James Whitcomb Riley
By Nathan Shepard

About His Life

• (1849-1916)
• Born in Greenfield, Indiana on Oct. 7
• Grew up in the west and knew western life very well
• Greenfield didn’t have a public school until 1870- Riley left after first term
• 1870-71- Worked in odd jobs such as a clerk, a salesman, a house painter, and as a small-time writer
• Toured all around Indiana with a medicine seller and a group of signpainters called the Graphic Company until 1874, when he toured solo as a reciter
• 1877-85, contributed to the Indianapolis Journal regularly under the pen name of Benj. F. Johnson
• 1885- Got a job in his dad’s law office but left within the year
• 1886-1890- did readings with Bill Nye- entertainer, Nye and Riley made a great team and gained popularity
• 1890-1907- During these years he published most of his books and poems.
• The Indiana Federation of Women’s Clubs named a holiday, “Riley Day,” in 1911 to pay homage to him.- public school holiday
• July 22, 1916- Struck by Paralysis- Died later that day

About His Work

• Collections of his poems can be found in the books, The Old Swimmin’ Hole, and ‘Leven More Poems, and Rhymes of Childhood, and Poems Here at Home
• Definite Hoosier accent and style in poems such as his most famous poems, “Little Orphan Annie*,” “The Raggedy Man*,” and “When the Frost is on the Pumpkin*”
• Cheerful, whimsical humor in poems
• Laid-back poems about everyday life in Indiana

About His World View

• Agnostic
• Concerned about life after death- consistently wanted reassurance that it existed

*Perform these Poems