

Poetry UNIT

P.6 Oh, I Wish I'd Looked After Me Teeth

by Pam Ayres

1. **Parents alone are responsible for inculcating a good sense of dental hygiene amongst children. Do you agree/disagree? Discuss with your partner.**

2. **Listen to the poem.**

1 Oh, I wish I'd looked after **me teeth**,
And spotted the perils beneath.

All the toffees I chewed,
And the sweet sticky food,

5 Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth.

I wish I'd been that much more willin'
When I had more tooth there than fillin'
To pass up **gobstoppers**.

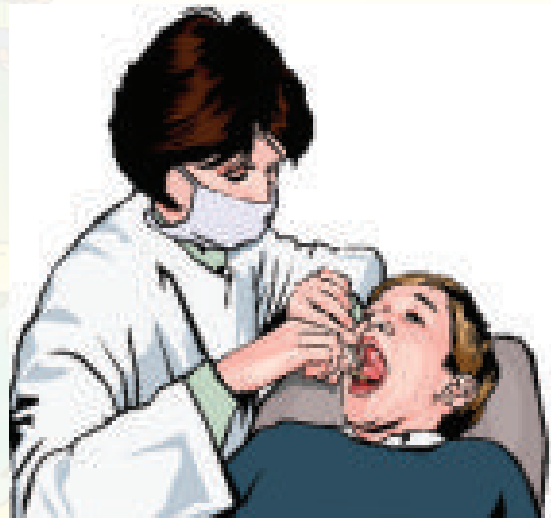
10 From respect to me choppers,
And to buy something else with me shillin'.

When I think of the lollies I licked,
And the **liquorice** all sorts I picked,

15 **Sherbet dabs**, big and little,
All that hard peanut brittle,
My conscience gets horribly pricked.

Oh I showed them the toothpaste all right,
I flashed it about late at night,
But up-and-down brushin'
And **pokin' and fussin'**

25 Didn't seem worth the time-I could bite!



me teeth: my teeth

gobstoppers: a large, hard sweet

liquorice: candy made with the dried root of the liquorice plant

sherbet dabs: tiny sweets

pokin' and fussin': checking carefully



If I'd known, I was paving the way
 To cavities, caps and decay,
 The murder of fillin's
 Injections and drillin's,
 30 I'd have thrown all me sherbet away.
 So I lay in the old dentist's chair,
 And I gaze up his nose in despair,
 And his drill it do whine,
 In these molars of mine.
 35 "Two **amalgum**," he'll say, "for in there."
 How I laughed at my mother's false teeth,
 As they foamed in the waters beneath.
 But now comes the reckonin'
 It's me they are beckonin'
 40 Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth.



About the Poet

Pam Ayres (1947-) is a contemporary writer, a great entertainer who writes and performs comic verse. She started writing poems and verses as a hobby and has appeared in every major TV show in the U.K. She has published six books of poems, and cut seven record albums including a collection of 50 best known poems.

3. On the basis of your reading of the poem, complete the following table.

Stages in the life of the poet	Activities	Consequences
(a) Youth	eating toffees _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
(b) Adult hood	_____ _____ _____	gazing at the dentist in despair.

amalgum: a mixture of mercury and silver used to make fillings



4. **On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice.**

- (a) The title '*Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth*' expresses _____.
- (i) regret
 - (ii) humour
 - (iii) longing
 - (iv) pleasure
- (b) The conscience of the speaker pricks her as she has _____.
- (i) been careless
 - (ii) been ignorant
 - (iii) been fun loving
 - (iv) been rude
- (c) The speaker says that she has paved the way for cavities and decay by _____.
- (i) eating the wrong food and not brushing.
 - (ii) not listening to his mother
 - (iii) laughing at his mother's false teeth
 - (iv) not listening to the dentist
- (d) The tone of the narrator is one of _____.
- (i) joy
 - (ii) nostalgia
 - (iii) regret
 - (iv) sorrow

5. **Answer the following questions.**

- a) *"...But up-and-down brushin'
And pokin' and fussin'
Didn't seem worth the time-I could bite!"*
What do these lines convey?
- b) Why did the poet go to the dentist? How could she have avoided it?
- c) *"If you got a tooth, you got a friend"*, what do you understand from the line?
- d) With reference to the poem, how can you look after your teeth?



- e) Give an appropriate proverb that conveys the message that this poem carries.
6. **Listen to the conversation between Doki and his sister, Moki. As you listen complete the idioms and expressions listed below.**
1. sleep.....
 2.me the willies
 3. crack the.....
 4. take the.....to water
 5.tail.
 6. wonders will.....
 7.can't be undone.
 8. reap what I

Idioms are metaphorical expressions rather than literal. For example 'give someone the willies' does not simply mean 'to handover something called willies to someone', but 'to make someone feel nervous'. It is important for learners of English to understand them and be able to use them.

7. **Read the following statement where 'I' refers to 'you'**
- "I can't afford to, after what Jack's done to his teeth."**
- What is it, you think you can't afford and why? Write a diary entry of not less than 125 words.**
- (in-class activity; not to be set up as homework).**

JUST THINK

8. **In line 35, the poet has misspelt the word 'amalgum'. Why do you think she has done that? Discuss.**

(Teacher would point out the use of 'me' instead of 'my' and other linguistic variations that make the poem enjoyable.)

