

Some Ideas to use with “The Mad Professor’s Daughter”

by Alan Ahlberg (taken from “I Heard it in the Playground”)

Here is a copy of that wonderful poem by Alan Ahlberg called “The Mad Professor’s Daughter”. I’ve also thought up some things you can do once you have read it.

The poem is a narrative poem - that is, a poem that tells a story.

- ◆ Can you think of another very famous long, narrative poem about a stranger who led away a lot of children. There is a hint about this poem in “The Mad Professor’s Daughter”.
- ◆ Have you noticed any pattern in the way the verses are written? Do any lines repeat themselves - where and why?
- ◆ What sort of person is Margaret Bell? What did she look like? Draw a picture of her.
- ◆ What sort of weather does Margaret Bell seem to carry with her? (Verses 5, 12, 15, 16)
- ◆ Why did Alan Ahlberg choose this kind of weather to associate with her?
- ◆ How do the class feel about her? (Verses 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14)
- ◆ How did the people in the street react to her?
- ◆ We don’t meet Margaret’s father - we only see “a mad face at a window” and hear “his foot upon the stair”, so WHO can he be?

Now that you know the poem quite well, you could:

- ◆ Write a letter home to your mum and dad, from the dungeon where you are chained, asking them to rescue you. How are you going to get it out to them?
- ◆ Write a description of Margaret Bell in verse. It might go a bit like this:

Margaret Bell, oh Margaret Bell,
She wore a black dress
And had green eyes as well.
She was tall and polite
And caught us in her spell,
That stranger-than-strange girl,
Miss Margaret Bell.

Your verse description could go with the picture you have drawn of her.

- ◆ Write a couple of verses about Margaret’s father, saying what he looked like and what he did to the children. Did he make them say their times tables over and over again or chant French verbs for ever and ever? Perhaps he was D . . . r . . . a Have fun!