

Get your tongue in a twist with Tongue Twister Day

Introduce some variety into the classroom and get your students' tongues twisting around the sounds of English. An excellent way to improve pronunciation – and have some fun on the way!

International Tongue Twister Day doesn't really have a long or traditional history. It first made its appearance this century and is really just an opportunity for some fun rather than a celebration of a historic event. It is held on the second Sunday in November, so why not take the opportunity to practise pronunciation with some entertaining tongue twisters in your November lessons.

There are several kinds of tongue twisters: a sentence or verse where there is an alternation between similar but distinct phonemes - the *s* and *sh* in *She sells seashells* for example. They may also rely on the same sound at the start of the words like *Betty Botter* or *Peter Piper*. While many tongue twisters are verses that have rhyme and rhythm, others are just three or four word phrases that require fast repetition as in *red lorry, yellow lorry*.

Many German speakers will be familiar with *Fischers Fritze fischt frische Fische* and it's not surprising to learn that, of course, tongue twisters are common in all languages – from Breton to Tibetan and from Shona to Sicilian, there are examples of poems or sentences which are challenging for native speakers, never mind learners of the language.

Two of the most well-known English tongue twisters are based on real people. *She sells seashells on the seashore* is based on a woman called Mary Anning, who lived near Lyme Regis in Dorset, England, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. She was fascinated by the many fossils found on the coastline and was one of the first palaeontologists in the world. *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers* is based on an eighteenth-century French horticulturalist named Pierre Poivre who developed the cultivation of spices in Mauritius, thus breaking the Dutch monopoly of spice cultivation in the Spice Islands.

And which is the most difficult English tongue twister? The *Guinness Book of World Records* claims that it is *The sixth sick sheikh's sixth sheep's sick*. Why not have a go and say it yourself?

If you would like to read and try more tongue twisters in English, then click [here](#).

And [here](#) is a short video from an American programme discussing tongue twisters.

If you would like to use tongue twisters in your lesson, then we have provided you with two activities at A1 level. You'll find them in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1: *She sells seashells* (level A1+, 10 mins)

- On the board write: *tongue twister* and ask students if they know what this means (*Zungenbrecher*). Ask students if they know any German examples.
- On the board write: *shell, sell, shore, sure, surely* and ask for translations.
- Tell students that you are going to read out a tongue twister that includes some of the words on the board.
- Read out the text once at normal speed:
*She sells seashells by the seashore.
The shells she sells are surely seashells.
So if she sells shells on the seashore,
I'm sure she sells seashore shells.*
- Now ask students to write down the text in their notebooks.
- Ask a confident student to write the text on the board as you dictate.
- Read the first line at a slower speed. Repeat the first line. Continue with the next three lines, repeating each line twice.
- Ask students to check their texts in pairs.
- Check together by correcting the text on the board. Or ask individual students to read out one line and then you write it on the board.
- Read out *She sells seashells* together.

Activity 2: Tongue twisters (level A1+, 20 mins)

- Make one copy of **Tongue twisters** (see Worksheet) for each pair of students.
- Tell students they are going to practise reading some English tongue twisters.
- Give each pair of students a copy of **Tongue twisters** and tell them to read the tongue twisters out loud to their partner.
- Monitor and help with pronunciation.
- Ask individual students to read out one of the tongue twisters.
- Ask students which ones they liked best. Ask: *Which ones were difficult/easy?*
- Ask students to write their own tongue twister with a partner.
- When everyone has finished ask confident pairs of students to read out their tongue twister.

Worksheet

Tongue twisters

Work with your partner. Read these tongue twisters.

1. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers;
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked;
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?
to pick = pflücken | a peck = Viertelscheffel | pickled = eingelegt
2. Betty bought some butter but the butter she bought was bitter,
So she bought some better butter to make the bitter batter better.
batter = Teig
3. A big black bug bit a big black dog on his big black nose.
bug = Käfer
4. Vivian's wild vines make fine vintage wines.
vine = Weinrebe | vintage wine = Qualitätswein
5. Elizabeth's birthday is on the third Thursday of this month.
6. I wish to wash my Irish wristwatch.
wristwatch = Armbanduhr

Work with your partner. Repeat these sentences as fast as you can ten times.

1. Red lorry, yellow lorry.
lorry = Lastwagen
2. Eddie edited it.
edit = redigieren
3. She sees cheese.
4. Three fat thistle sticks.
thistle = Distel | stick = Stock

Now you. Look again at the tongue twisters above.
Try to write your own five- or six-word tongue twister.