

## SCIENCE VERSE

### Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 3-5

Submitted by Heather Miller, School Librarian (East Baton Rouge Parish Main Library) and Graduate Student at School of Library and Information Science, LSU (Professor: Dr. Margie Thomas); and Chastity Arwood, Student at University of Louisiana at Lafayette (Instructor: Dorothy Grimsley)

**Science Verse** by Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Lane Smith. Viking, 2004. 40 p.

#### Summary

This collection of poems about science begins with a boy sitting in science class listening to his teacher talk about the "poetry of science." The next day the boy starts hearing everything as a science poem. Ten parodies of well-known poems follow. Each poem is about a scientific topic: dinosaurs, atoms, planets and much more. The humor of the poetry is enhanced by Lane Smith's exuberant illustrations. The combination of Scieszka's clever verse and Smith's fantastic images creates a book that is terrifically fun for kids. The last page lists the famous poems that provided the basis for the parodies. This is an exciting book that can serve as an excellent springboard for teaching both science and language arts.

\* Editor's note: Both Study Guide authors mentioned an accompanying CD of the poetry being read aloud. However, the copy I had did not have a CD. I hope your copy has one! Gale

#### Awards

Parent's Choice Award Gold 2004 Non-Fiction  
ALA Notable Children's Book Award 2005

#### Author's Biography

Jon Scieszka was born on September 8, 1954 in Flint, Michigan. He graduated from Culver Military Academy and studied to be a doctor. He decided to change career paths and attended Columbia University. He earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1980. For a time he was an elementary school teacher. He left the teaching job to begin writing children's books.

Scieszka sizes up his motivation for writing children's books in an interview with *Children's Literature* stating, "Originally I thought more of writing for adults, or twisted college students. I moved to New York and got my master's in fiction writing from Columbia, I think intending to write the great American novel and wear tweed jackets. Then as I became a teacher and hung out with second-graders, I realized what a great format the picture book is, because kids are so sharp and visually literate...the picture book is the perfect short story."

Graham, Jen. "Jon Scieszka." 11 Nov. 2005.

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/scieszka.htm>.

#### Illustrator's Biography

Lane Smith was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on August 25, 1959. Traveling every summer from Oklahoma to California as a child helped to inspire his vivid imagination. Smith holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in illustration. He moved to New York to start his career as an illustrator. His technique is all about textures, as Smith reveals, "I paint on board, building up several thin glazes of the oil, sealing them between coats with an acrylic

spray varnish. This not only dries the oil instantly, but also causes a chemical reaction between the oil and the acrylic.” Smith’s work has appeared on the covers of *The New York Times Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He received a Caldecott Honor Award for his illustration of *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*.

Penguin Group (USA). 2000. 11 Nov. 2005.

[http://www.penguinputnam.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0\\_1000029880,00.html](http://www.penguinputnam.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0_1000029880,00.html).

### **Other Titles written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith**

*Math Curse*

*Seen Art?*

*Squids will be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*

*The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*

### **Related Titles: Poetry about Science and Animals**

*Almost Late for School and More School Poems* by Carol Diggery Shields.

*Animal Sense* by Diane Ackerman.

*Big, Bad and Scary: Poems That Bite Back* edited and illustrated by Wade Zahares.

*Danitra Brown, Class Clown* by Nikki Grimes.

*Dinosaurs and Dino-Roars* by Lee Bennett Hopkins.

*Earthshake: Poems From the Ground Up* by Lisa Westberg Peters.

*The Frogs Wore Red Suspenders* by Jack Prelutsky.

*Joyful Noises! Poems for Two Voices* by Paul Fleischman.

*Scien-trickery: Riddles in Science* by J. Patrick Lewis. (Includes poems about science.)

### **Poetry Resource Books**

*How to Write, Recite, and Delight in All Kinds of Poetry* by Joy Hulme and Donna Guthrie.

*Wham! A Poetry Jam: Discovering Poetry Performance* by Sara Holbrook.

### **Classroom Connections**

#### **Science**

- What is so wonderful about this book is its potential to serve a dual purpose in both science and language arts classes. In science, the poems could be read aloud (or listened to on the recorded reading) as “ice-breakers” for applicable science lessons.
- The topics of the poems are: evolution, water cycle, anatomy, astronomy, black holes, dinosaurs, food chain, food additives, light, worms, parasites, fire, bedbugs, scientific method, electricity, virus, atoms, states of matter, senses, amoeba, metamorphosis, expanding universe and the solar system. See the web site: <http://www.thinkquest.org/library/> for hundreds of excellent lesson plans.

#### **Science and Language Arts Combined**

- Select a science topic to teach. After the science lesson have the students write their own “science verse” of the lesson, using rhymes or prose to describe the lesson they have just learned; thus, combining language arts skills with a science application.

## Language Arts: Poetry

- Have students read the original poems and discuss the similarities and differences between the originals and the parodies. Students may also read more poems by these authors and research their work and lives.
- The famous poems used are:
  - “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” by Julia Ward Howe
  - “Trees” by Joyce Kilmer
  - “The Star” by Ann and Jane Taylor
  - “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe
  - “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll
  - “Mary’s Lamb” by Sarah Josepha Hale
  - “Casey at the Bat” by Ernest Lawrence Thayer
  - “The Song of Hiawatha” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
  - “Paul Revere’s Ride” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
  - “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost
- There are a variety of activities that can be done in language arts with this book. While some of the poems do rhyme, most do not follow the traditional end couplet rhyme scheme that most children associate with poetry. Examining this, in conjunction with the original poems that the parodies were modeled after will alter student’s standardized notion that all poems must rhyme.
- As a creative writing exercise children could also imitate other classic poems in the same manner, following the established meter and rhyme and coming up with their own amusing content.
- The included audio C.D. is also an immensely helpful tool for teaching, as you can really hear the meter and rhymes as the author, illustrator, and children narrate with accompanying music and amusing sound effects.

## Web Links

### Author and Illustrator

#### **Jon Scieszka: Favorite Answers To Frequent Questions**

<http://friend.ly.net/users/jorban/biographies/scieszkajon/index.html>

Brief biography with links to other popular titles from the author.

#### **Parents Choice Foundation**

[http://www.parentschoice.org/product.cfm?product\\_id=16948&award=xx&from=Science](http://www.parentschoice.org/product.cfm?product_id=16948&award=xx&from=Science).

Review on award winning *Science Verse*. Many more Parent’s Choice Award winning science books can be viewed by typing “science” in the search bar.

#### **Internet School Library Media Center: Jon Scieszka**

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/scieszka.htm>.

Graham, Jen. “Jon Scieszka.” 11 Nov. 2005. A note on this site March, 2006 said that it would be closing soon.

#### **Penguin Group (USA): Lane Smith**

[http://www.penguinputnam.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0\\_1000029880,00.html](http://www.penguinputnam.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0_1000029880,00.html).

Penguin Group (USA). 2000. 11 Nov. 2005.

Biography of Lane Smith.

## **Science**

### **Thematic Pathfinders for All Ages**

<http://42explore.com/>

This excellent search engines has links to numerous sites that are appropriate for elementary school students. It frequently includes classroom project ideas and webquests as well.

<http://www.42explore.com/astronomy.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/dinos.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/electric.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/fire.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/insects.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/respsyst.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/water.htm>

<http://www.42explore.com/worms.htm>

### **Oracle Education Foundation ThinkQuest**

<http://www.thinkquest.org/library/>

This site has links to 100s of school “thinkquests” related to science (and many other subjects). Use the Search tool and type in the topic. Scroll to find interesting lesson plans.

## **Poetry**

### **Thematic Pathfinders: Poetry**

<http://www.42explore.com/poetry.htm>

Links and projects related to poetry and poetry-writing.