3 Miss Strawberry - Her Purse

*Eric **Rolls** (1923-2007) was born into a farming family in Australia. He is known for his celebration of the Australian land. A poet, historian and environmentalist, he published more than twenty books. **A Million Wild Acres** (1981), a history of the conquest and destruction of the Australian wilderness, is considered his masterpiece. He is also known for his verses for children, the **Miss Strawberry Verses** being one such collection.*

Miss Strawberry has a long fat purse
To keep her money in.
It is a rare and **handsome** purse
Made of crocodile skin.
It is crocodile skin without a doubt
For she did not take the crocodile out
And when she walks to town to shop
He follows behind her clop, clop-clop,
And opens his mouth and **bellows** aloud
And **swishes** his tail amongst the crowd.
And now and again there's an angry mutter
As a man is swept into the **gutter**.
When in a shop it is time to pay
Shopkeepers look at the **brute** in **dismay**.

When Miss Strawberry says, 'Crocky, open wide,'
And, 'Shopman, your money is deep inside.
Just **dodge** the **slashing** of his paws
And reach beyond those ugly jaws;
But I warn you if you make him cough
He'll probably bite your arm right off.'
The Shopkeeper usually says, 'No worry.
Pay next month. I'm in no hurry.'
But a grocer once, owed four-pounds-ten,
Said, 'That's worth more than one of my men.'
He called his **errand-boy**, 'Hey son,
Come over here, we'll have some fun.
I'll hold your legs and guard you while
You crawl in this quiet old crocodile
And collect in his **vitals** four-pounds-ten.
If you bring it out again
I'll give you sixpence for your trouble.
Come here, son, and at the double!'
Now the length of Miss Strawberry's crocodile's throat
Is four times as long as a shopkeeper's coat.
The crocodile opened fearfully wide
And the errand-boy crawled deep inside.
When he had gathered four-pounds-ten
And hurriedly tried to back out again,
The crocodile closed his jaws with a smile,
Saying, 'One of the joys of a crocodile,
Indeed you might say, his favourite joy,
Is making a meal of a messenger-boy.'

Eric Rolls (The New Faber Book of Children's Poem

Exercises

I Understanding the poem

Answer the following questions:

1. ***'It is a rare and handsome purse***
   Made of crocodile skin.'
   (a) Whom did the purse belong to?
   (b) What was so unique about the purse?
   (c) What happened when the owner of the purse stepped out on the street?
   (d) What effect did the purse have on shopkeepers?
   (e) Do you think having such a purse was an advantage for its owner? Give reasons for your answer.
2. ***'But a grocer once, owed four-pounds-ten,***
   Said, 'That's worth more than one of my men.'
   (a) Who owed the grocer four-pounds-ten?
   (b) How did the grocer plan to get his money from this person?
   (c) What happened when he put his plan into action?
   (d) Do you think the poem ends happily for any of the characters? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What are the joys of being a crocodile?

Words from the poem

handsome	attractive
bellows	a deep, loud sound
swishes	moves quickly through the air in a way that makes a soft sound
gutter	a channel at the side of a street to carry off rainwater
brute	an unpleasant thing (animal, in this case)
dismay	concern and distress caused by something unexpected
dodge	quick movement to avoid something
slashing	making a long cut with a sharp object
errand-boy	a person who does jobs like delivering and collecting messages and goods (these are sometimes called 'odd jobs')
vitals	the body's internal organs

II Express Yourself

- Is there a 'Miss Strawberry' (or someone who is quite like her) in your neighbourhood or family? Tell the class about this lady – how she relates to her neighbours, any unusual characteristics that she may have, whether she has a heart of gold under a rough exterior, and so on.

- Do you know of people who keep unusual animals at home? Talk about this with your friends. Exchange views on whether this is the right thing to do. What could be the possible dangers of keeping such animals in the house?

III Creative Inspiration

The grocer has asked the errand-boy to get his money from inside the crocodile. Write a conversation piece between the grocer and the boy in which the grocer insists that the latter should get his money out and the boy refuses to do so. Think of some funny reasons for the boy's refusal. How does the grocer succeed in changing his mind? Let your imagination run wild. Have fun!

IV Vocabulary

1. The crocodile **clops** along behind Miss Strawberry. He **swishes** his tail, **bellows,** and also **slashes** his paws.

The highlighted words produce sound effects. Fill in the blanks with suitable 'sound' words from the list below:

(a) The ..... of bells

(b) The ..... of dry leaves

(c) The ..... of broken glass

(d) The ..... of thunder

(e) The ..... of hinges

rustling; creaking; clap; peal; chatter

2. **Find one word for each of the phrases. The answers in each set starts with the same letters. Choose the answers from the list below.**

(a) verbal explosion of anger .....

surpass in quality .....

(b) experienced and trusted advisor .....

small zoo .....

(c) musical composition for one or two instruments .....

poem of 14 lines with a fixed rhyme-scheme .....

(d) an inverted hollow cone with a pipe, used to fill liquids .....

ceremonial burial or cremation of a corpse .....

(e) kind, gentle and loving .....

slender leafless shoot by which some climbing plants cling .....

(f) area behind the actual stage used for performances .....

violent and hostile reaction .....

funnel, funeral	***outdo, outburst***	***menagerie, mentor***
tender, tendril	***backstage, backlash***	***sonnet, sonata***

Proper Pronunciation

The silent **'g'** – design, resign, sign, reign, foreign, assign, malign, cologne, campaign, gnat, gnome, length, strength, gnash, gnarled, gnaw, sovereign, benign, phlegm, feign

The silent **'gh'** – thought, bought, caught, flight, eight, freight, drought, height, sight, night, fight, taught, weight, knight, brought, might, taught, bright, night, knight, fight, might, caught, fraught, weight, freight, bough, though

The **'f'** sound of **'gh'** – cough, rough, trough, draught (pronounced 'draft')

The **'j'** sound of **'g'** – germ, geography, geometry, gauge, range, gem, rage, garbage, gender, general, gene, genius, gesture, gentle, stranger, giant, ginger, gipsy, gist

(Find out the meanings of the words you are not familiar with.)

A Way with Words

The use of the word **'return'**

'Return' can mean a number of things:

To give back / To bring back – I returned the books yesterday.

To hit back – Federer returned Nadal's serves beautifully.

To go back – She returned to Mumbai last week.

To come back – She returned from Australia last month.

To put back – We returned the books to the library.

To send back – The bank returned the papers to my parents.

To pay back – He returned all the money he had taken.

Note: The word **'back'** must not be used after **'return'**.

Do not say...

He never **calls me back.** X

He asked me what I **would give him back** if he gave me his pen. X

She never **gives back** the things she borrows. X

Instead, say...

✓ He never **returns** my calls.

✓ He asked me what I **would give him in return** if he gave me his pen.

✓ She never **returns** the things she borrows.