack" (it's been monologuing now in English for a stanza and a half!), and the suggestion seems to be that quacking would be a lesser form of communication, more of a natural, uncontrollable side effect of being a Duck than a mode of speaking. The juxtaposition of this "quack" with the Duck's speech helps to establish the boundaries of Lear's nonsense world: the duck takes on the human ability of English speech

seemingly in addition to its standard duck qualities (like quacking). Lear, then, superimposes his creatures' anthropomorphic behaviors on top of their real-world characteristics.

LINES 14-17

And we'd go to the Dee, and the Jelly Bo Lee,
Over the land, and over the sea;—
Please take me a ride! O do!'
Said the Duck to the Kangaroo.

The Duck continues its proposal by laying out some of the geography it wants to see: the fictional lands of the Dee and the Jelly Bo Lee. By choosing made-up places for the Duck's envisioned journey, Lear emphasizes the role of imagination in fueling the Duck's wanderlust. Perhaps these are places that the Duck has heard about from fellow pond denizens, or maybe they are just words that roll off the Duck's tongue in an improvisational moment—either way, they are unfamiliar to the reader and, therefore, convey the sparks of freshness and uncharted potential that the Duck also experiences when it speaks of these lands.

The Duck's hope to travel "over the land" and "over the sea" echoes the opening stanza's "over the fields and the water too." The Duck seems to be particularly impressed with the Kangaroo's ability to move over both land and water, which is reflected in the meter of line 14:

Over | the land, | and o- | ver the sea;—

The shifting meter—with its opening [trochee](#), [iamb](#)s, and final [anapest](#)—suggest the undulating waves over which the Kangaroo travels as well as the graceful curves of the Kangaroo's hopping. It also recalls the trochaic stress in line 3 ("Over the **fields**"), conjuring up the Duck's initial portrayal of the Kangaroo's movement.

Moreover, the Duck molds its early flattery of the first stanza into practicable action for the Kangaroo to take: because the Kangaroo has specifically complimented the Kangaroo's land/water flexibility, the Duck may hope to take advantage of that as it makes its pitch.

The Duck's plea to the Kangaroo to "take me a ride!" registers as grammatically unexpected—the absence of a preposition (for a ride, on a ride, etc.) sets up a playful contrast with ("Give me a ride") earlier in the stanza and also creates the sense that the Duck, in hatching this plot, is concocting its own linguistic set of rules.

In the second half of stanza II, Lear continues the pattern of ending each stanza with a [couplet](#) including the end rhyme "kangaroo." This section of the poem also features some of the text's densest [internal rhymes](#) (Dee/Lee/sea). This use of increasing internal rhyme helps to build momentum and excitement: as the Duck's vision comes to life through the

Duck's description of the imagined journey, it as if the right sounds all fall into place, each /ee/ sound representing one fantastical locale after another.

LINES 18-21

*Said the Kangaroo to the Duck,
This requires some little reflection;
Perhaps on the whole it might bring me luck,
And there seems but one objection,*

The third stanza opens with the Kangaroo speaking for the first time, revealing itself to have just as heightened a diction as the Duck does (its speech even features a semi-colon!). Lear's speech tag for the Kangaroo ("Said the Kangaroo the Duck") reverses the opening lines of the poem (and the animals in the title) and feels, as a result, both natural and playful. This is also helped by the fact that the Kangaroo's language pops with [alliteration](#) (requires/reflection) and [consonance](#) (perhaps/whole).

The Kangaroo seems immediately open to the possibility of having the Duck ride on its back, imagining (superstitiously, perhaps) that it would bring luck to have the Duck along for the ride (of course, it also seems plausible that the line about "luck" occurs primarily to provide an easy rhyme for "Duck"). The Kangaroo does not need much time, apparently, to consider the Duck's offer before generating the "one objection": "some little reflection," rather than meaning "a bit of reflection" seems instead to mean more precisely "only a little reflection."

At this point in the poem, as the conversation glides smoothly from the Duck's voice to the Kangaroo's, it becomes clear that the narrator will seldom assert a voice other than the voices of the characters throughout the poem. The poet provides no information about how the Kangaroo physically reacts or looks or behaves. The reader only learns which animal is speaking and what they are saying. As a result, the poem relies exclusively on language to establish character: the aforementioned alliteration, consonance, and heightened grammatical expression ("some little reflection," "on the whole," "seems but one") work together to paint a portrait of a rather upper-crust Kangaroo in a space of three lines.

LINES 22-25

*Which is, if you'll let me speak so bold,
Your feet are unpleasantly wet and cold,
And would probably give me the roo-
Matiz!' said the Kangaroo.*

In the second half of stanza III, the Kangaroo lays out its only objection: the Duck's webbed feet are so wet and cold that they would lead the Kangaroo to contract "roo-matiz" (the kangaroo version of rheumatism, presumably). The Kangaroo breaks this news with a hesitant, polite preface ("if you'll let me speak so bold") and the comma [caesura](#) in line 21 helps to suggest the Kangaroo's awkward pause before delivering its assessment of

the Duck's feet.

The Kangaroo has asserted that the wet feet concern is its only objection to the Duck's proposal: while the talkative Duck has offered a vow of relative silence, the Kangaroo never refers to it—meaning we can probably assume that the Kangaroo is far more concerned about the Duck's wet feet than the Duck's verbosity (or, at least, that it believes the Duck's commitment to keeping its bill shut).

The Kangaroo's assumption about the Duck serves to establish the foundation for the poem's treatment of the two animals' evolving friendship and the need for compromise in their relationship. The animals know very little about each other beyond their physical traits: the Duck seems only to know that the Kangaroo can hop very well and the Kangaroo appears only to know that the Duck has uncomfortably feet. As the poem continues, the creatures will come to recognize how the personality characteristics *beyond* these surface-level traits can more potently drive a friendship.

In this section of the poem, the Kangaroo delivers the text's only example of wordplay, the [punning](#) "roo-/Matiz!" This is the height of Lear's delicious [anthropomorphizing](#): not only does the Kangaroo have anxiety about getting a very human disease (rheumatism), but it seems to have a marsupial form (Roo-matiz)—or else, an even funnier possibility, the Kangaroo is deliberately making a pun for the Duck's benefit itself!

LINES 26-29

*Said the Duck, 'As I sate on the rocks,
I have thought over that completely,
And I bought four pairs of worsted socks
Which fit my web-feet neatly.*

In the first half of stanza IV, the Duck reveals how much forethought it has put into its plans, anticipating the Kangaroo's complaints. As if to one-up the Kangaroo's heightened diction and to assert its own competence, the Duck opens by using the archaic "sate" instead of "sat."

Again, stanza IV offers a new lens of the [anthropomorphism](#) of the poem, as the duck begins to itemize its purchases. The reader does not learn where, or from whom, these socks (and, later, a cloak and cigar) were bought, but it seems clear that this is a version of the animal kingdom that allows for interspecies commerce.

This section of the poem strongly develops the theme of friendship and compromise that runs throughout the text. The Duck, even in devising a plan designed to promote its own interests, has carefully considered the Kangaroo's needs, recognizing its own flaws (its cold, wet feet) and even investing in a safeguard against the Kangaroo's discomfort (or over-investing, as the case may be, given that the duck has purchased *four* pairs of socks).

Throughout this half of the stanza, the series of [alliterative](#)

words beginning with /f/ (four/fit/feet) and /w/ (worsted/which/web), along with the [consonance](#) of the repeated /t/ sound (bought/fit/feet/neatly) create a sense of compactness and precision, supporting the Duck's desire to sound fully packed and prepared.

The Duck also moves from [anapestic](#) meter to a series of [iamb](#)s in lines 27 and 28:

And I bought

gives way to:

four pairs | of wor- | sted socks
Which fit | my web- | feet neatly.

Line 28 also has an extra syllable, arguably creating a rare foot known as an amphibrach, but this unstressed (a.k.a. "[feminine](#)") ending does little to change the feel of these lines. The iambic rhythm feels somewhat sturdier here than the rollicking anapest, asserting the firmness and seriousness of purpose in the Duck's pre-planning.

LINES 30-33

*And to keep out the cold I've bought a cloak,
And every day a cigar I'll smoke,
All to follow my own dear true
Love of a Kangaroo!*

The Duck evolves its tactical approach to convincing the Kangaroo to accept the plan here, not only arguing that it has prepared to keep the Kangaroo warm but also using terms of endearment for the Kangaroo for the first time ("my own dear true / Love").

Prior to this stanza, the Duck's only stated interest in the proposed journey has been to escape the monotony of the pond. It has not even been clear that the Duck and the Kangaroo have ever spoken before; the Duck has known the Kangaroo long enough to make its plan and purchase socks, a cloak, and cigars, but the previous nature of their relationship is unexplored. The Duck's sudden suggestion that its reason for wanting to take this journey is to be with the Kangaroo can be read as either a twist (the Duck reveals its real reasons for devising this plan) or a clever ploy (as the next stanza shows, the Duck's stanza IV arguments are fully successful). There is no further indication whether Lear intends the relationship to be platonic or romantic (certainly the [Owl and the Pussy-Cat](#) in Lear's most famous poem were a romantic item), but the Duck's effusive language indicates, at least, that it might harbor strong, long-lasting feelings for the Kangaroo.

The [anthropomorphic](#) adventures of the earlier part of this stanza continue here, with the Duck explaining that it has purchased a cloak (perhaps to keep both itself and the Kangaroo warm) and a large number of cigars (it plans to smoke

one a day), presumably also to provide some atmospheric heat as they travel. Whether the cigars would actually help the Kangaroo to stay warm is questionable; perhaps the duck also just enjoys smoking cigars and has woven this justification for a personal purchase into the argument.

The [alliterative](#) and [consonant](#) patterns of the first half of the stanza continues with a series of /k/ sounds in line 29 (keep/cold/cloak) and /s/ sounds in line 30 (cigar/smoke). There's also a subtle [anaphora](#) happening in lines 29 and 30 (and, for that matter, 27) with the repetition of "And" at the start of the lines. This draws attention to the breadth of the Duck's preparations—he has done this *and* this *and* this in consideration of the Kangaroo's comfort.

LINES 35-38

*Said the Kangaroo, 'I'm ready!
All in the moonlight pale;
But to balance me well, dear Duck, sit steady!
And quite at the end of my tail!'*

The final stanza opens with the Kangaroo's eager consent to the Duck's plan. This is the only section of dialogue that spans less than a full stanza; the Kangaroo's final lines end halfway through this stanza before the narrator takes over.

The Kangaroo's second line, "All in the moonlight pale," seems rather out of place: is the Kangaroo simply saying it is currently nighttime and it is ready to leave immediately? Does the line only exist to provide a poetic rhyme for "tail"? Either way, the first half of the [quatrain](#) sets up the Kangaroo to offer its own ideas for the journey that will support the Duck, a strategy for where the Duck should sit to optimize the pair's balance as they travel. The Kangaroo's suggestion marks the first time that the Kangaroo shares in the Duck's vision of what their road trip can be: the Kangaroo contributes its knowledge of its own body to make this adventure—and the pair's friendship—as successful as possible.

Here, the Kangaroo echoes the Duck's term of endearment ("dear Duck") as well as the duck's [alliteration](#) (dear / Duck, sit / steady). The Kangaroo's adoption of the Duck's language cements their friendship and reinforces their newly forged bond.

The third line's metrical shifts (two [anapests](#) followed by two [iamb](#)s, the second of which has a [feminine ending](#)) illustrate the quest for balance that the kangaroo references in the line.

But to bal- | ance me well | dear Duck, | sit steady!

The first two feet are comfortably balanced—they are both anapests—but as soon as the Duck climbs aboard in the third foot, the meter begins to rock, with the stressed syllable coming a syllable earlier than anticipated (with the move from a three-syllable foot to a two-syllable foot). Even with the repetition of the iamb, the Duck doesn't quite settle in: the

feminine ending of the last foot evokes an unsteadiness. It's not until the end of the next line—

And quite | at the end | of my tail!

—that anapestic order seems to be restored.

The [caesura](#)—the two commas around "dear Duck" in line 35—add to the sensation of lost balance, until the following line's sturdier meter accompanies the Kangaroo's proposed solution to the balance problem.

LINES 39-42

*So away they went with a hop and a bound,
And they hopped the whole world three times round;
And who so happy,—O who,
As the Duck and the Kangaroo?.*

The final stanza marks a significant shift in the voice of the poem, as the narrator describes the *actions* of the Duck and the Kangaroo for the first time. The pacing of the poem completely alters: instead of conveying a dialogue in real time, the final four lines zoom out to span the entirety of the pair's journey. These lines also offer the poem's first direct address to the reader, with the question posed in the final lines. This ebullient burst of superlatives (and perhaps [hyperbole](#))—they are the happiest pair in the world and they traveled the whole world *three* times—suggests the narrator's repressed subjective voice finally breaking through with its own bouncy eagerness.

The Duck and the Kangaroo, despite their differences and the unlikelihood of their successful symbiosis, achieve an uncanny unity by the poem's close. Lear does not say in the final stanza that the *Kangaroo* hopped—at this point, the action of the Kangaroo evolves verbally into a shared language: "So away *they* went with a hop and a bound, / And *they* hopped the whole world three times round."

Although the hopping and bounding can only physically be performed by the Kangaroo, because the Kangaroo has allowed the Duck to take full part in the marsupial experience, the Duck becomes part of the hopping itself. As the Duck hoped, its physical inability to "hop like you" can be overcome by riding on the Kangaroo's back. By absorbing the Duck into its physical life and identity, the Kangaroo, who hopes the arrangement "on the whole ... might bring me luck," is made blissfully happy as well.

Lear relishes in the initial /h/ and /p/ sounds throughout these final lines, the [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) seeming to represent the bouncing Duck and Kangaroo (hop/hopped/whole/who/happy/who).



SYMBOLS



THE POND

The Duck's "nasty pond" represents the constraints that the Duck experiences as it longs to flee its environment and go out into the world beyond. The pond's nastiness registers as a product of the Duck's desire to be elsewhere: in other words, the pond is nasty precisely *because* it is the space that the Duck cannot escape, the symbol of the Duck's restricted existence. The Duck recognizes that its own physical limitations prevent it from leaving its boring pond life. For the Kangaroo, however, the pond is a space that can be both traversed and escaped, since the Kangaroo can travel over both land and water—and, therefore, the Kangaroo serves as the Duck's best chance to escape the pond's boundaries.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "My life is a bore in this nasty pond,"



POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) abounds in "The Duck and the Kangaroo," from the Duck's opening exclamation onward. The alliteration of the initial /h/ sound, when read aloud, conveys a bouncing quality that tends to accompany descriptions of the Kangaroo's hopping ("How you hop!" in the opening stanza and "Hopped the whole" and "who so happy" in the final stanza, as the Kangaroo and Duck journey together).

Lear also uses alliteration to re-animate phrases that repeat throughout the poem: "'O do!' / Said the Duck" in stanza II and "Said the Duck, 'As I sate,'" in stanza IV allow the reader to hear the recurring "Said the Duck" in new ways, with, respectively, the sparks of the hard /d/ sound and the sibilance of the recurring /s/.

Alliteration emerges most exuberantly in stanza IV, as the duck describes its preparations for the proposed journey: the overlapping /w/ and /f/ sounds in "worsted socks / Which fit my web-feet/ might suggest the Duck sonically tripping over itself with excitement about the lengths to which it's gone to consider the Kangaroo's need. There is also the sense of the Duck assembling all its ducks in a row, so to speak, with the three alliterative lines in a row (lines 28-30): both in purchasing items and lining up initial word sounds, the duck has everything in order.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "G," "g," "h," "h"
- **Line 12:** "s," "q," "s," "s," "Q"
- **Line 15:** "O," "o"
- **Line 19:** "re," "re"
- **Line 26:** "S," "s"
- **Line 28:** "w"
- **Line 29:** "W," "f," "w," "f"
- **Line 30:** "k," "c," "c"
- **Line 31:** "c," "s"
- **Line 37:** "B," "b," "d," "D," "s," "s"
- **Line 39:** "w," "w"
- **Line 40:** "h," "w"
- **Line 41:** "w," "h," "h," "wh"

- Lines 30-31
- Lines 35-38

ASSONANCE

While [assonance](#) plays less of a significant role than the [alliteration](#) and rich, [perfect rhyming](#) that appear throughout the poem, "The Duck and the Kangaroo" still depends upon the nimbleness conveyed by the scattering of matching vowel pairs. The increased assonance in the Kangaroo's personal comments to the Duck in lines 21-22 ([speak/feet](#) and [unpleasantly/wet](#)), partnered with the bold/cold rhyme at the ends of those lines, trigger a change in mood, helping to convey the Kangaroo's awkwardness in sharing this concern with the Duck.

Stanza IV also offers a strong example of alliteration and assonance working together: "cold" and "cloak" share not only initial consonants but the long vowel /o/ sound as well, helping to articulate the crisp clarity of the Duck's game plan.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The entirety of Lear's poem (indeed, much of Lear's work) falls under the label of [anthropomorphism](#). This is apparent from the very first words, in which the Duck starts a conversation with the Kangaroo.

Stanza I demonstrates the Duck's human feelings: boredom, desire, admiration, jealousy. Many readers can empathize with the Duck in these, allowing the poem to read like a kind of instructional fable. Meanwhile, the Duck's promise to say nothing but "Quack" in stanza II then confirms that the duck has language abilities *beyond* quacking—in the world of the poem, the Duck clearly views quacking as a lower form of communication than verbal language.

The Kangaroo, in addition to sharing the Duck's human language and emotion, also conveys its concerns about its own medical health in stanza III, citing a specific illness ("the roo-Matiz!"). Finally, in the penultimate stanza, the Duck describes engaging in a series of decidedly human activities: buying items, wearing socks and cloaks, and smoking cigars.

Much of the charm of "The Duck and the Kangaroo" stems from Lear's use of anthropomorphism: the ever-expanding human behaviors of these animals constantly surprise the reader but also provoke a deeper level of sympathy for the characters. This is a tale about a duck and a kangaroo, yes, but its message of friendship and compromise extends to the human world as well.

Where Anthropomorphism appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-8
- Lines 5-6
- Lines 10-17
- Line 12
- Lines 18-25
- Lines 24-25
- Lines 26-33
- Line 28

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "o," "oo"
- **Line 5:** "y," "i"
- **Line 6:** "o," "o"
- **Line 8:** "o," "oo"
- **Line 10:** "ea," "e"
- **Line 11:** "o," "oo"
- **Line 14:** "e," "o," "ee," "o," "ee"
- **Line 15:** "a," "a"
- **Line 17:** "o," "oo"
- **Line 22:** "ea"
- **Line 23:** "ee," "plea," "we"
- **Line 30:** "o," "oa"
- **Line 37:** "e," "ea"
- **Line 40:** "o," "o," "o"

CAESURA

[Caesura](#) fulfills multiple functions in "The Duck and the Kangaroo." In lines 2 and 15, the use of the exclamation point, and accompanying pause when read aloud, in the middle of the line works to emphasize the Duck's enthusiasm and eagerness. Even as the Duck describes the fluid motion of the Kangaroo, the caesuras halt the Duck's use of language: the Duck trips over its words in its excitement to express its admiration for the Kangaroo's hopping. (The movement from the female caesura—following an unstressed syllable—in line 2, to the male caesura—following a stressed syllable—in line 15 reinforces the Duck's increasing intensity as the rhythmic begging becomes more abrupt).

In the third stanza, the brief pause as the Kangaroo prepares to apologize for commenting on the Duck's physical qualities ("Which is, if you'll let me speak so bold"), effectively

demonstrates the Kangaroo's awkwardness about calling the Duck out in this way: it's an anxious moment of hesitation.

Finally, the triumphant final caesura in stanza V—the comma and dash in the penultimate line—serves as a wind-up for the final [rhetorical question](#), almost like a celebratory drumroll. The narrator adds a pause that builds tension, subtly emphasizing the immense joy of the two animals.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “!”
- **Line 12:** “,”
- **Line 14:** “,”
- **Line 15:** “,”
- **Line 16:** “!”
- **Line 22:** “,”
- **Line 26:** “,”
- **Line 35:** “,”
- **Line 37:** “,” “,”
- **Line 41:** “,” “_”

CONSONANCE

Throughout the poem, Lear utilizes [consonance](#) to strengthen the sing-song momentum of the story. Indeed, part of the poem's instant appeal may be the delightful consonance of the /k/ in the title characters' identities: Duck and Kangaroo. In a sense, just by their shared consonant, the two creatures belong together.

Words that belong together in a similar way can be found in every stanza, most prominently in stanza IV, as the Duck lays out its plans to accommodate the Kangaroo's needs on their shared journey. Some pairs of words share both initial and final consonance (thought/that and fit/feet) and each pair is followed by a word that shares the /t/ sound inside it (completely and neatly). This dense grouping of words with shared sounds works persuasively to support the Duck's argument that it has premeditated and prepared well for the journey: such words don't just come together by chance, and the well-organized language represents the Duck's well-organized itinerary for the journey ahead.

Across the entire poem, the repeated use of consonance, along with [alliteration](#) and [assonance](#), participates in constructing a crisp and patterned sound-world accessible to children and reminiscent of children's nursery rhymes.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “d,” “D,” “k,” “K,” “g”
- **Line 2:** “G,” “g,” “h,” “h”
- **Line 3:** “t,” “t”
- **Line 5:** “s,” “s”
- **Line 6:** “d,” “d”

- **Line 8:** “d,” “D,” “ck,” “K”
- **Line 11:** “d,” “D,” “ck,” “K”
- **Line 12:** “s,” “t,” “q,” “t,” “s,” “t,” “s,” “Q”
- **Line 13:** “l,” “l”
- **Line 14:** “d,” “D,” “ll,” “L”
- **Line 16:** “d,” “d”
- **Line 17:** “d,” “D,” “ck,” “K”
- **Line 18:** “K,” “ck”
- **Line 20:** “l,” “wh,” “m,” “m”
- **Line 21:** “b,” “b”
- **Line 22:** “s,” “s”
- **Line 23:** “t,” “l,” “tl,” “t,” “l”
- **Line 24:** “b,” “b”
- **Line 26:** “S,” “d,” “D,” “ck,” “s,” “s,” “cks”
- **Lines 27-27:** “t / t”
- **Lines 27-27:** “th / t”
- **Line 27:** “l,” “t,” “l”
- **Line 28:** “s,” “w,” “s,” “s,” “s”
- **Line 29:** “W,” “t,” “t,” “w,” “t”
- **Lines 29-29:** “f / t”
- **Line 30:** “k,” “c,” “l,” “c,” “l”
- **Line 31:** “c,” “s”
- **Line 32:** “l,” “l,” “ll”
- **Line 33:** “l”
- **Line 36:** “ll”
- **Lines 36-36:** “l / l”
- **Line 37:** “B,” “t,” “t,” “b,” “l,” “ll,” “d,” “D,” “s,” “t,” “st,” “d”
- **Line 39:** “w,” “w,” “w,” “nd,” “nd”
- **Line 40:** “nd,” “h,” “wh,” “l,” “l,” “d,” “n,” “d”
- **Line 41:** “nd,” “wh,” “h,” “wh”
- **Line 42:** “D,” “ck,” “nd,” “K”

END-STOPPED LINE

In “The Duck and the Kangaroo,” well more than half of Lear's lines are [end-stopped](#). The use of short phrases and sentences throughout the poem helps to fuel its momentum. Lear's ideas are, as a result of this device, quick, crisply articulated, and digestible. The frequent use of end-stopped lines also makes the poem accessible for younger readers and listeners: there is no need to keep track of complex thoughts for several lines. Instead, each line presents a clear idea and the logic of the poem is very easy to follow. This helps its broader messages—about the importance of friendship and cooperation—shine through clearly.

The use of end-stopped line is most pronounced in the opening and closing stanzas, which are arguably end-stopped in full. These stanzas also present moments when the Duck is at its most clear about what it observes and what it wants and when the Kangaroo is committed to taking the duck on this globe-trotting journey. As such, the use of end-stop throughout can be read as reflecting the certainty and forcefulness of these particular lines.

Lines that end in punctuation do not always necessarily qualify as end-stopped if the meaning and substance of the line is incomplete without subsequent text. For example, lines 20-24 read as one cohesive thought, in which the Kangaroo explains what its "one objection" is. Although lines 20-23 end with punctuation, the subsequent text seems necessary for the reader to glean the complete meaning. Readers may differ, of course, on whether or not a line of poetry contains a complete thought: the classification of end-stopped lines is not an exact science.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Kangaroo,"
- **Line 2:** "hop!"
- **Line 4:** "stop!"
- **Line 5:** "pond,"
- **Line 6:** "beyond!"
- **Line 7:** "you!"
- **Line 8:** "Kangaroo."
- **Line 10:** "back!"
- **Line 11:** "Kangaroo."
- **Line 13:** "through!"
- **Line 15:** "over the sea;—"
- **Line 16:** "do!"
- **Line 17:** "Kangaroo."
- **Line 18:** "Duck,"
- **Line 19:** "reflection;"
- **Line 20:** "luck,"
- **Line 25:** "Kangaroo."
- **Line 27:** "completely,"
- **Line 29:** "neatly."
- **Line 30:** "cloak,"
- **Line 31:** "smoke,"
- **Line 33:** "Kangaroo!"
- **Line 35:** "r," "eady!"
- **Line 36:** "pale;"
- **Line 37:** "steady!"
- **Line 38:** "tail!"
- **Line 39:** "bound,"
- **Line 40:** "round;"
- **Line 42:** "Kangaroo?."

ENJAMBMENT

[Enjambment](#) is much rarer than [end-stop](#) in the poem, and appears most prominently in the third stanza as the Kangaroo gears up to tell the Duck that the Duck's feet are wet and cold and might cause "roo-matiz" if rested on the Kangaroo's back. The enjambment, especially because it stands in contrast with the otherwise-prevalent end-stopped lines throughout the poem, creates the sense of an unusually meandering thought. The Kangaroo is not quite sure of how to word its objection to the Duck, and as such the thought wends its way from line to

line until the Kangaroo finally arrives at what it is trying to say. Enjambment also sets up the miniature suspense of the final line. The reader has to wait to hear the end of the question posed in line 39 ("O who") so the final victorious line packs a greater punch.

As mentioned in our entry on end-stop, enjambment can still be active in the presence of punctuation at the end of lines. For example, in Stanza III, although lines 20-23 all end with punctuation, these can be classified as examples of enjambment rather than end-stopped lines because a single thought—the Kangaroo's "one objection"—travels from line to line and requires the six complete lines to carry its full meaning. Readers may argue that some of these lines could be classified as end-stopped by claiming that a thought is, in fact, completed by the punctuation at the end of a line and that the meaning of the line is not altered by the text that follows. Again, the classification of enjambment is not an exact science.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "too,"
- **Line 4:** "As"
- **Line 12:** "'Quack,'"
- **Line 13:** "The "
- **Line 14:** "Lee,"
- **Line 15:** "Over"
- **Line 21:** "objection,"
- **Line 22:** "Which," "bold,"
- **Line 23:** "Your," "cold,"
- **Line 24:** "And," "roo-"
- **Line 25:** "Matiz!"
- **Line 26:** "rocks,"
- **Line 27:** "I "
- **Line 28:** "socks"
- **Line 32:** "true"
- **Line 33:** "Love"
- **Line 41:** "who,"
- **Line 42:** "As"

PUN

The Kangaroo expresses its concern in lines 23-24 that the Duck's wet and cold feet could give the Kangaroo "roo-matiz," a condition that is clearly a [pun](#) on "rheumatism." Lear sets up the wordplay subtly. Line 23 ends with the first part of the word, "roo," and the rest of the word arrives, like a punchline, at the start of the subsequent line.

While the reader might recognize "roo" in line 23 as a diminutive of "Kangaroo" (like the characters in the *Winnie the Pooh* stories, Kanga and Roo), the continuation of the word surely comes as a surprise. It is unclear whether the Kangaroo intentionally makes a pun here or whether the "roo-matiz" is to be understood as the marsupial version of rheumatism. In any

case, it adds more light-hearted humor to the poem and keeps up its silly and fantastical tone.

Where Pun appears in the poem:

- **Lines 24-25:** "roo- / Matiz!"

REPETITION

The [repetition](#) of the opening line ("Said the Duck to the Kangaroo")—and variations of the line—grounds the poem in its [limerick](#)-like verse family. This repetition helps Lear to constrain the poem's rhyming reach—the ending sound of the line requires a "roo"-rhyming word five times.

That first line ("Said the Duck to the Kangaroo") repeats exactly four times before it receives any changes to the words, but there is one distinctive change between its usage in the first and second stanza: in stanza II, the line moves to the second line in the stanza, the dialogue coming *before* the speech tag ("said"). In this way, the reader can be caught by surprise—so eager is the Duck that it begins to talk before being introduced again by the narrator.

A surprise occurs again when the characters change places in stanza III: now it's the Kangaroo's turn to respond to the Duck. By stanza IV, the original line has been shortened ("Said the Duck" and "Said the Kangaroo"), perhaps reflecting the reader's familiarity with the phrase: at this point, the reader knows whom the Duck or Kangaroo is addressing.

As the Duck swears its love in line 32—perhaps losing some of its formality—it declares, in the place where the "Said the Duck to the Kangaroo" might be expected to again repeat, the Duck's "Love of a Kangaroo." This shift reflects the evolving conversation between the animals: they aren't talking at each other anymore, but sincerely listening and taking the other's comfort into consideration.

The original rhythms return in the final line, but now the phrasing has been fully transformed with "the Duck *and* the Kangaroo." This is another significant change that sees the animals uniting as best friends, replacing the more disjunct "Said the Duck *to* the Kangaroo." This change resonates precisely because of all the repetition that came before it in the poem.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Said the Duck to the Kangaroo,"
- **Line 8:** "Said the Duck to the Kangaroo."
- **Line 11:** "Said the Duck to the Kangaroo."
- **Line 17:** " Said the Duck to the Kangaroo."
- **Line 18:** "Said the Kangaroo to the Duck,"
- **Line 25:** "said the Kangaroo."
- **Line 26:** "Said the Duck,"
- **Line 35:** "Said the Kangaroo,"

DIACOPE

Lear's occasional use of [diacope](#) helps to shape the poem's rhythmic momentum and to develop the character of the Duck. The Duck's initial travel proposal to the Kangaroo (in stanza II) features a brief usage of diacope ("Over the land, and over the sea") that conveys a sense of grandiose gesture—the waves of repeated words echoing the undulations of the journey.

The Duck's next use of diacope arrives in the Duck's series of phrases beginning with the word "and" in stanza IV. Here, diacope supports the duck's attempts to demonstrate just how prepared it is for this trip to take place: with each "and," the duck expands the list of purchases and plans that have been made. This can also be read as a moment of [anaphora](#), as the repetition of "And" comes at the beginning of the lines. The result is essentially the same, however: an emphasis on the sheer extent and thoughtfulness of the Duck's preparations.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 15:** "Over , "over"
- **Line 28:** "And"
- **Line 30:** "And"
- **Line 31:** "And"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The poem ends with the sole use of a direct address to the reader in the form of a [rhetorical question](#). The device here has the primary effect of transforming the speaker's voice and relationship to the reader: instead of a dispassionate, omniscient relater of facts, oblivious to the reader's presence, the narrator now becomes a subjective figure in the poem—someone invested both in the happiness of the Duck and the Kangaroo and the reader's comprehension of that happiness.

By ending with a rhetorical question, rather than simply saying, for example, "They were the happiest beings in the world," the speaker implicitly asks readers to consider their *own* happiness—or the happiness of anyone the readers know—and to size it up against the joy found in liberation that the Duck and Kangaroo experience. The use of rhetorical question thus supports the poem's thematic focus on freedom and friendship, experiences that bring the title characters superlative happiness. In providing the question's silent answer, the speaker tacitly asks the reader to come to the conclusion that only by achieving freedom *through* companionship can true joy be felt.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 41-42:** "And who so happy,—O who, / As the Duck and the Kangaroo?"



VOCABULARY

The Dee and the Jelly Bo Lee (Line 14) - "The Dee" and "the Jelly Bo Lee" are fictional locations invented by Lear in this poem.

Roo-matiz (Lines 24-25) - "Roo-matiz" is a made-up abbreviation for the disease "rheumatism," an inflammation which causes tenderness and swelling in joints and muscles.

Sate (Line 26) - "Sate" is an archaic, or old-fashioned, version of "sat."

Worsted (Line 28) - "Worsted" is a type of wool yarn. Worsted yarn is of a high-quality and, if worn by the Duck, would help to keep the Kangaroo's back warm.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Duck and the Kangaroo," despite its tight metrical patterns and rhyme scheme, does not follow any traditional poetic form. That said, it does pay tribute to the [anapestic](#) (da-da-DUM: "Said the Duck / to the Kang") metrical lilt of Lear's most frequent verse form, the [limerick](#).

Lear divides the poem into five eight-line stanzas (a.k.a. octaves), each denoted with a Roman numeral above it. The consistent, reliable structure helps to amplify the poem's nonsensical elements: by maintaining a predictable meter and rhyme scheme, the unpredictable turns within the poem (namely its characters and content) register as greater surprises.

For example, the Kangaroo's punning concern about contracting "the roo-matiz" in lines 23-24 is unexpected (both because the Kangaroo is anxious about rheumatism and because it is an invented word). As such, the way in which Lear nestles the word comfortably across the [enjambment](#) between lines 23-24 contrasts sharply with the discombobulation of the word and idea itself. (Lear also maintains a sense of stability and consistent structure by featuring lines that recur throughout with slight variation, like the opening, "Said the Duck to the Kangaroo," which resurfaces in various forms in lines 8, 10, 16, 17, 24, 25, and 33).

Formally, "The Duck and the Kangaroo" bears closest resemblance to Lear's "[The Quangle Wangle's Hat](#)," which consists of a series of nine-line stanzas with similar meter and nearly identical rhyme scheme.

METER

The most central rhythm of "The Duck and the Kangaroo" is the [anapestic trimeter](#), as can be seen perfectly in line 25:

Said the Duck, | 'As I sate | on the rocks,

The anapest (da-da-DUM) may sound familiar to readers of Dr. Seuss, whose texts frequently feature it throughout. This meter isn't all that consistent, though, and very often one or more of the anapests in a line will be replaced by an [iamb](#), as can be seen in line 5. Here, the first and fourth [foot](#) are iambs, while the second and third are anapests:

My life | is a bore | in this nas- | ty pond,

As this specific example also shows, the poem isn't consistently in trimeter either. While these trimeters guide the first four lines of each stanza, the fifth and sixth lines of each stanza tend to move into [tetrameter](#). Take, for example, the second stanza's anapestic tetrameter of line 13—

And we'd go | to the Dee, | and the Jel- | ly Bo Lee

—or the final stanza's sixth line (line 38), which can be scanned as consisting of an anapest followed by three iambs (that said, whether or not we should stress "whole" or "world" is up for debate):

And they hopped | the whole | world three | times
round

Both the anapest and the iamb help to create the lightly, bouncing sensation to match the actions of the Kangaroo. Since each metrical accent follows a less pronounced take-off (the first two syllables of the anapest or the first syllable of the iamb), that airier space allows the kangaroo to rise off the ground before settling on the moments of metrical emphasis.

Occasional surprising twists to the meter seem to illustrate the text with a wink. In the opening stanza, line 6 lengthens the syllable count from all the lines that have come previously. Note the 11 syllables:

And I long | to go out | in the world | beyond!

As the Duck's vision of the world outside comes to the fore, the length of the line expands, too, with the anapestic meter seeming to take off in a soaring iamb on the word "beyond," as if the anapests give the Duck a running start to escape on the final foot. The Duck is brought back to earth with the bumper, short landing of the reality of the next line:

I wish | I could hop | like you!

When the Kangaroo teaches the Duck how to sit steadily on the Kangaroo's tail, the meter momentarily wobbles as the Duck balances itself:

But to bal- | ance me well | dear Duck, | sit steady!

The sudden shift from anapest to iamb followed by the iamb with a feminine ending seems to conjure up the Duck finding its balance as the Kangaroo interjects its guidance.

RHYME SCHEME

Each stanza of "The Duck and the Kangaroo" has a relatively consistent rhyme scheme, with the first four lines alternating in and ABAB pattern, followed by a rhyming [couplet](#), which is itself followed by another couplet, for a rhyme scheme that looks like:

ABABCCDD

In every stanza, the final line also ends with "kangaroo"—meaning that the second-to-last line of each stanza ends with a *rhyme* for "kangaroo" (in other words, the "DD" rhyme is the same /oo/ sound in every stanza).

The clear, consistent rhyme scheme helps to create a sense of familiarity and predictability that makes the poem accessible to children but also sets up a contrast between the simplicity of the form and the sophistication of the characters.

There are some variations, however. In the first stanza, lines 1 and 3—the pair of "A" lines in the scheme written out above (Kangaroo/too)—reappear in the final couplet (you/Kangaroo). In the second stanza, this same rhyme sound (/oo/) is repeated in the second and fourth lines (that is, where the "B" rhymes had appeared in the prior stanza). In other words, if we rewrote stanza I to reflect these repeated sounds, it would look like this:

ABABCCAA

By contrast, stanza II would be:

ABABCCBB

This movement of various versions of the opening phrase ("Said the Duck to the Kangaroo") suggests a playful shifting meant to surprise a reader who expects the title phrase to show up in the same place in each stanza.

Lear also uses exclusively [perfect rhymes](#) except for the third stanza, in which he rhymes "roo," the first syllable of "rheumatiz" with "kangaroo": this is an example of an identical rhyme, a rhyme of two words or syllables that are sonically identical but may have different meanings (roo/roo). The use of this rhyme here emphasizes the wordplay between the matching syllables of "rheumatism" and "kangaroo" over the consistent rhyme scheme.

[Internal rhyme](#) helps to convey the rhythm of hopping when the duck imagines that "we'd go to the Dee, and the Jelly Bo Lee." Internal rhyme also stresses the neat fit of the duck's new socks when its "web-feet" snuggle next to the rhyming first syllable "neatly."

knowledge, perhaps omniscient, of the conversation and subsequent adventure of the Duck and the Kangaroo. The role of the speaker, for the first four stanzas, is simply to share the dialogue between the Duck and the Kangaroo and identify which animal speaks which words: in that sense, the first four stanzas function almost as an un-annotated play script.

In the final stanza only, the speaker describes the journey of the Duck and the Kangaroo that follows their conversation. The speaker ends the poem by stepping out of the purely narratorial role, asking the reader rhetorically who is as happy as the Duck and the Kangaroo.

The two animals, for their part, appear to be decidedly polite and well-spoken creatures. Lear uses [anthropomorphism](#) to make the fanciful tale allegorical and let these animal speakers relate a lesson to human readers.



SETTING

The first four stanzas of "The Duck and the Kangaroo" take place within the "nasty pond" where the Duck lives, an environment that the Duck finds unpleasant and confining. The Duck imagines other settings it might encounter while on a journey on the Kangaroo's back—including the fictional lands of the Dee and the Jelly Bo Lee. In the final stanza, the setting expands to traverse the entire globe as the Duck and the Kangaroo hope around the whole world three times. Through compromise and friendship, the Duck gets its wish to explore the world and the Kangaroo gets a companion. The expanding setting of the poem, then, reflects the thematic emphasis on friendship, wanderlust, and freedom, presenting the former as a means to the latter.

Note also that the Dee and the Jelly Bo Lee are not real places. Lear has made them up, meaning they're unfamiliar to the reader. Such unfamiliarity helps convey the excitement and uncharted potential that the Duck feels to the reader.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Duck and the Kangaroo" appeared originally in a compilation of Edward Lear's poems called *Nonsense Songs* in 1870. The poem was published alongside "[The Owl and the Pussy-Cat](#)," a similar example of nonsense [anthropomorphic](#) poetry. Although Lear hoped to be best known for his visual art, he distinguished himself most dramatically for his multitude of [limericks](#). While the limerick was not created by Lear himself, he popularized and expanded the form, most famously in *A Book of Nonsense*, first published in 1846.

Both Lear's limericks and nonsense poetry find inspiration in English nursery rhymes which originated in the 17th century.



SPEAKER

The speaker appears to be an unidentified narrator with

Lear's closest contemporary and heir apparent in nonsense poetry was Lewis Carroll: "[Jabberwocky](#)" and "The Walrus and the Carpenter" were published within the text of *Through the Looking-Glass, or What Alice Found There* in 1871, a year after *Nonsense Songs*. In the 20th century, the clear impact of Lear's writing could be found in the works of Dr. Seuss and Ogden Nash.

The Duck's world-hopping ambition might also reflect the wanderlust of literary characters emerging in prose at the same time of Lear's *Nonsense Songs*. In the same year of the collection's publication, Jules Verne release two science fiction novels, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Around the Moon*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The vision of world travel as the physical manifestation of the Duck's desire for freedom may have been distinctly personal for Lear: he, too, traveled the world, spending time in Jerusalem, Paris, Corsica, and San Remo in the years leading up to the poem's publication. Even so, that personal longing could never have been satisfied without the public industrial sea change occurring in Lear's lifetime.

The boom in rail travel—both within England, internationally, and even transcontinentally, allowing travel from Europe to Asia—made it possible for Lear to lead a far-flung nomadic lifestyle. The Kangaroo's astounding physical ability to hop "the whole world three times round" appears to mirror the recent, and ever-expanding, possibilities for travelers to "go out in the world beyond" like never before. Even if the Kangaroo's hopping prowess seems exaggerated for the animal kingdom, at the time of the poem's composition, such a feat was now becoming close to achievable by humans, and Lear himself would take full advantage of the ability to ride on the back of this new technology.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "[The Duck and the Kangaroo](#)" Read Aloud — Listen to a

reading of the entire poem. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wblDjwECPu4>)

- [Nonsense Songs – Project Gutenberg](#) — In this digital version of the original 1870 book, read "The Duck and the Kangaroo" and the poems and stories with which it first appeared. See Lear's illustrations that appeared with the poem in its first printing. (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13647/13647-h/13647-h.htm>)
- "[The Duck and the Kangaroo](#)" Song — Listen to the poem set to music (though note that this song includes only stanzas I, II, and V). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc5F_NZIHbM)
- [Nonsense Verse Activities](#) — This article contains an outline of various lesson plans and activities that can be used to explore nonsense verse (by authors like Lear and Lewis Carroll) further. (<https://www.teachwire.net/news/nonsense-verse-a-gloriously-silly-ks3-poetry-session-could-have-serious-ben>)
- [Edward Lear Biography from the Poetry Foundation](#) — Learn about the development of Lear's poetry over the decades, the connections between his visual art and his poetry, and the impact of his wandering lifestyle on his work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edward-lear>)



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