

# Literature/Writing Connection: *Jabberwocky*

## TRAIT FOCUS: WORD CHOICE

### Lesson Objective

Students revise a piece of writing for fresh and interesting word choices.

### Energizing a Student's Word Choices

The more comfortable and familiar students become with their writing, the more they can become complacent with their work. It's often easier to rehash old material and rely on the tried-and-true to get through just another in a long line of writing assignments. If you find this to be the case, it's important to re-energize your writers so they can continue to grow in their crafts.

A lesson in creative and evocative word use will often jump start the imaginations of young writers. Poetry, especially the nonsense verses of Lewis Carroll, seem to break all the rules when it comes to conventional word use. Poetic language breaks from the straightforward text of everyday conversation and run-of-the-mill prose students regularly encounter. A bit of poetry injected into a writing curriculum reinforces the fact that the English language goes far beyond *he, she, run, go, pretty, and smile*.

The poem "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll is an excellent mentor text with some of the most creative word usage in the literary canon. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your curriculum as a way of energizing your writers as they revise for word choice.

### Story Overview

Taken from the pages of *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*, the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the poem tells the traditional story of a brave man slaying the evil monster. It is, however, a poem of nonsense verse in which Carroll invented many new words—some of which are still in common use today.

### Transform a Dragon into a Jabberwocky

1. Use the following lesson as you teach the trait of word choice as a strategy for revision. Students will have completed a first draft of their papers. Next comes the time when they revise their writing for strong word choices.
2. Define for your students what word choice is. It is choosing the very best words to express your ideas. For instance, specific nouns (*The Queen Mary*) make better details than general nouns (boat). Always try for an vivid verb (scramble) rather than a common one (go). Use colorful adjectives (dazzling) rather than plain ones (pretty).
3. Let your students know that the final effect, when all words work together, can be quite memorable for the reader. The writing comes alive in their imaginations and sticks with them even after they have finished reading.
4. Read the poem to your class. As part of your discussion, ask them what they think the made-up words mean. Carroll often combined two words to make a new one (portmanteau). For example, *chuckle* and *snort* become *chortle*. *Fuming* and *furious* become *frumious*. *Miserable* and *flimsey* become *mimsy*.
5. Remind students that this lesson is not suggesting they make up words, but rather it is to illustrate the point that taking time to select just the right word for the job can greatly enhance a piece of writing. Without Carroll's extreme word choices, this would have been just another poem about a knight fighting a dragon.
6. With the poem fresh in their minds, have your students return to their papers. As they revise for word choice, tell them to think about the words they've used. Are they as powerful as they could be? Do they transform a simple dragon into a Jabberwocky?