

The Park in the Dark

Martin Waddell

This is a rhyming picture book. It has a repetitive refrain and a poetic quality. It's about three toys who go out at night in the dark – to the park! An extract is provided here but it is worth sharing the full picture book if you can. The narrative tells an exciting story tinged with fear, so it lends itself to some exploration of mood and feelings in relation to time of day and the sounds we hear. Children will also enjoy acting out the scenarios.

Fun to have
Monkey, elephant and
puppy toys and masks.

1 Warm up

Ask the children to:

- Shake each hand, then each leg. Then shake all over.
- Imagine they are running very fast and puffing and blowing – blow one, two, three, four, five times. Then pretend to blow slowly, whilst counting to five.
- Chew a pretend toffee and then make a big smile.
- Whisper 'whoopee'; say it louder; then say it even more loudly.

2 Tune in

- Tell the children that the poem is from a picture book story called *The Park in the Dark*. Point out that 'PARK – DARK', 'DARK – PARK' rhymes!
- If you can, read the rhyme through using the text with the pictures. (Note that the version in this resource is an edited version.)
- You may want to choose three toys or puppets to show the children as you read (a monkey, an elephant and a puppy). Children either need to see the toys or your face as you read.
- Check the children's understanding of the poem. Reiterate that there are three friends who go to the park in the dark. Ask the children: Have any of you been out in the dark with friends or parents? What do you think the 'THING' is? What makes a sound like that? If the children are not sure, suggest you listen to recording 1 to see if that offers further clues.
- Listen to recording 1 and encourage the children to listen out for the THING. Ask the children: Does it scare the 'three'? Why? Would it scare you if you heard a loud sound in the dark?
- Listen again and get the children to join in with the repetitive refrain: '... me and Loopy and Little Gee, all three ... all three ... we three ... just three ... the Big Three ... scared three ... we three ... all three.' The children will automatically want to join in with the 'WHOOPEE!' and 'YAAAAA AAIII OOOOOEEEEEEEE!' of the train.

Recording 1

Read in rhyme with sound effects.



3 Model and explore

- Reread the poem or listen to recording 2. Ask the children to really listen to the repetitive refrain and how it is said differently in each stanza in order to tell us more about the toys and their adventure.
- Ask the children to join in with the repetitive refrain, and on 'me' ask them to point to themselves.
- Focus on using the voice and volume to reflect the toys' emotions during their adventure. Ask the children if they can say stanza 2 softly and quite quietly as they creep out. Then ask them if they can shiver and say 'shivery' in stanza 3 in a shivery voice.

Recording 2

Read more slowly and with some pauses to allow for accompanying actions to be performed.



- The refrain needs to reflect the shivery coldness of the night. Tell the children that it is exciting but a bit scary.
- Get the children to practise saying 'WHOOPEE!' in a big happy voice in stanza 4 and to use the same voice in stanza 5 when the toys are playing. They need to say 'the Big Three' in a strong confident way to show the friends have no worries now.
 - For stanza 6, ask the children to use a worried voice. Encourage them to say the words dramatically and choose a few children to experiment with making the train noise (or use instruments).
 - For stanzas 7 and 8, ask the children to use a scared, breathless voice as they hurry away. Practise saying the stanza quite quickly to give a sense of urgency. Ask them to say 'scared three' in a scared voice.
 - For the final stanza, ask the children to pause a second. Say the words more slowly and with relief – ask them if they can make 'all three' sound like they are relieved to be home, safe and sound.
 - Repeat several times until the children are familiar and comfortable with saying the words in these ways.
 - **Support:** Some children will benefit from working in a smaller group to help with learning the poem.

4 Rehearse*tips*

You might choose three children to front the performance. These front performers could hold a toy or wear masks. Give several children the opportunity to be the main characters at different times.

- Discuss how to break the rhyme up into its parts with actions. Ask the children to say and act out each action. Focus on simple but big movements and give children time to co-ordinate.
 - Stanza 1: arm movement to indicate sun down and moon rising; something to make a creaking sound.
 - Stanza 2: pretend to step softly and look small.
 - Stanza 3: pretend to shiver and then be still.
 - Stanza 4: painting of lake and a bridge, or use a gym mat and low bench for the toys to cross.
 - Stanza 5: children could act out each movement – swing, slide, dance, jump, chase. If using toys, ensure that the children hold them high whilst performing the actions.
 - Stanza 6: make the train noise – decide what instruments you need to make the sound. Everyone should look scared.
 - Stanzas 7 and 8: children pretend to run – looking scared.
 - Stanza 9: pretend to climb upstairs and then sit down; lie down and close eyes.
- If you choose to perform to an audience outside the classroom, the children will need to practise this poem over a few days to refine it.

5 Perform*tips*

You may wish to begin with a straight recital of the rhyme to give the children time to focus on the words before they focus on the actions. This will also give the audience time to understand the context.

- When performing the poem, you may wish to use recording 2 to help with timing.
- Ensure the children have sufficient room to safely perform their actions.
- If the performance is low-key and in class just practise performing for each other and allow several children the chance to take on the role of the toys.
- If the performance is for an audience you will need to practise several times in the exact place where the children will be performing, so they are confident about the space and their place within it.

The Park in the Dark

by Martin Waddell

When the sun goes down and the moon comes up
and the old swing creaks in the dark,
that's when we go to the park,
me and Loopy and Little Gee, all three.

Softly down the staircase, through the haunted hall,
trying to look small,
me and Loopy and Little Gee, we three.

It's shivery out in the dark on our way to the park,
down dustbin alley, past the ruined mill, so still,
*just me and Loopy and Little Gee, just three.**

In the park in the dark by the lake and the bridge,
that's when we see where we want to be,
me and Loopy and Little Gee. WHOOPEE!

And we swing and we slide and we dance and we jump and we chase
all over the place,
me and Loopy and Little Gee, the Big Three!

And then the **THING** comes!
YAAAAA AAIII
OOOOOEEEEEEE!

RUN RUN RUN shouts Little Gee to Loopy and me
and we flee,
me and Loopy and Little Gee, scared three.

Back where we've come through the park in the dark
and the **THING** is roaring and following, see?
After me and Loopy and Little Gee, we three.

Up to the house, to the stair, to the bed
where we ought to be,
me and Loopy and Little Gee,
safe as can be, all three.



*missing verses from the picture book