CAN MATH LIMERICKS SURVIVE?

WILL NEDIGER
London, Ontario, Canada

This famous mathematical limerick by Leigh Mercer appeared in the February 1980 Word Ways:

> A dozen, a gross, and a score
> Plus three times the square root of four
> Divided by seven
> Plus five times eleven
> Is nine squared and not a bit more.

Using the same rhyme scheme, I propose a new version:

> The sum of 2k-4
> From one to thirteen plus a score,
> Over eleven,
> Plus eighteen times seven,
> Equals six cubed and not a bit more.

Unless other rhyme schemes can be found, the possibilities for fully mathematical limericks seem limited. Instead of expressing equations involving specific numbers, they must be more general. Here are a couple of examples:

> The sum of 3x and a trinity
> As x is approaching infinity
> Is so terribly large
> It could fill up a barge--
> So drop Math and take up Divinity.

> To find the square root of a third
> Is clearly extremely absurd.
> Every math student knows
> The way that it goes:
> You'll always end up with a surd.

If you end up with an equation that can be expressed as a rhyming triplet in anapestic rhythm where the first two lines equal the third, you can simply sandwich two more lines in between to make it a limerick. The cosine of zero is conveniently one, so "Times the cosine / Of three squared minus nine" conveniently keeps the value the same while adding two lines:

> The size of a triangle (right)
> With eight as its base and its height,
> Times the cosine
> Of three squared minus nine,
> Is the number of teeth in your bite.

Thus, the area of a right triangle with legs of length 8 is 32, the number of teeth in a normal bite.

It appears that there are many mathematical limericks yet to be discovered--with poetic license and a little bit of luck!