

The Arts Samples

THE GREAT SNOW-SCULPTURE

By Rebecca Kane

Every winter, people travel to the tiny mountain town of Breckenridge, Colorado, to play in the snow. Some ski or snowboard. Others snowshoe or ride snowmobiles. And some come to carve giant snow sculptures. These are not your average snowmen with carrot noses, button eyes, and broom-handle arms. They are works of art.

Champion Snow Sculptors

Every January, Breckenridge hosts the International Snow Sculpture Championships. Fourteen teams travel from all over the world, from Mexico to

up. A machine blows snow into each crate. Volunteers called "snow stompers" strap on their snow boots, climb inside the crates, and stomp the snow down. Their job is to pack the snow hard, so that no air pockets or holes are in the blocks. Once the snow has been compacted, the sides of the crates are removed and a twenty-ton block of snow remains for the artists to carve.

The sculptors bring out their favorite tools. Some prefer potato peelers, while others use spoons. They choose tools that work best on hard ice-packed snow: ice picks, garden shovels, tiny Japanese saws, and even cheese graters. Strict guidelines don't allow tools that use electricity, such as power saws.

Turning Ideas into Art

Most teams get ideas from things they have seen. They might carve a copy of the Statue of Liberty or a teapot with tea pouring out. One team sculpted a kitten on its hind feet reaching into a fish bowl complete with air bubbles, water ripples, and a crab trying to pinch the kitten's paw.

In 2006, Team USA sculpted a golden retriever looking at its reflection in a mirror. To create the illusion that the puppy saw its reflection in the glass, the artists carved two identical puppies facing each other with their paws touching.

"We wanted to sculpt a piece in which the viewer was able to



"A Fishing Tale" won the Kids' Choice Award in 2003.

participate," said Rob Neyland, Team USA's captain. "The concept was also strong enough that everyone was able to understand it."

The Prize

As the final hours of the championship tick by, exhausted team members add last-minute details. They use small whisk

Sculptures start with a 20-ton block of hard-packed snow.



Hard work turns huge blocks of snow into works of art.

Switzerland, to compete. Teams sculpt for sixty-five hours over five days. Each team hopes that when the time is up, its sculpture will be judged the best.

As the championship begins, enormous twelve-foot-tall-by-ten-foot-wide cement crates are set

CONTEST

brooms to brush off snow caught in tiny crevices. One team member counts down the last five minutes while others scramble to clean up the tools. If they leave any tools out, they will be disqualified. When the whistle blows, everyone must step away from the sculpture. The judges then vote on creativity, technical skills, and visual impact of the designs.

In 2006, Team USA took first place for their golden retriever sculpture titled "Discovery." But the contest is not just about medals and ribbons.

"It's not about the prize," Neyland said. "It's about touching the audience." As the championship ends, Neyland is already dreaming of the next masterpiece his team will design. 

Carve Some Snow!

1. Draw your ideas on paper. Design a sculpture that will be easy to carve, such as a rocket ship or a seal with a ball on its nose. Animals with skinny legs and heavy bodies don't work as well.
2. Shovel snow into a large hard-plastic box. Press the snow down with your hands or feet.
3. Lightly spray water on top. Let it sit overnight.
4. The next day, carefully tip the box over and lightly tap the top so the snow slips out.
5. Pick out some carving tools, such as a garden shovel, spoon, butter knife, and old toothbrush.
6. Take your time and carve carefully.
7. When you're finished, take a photo of your sculpture.

We'd love to see photos of your snow sculptures! Include your name, age, and address. Mail to

Highlights

Snow Sculptures
803 Church Street
Honesdale, PA 18431

Team USA's "Discovery" wins first place.

No power tools allowed!



—GET READY TO SCULPT!

14 TEAMS ... 65 HOURS ... 5 DAYS



Jack Prelutsky's Rib-Tickling Reign

By Kelly Milner Halls
Art by John O'Brien
Photo by Amy Sinisterra



Jack Prelutsky once thought poetry was boring.

Now, as the first Children's Poet Laureate, he's the reigning king of funny poems.

When Jack Prelutsky was a kid in New York more than fifty years ago, he didn't know he would grow up to write poetry for children. He didn't even think he liked poems.

Neither of his parents read poetry to him when he was little. When his fourth-grade teacher read poems in class, he thought they seemed dull. "She would pick a boring poem from a boring book and recite it in a boring way," Prelutsky remembers. "She would even look bored as she read it."

To nine-year-old Jack Prelutsky, poetry seemed like serious business. And Jack was anything but serious. "I wanted to hear poems about myself—about outer space and sports and music, and about the kind of kid I was," he admits. "So I started to think of poetry as punishment."

What changed Jack Prelutsky's mind and helped him become America's first Children's Poet

Laureate—the top American kids' poet—in 2006? Music!

Poetry in a New Light

Prelutsky had always taken voice and piano lessons, but when he enrolled in New York's High School of Music and Art, his love for music grew deeper. "The rhythm of music is natural to us," he says. "Look at our heartbeats, at the rhythm of our breathing. Going to that high school may have started the change, but what really did it was folk music."

After graduation, Prelutsky took a job at the Folklore Center in Greenwich Village in New York City. He was fascinated with North American and international folk stories and the music that went with them. "I liked the way those songs said what they had to say—the simple, direct, ordinary language they employed. I really

think that's what made me see poetry in a new light."

Imaginary Animals to the Rescue!

Even so, it took a few more years and a drawing class to bring out his poetic skill. "I took a sketch class in my early twenties," he says, "and found I wasn't very good at life drawing. But I was good at drawing creatures that didn't exist. When I invented my own animals, they were perfect because they were mine—and there were no rules."

In six months, Prelutsky drew about two dozen imaginary animals with strange features, like multiple heads, rubbery bodies, or very long tongues. He loved each one, but felt something was missing. "Then one evening, I looked at them and said, 'They need poems.' I still don't know why I thought of it," Prelutsky says. "But

within half an hour, I had all the poems written."

Publishing the poems never crossed Prelutsky's mind in those early days. He did them just for fun. But when friends fell in love with his critters, he agreed to share them with a children's book editor.

"She didn't think much of my illustrations," he admits, "but she told me that I was a natural poet and encouraged me to keep writing."

A Natural Poet

At the time, Prelutsky was surprised at the editor's encouragement. But decades—and more than forty books—later, he's still making friends and fans giggle. From monsters to gremlins

to frogs in red suspenders, Prelutsky has turned silly into an art form.

Despite a busy schedule, Prelutsky makes time to visit schools when he can. "Seeing kids and listening to them reminds me of why I do what I do," he says. Kids also keep him laughing.

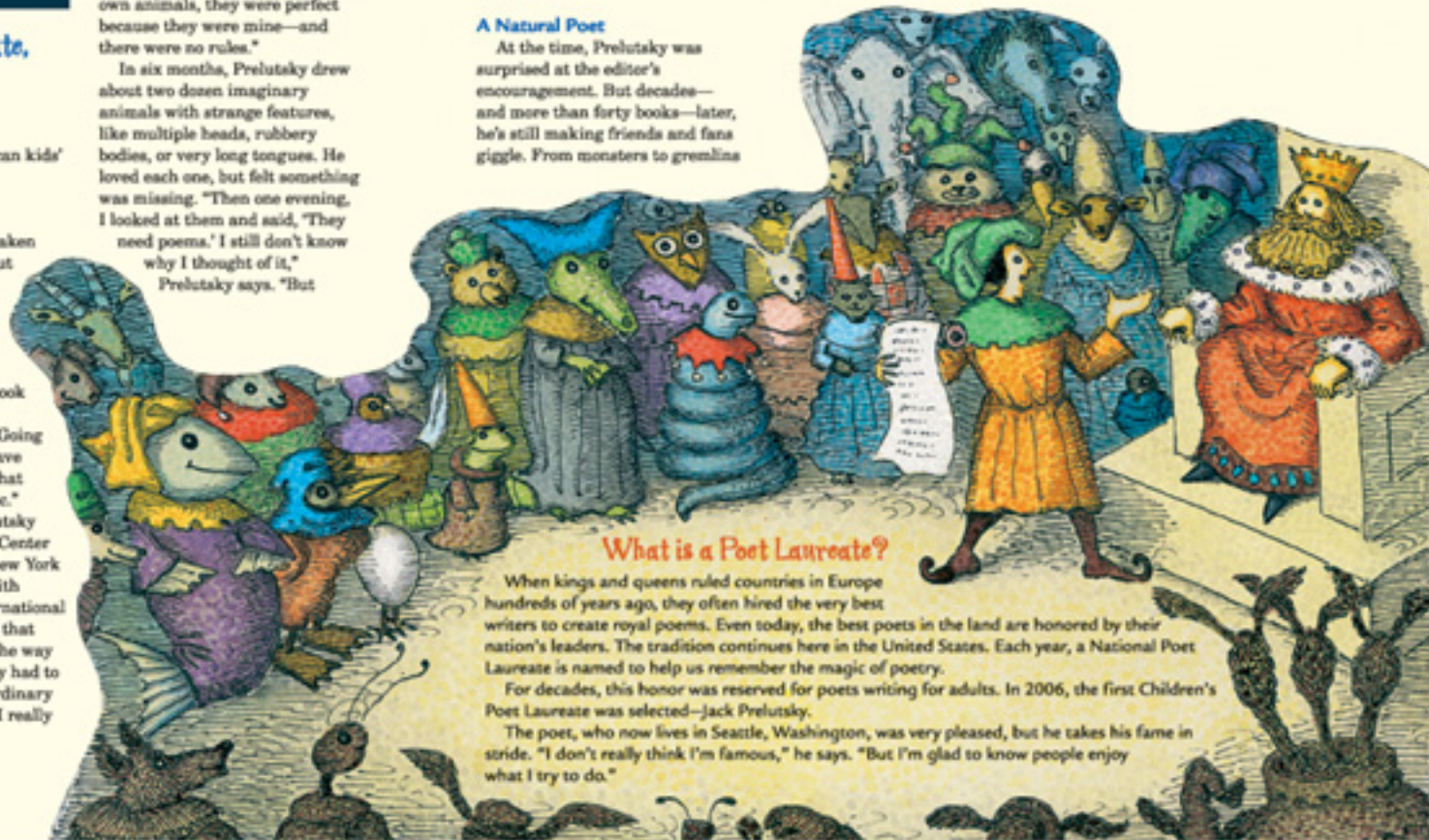
When he visited Pennsylvania, a fourth-grade boy was eager to meet his favorite poet. After Prelutsky said hello and asked the

student how he was, the boy responded, "I'm good."

Prelutsky said, "Well, you look good."

The boy quickly answered, "I'll bet when you were my age, you looked good, too!"

The Poet Laureate laughed. "When I do school visits," he says, "the kids realize writers aren't just boring dead guys. They're people, just like them."



What is a Poet Laureate?

When kings and queens ruled countries in Europe hundreds of years ago, they often hired the very best writers to create royal poems. Even today, the best poets in the land are honored by their nation's leaders. The tradition continues here in the United States. Each year, a National Poet Laureate is named to help us remember the magic of poetry.

For decades, this honor was reserved for poets writing for adults. In 2006, the first Children's Poet Laureate was selected—Jack Prelutsky.

The poet, who now lives in Seattle, Washington, was very pleased, but he takes his fame in stride. "I don't really think I'm famous," he says. "But I'm glad to know people enjoy what I try to do."

Artist Charles Willson Peale began his museum in 1784 with a single specimen—a four-foot-long paddlefish. He hoped to collect animals from around the world and house them in a museum where Americans could see the wonders of nature.

Peale's friends jumped in to help. When his French Angora cat died, Benjamin Franklin sent it to Peale, as did George Washington when two pheasants died at his Mount Vernon estate.

If Peale was going to display specimens of animals, his first task would be learning how to preserve them. He experimented with turpentine but settled on arsenic and mercury. Unfortunately, these poisons sometimes made Peale ill, and he had to dose himself with castor oil, sulfur, milk, and soapy water.



A Family Business

Because the museum adjoined his home, Peale's sons Raphaelle, Titian, and

Rubens helped out. They collected birds, snakes, and insects, then preserved the specimens in the garden and even the kitchen. Poor Mrs. Peale had to work around her husband's taxidermy projects when she wanted to cook dinner.

Peale worked "by day and by night," as long as he could keep his eyes open. Through his care and hard work, Peale's museum took shape. He displayed the specimens in natural poses, painting background scenes from nature to create "a world in miniature."

Word of the museum spread, and Peale received more donations. He set a stuffed buffalo at the entryway and created artificial ponds for specimens of turtles, frogs, lizards, geese, and herons. He arranged birds in a display of trees and placed bears, foxes, panthers, raccoons, and rabbits nearby.

Peale also kept live animals. He housed rattlesnakes in a cave he'd built inside the museum. Outside,

on the museum grounds, lived owls, wildcats, and even monkeys. He had a baboon that caught and ate apples, an eagle that greeted Peale with loud cries, and a five-legged, six-footed, two-tailed cow that also provided milk for the family.



Growing Pains

His collection grew until it took over his entire house and yard. Peale didn't want to stop collecting, but how could he expand when the museum was already bursting at the seams?

There was only one thing to do: move the collection to a larger, more visible site. Luckily, in 1794, future Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and other members of the American Philosophical Society, said Peale could use Philosophical Hall, a grand building right by the State House.

Peale was delighted. But moving the collection would be a job of "considerable magnitude."

Thousands of specimens would need to be carried by wheelbarrow or by hand for a distance of six blocks. How could he accomplish the task?

Peale estimated that the entire move would take two weeks. But why not include a day showcasing the museum's most impressive specimens in an event worthy of the whole city's attention? And so he hired workmen, rounded up the neighborhood boys, and set his plan in motion—a marvelous parade!

Moving Day

He lined up his marchers—tall to small. The parade kicked off with the buffalo, carried on the men's shoulders. "Then followed the Panthers, Tyger Cats and a long string of Animals of smaller size carried by the boys," Peale later wrote.

Down the street, block after block, marched boys carrying one curiosity after another. "The



parade . . . brought all the inhabitants to their doors and windows to see the cavalcade," Peale noted with pleasure.

In spite of the jostling excitement, only one glass case was broken. Peale declared, "It was fine fun for the Boys." The museum settled into its new home. Just as Peale had hoped, it soon became a national treasure. For more than fifty years, it inspired future scientists such as Joseph Henry, who later became the first director of the Smithsonian Institution, and ornithologist John James Audubon.

The museum eventually closed. Many of Peale's displays were sold to institutions in America and Europe. Some specimens were destroyed in two great fires. But a collection of birds remains today at Harvard University.

Still, Peale's museum has left its mark. Born in the back room of his home, nurtured by him and his sons, it fostered the growth of science in America. **W**

This self-portrait shows Charles Willson Peale unveiling his natural history museum—the first of its kind in America.



Peale's Marvelous Parade

By Barbara Kerley Art by Mark Corcoran

In 1794, Philadelphians witnessed an amazing sight—a line of boys carrying specimens of wildcats, foxes, raccoons, birds, rabbits, and even a baby alligator parading down the street. It was moving day for Peale's museum, the first natural history museum in America, and the crowds had never seen anything like it.



Read the funny story "Mystery in the Old Museum" on HighlightsKids.com.



LOOK OUT FOR TIN MEN!

By Betty Mermelstein

These shiny metal men might be in your neighborhood. Perhaps you see them in front of stores that sell heaters, air conditioners, or car mufflers. Look for them waving at you from welding shops. Workers there put pieces of metal together to make machines or other useful objects.

Tin figures were first used about one hundred years ago. They drew people's attention to businesses that made things from metal. They were the symbols of the fine metal work that went on inside the shops.

These friendly greeters can still be seen all over the United States. Each figure is unique because it is made up of different parts.



This muffler man is on a quest to let everyone know about a free muffler inspection. A metal worker made him for a muffler shop in Arizona.

FUNNY FIGURES CAN BE MADE FROM METAL PARTS.



This metal boy was made from car-muffler parts at Mike Hammond's muffler shop in Washington State. Mike later donated the figure to the town library. The library named the figure Spike Read-a-thon. (Now Spike loves to read books.) His spiky hair is made from nails.

MAKE A FUNNY FIGURE

With permission, collect leftover objects from around your house to create your own figure. Here are some ideas for things to use.

