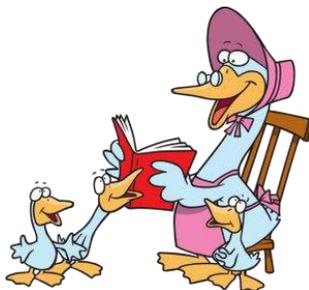




## THE VALUE OF NURSERY RHYMES

A quick guide to the early learning opportunities available through familiar rhymes and songs and how you can use them to help with all areas of your child's development at home.





Dear parents and carers,

With a wealth of stories and technology at our fingertips, the value of nursery rhymes may seem irrelevant in the 21st century, however many of us learnt rhymes by heart as children which we remember today.

Evidence has shown that children who know eight or more nursery rhymes by heart by the age of four will go on to be the best readers and spellers in their class by Year 3. So despite many rhymes appearing to be 'old fashioned' or just plain nonsense, there are in fact many reasons why enjoying nursery rhymes with your child from a very early age can contribute to all areas of their early linguistic, social, physical and academic development.

This booklet should give you a bit more information about how we use songs and rhymes to prepare children for early education, as well as some hints and ideas for how you can help your child at home. Please note, this is a brief overview for your information rather than a compulsory home-learning programme.

Above all, it should be fun for you to enjoy too!

## Why are Nursery Rhymes Important?

### Language Development

As children recite rhymes and sing songs, they are learning new vocabulary and how to articulate words, use their voices to create expression and enunciate clearly. They are practicing pitch, volume, and intonation while experiencing the rhythm of language. They learn to pronounce words easily by saying them over and over again and by practicing them without fear of criticism. Nursery rhymes are short and easy to repeat so they become some of a child's first sentences.

Rhymes also expose children to vocabulary they might not hear every day, such 'fetch' and 'tumbling' in '*Jack and Jill*'.



### Poetry, Rhyme and Early Phonics

Nursery rhymes are a great way into learning early phonic skills (the ability to hear, identify and manipulate letter sounds).

Practicing pitch, volume and language rhythm gives children the opportunity to experience and play around with groups of sounds. Children are hearing the sounds that vowels and consonants make and beginning to experience how these can be put together to make words.

All Nursery rhymes draw on rhythm, rhyming patterns, repetition and alliteration to make them fun and easy to remember and all contribute to a child's awareness of letters and the sounds that they make. For example rhyming groups such as 'diddle', 'fiddle' and 'griddle' in '*Hey, Diddle, Diddle*' or alliteration and onomatopoeia in '*Baa, Baa Black Sheep*'.



## Why are Nursery Rhymes Important?

### Reading and Poetry Experiences

Nursery rhymes are a powerful learning source in early Literacy. Short nursery rhymes often tell a story and contain a beginning, middle and end, helping them to follow along with a sequence of events, a skill they need when reading and writing in the future. Nursery rhymes are also an early form of poetry and so children can begin to understand the rules and patterns they will use as they explore this at school.



### Mathematical Development

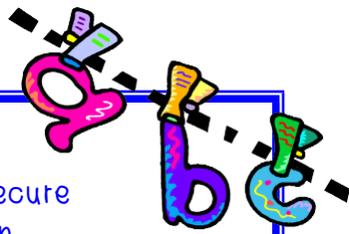
Nursery rhymes use patterns and sequence, so children begin to learn simple Mathematics skills as they recite them (e.g. 'Solomon Grundy, born on a Monday'). Many rhymes also use numbers, counting forwards and backwards (e.g. '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I Caught a Fish Alive'), and other vocabulary that children need to learn, such as size, weight and quantity (few, plenty, many).

### Physical Development

Children develop their mouth and tongue muscles by using the different sounds in the rhyme.

Tongue twisters such as 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers' are great for practicing this skill, even if you feel a little silly! Rhymes that involve movement help with co-ordination and in dramatic play, children use their whole bodies to act out the nursery rhymes they hear. Actions help children to remember the 'story' too.





### Social and Emotional Development

Sharing nursery rhymes provides a safe and secure bond and routine between parents and children which is important for social development. In addition, nursery rhymes are often about distressing or difficult situations or emotions and children are able to experience, talk about and discuss these safely, which helps them understand the real emotions of themselves and others.



### Creative Development

Nursery rhymes expand your child's imagination by taking them to an imaginary world where blackbirds are baked in pies and whole families live in shoes! Transporting them to a world of fantasy develops children's own imaginations and creative ideas.

### Passing Down History

Nursery rhymes teach history and connect children to events, people and places in the past in a way that is harmless and fun (e.g. 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses' or 'Doctor Foster').



### Enjoyment!

Above all, nursery rhymes are something silly that can be enjoyed together, encouraging children to develop a sense of humor! Quite often nursery rhymes make no sense or have unexpected endings, and give children the opportunity to explore silly words, ideas and worlds in a safe and supported environment.



What you can do at home  
There are plenty of fun things you can do at home to support your child's experiences of nursery rhymes and traditional stories.



### Introducing Nursery Rhymes

#### Rhymes

Start with simple rhymes that are not very long. For example, 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' and '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I Caught a Fish Alive'. Use actions, facial expression and vary your voice to capture their interest.

### Rhymes as a Distraction!

Nursery rhymes are portable; they can be enjoyed anytime, any place, anywhere! Share them at bath time, when getting ready for bed, whilst cooking tea or in the car (and remember they can be fantastic tantrum diffusers as they cannot resist joining in!).



### Repetition

Repeating the same rhymes and stories over and over is really important for children's engagement and confidence. As they become more familiar, you can encourage them to join in and even recite rhymes on their own. It may feel a little boring at times, but repetition is an important part of early reading, so be patient!



## Expression

Reading or reciting rhymes and stories with lots of expression and varying of speed, volume and pitch is a great way of making it more interesting (for you as well!) and will model these skills for children too.



Miss out rhyming words and encourage them to fill in the last word of each line.

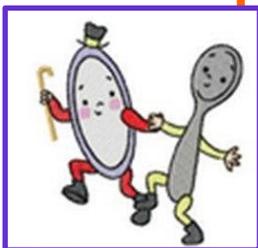


Make up your own actions! Your child will remember and engage with a rhyme more quickly if they have come up with their own actions.

Clap along with a steady beat to help them hear the rhythm of a rhyme.

Miss out or change a word and let your child correct you!

Use finger puppets (or puppets made from lolly sticks and paper) to help act out the rhymes.



Make a nursery rhyme 'prop box' collecting items that can help you tell the story (e.g. a plate, spoon, cow, cat for 'Hey Diddle, Diddle').



Paint or draw scenes from your favourite rhymes. You could use these with your puppets or prop box to make a puppet show (see previous page).



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Visit your local library to borrow books or CDs or download them online to expand your collection of Nursery rhymes (and keep everyone interested!)

Listen to audio CDs in the car or at home. Some books come with a CD so you can follow along with the words on the page and experience reading together.

Make your own nursery rhyme recordings! Record on a phone or tablet and play it back. You could even write and record your own CD for relatives!

Write your own nursery rhymes by using traditional ones and changing the words for people and places that you know.

Dress up as your favourite characters and act out the rhymes (just make sure that Humpty Dumpty's wall is not too high!)

Discuss the meaning of a rhyme (you could look it up together if you are not sure). Talk about what the 'story' is and how you think the character might be feeling. Can your child relate this to their own feelings? Have they ever felt that way?



## Glossary of Terms



**Nursery rhyme**—a traditional poem or song for young children.

**Traditional story**—a familiar story (e.g. a fairy tale) that is told in many similar forms in a particular culture, often based on legend and incorporating mythical characters.

**Rhyme**—words that have the same last sound (e.g. Humpty / Dumpty)

**Pitch**—the level of your voice (how high or low).

**Volume**—how loud or quiet your voice is.

**Intonation**—how the rise and fall of your voice changes meaning (e.g. going up at the end for a question).

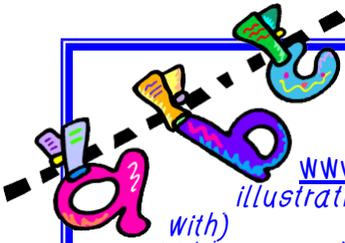
**Rhythm**—a regular pattern of sounds (e.g. 'hi-cko-ry di-cko-ry dock' has a strong rhythm)

**Repetition**—when a word or phrases is repeated (e.g. 'Three blind mice, three blind mice').

**Alliteration**—The use of the same sound at the start of a word close together to create effect (e.g. 'Baa, baa, black sheep').

**Onomatopoeia**—using words that include sounds to describe a sound (e.g. in 'Old Mac-Donald' or 'Horsey, horsey, don't you stop; Just let your feet go clippety clop').





## Some useful websites

[www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk](http://www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk) (for games, illustrations to colour and nursery rhymes to join in with)

[www.kidsnurseryrhymes.co.uk](http://www.kidsnurseryrhymes.co.uk) (as above but with an MP3 download facility)

[www.songsforteaching.com/nurseryrhymes](http://www.songsforteaching.com/nurseryrhymes) (recorded nursery rhymes to sample and buy)

[www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk](http://www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk) (for games, illustrations to colour and nursery rhymes to join in with)

[www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/earlylearning/nurserysongs](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/earlylearning/nurserysongs) (free nursery rhymes with animated cartoons to join in with, including words to follow)

[www.bussongs.com](http://www.bussongs.com) (as BBC above with animated clips)

### Smart Phone Apps

There are plenty of apps that can be downloaded to watch, read and join in with that will help build confidence, language and expand your repertoire!

