

Nursery Rhymes are Great For All Times!

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Twinkle, twinkle little star, /How I wonder what you are...; One, two, buckle my shoe...; Baa, baa, black sheep...; and so on and so forth go the numerous nursery rhymes that are caught in the long ago memories of my own childhood; and of a more recent time as I recited them to my kids when they were little (they are teens now!). Time can fly and years can pass, but these rhymes have retained their stronghold on my (and yours too, maybe?) memories seemingly forever. So today's post talks about the history of rhymes, and also all the reasons why Nursery Rhymes are Great For All Times!

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Poetic Potpourri From AtoZ
NURSERY RHYMES ARE
GREAT FOR ALL TIMES!

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HOW IT IS

we shut our doors
we don't sleep with them open
for fear the world sees in
nally sees us
sees our mess
sees the things we can't brush into place
the art we create we're too afraid to show the world
we don't open our doors wide
we don't open our hearts
turn the spotlight on
and say "I haven't done laundry in a week. My girlfriend
left me. I'm not sleeping"
we just shut the white door
with a blue handse
and lie in bed
at the ceiling all night.

I don't
I w

Nursery Rhymes

A [2009 Booktrust poll](#) showed that fewer parents recite or enact nursery rhymes to their kids than previously; while a more [recent \(2019\) government](#) survey in the UK showed that 8% of children under five had never learnt a song, poem or nursery rhyme. It did sadden me to read that; because for me:

- nursery rhymes are bringers of wonderful memories
- they are wonderful sources of learning - for language, reading, numbers, and more
- rhymes help build skills of well, rhyming, and rhythm
- they help connect people and generations seamlessly and with fun

Some of the reasons cited across the above linked survey related articles for this decreasing popularity were that:

- one, some consider them too "old fashioned" or archaic;
- two, they (rhymes) are considered as 'not educational'
- three, some, like with fairy tales of yore, are considered "too dark"
- and, four, maybe there are reasons more (though I am not sure)

But, having said that, there is also evidence to the contrary. Various [studies](#) have shown that rhymes help learning in early childhood. More on that later, but first.....

The Story Of Nursery Rhymes

The term **nursery rhyme**, as is obvious, refers a short rhyme for children that often tells a story; and maybe the term springs from the fact that the **nursery** was/is the room/place where young children are taken care of when their parents are at work/elsewhere. One source mentions that the term nursery rhyme derives from the 1806 book [Rhymes For The Nursery](#) by Jane and Ann Taylor.

I love that these rhymes have been around for centuries, passed from one generation to , handed down from generation to generation verbally and changing over time. The only way to date them is as and when they've been written down

One of the oldest rhymes, or lullabies, might well be a Roman nurses' lullaby , "*Lalla, Lalla, Lalla, aut dormi, aut lacta*" (translated as Lullaby, Lullaby, Lullaby, / either go to sleep or suckle), is recorded in a [scholium](#) on [Persius](#) (34 - 62 A.C). Reading this one reminded me of a lullaby in Hindi which goes like "*lalla, lalla, lori, doodh ki katori*" (lullaby for my little one, there is a bowl full of milk; *lori* being the Hindi word for lullaby).

Very often, nursery rhymes are anonymous, though there are many instances of rhymes written by known authors. The origin of many is in rich oral traditions, and publication first started in the early 18th century. Though the popular "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake" dates back to 1698 when it appeared in [Thomas d'Urfey's](#) play *The Campaigners*. Some rhymes date back to the late 16th

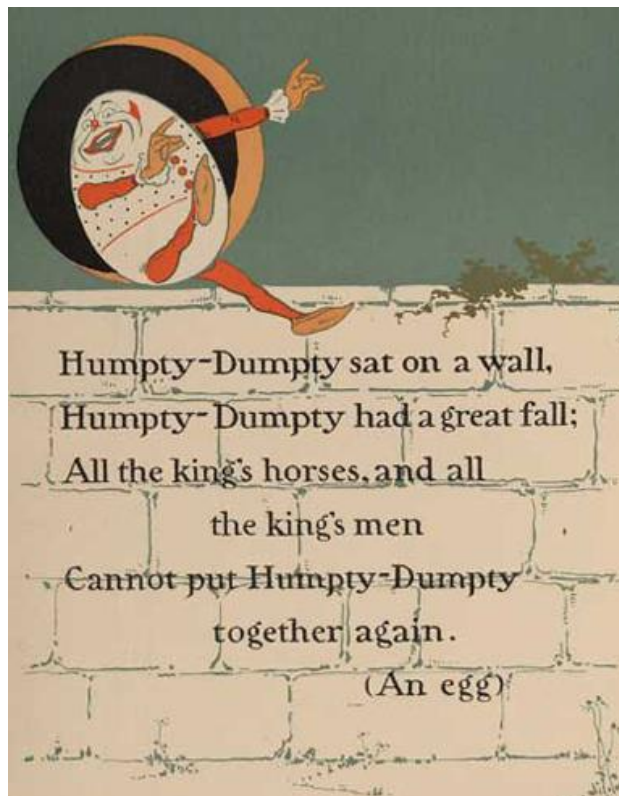
century (for example, "To market, to market") and the 17th century ("Lavender's Blue," "Rain, rain, go away"), but were recorded in written works later.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw a spur of nursery rhymes books being published with increased popularity of children's literature; while the 20th century brought with a slew of illustrated versions of nursery rhyme books.

The Stories Behind Some Nursery Rhymes

There are a great many resources online that offer up stories behind many of the nursery rhymes; dark origins, disturbing stories, the history of, and so on. I have linked many of those in the further reading/references section below but wanted to mention a few here.

Humpty Dumpty



[William Wallace Denslow](#), Public domain, via

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Humpty Dumpty seems to have a great many origin stories; ranging from referring to rotund people in the 15th century to the nickname of a cannon that was displaced from the wall it sat on by enemy cannonballs and broke into pieces when it fell. Then there are stories that point to it being a riddle rhyme across cultures with variations on the answers. And there is the story that it could refer to Richard III of England made popular by Shakespeare's play where he was depicted as humpbacked and brittle (like an egg). [Source: [Owlcation](#)]

Whatever the origin, the rhyme is certainly a popular one that has withstood the test of time, way better than poor Humpty Dumpty; and in its repeated recitations, he has had a zillion falls (and counting!)

How many times have you made him fall?! And did you start reciting the lines when you saw the name?

And of course, he is part of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. Without the all-knowing Humpty, Alice would have had a tough time understanding the *Jabberwocky* poem!!

Mary Had a Little Lamb



Mary had a little lamb 2 - Illustration by

[w:en:William Wallace Denslow](#)

When Sarah Josephina Hale was teaching at a school in Newport, New Hampshire, one of her students named Mary, brought her pet lamb to school at her brother's suggestion! [source: [Wikipedia](#)]

If her name sounds familiar to some of you, it is because [Hale](#), in addition to being the author of this popular nursery rhyme, also famously campaigned for the creation of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Where Are You Going, My Pretty Maid?

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[*The Real Mother Goose*](#) (1916), illustrated by Blanche Fisher

Wright

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY PRETTY MAID

"Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

"I'm going a-milking, sir," she said.

"May I go with you, my pretty maid?"

"You're kindly welcome, sir," she said.

"What is your father, my pretty maid?"

"My father's a farmer, sir," she said.

"What is your fortune, my pretty maid?"

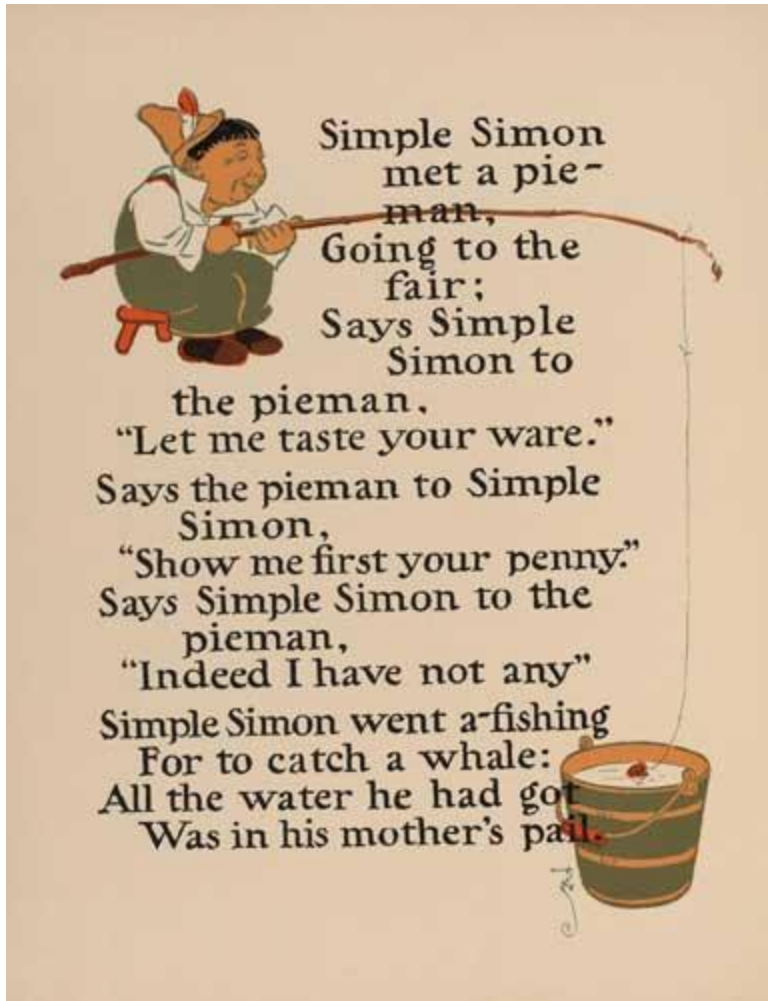
"My face is my fortune, sir," she said.

"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid."

"Nobody asked you, sir," she said.

Somehow the verses of this [song](#) gave me mixed feelings; a "wow-feminist" reaction to that last line "Nobody ask'd you" countered by a not-so-wow reaction to the line "My face is my fortune." But still that last line was powerful enough to leave me with that wow-feminist feeling than anything else; especially given that this

Simple Simon



Simple Simon 1 - WW Denslow -

Project Gutenberg etext 18546

(via Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain in the United States)

Do you recall this nursery rhyme? When I saw the lines in the illustration above, I realized I didn't recall reading the last four lines when I learned it ages ago. What about you?

Nobody really knows who Simple Simon was. One of the earliest references is in an illustrated chap-book from 1685 titled *Simple Simon's Misfortunes and his Wife Margery's Cruelty*. While another source of inspiration could have been a beggar named [Simon Edy](#) who lived in the St Giles area in the 18th century. [Source: [Wikipedia](#)]

More That is Neat About Nursery Rhymes

In addition to the fascinating history of nursery rhymes in general and behind many of them, there is so much more that is neat about them.

Because of those dark and disturbing histories of nursery rhymes, there has forever been a hue and outcry to make changes to the words within. Just in case you are wondering about the "forever" in the previous sentence, there was a [Society for Nursery Rhyme Reform](#) in the early

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1900s in Britain! And then, there are those surveys I mentioned earlier that showed reduced popularity of rhymes.

Did you know that "Twinkle twinkle little star" was jointly written by two sisters? They were Ann Taylor (1782-1866) and Jane Taylor (1783-1824). And do you know the complete rhyme? I know I did not!! You can read it [here](#)

The Learn With Fun Aspect Of Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes are a freely available resource of learning and action. They are a stepping stone into the world of reading; for when kids know the rhymes, and then see the words on pages as they start learning to read, they can identify the words by that cool combination of memory and sight.

In addition to helping build reading skills, they also help build social skills. When kids in a group all know and sing/recite rhymes together, it is an ice-breaker of a huge magnitude. It creates comfort; and even for those who might not know the rhymes, the fact that they are easy to memorize allows them to be part of the group sooner than later.

Then there are all those amazing motor-skill builders within these rhymes. Think about *Itsy bitsy spider* or *Hickory Dickory Dock* or *Jack be Nimble*. Each of these encourages actions and helps develop early motor skills, in addition to always building vocabulary. Where else would kids learn nimble or itsy?

Plus, there is that connection with culture and history as we teach and learn nursery rhymes. Kids learn storytelling skills without realizing they are doing so; they learn words, numbers, and so much more, all in the name of fun.

And don't forget all the more newer nursery rhymes as well. Starting from the beloved Raffi to The Wiggles, and so many other options, there are endless ways to learn nursery rhymes old and new, and to have lots of fun.

Because in the end, it all boils down to this simple fact: **nursery rhymes are pure fun!**

So I do hope that the next survey shows an upsurge; and that the rhymes thrive for more centuries to come.

Some Cool Ways To Learn Using Rhymes

- Rhymes like *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* are a great way to learn **numbers**, as well as to help with **simple actions**. Trying to enact each of those actions in the words will help motor skills. Considering that there might not be many shoes with buckles nowadays, maybe you could change it to "lace my shoe" or "velcro my shoe"?!
- Children can learn about the different **animals and the sounds** they make with songs/rhymes like *Old Mac Donald*. Add more animals to his farm to make it more fun.
- **Teach the weather** with *Itsy Bitsy Spider*, and to **read time** with *Hickory Dickory Dock*.

- Of course, you can have kids **illustrate rhymes**; or **create crafts** for them. Just google "nursery rhyme crafts" and the options are endless. I hope to add some to this or a later post.
- You could cut out and mix up the sentences of two or more memorized rhymes, and have kids put them together the right way (**testing memory**). Or put them together in a new way (helps build **creativity**). You could also have them create new rhyming sentences and make the rhyme bigger (or replace some of the lines)
- You can take it one step further by cutting out words from one (or more) rhyme and having kids put them back together into the rhyme (or rhymes) like a **puzzle**
- **Creative cacophony!** Pick two or more nursery rhymes with similar tunes; like the *Alphabet Song*, "Twinkle, twinkle", and "Baa, baa, black sheep". And assign one rhyme each to a different group of kids; next have them all try to sing their rhymes - all of the groups singing their assigned rhyme at the same time!!
- And so many more creative ways to combine fun and learning through rhymes!

h/t, References, Further Reading

- [Nursery rhymes from all over the world – a gallery to share with children](#) (The Guardian)
- [Wikipedia's Nursery Rhyme page](#)
- [Rhymes in early childhood](#) (Booktrust)
- [Culturally Diverse Nursery Rhymes to Share](#) (NYPL)
- [The Dark Origins of 11 Classic Nursery Rhymes](#) (MentalFloss)
- [The Secret History of the Nursery Rhyme!](#) and more to explore at Rhymes.org
- [English Nursery Rhymes with Unexpected and Sometimes Disturbing Historical Origins](#) (Ancient-Origins, net)
- [The Real Mother Goose](#) (Project Gutenberg)
- [MamaLisa.com](#)