I'm Tracy K. Smith, and this is the slow down.

Sometimes it's just not about sense, right? When my daughter was a baby, she would say lots of things that made sense. Her first word at I'm not exaggerating, four, five months old, was high. I said it to her every morning when I open my eyes and saw her there beside us in the bed. And then one day, she was the first to wake and say it to me. She said Dabi for diaper. One day, she said to me, Dabi now, which convinced me it was time for her to be potty trained. Lobby was her way of saying water. And then there were words whose meaning we came to understand. Meow meant banana. Because her babysitter used to say Yummy, yummy, yummy. When she fed her banana. That word morphed in her ear into meow meow meow. I never did figure out what an appy doobie was. When I asked Naomi, she just laugh and say the word again as if it meant Of course itself. But she said it was such joy. It became an expression in our household for a while. Abby Dubey still pops up from time to time out of parental nostalgia. For the bliss it seemed to signal way back when my son Atticus coined the phrase, Roppongi pangi when he was three. This was another instance of an indefinable expression, taking root in our vocabulary. Roppongi just felt good to say, so we said it. Atticus was around g pangi. Sterling was around g pangi, rongji pangi could be applied to anything or simply spoken as an expression of joy. Just this year, I succeeded in getting Atticus to define the term. What is a rongji? pony? I asked him one weekend afternoon when we were all together at the table, or maybe riding somewhere in the car around g. pangi is a cute little boy, he said, and I thought, aha, so I've been using it correctly after all. Today's poem is Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky from Alice in Wonderland. Do you remember hearing it or maybe even memorizing it as a child? It's lived in my memory since I was in the fifth grade, meaning whatever it means, and sparking a happy, senseless joy.
Jabberwocky by Lewis Carroll

Twas brillig and the slithy toves Did gyre and gimble in the wabe All mimsy were the borago verbs, and the mome raths out grade. B were the jabber walk my son, the jaws that bite, the claws that catch B where the job job bird and Shawn the freemius bandersnatch he took his vorpal sword in hand, long time the man zone foe he sought so rested he by the tumtum tree and stood a while in thought. And, as an offish thought he stood the jabber walk with eyes of flame came whistling through the toll g wood and burbled as it came. One to One to and through and through the vorpal blade went Snickers snack, he left it dead, and with its head he went galumphing back, and has now slain the jabberwock come to my arms might be Mish boy. Oh frappe just stay Kullu Calais, he chortled in his joy. Twas brillig and the slithy toves Did gyre and gimble in the wabe All mimsy were the borago Vz and the rats out Ghraib. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.

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