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Jabberwocky is a [nonsense poem](#) written by [Lewis Carroll](#) in his 1871 novel *[Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There](#)*, a sequel to *[Alice's Adventures in Wonderland](#)*. The book tells of [Alice's](#) adventures within the [back-to-front world](#) of a [looking glass](#).

In an early scene in which she first encounters the chess piece characters [White King](#) and [White Queen](#), Alice finds a book written in a seemingly unintelligible language. Realising that she is travelling through an inverted world, she recognises that the verse on the pages are written in [mirror-writing](#). She holds a mirror to one of the poems, and reads the reflected verse of "Jabberwocky". She finds the nonsense verse as puzzling as the odd land she has passed into, later revealed as a dreamscape.^[1]

Jabberwocky is considered one of the greatest nonsense poems written in English.^{[2][3]} Its playful, whimsical language has given English [nonsense words](#) and [neologisms](#) such as "[galumphing](#)" and "[chortle](#)".

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Not to be confused with [Nonce word](#).

A **nonsense word**, unlike a [sememe](#), may have no definition. Nonsense words can be classified depending on their [orthographic](#) and [phonetic](#) similarity with (meaningful) words.^[1] If it can be pronounced according to a language's [phonotactics](#), it is a [pseudoword](#).^[2] Nonsense words are [used in literature](#) for [poetic](#) or [humorous](#) effect. [Proper names](#) of real or fictional entities are sometimes nonsense words.

A **stunt word** is a nonsense word used for a special effect, or to attract attention, as part of a performance. Such words are a feature of the work of [Dr. Seuss](#) ("Sometimes I am quite certain there's a Jertain in the curtain").^[3]

The ability to infer the (hypothetical) meaning of a nonsense word from context is used to test for [brain damage](#).^[4]

Neologism - is the name for a newly coined term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use, but that has not yet been accepted into mainstream language.

Commerce and advertising^[edit]

See also: *[List of generic and genericized trademarks](#)*

These neologisms are [genericised trademarks](#).

- [aspirin](#)
- [hoover](#)

- laundromat
- band-aid
- kleenex
- frisbee
- xerox
- Tupperware

Post-It

Possible interpretations of words[\[edit\]](#)

- **Bandersnatch**: A swift moving creature with snapping jaws, capable of extending its neck.[\[18\]](#)
A 'bander' was also an archaic word for a 'leader', suggesting that a 'bandersnatch' might be an animal that hunts the leader of a group.[\[16\]](#)
- **Beamish**: Radiantly beaming, happy, cheerful. Although Carroll may have believed he had coined this word, it is cited in the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) in 1530.[\[19\]](#)
- **Borogove**: Following the poem Humpty Dumpty says, " 'borogove' is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round, something like a live mop." In explanatory book notes Carroll describes it further as "an extinct kind of Parrot. They had no wings, beaks turned up, made their nests under sun-dials and lived on veal."[\[16\]](#) In *Hunting of the Snark*, Carroll says that the initial syllable of *borogove* is pronounced as in *borrow* rather than as in *worry*.[\[18\]](#)

- **Brillig**: Following the poem, the character of Humpty Dumpty comments: " 'Brillig' means four o'clock in the afternoon, the time when you begin broiling things for dinner." [15] According to *Mischmasch*, it is derived from the verb to *bryl* or *broil*.
- **Burbled**: In a letter of December 1877, Carroll notes that "burble" could be a mixture of the three verbs 'bleat', 'murmur', and 'warble', although he didn't remember creating it. [19][20]
- **Chortled**: "Combination of 'chuckle' and 'snort'." (OED)
- **Frabjous**: Possibly a blend of *fair*, *fabulous*, and *joyous*. Definition from *Oxford English Dictionary*, credited to Lewis Carroll.
- **Frumious**: Combination of "fuming" and "furious". In *Hunting of the Snark* Carroll comments, "[T]ake the two words 'fuming' and 'furious'. Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards 'fuming', you will say 'fuming-furious'; if they turn, by even a hair's breadth, towards 'furious', you will say 'furious-fuming'; but if you have the rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say 'frumious'." [18]
- **Galumphing**: Perhaps used in the poem as a

- blend of 'gallop' and 'triumphant'.[\[19\]](#) Used later by [Kipling](#), and cited by Webster as "To move with a clumsy and heavy tread"[\[21\]](#)[\[22\]](#)
- [Gimble](#): Humpty comments that it means "to make holes like a [gimlet](#)."[\[15\]](#) [The setting for spinning objects](#) such as [gyroscopes](#). (OED)
 - [Gyre](#): "To 'gyre' is to go round and round like a gyroscope."[\[15\]](#) Gyre is entered in the [OED](#) from 1420, meaning a circular or spiral motion or form; especially a giant circular oceanic surface current. However, Carroll also wrote in [Mischmasch](#) that it meant to scratch like a dog.[\[16\]](#) The *g* is pronounced like the /g/ in *gold*, not like *gem*.[\[23\]](#)
 - Jabberwocky: When a class in the [Girls' Latin School](#) in Boston asked Carroll's permission to name their school magazine *The Jabberwock*, he replied: "The [Anglo-Saxon](#) word 'wocer' or 'wocor' signifies 'offspring' or 'fruit'. Taking 'jabber' in its ordinary acceptation of 'excited and voluble discussion', this would give the meaning of 'the result of much excited and voluble discussion'..."[\[16\]](#)
 - [Jubjub bird](#): 'A desperate bird that lives in perpetual passion', according to the Butcher in Carroll's later poem [The Hunting of the Snark](#).[\[18\]](#) 'Jub' is an ancient word for a [jerkin](#) or a dialect word for the trot of a horse (OED). It

- might make reference to the call of the bird resembling the sound "jub, jub".[\[16\]](#)
- **Manxome:** Possibly 'fearsome'; A portmanteau of "manly" and "buxom", the latter relating to men for most of its history; or relating to [Manx people](#).
 - **Mimsy:** Humpty comments that " 'Mimsy' is 'flimsy and miserable' ".[\[15\]](#)
 - **Mome rath:** Humpty Dumpty says following the poem: "A 'rath' is a sort of green pig: but 'mome' I'm not certain about. I think it's short for 'from home', meaning that they'd lost their way".[\[15\]](#) Carroll's notes for the original in [Mischmasch](#) state: "a species of Badger [which] had smooth white hair, long hind legs, and short horns like a stag [and] lived chiefly on cheese"[\[16\]](#) Explanatory book notes comment that 'Mome' means to seem 'grave' and a 'Rath': is "a species of land turtle. Head erect, mouth like a shark, the front forelegs curved out so that the animal walked on its knees, smooth green body, lived on swallows and oysters."[\[16\]](#) In the [1951 animated film adaptation of the book's prequel](#), the mome raths are depicted as small, multi-coloured creatures with tufty hair, round eyes, and long legs resembling pipe stems.
 - **Outgrabe:** Humpty says " 'outgribing' is something between bellowing and whistling, with

a kind of sneeze in the middle".[15] Carroll's book appendices suggest it is the past tense of the verb to 'outgribe', connected with the old verb to 'grike' or 'shrike', which derived 'shriek' and 'creak' and hence 'squeak'.[16]

- **Slithy**: Humpty Dumpty says: " 'Slithy' means 'lithe and slimy'. 'Lithe' is the same as 'active'. You see it's like a portmanteau, there are two meanings packed up into one word." [15] The original in *MischMasch* notes that 'slithy' means "smooth and active" [16] The *i* is long, as in *writhe*.
- **Snicker-snack**: possibly related to the large knife, the **snickersnee**. [19]
- **Tove**: Humpty Dumpty says " 'Toves' are something like badgers, they're something like lizards, and they're something like corkscrews. [...] Also they make their nests under sun-dials, also they live on cheese." [15] Pronounced so as to rhyme with *groves*. [18] They "gyre and gimble," i.e. rotate and bore.
- **Tulgey**: Carroll himself said he could give no source for Tulgey. Could be taken to mean thick, dense, dark. It has been suggested that it comes from the **Anglo-Cornish** word "Tulgu", 'darkness', which in turn comes from the **Cornish language** "Tewolgow" 'darkness, gloominess'. [24]
- **Uffish**: Carroll noted "It seemed to suggest a

state of mind when the voice is gruffish, the manner roughish, and the temper huffish".[19][20]

- **Vorpal**: Carroll said he could not explain this word, though it has been noted that it can be formed by taking letters alternately from "verbal" and "gospel".[25]

Wabe: The characters in the poem suggest it means "The grass plot around a sundial", called a 'wa-be' because it "goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it".[15] In the original *MischMasch* text, Carroll states a 'wabe' is "the side of a hill (from its being soaked by rain)".[16]