

Tooth Truth

This is the truth.
I am sick of this tooth.

The wiggling.
The waggling.

Oh, what a pain.

Oops!

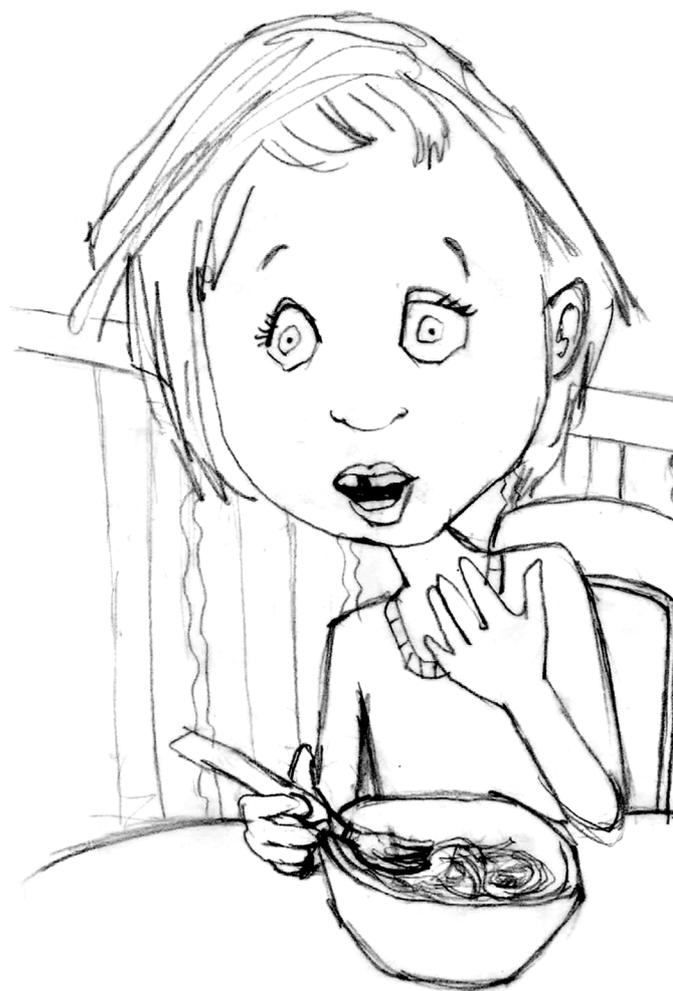
What just happened?

It is hard to explain.

My tooth
just
fell out
in my bowl
of
chow mein.

– By Lee Bennett Hopkins

Responding to the Poem





Tooth Truth

Lee Bennett Hopkins

Monday: Introduce the Poem (big book page 7)

The Heart of the Poem

Sometimes poets like to surprise us at the end of a poem, as Lee Bennett Hopkins does in “Tooth Truth.” Let me see a thumbs-up if you have lost a tooth, or if you have a wiggly tooth right now. You never know when or how those teeth are going to fall out—it’s always sort of a surprise, just like it is for the speaker in this poem!

Conversations About the Poem

Were you surprised at the end of the poem by where the speaker’s tooth ended up? Have you ever been surprised by how or when one of your teeth fell out? Turn and tell someone near you about what happened.

Tuesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Acting

Read the poem aloud and pause after each stanza to create a set of gestures to accompany the words. For example, try these actions:

Poem

This is the truth.
I am sick of this tooth.

The wiggling.
The wagging.

Oh, what a pain.
Oops!
What just happened?

It is hard to explain.
My tooth
just
fell out
in my bowl
of
chow mein.

Actions

Hands open. Palms up with fingers spread.
Exasperated expression on your face.

Exaggerate wiggling motion with your right hand,
your index finger on one tooth.
Repeat with left hand.

Hands open, palms on cheeks.
Eyes open wide.
Mouth open as if saying, “Oh.”

Look downward as if
staring into a bowl.

Place one hand over your mouth.

Eyes open wide as if in surprise.

Wednesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Interactive Writing

The early years of schooling are the years when tooth-losing is frequent and magical. Almost every child in the primary grades has lost at least one tooth (or has heard an earful about tooth-losing from friends and siblings), so writing a “lost tooth” poem together draws on your students’ shared life experience, which is always a good place to start a shared writing experience. One element of Lee Bennett Hopkins’s poem to focus on might be the short list of how the loose tooth moves before it falls out (“The wiggling./ The waggling.”). You might begin by asking children to think of a list of words that describe how a loose tooth moves; encourage them to make up words, too, if you feel comfortable. You might then go back to your list and make a sentence that includes each wiggly word. This gives children great practice in thinking of many specific verbs for one type of motion and then incorporating those words into a poem.

Thursday: Poet’s Talk

Lee Bennett Hopkins writes about how he gets ideas for his poems,

“Something inside my head seems to say: ‘Write a poem about me! I need attention!’”

When we read his poem “Tooth Truth,” can we make a guess about what needed attention when he wrote this poem? Turn to the person next to you and share your guess.

Friday: Craft Talk

- ☉ The poet uses the **white space** and **line breaks** to suggest the pace and tone. Slowing the pace by writing very few words per line helps us slow down as we read the poem. The pace mimics the slow, back-and-forth wiggle of a loose tooth!
- ☉ The poet uses **specific verbs** to describe the action of a wiggling tooth. Young poets can easily be encouraged to choose more descriptive action words in their own poems.
- ☉ **Print Conventions:** The poet shows emphasis with the use of **italics** on the word *Oops*.
- ☉ The poet uses a **surprise ending**—who knew that loose tooth would fall out in the speaker’s dinner? You may ask young poets to notice surprise endings in other poems or to try adding their own surprises at the ends of poems they write themselves.