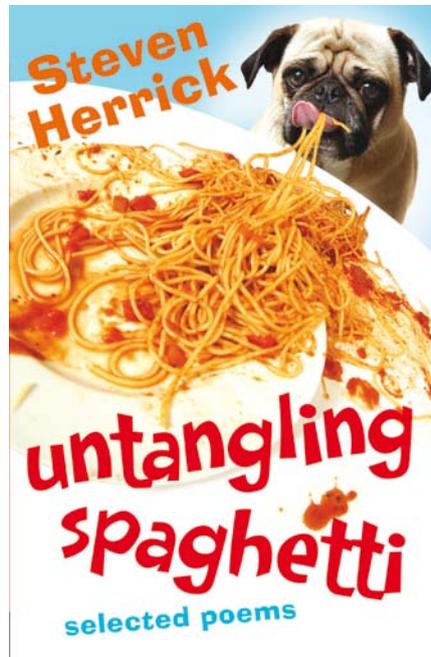


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

# UNTANGLING SPAGHETTI

## SELECTED POEMS

Steven Herrick



## Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising secondary teacher

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**SYNOPSIS**

*Untangling Spaghetti* is a collection of poetry compiled from previous books by Steven Herrick. Each chapter deals with a different form of poetry and is themed around subjects. These include: family, friends, sport and food. Herrick draws on personal stories from his family life — his sons, Jack and Joe, and various aspects of their young lives — to create this personal, touching and heartfelt collection of poetry.

**WRITING STYLE**

The poems are generally humorous and playful. They reveal a loving and positive philosophy of life from a poet who continues to nurture his inner child. Students will learn about the art and craft of writing poetry through themes that relate to their everyday lives.

**THEMES****Family life (House rules)**

In addition to the members of Herrick's immediate family, there are other recurring characters who appear in the poems. These include the boys' grandmother, their teachers and their peers.

**Being a poet (There once was a limerick called Steven)**

In Chapter Two Herrick uses his skill to present a collection of poems that demonstrates the poet's craft. Limericks, acrostic poems, love poems and metaphor poems are all explored.

**Playing games (The big match)**

Herrick explores the significance of sport to school and family life. Chapter Three includes poems about backyard races and cricket matches, going to the soccer with Dad, the highs and lows of winning and losing, and falling in love with the school captain.

**School life (Ms Understanding)**

School plays a big part in every child's life. In Chapter Four Herrick offers readers a humorous insight into the everyday routines and characters of school life from a child's perspective.

**Food (Spaghetti Jack)**

Chapter Five focuses on one of life's essentials – food – and our associations with it.

**The world beyond (Seeing the world)**

In this chapter Herrick explores topics beyond a child's experiences in the family

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home and at school. The topics include real-life events, such as the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, patriotism, news reporting and relationships.

**STUDY NOTES****House rules**

- ‘Digital clock’ (page 3) focuses on a child learning to tell the time. What have you learnt about the child from this poem?  
How is the inevitable passing of time represented in the poem?  
How would you describe the poem? Find an aspect of the poem that represents your view.
- ‘Wake up’ (page 33) shows the relationship between the two brothers. How would you describe that relationship?  
Look at the last four lines. Do you believe that Joe will keep his promise? Why do you think he will or won’t?  
Can you find a connection between the two poems ‘Digital clock’ and ‘Wake up’? Give reasons for your answer.
- ‘Grandma’ (page 6) describes a very important member of Jack’s and Joe’s family. How do we know her grandchildren are important to her?
- ‘My grandma talks to birds’ (page 29) is a humorous poem. What makes it humorous?  
Re-read the two poems and find one thing Jack’s and Joe’s grandmother does that is typical of grandparents. Find one thing that isn’t typical.
- ‘The ten commandments [or ten things your parents will never say]’ (page 13) makes reference to a story from the Bible. What are the Ten Commandments?  
Why do you think Herrick has named this poem after that story?  
What is unusual about the way he presents his ten commandments?
- Read ‘The ten commandments (part two) [or ten things your teacher will never say]’ (page 81). What connection is Herrick making between homes and schools?
- ‘Talk’ (page 18) looks at the father through the eyes of Jack and Joe. From reading the poem, how would you describe one of your family members?  
Look at the first two lines and the last two lines. What do you think this says about Jack’s and Joe’s grandfather and his relationship with his son?  
What do you think is meant by, ‘I think that’s sad’? Do you agree? Why?

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**There once was a limerick called Steven**

- ‘Advertisements for poetry’ (page 37) uses the language of advertising to sell a product. Find three phrases you have seen used in advertising. What was the product being advertised and what was the intended effect of the phrase in that advertisement? What is Herrick’s product? Why do you think he needs to ‘sell’ it? As a potential customer, does his sales pitch succeed with you? Explain your response.
- Read ‘A limerick’ and ‘Another limerick’ (page 42). What is a limerick? Are ‘A limerick’ and ‘Another limerick’ examples of limericks? Why or why not? What do you think is Herrick’s intention in these poems? ‘Another limerick’ is an example of a shape poem. How does the shape of the poem represent Herrick’s content in the poem?
- Read ‘A metaphor poem’ (page 43). Give an example of a metaphor. What does Sam’s question indicate? How has Sarah’s answer ‘saved the day’?
- ‘Autumn’ (page 47) is almost a haiku. Give an example of a haiku. Explain the comparison in ‘Autumn’. Write the last line for Herrick.

**The big match**

- ‘Backyard soccer’ (page 66) is an account of a family soccer match. What words in the poem could you use to write a poem about netball? Which words wouldn’t you use? If you had been playing, how would you describe this game to a friend?

**Ms Understanding**

- The title of this chapter uses a pun, which is a play on words, usually for comic effect. Can you explain the pun?
- Sam is a character we meet in ‘A metaphor poem’ (page 43). Who is Sam’s favourite teacher? Why? The title of the poem is ironic. Irony is when you imply something very different from what you are actually saying. Explain how the poem is ironic. What is your impression of Sam?
- In ‘School rules’ (page 88), how has Herrick used structure and font to communicate the meaning of the poem?

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Can you explain the pattern in the pairs of lines that Herrick uses?  
Can you think why the first line of every pair of lines has been written in capitals?

- 'Marking the roll' (page 94) is another example of a poem that makes use of the layout of the lines on the page. The layout of this poem allows students to act out 'Marking the roll' in class and explore the nature of reading poetry aloud.
- Read 'Ms Understanding' (page 91). Describe Billy's personality. Do you like him? Why? Why Not?  
Describe Billy's relationship with Ms Batlow. Do you know anyone like Billy? Ms Batlow?

**Spaghetti Jack**

- Imagine you are Sam or Billy and you have been invited to dinner with the Herrick family. Write a narrative of your experience, using some of the details contained in the poems in this section.

**Seeing the world**

- In 'The television news' (page 139), why does the speaker make the connection between the eye colour of a dying man and his own eyes? What is the purpose of the last line? What is the effect on you as a reader?  
How would you describe the mood of this poem? Why?
- 'The day the princess died' (page 158) is a personal response to the news report about the death of Diana, Princess of Wales.  
What is the speaker's purpose in telling the reader what he was doing on the day Diana, Princess of Wales died?  
What is the impact of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales on this child and on other people?  
What conclusion does this child come to about the death of Diana, Princess of Wales?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Steven Herrick is one of Australia's most popular and widely heard children's authors. Many of his fourteen books for children and young adults have been on the CBCA Children's Book of the Year Awards shortlist, including *Love, Ghosts and Nose Hair* (1997), *A Place like This* (1999), *The Simple Gift* (2001), and *Tom Jones Saves the World* (2003). *Do-wrong Ron* (2004) and *By the River* (2005) were named Honour Books. He lives in the Blue Mountains with his partner and two sons.