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## NURSERY RHYMES FOR ALL AGES

Almost from birth, the nursery rhymes we hear become ingrained in our subconscious. Poet Liz Rosenberg wrote in a 1991 *New York Times* feature, “Has Poetry for Kids Become a Child’s Garden of Rubbish?,” that these rhymes, and the songs they may derive from, “provide a few things very small children love best—vibrant, musical language and a quick bolt of drama.” Often the rhymes consist of nonsensical phrases and silly words strung together to sound lyrical and funny while capturing a child’s attention. The rhymes may provide lessons that later in life we never even consider how we learned, such as counting, distinguishing between colors, reciting the alphabet, or understanding concepts.

Many child-development experts recommend that children know, by heart, at least eight nursery rhymes by the age of four. Many parents, though, don’t know any nursery rhymes, don’t think they are educational, or are embarrassed to recite them. Some rhymes are also controversial or seem silly or irrelevant to adults, who may shy away from sharing them. Few parents share “Three Blind Mice” these days, for example, either because of the violence (cutting off their tails) or because of perceived discrimination against the physically disabled (the rodents are blind). Some scholars believe that “Ring around the Rosie” refers to the plague, and the spider in “Little Miss Muffet” could be a sixteenth-century religious reformer. Although it is possible that some rhymes have hidden meanings, and some rhymes have fallen out of favor for reasons of political correctness, the children listening to them and reciting along don’t generally care about or recognize possibly sinister undertones. For those who prefer to avoid anything potentially unpleasant, there are plenty of rhymes to chant, recite, read, and enjoy, including many from around the world and from sources other than Mother Goose. What matters most is that we share these shortest of short stories, simple songs, and baby poems that set the stage for deciphering spoken and written language.

Parents, teachers, and librarians can select from a rich assortment of nursery rhymes in collected volumes. Some collections may be most useful as resources for adults, while others, such as *My Very First Mother Goose*, edited by Iona Opie, have large, colorful illustrations that encourage sharing page by page. Other collections may gather rhymes based on a theme or provide alternative settings. Individual rhymes may also appear in illustrated board books and picture books that

can be held by tiny hands. In today’s pantheon of publishing, there are books based on nursery rhymes that can be used with children in a wide age range, and older children, even high-school students, can enjoy seeing their favorite characters in fractured versions, expanded retellings, and adaptations.

### Infants

**Baa, Baa, Black Sheep.** By Annie Kubler. Illus. by the author. 2005. 12p. Child’s Play, \$4.99 (9781904550419). PreS.

A single nursery rhyme is presented in this sturdy board book with big, bold illustrations that include directions for American Sign Language. Other titles in the series feature additional rhymes and songs.

**The Itsy-Bitsy Spider.** By Rosemary Wells. Illus. by the author. 1998. 18p. Scholastic, \$6.99 (9780590029117). PreS.

Part of a series, in which each volume contains one rhyme with large, colorful illustrations, this board book will encourage infants and toddlers to learn the words and recite them back as they practice reading.

**My First Mother Goose.** By Tomie dePaola. Illus. by the author. 2009. 14p. Penguin, \$5.99 (9780448451992). PreS–K.

With real-life people portrayed in dePaola’s illustrations, this board book is a perfect introduction to standard nursery rhymes for toddlers.

**My Very First Mother Goose.** Ed. by Iona Opie. Illus. by Rosemary Wells. 1996. 108p. Candlewick, \$22.99 (9781564026200). 398.8. PreS.

This volume pairs more than 60 old favorites with Wells’ joyful illustrations in her trademark style. Adults will be giggling along with Baby, and the fun continues in companion anthology, *Here Comes Mother Goose* (1999).

**One, Two, Buckle My Shoe.** By Salina Yoon. Illus. by the author. 2011. 22p. Random, \$6.99 (9780375864797). PreS.

Die-cut pages in this board book show abstract images that transform into circus scenes as toddlers learn to count as they follow the rhymes.

**Pat a Cake.** By Annie Kubler. Illus. by the author. 2010. 12p. Child’s Play, \$4.99 (9781846433382). PreS.

This board book presents a single rhyme with large illustrations of babies and toddlers, including some with disabilities. Other books in the publisher’s Nursery Time series are similarly perfect for sharing with the youngest children.

**Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.** By Jerry Pinkney. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. Little, Brown, \$16.99 (9780316056960). PreS.

This lushly illustrated version of the nursery song imagines a chipmunk's travels through the wonders of the world around him.

## Preschool

**Builder Goose: It's Construction Rhyme Time!** By Boni Ashburn. Illus. by Sergio De Giorgi. 2012. 24p. Sterling, \$14.95 (9781402771187). 398.8. PreS–K.

Traditional rhymes are recast for the construction site in this title, which include lingo, vehicles, and equipment related to building. As the “crumbling bridge is falling down,” children can clap out “rat-a-tat” to the rhythm of “pat-a-cake.” The bright illustrations feature both animals and people on a busy construction site.

**The Eensy Weensy Spider Freaks Out! (Big Time!)** By Troy Cummings. Illus. by the author. 2010. 40p. Random, \$16.99 (9780375865824). K–Gr. 3.

This witty parody provides readers with the opportunity to see how the spider overcomes her fears after getting washed down the water spout. Will she be brave enough to climb up the spout again?

**Good Night, Sleep Tight.** By Mem Fox. Illus. by Judy Horacek. 2013. 32p. Scholastic, \$16.99 (9780545533706). PreS–Gr. 1.

Babysitter Doug starts out by sharing one nursery rhyme to put the kids to bed. When asked to repeat the rhyme, Doug instead offers another and another until everyone is asleep in a clever bedtime story that includes six familiar rhymes.

**The Green Mother Goose: Saving the World One Rhyme at a Time.** By Jan Peck and David Davis. Illus. by Carin Berger. 2011. 32p. Sterling, \$14.95 (9781402765254). 811.54. PreS–Gr. 3.

Thirty familiar rhymes are reworked to be ecofriendly, often with hilarious results, in this picture book illustrated with artwork made from recycled materials.

**Japanese Nursery Rhymes: Carp Streamers, Falling Rain and Other Traditional Favorites.** By Danielle Wright. Illus. by Helen Acraman. 2011. 32p. Tuttle, \$16.95 (9784805311882). 398.8. K–Gr. 1.

Each double-page spread introduces one of 15 poems passed down through generations and written in Japanese script, a Roman alphabet transliteration, and English. Colorful, stylized illustrations reflect Japanese children at play, and an accompanying CD features children singing in both languages.

**Korean Nursery Rhymes: Wild Geese, Land of Goblins and Other Favorite Songs and Rhymes.** By Danielle Wright. Illus. by Helen Acraman. 2013. 32p. Tuttle, \$16.95 (9780804842273). 398.8. K–Gr. 1.

Each of 14 traditional songs and rhymes are presented in Korean, in both Hangeul characters and phonetically, and English, with a note about Korean culture. An accompanying CD includes performances in both languages sung by children.

**Maria Had a Little Llama / María tenía una llamita.** By Angela Dominguez. Illus. by the author. 2013. 28p. Holt, \$16.95 (9780805093339); e-book, \$9.99 (9781466844681). PreS–Gr. 2.

This bilingual rhyme, set in Peru, features a young girl who takes her pet llama to school. Illustrations reflect Peruvian culture, dress, and animals.

**Moo, Moo, Brown Cow, Have You Any Milk?** By Phillis Gershator. Illus. by Giselle Potter. 2011. 40p. Random, \$16.99 (9780375867446); e-book, \$10.99 (9780375988714). PreS–Gr. 1.

As a boy roams around a farm, he asks the animals for milk, honey, wool, and more in this twist on the nursery rhyme “Ba, Ba, Black Sheep.” At bedtime, the black sheep's wool becomes a blanket, and items collected from the other animals become other products.

**¡Muu, Moo! Rimas de Animales.** By Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy. Illus. by Viví Escrivá. 2010. 48p. HarperCollins, \$16.99 (9780061346132); lib. ed., \$17.89 (9780061346149). PreS–Gr. 2.

Chubby-cheeked children and playful animals adorn 16 gentle rhymes from Latin American countries and Spain. English translations retain the poetry of the originals rather than providing literal translations.

**My Mother Goose.** By David McPhail. Illus. by the author. 2013. 96p. Roaring Brook, \$19.99 (9781596435261); e-book, \$9.99 (9781466848757). 398.8. PreS–K.

Sixty-plus mostly familiar rhymes introduce basic concepts—as well as more advanced ideas, like getting dressed and the months of the year—in this compendium. Each rhyme or song is accompanied by illustrations of human and animal characters in a cozy style that re-creates the feeling of classic collections.

**¡Pío Peep!** Traditional Spanish Nursery Rhymes. Ed. by Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy. Illus. by Viví Escrivá. 2003. 64p. HarperCollins, \$15.99 (9780688160197). 398.8. PreS–Gr. 2.

This stellar collection of Spanish-language nursery rhymes

brings together the best verses from Latin America and the American Southwest. Rhymes appear in Spanish and then are re-created, rather than directly translated, in English to maintain the rhythm and meaning of the verses.

**Songs from a Journey with a Parrot:** Lullabies and Nursery Rhymes from Portugal and Brazil. By Magdeleine Lerasle and Paul Mindy. Illus. by Aurelia Fronty. 2013. 52p. Secret Mountain, \$16.95 (9782923163994). 782.42. PreS–Gr. 1.

In this illustrated volume, 30 rhymes and lullabies are presented in Portuguese and English to demonstrate the cultural ties between the two countries. An accompanying CD vocalizes the songs in a variety of musical styles, sung by men, women, and children accompanied by traditional and indigenous instruments.

**Songs from the Baobab:** African Lullabies & Nursery Rhymes. By Chantal Grosleziat. Illus. by Elodie Nouhen. 2011. 63p. Secret Mountain, \$16.95 (9782923163796). 781.62. PreS–Gr. 2.

English translations accompany these 29 rhymes and songs in 11 languages from Central and West Africa, while a companion CD offers performances by native musicians accompanied by traditional instruments.

**This Little Piggy.** By Tim Harrington. Illus. by the author. 2013. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15.99 (9780062218087). PreS–K.

Harrington, an indie rock singer, takes a look at the secret life of toes and extends the rhyme to the other foot, the one never mentioned in the original nursery rhyme. Turns out those toes were doing interesting things!

**Three Little Kittens.** By Jerry Pinkney. Illus. by the author. 2010. 40p. Penguin, \$16.99 (9780803735330). 398.8. PreS–Gr. 2.

Lush illustrations greatly enhance this picture book, which features color-coded text to cue young readers to chant along with some of the words as the little kittens are gently scolded for losing their mittens.

**When the Wind Blew.** By Alison Jackson. Illus. by Doris Barrette. 2014. 32p. Holt, \$16.99 (9780805086881). PreS–Gr. 1.

The wind is blowing hard on the old lady's shoe home. When a cradle arrives on her doorstep, it sets off a chain of events that causes upheaval in the house. Can all be set right before bedtime?

## Elementary

**And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon.** By Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel. Illus. by Janet Stevens. 2001. 56p. Houghton, \$17.99 (9780152022983); e-book, \$17 (9780547767055). K–Gr. 3.

When the dish really does run away with the spoon, and the two don't come back, things start to go terribly wrong. The rest of the characters search for the runaways so that the rhyme can be restored before the next bedtime. Along the way, they meet other nursery characters who help with the search.

**The Cheese.** By Margie Palatini. Illus. by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. 2007. 32p. Harper, \$17.99 (9780060526306); lib. ed., \$18.89 (9780060526313). K–Gr. 3.

Picking up the action where the familiar song ends, a wedge of cheese stands alone and begins to question the rules of the game. As the rest of the characters appear, the reworked song concludes with a picnic.

**Detective Blue.** By Steve Metzger. Illus. by Ted Arnold. 2011. 32p. Scholastic, \$17 (9780545172868); e-book, \$4.99 (9780545598439). K–Gr. 3.

Formerly known as Little Boy Blue, the lead character in this title now solves nursery-rhyme crimes. Dressed in a fedora and trench coat and spouting deadpan lines, Blue sets out to find Miss Muffet, who has been reported missing. The oversized, comic-book-style illustrations add to the humor.

**The Great Nursery Rhyme Disaster.** By David Conway. Illus. by Melanie Williamson. 2009. 32p. Tiger Tales, \$15.95 (9781589250802); paper, \$7.95 (9781589254381). K–Gr. 2.

Bored with the same old rhymes, Little Miss Muffet gets off her tuffet and sets out to energize the tales and update the characters, leaving chaos in her wake. Children will want to pay attention to the humorous and witty comments written on placards being held up by a Greek chorus of characters.

**Mary and Her Little Lamb:** The True Story of the Famous Nursery Rhyme. By Will Moses. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. Philomel, \$17.99 (9780399251542). K–Gr. 2.

With rustic Americana illustrations, this picture book sets out the true story behind the nursery rhyme as a young farm girl nurses a sick lamb back to health. The fleshed-out account and historical back matter, along with detailed illustrations, make for a good "behind-the-scenes" lesson for older children.

**Southern Mother Goose.** By David Davis. Illus. by Herb Leonhard. 2013. 40p. Pelican, \$17.95 (9781455617609). 811.54. K–Gr. 4.

These adaptations of familiar rhymes feature Mother Goose

with a twang and a drawl. Old Mother Hubbard goes to the cupboard for cornbread, while Little Boy Bluegrass plays the fiddle.

**Spinster Goose:** Twisted Rhymes for Naughty Children. By Lisa Wheeler. Illus. by Sophie Blackall. 2011. 41p. Atheneum, \$16.99 (9781416925415). 811. K–Gr. 3.

In these twisted rhymes, children who misbehave are sent to Spinster Goose's reform school, run by Mother Goose's sister. Readers familiar with the characters will be delighted to find an entirely different story!

**Who Pushed Humpty Dumpty?** And Other Notorious Nursery Tale Mysteries. By David Levinthal. Illus. by John Nickle. 2012. 40p. Schwartz & Wade, \$17.99 (9780375841958); lib. ed., \$20.99 (9780375945953); e-book, \$10.99 (9780375987700). K–Gr. 3.

Officer Binky, a “just-the-facts” toad, narrates five tongue-in-cheek mini mysteries based on crimes against nursery-rhyme characters. Young readers familiar with the original tales will enjoy closing these cases.

**What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?** By Debi Gliori. Illus. by the author. 2012. 32p. Walker, \$16.99 (9780802734327); lib. ed., \$17.89 (9780802734334); e-book, \$8.99 (9781408839607). 823.92. K–Gr. 2.

A mix of nursery-rhyme and fairy-tale characters play a game with the Big Bad Wolf as the clock counts down to his birthday celebration. Readers will enjoy finding even more characters in the illustrations.

## Older Readers

**Crafts from Your Favorite Nursery Rhymes.** By Kathy Ross. Illus. by Elaine Garvin. 2002. 48p. Lerner, lib. ed., \$24.90 (9780761325239); paper, \$8.95 (9780761315896); e-book, \$38.60 (9780761368458). 745.5. Gr. 3–5.

Nursery-rhyme-inspired crafts fill this DIY volume, with projects ranging from puppets and masks to home decorations.

**Mother Goose Unplucked:** Crazy Comics, Zany Activities, Nutty Facts, & Other Twisted Takes on Childhood Favorites. By Helaine Becker. Illus. by Claudia Dávila. 2007. 160p. Owl Kids, paper, \$10.95 (9781897066843). 813.6. Gr. 3–7.

The title says it all: this book is filled with games, crafts, recipes, cartoons, trivia, and more, featuring a host of familiar friends, from the Ugly Duckling to Humpty Dumpty and Miss Muffet.

**Nursery Rhyme Comics.** Ed. by Chris Duffy. 2011. 128p. illus. First Second, \$18.99 (9781596436008); e-book, \$9.99 (9781466831667). 741.5. Gr. 4–12.

Fifty cartoonists and artists illustrate nursery rhymes, interpreting familiar and unfamiliar poems in just as many ways. Each double-page spread is laid out in comic-book format with the original nursery-rhyme text.

**Two and Twenty Dark Tales:** Dark Retellings of Mother Goose Rhymes. Ed. by Georgia McBride and Michelle Zink. 2013. 340p. Month9Books, paper, \$14.95 (9780985029418); e-book, \$6.99 (9780985327842). 808.83. Gr. 9–12.

Twenty YA authors reimagine nursery rhymes, exploring the darker motivations behind the stories. Did Jack really fall, or was he pushed down the hill by his jealous sister? The anthology offers a range of diversity in authors and tone, and each selection includes an unexpected twist.

**Jeanette Larson** is a library and literature consultant and an author. Her latest title is *Hummingbirds: Facts and Folklore from the Americas* (2011).

## Web Resources

*Reading Is Fundamental: Nursery Rhymes*

[rif.org/kids/leadingtoreading/en/babies-toddlers/nursery-rhymes.htm](http://rif.org/kids/leadingtoreading/en/babies-toddlers/nursery-rhymes.htm)

Reading Is Fundamental provides text and sound files for an assortment of rhymes in English as well as a mix of original and translated Spanish rhymes.

*Mama Lisa's World*

[mamalisa.com](http://mamalisa.com)

This website provides thousands of songs and rhymes from more than 135 countries in a multitude of languages.

## Web Connections

For links to additional nursery-rhyme resources, visit [www.booklistonline.com](http://www.booklistonline.com) and select “Web Connections” under *Book Links* on the left-hand navigation bar.

## Common Core Connections

Below are suggestions for implementing the Common Core State Standards with nursery rhymes. You can find more information about the standards at [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

**In the Classroom:** Read aloud the rhyme “Old Mother Hubbard” from a collection such as *My First Mother Goose*, by Tomie dePaola. Then create paper-bag puppets for each character in the rhyme. Finally, have students use the puppets to dramatize the poem.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.2.** With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3.** Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

**In the Classroom:** After reading Jerry Pinkney’s *Three Little Kittens*, have children create pairs of mittens from wallpaper samples or other scraps of colorful paper. Next, ask students to hold on to one mitten. Hide the other mittens around the room, and ask children to find the match to theirs. Finally, ask students to describe where they found their mitten, using prepositions.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.K.1e.** Use the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with).
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.5.** Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.

**In the Classroom:** Read a fractured version of a nursery rhyme, such as Phillis Gershtator’s *Moo, Moo, Brown Cow, Have You Any Milk?* Next, have students select another traditional rhyme from a collection such as *My Very First Mother Goose*, edited by Iona Opie, and ask them to rewrite their own versions.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3a.** Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3b.** Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.

**In the Classroom:** Have students select a nursery rhyme from a collection such as David McPhail’s *My Mother Goose* and then write a newspaper story about it. What would be the headline? Focus on who, what, where, and why for the lead-in and article content.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1.** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2.** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

**In the Classroom:** Make a clock face using a paper plate, construction paper, crayons, and brass brads. Read Debi Gliori’s *What’s the Time, Mr.*

*Wolf?*, and as you discuss the events of the book as a class, have students use the clock to match up the times as the wolf and his friends go through their day. You can also extend the exercise to include a discussion of the differences in telling time with both analog and digital clocks.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.2.** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1b.** Build on others’ talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
- **CCSS.Math.Content.1.MD.B.3.** Tell and write time in hours and half-hours using analog and digital clocks.

**In the Classroom:** Read *Who Pushed Humpty Dumpty? And Other Notorious Nursery Tale Mysteries*, by David Levinthal. Next, have students choose a character from the text and create a “wanted” poster detailing their aliases, the crime they have committed, distinguishing characteristics or features, and who is looking for the character.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1.** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.6.** Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

**In the Classroom:** Select a traditional nursery rhyme or a reinterpreted one, such as a selection from *The Green Mother Goose: Saving the World One Rhyme at a Time*, by Jan Peck and David Davis. After reading the rhyme out loud, work together as a class to identify the words with similar endings. Write them on the board, and then create a list of more words that will rhyme.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2f.** Use spelling patterns and generalizations (e.g., word families, position-based spellings, syllable patterns, ending rules, meaningful word parts) in writing words.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1.** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

**In the Classroom:** Read *Mary and Her Little Lamb: The True Story of the Famous Nursery Rhyme*, by Will Moses. Have students choose another nursery rhyme and research the story and meaning behind it. Select unfamiliar words or archaic words, and look up the definitions. Look for more contemporary words that express the same or similar meanings.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4c.** Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7.** Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

## Common Core Connections

**In the Classroom:** After sharing traditional rhymes with students from collections such as *My Very First Mother Goose*, edited by Iona Opie, look at some of the rebus versions of nursery rhymes available on websites like Enchanted Learning, [enchantedlearning.com/Rhymes.html](http://enchantedlearning.com/Rhymes.html). ] Have students pick another rhyme and then create their own rebuses. Finally, have them present their rebuses to the class, and, if possible, create audio or video recordings of the presentations.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.5.** Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.5.** Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

**In the Classroom:** After reading Angela Dominguez's *Maria Had a Little Llama / María tenía una llamita*, have students pick another animal that might accompany them to school and, together as a class, write a new rhyme, following the same rhythms and using Dominguez's book as a mentor text.

### Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.2.5b.** Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., toss, throw, hurl) and closely related adjectives (e.g., thin, slender, skinny, scrawny).
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.2.** Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.3.** Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.