



# Sonsense Nongs

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**Michael Rosen** reports on the **BfK / A & C Black Nonsense Song Competition**.

## The BfK/A & C Black Nonsense Song Competition

**Michael Rosen** reports

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The right to be silly is not one of the human rights in the UN Charter but perhaps it should be. I've always seen it as a sign of health. One of the ways many of us are silly is to sing silly songs. I can't think of how many times when I was young I must have pleaded with my dad to sing 'Suzannah's a funniful man'. Pause for a moment - have you or have you not ever sung, whistled or hummed any of the following: 'John Brown's baby's got a pimple on his chest', 'Does your chewing gum lose its flavour on the bedpost overnight?', 'Lost a peanut ...'? No doubt anyone reading this could quickly add a few more, and yet surprisingly there isn't an easily available book of silly songs. In spite of this, for some years now, my act in schools has been peppered with various chants and nutty jingles that I've picked up from children.

With this sort of thing in mind, some months ago I approached A & C Black with the idea of a silly song book. They needed no coaxing and added on the proposal of a schools' competition linked with **Books for Keeps** - write your own silly song, come up with a title for the song book and send us some artwork too.

So now try and imagine a committee of grown-ups sitting round a table trying to measure silliness. The judges were Sheena Roberts, Music Editor at A & C Black; George Hunt, who teaches at a South East London primary school; and myself. We wheeled in a piano for Sheena to bash out the tunes on, set up a tape recorder to play the tapes of those who were kind enough to record their numbers and got down to some seriously silly listening. We very quickly realised just how hard it is to write a silly song. What is the vital ingredient? Something illogical? Some kind of inversion of normality - with either the world or language turned upside down? The kinds of titles we were offered will give you an idea of what people went for: 'Are you Pink and Green?', 'The King of Cannelonia', 'Jig a dig a dance'. Titles for the book were such things as: 'Flapdoodle Whatsit' and 'Flatter Splatter Soggy Batter'.

Among the runners-up for songs were: 'Nell and Ned' - a Noah's Ark farce involving elephants: 'Left side went low/Right side went high/Shot the other animals/Into the sky'; 'Snuggle Uggie Buns' - 'they taste funny/Snuggle uggie buns/in my tummy'; and again on the yummy theme - 'Yummy Scrummy' - 'I found a dead rat in the cellar the other day' . . . and yes we eat it!

The winner though was a piece called 'The King of Guncrania's Wedding Cake'. One thing the title did to me, before we got down to considering the song, was remind me of 'The King of Caractacus'. Surely that ought to go in the book? Come back Rolf Harris, all is forgiven. The King of Gunerania's cake, meanwhile, is a disgusting affair filled with spiders, rusty nails and the like. What we liked about this (the song, not the cake) was that it worked as a story, it was suitably revolting and absurd. But it had something extra that swayed us: the sound of the words works well, there's a

good strong rhyme at the end of the lines, plus a nearly perfect internal rhyme scheme. This ties up a silly song, making it have a very neat, complete feel about it: 'he mixed it, he whisked it, he threw it on the floor/he crushed it, he mused it, and it slithered out the door.' Very infectious.

The winning title for the book, by the way, was 'Sonsense Nongs'.

So the runners-up were:

Josie Cohen, Moss Hall Junior School, Finchley, London, for 'Yummy Scrummy' and book title 'Sonsense Nongs';

Christopher Clegg, Gareth Entwisle and Robert Pretty from Ponteland County Middle School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for 'Snuggle Uggie Buns';

and Mrs Morag C Blance and Primary 4S from Papdale Primary School, Orkney, for 'Nell and Ned'.

The winner was Robert Soulshy and I S from Brookvale Junior School, Runcorn, for 'The King of Gunerania's Wedding Cake'.

Thank you all for your silliness and may it long continue.

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