Play with Puns

Cassandra Austen, her ancestors, and her children were well known for their love of wordplay and puns. What is a pun? It's a word or phrase used in a clever way so as to have a double meaning.

Playing with puns is fun. If you learn how to "pun"ish your audience to get laughs, you'll be joining the ranks of literary giants such as William Shakespeare and Jane Austen. Both

Cassandra (Leigh) Austen, Jane's mother. *Courtesy of the Jane Austen's House Museum*

loved to sprinkle stories with witty wordplays.

Start by collecting puns. In Jane's day, people collected puns and wordplays in a scrapbook. Harriet Smith, in Jane Austen's book *Emma*, decorated the pages of her collection with ciphers—messages written in secret code. You can write your collection by hand or print them from your computer and glue them into your scrapbook.

Next, learn how to create your own puns. Here's how to get started.

1. Look online or in dictionaries and the-sauruses for homophones, homonyms, and homographs. Collect lists of these words and their meanings—you will need to know the definitions to create puns.

   Homophones are spelled differently but sound the same. For example: *gnu*, *new*, and *knew*.

   Homonyms are spelled and pronounced the same but have different meanings. For example, a *rose* is a flower, but *rose* is also the word used for getting up (The sun *rose* in the sky).

   Homographs are spelled the same but pronounced differently and have different meanings. For example, the *wind* blew in the trees, but you *wind* your clock.

2. Ask friends, family, and classmates to share their favorite sayings and proverbs. Collect these common phrases.

3. Use a rhyming dictionary to look up rhymes or near-rhymes for words you want to use in creating a pun.

4. Now put your research together. Choose words that have a double meaning and use them to write a clever sentence or phrase. Start with a common cliché or proverb and switch one or more words with words that rhyme or nearly rhyme to create a humorous twist.

Here are examples of puns:

This bag of coins shows the change in our society. (The word *change* has a double meaning that refers to coins as well as new events.)

I wondered why the ball kept getting bigger, and then it hit me. (The word