

# Nursery Rhymes

Remember those?? If you're anywhere close to my age(old) then you know all the good ones that were taught to you by your mom and teachers. They tend to stay with you forever and can be recited at the drop of a hat. I can remember my mother had a very thick book of classic nursery rhymes and stories. By the time I had used the book with my own children, the cover of the book was literally hanging on by a few threads. Unfortunately, it appears as though nursery rhymes are not taught as they used to be. Why is that? I know that some people may argue that there are those nursery rhymes which are not appropriate for one reason or another. However, there are certainly enough that are totally innocent that you could share with your children. My own opinion is that people are just not aware of the educational value that can be received from learning and reciting nursery rhymes.

In the years of my teaching pre k, I came to realize that many children had never heard such common rhymes as Jack and Jill or Baa Baa Black sheep. Can you imagine never having wiggled your child's toes to This Little Piggy? I had always thought most children would learn these from home or in their younger preschool classroom. After attending a workshop about the importance of early literature, I decided to incorporate the nursery rhymes into my own class time.

Nursery rhymes may truly be a child's first experience with literacy. Early literacy skills involve listening and speaking, two skills necessary to learn nursery rhymes. Evidence from research shows a direct correlation between nursery rhymes and the reading process. It is through these rhymes that children learn numerous language skills, expand their vocabulary and develop memory skills. Most importantly nursery rhymes are fun and will bring joy to your child. They contain humor and emotion. Who doesn't feel bad for the 3 Little Kittens when they lose their mittens? Tell me anyone who doesn't laugh when the dish runs away with the spoon? The benefits are valuable for children from a young age and onward.

If you are a parent, reading a book of nursery rhymes to your child is a great way to start. Pick out one or two and focus on memorizing them. You can say or sing them just about anywhere. They help pass the time when waiting in line or in traffic. You can get very creative and make up motions for the rhymes. One of my favorite gifts for a baby shower is a book of nursery rhymes. A friend of mine told me their son-in-law was reading from the book to his unborn baby, so sweet!

If you are a teacher, I want to give you some examples as to how I used them in my classroom. I started off teaching them as a weekly theme. I quickly discovered a week was just not long enough. I then began to focus on one nursery rhyme each month. The children were given enough time to memorize the rhyme and we were able to do multiple activities that went along with each rhyme before moving on the next month. (See monthly list of rhymes)

On the following pages, parents and teachers, see the sample nursery rhyme schedule for the school year and how it can be broken down to teach numerous literacy aspects.

## Nursery Rhymes by the Month

I am a huge proponent of carrying out a theme within the classroom as much as possible. When I scheduled my nursery rhymes, there was a reason behind the selected month. It may or may not work for you this way. I have put some notes so you can see my thought process behind the choice. There are also many other rhymes available that would be just as much fun. This is based on a 9-month school year.

**September** – *Mary Had a Little Lamb* – I hope it is obvious why this was selected for the first month of school. The first of the school year is based on getting to know the routine and rules and guidelines of the school and classroom. Mary's lamb follows her to school, which is against the rules, compare this to your classroom rules. What else might be funny to see in school?

**October** – *Little Miss Muffet* - This is a fun one and ties into Halloween, spiders and other creepy crawlies. You can also discuss emotions such as fear etc. Little Miss Muffet was afraid of spiders, what are your students afraid of?

**November** – *Old Mother Hubbard* - I typically did a unit on food during November because of the upcoming holiday of Thanksgiving. Compare a healthy cupboard to one that is unhealthy! You will have to describe what a cupboard is to your class.

**December** – *Humpty Dumpty* - December is a quick month, the choice of Humpty Dumpty was to go with the letter H which I covered during this time period. This is a good one for pointing out how to work together, despite the negative outcome of poor Humpty Dumpty. Another great choice for this month, especially if you work in a Christian school, is Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.

**January** – *Hickory Dickory Dock* - This is a great one for the start of the year. As soon as you arrive back after the holiday, you have celebrated the new year and the countdown of the clock to midnight. Your students are not too young to learn about the parts of a clock, the numbers, face and hands.

**February** – *The Three Little Kittens* - It's cold in many areas and those little kitties need their mittens. This can be an especially long nursery rhyme if you try to teach it all. Know your children and see how much you want to share with them.

**March** – *Hey Diddle Diddle* -Typically, I taught a space unit in March, and this helped tie into that, (a bit of a stretch but it does mention moon). It's important to mention here that this age will come up with many nonsensical rhyming words and that is totally acceptable.

**April** – *Jack and Jill* - This also accompanied one of the letters of the month, J. This nursery rhyme takes place outside and reminds me of springtime.

**May** – In May we have fun reviewing all that we have learned this year. A fun end of the year project would be to have them illustrate their favorite nursery rhyme and dictate why it is their favorite. Laminate this, it would make a nice keepsake for them to show their own children one day.

## How to Teach a Nursery Rhyme

Let's use Jack and Jill for our example, the first verse only. Always have the written rhyme up so the children can see it in print. It may be store produced or you might just write it on chart paper. Keep it visible throughout the month. Make sure to send the words home with your children for practice at home.

Jack and Jill went up the hill

To fetch a pail of water

Jack fell and broke his crown

And Jill came tumbling after.

- Read the rhyme aloud to the class. Then read line by line with your class repeating.
- Point out any vocabulary words they may not understand. These rhymes were written many years ago and the wording or vocabulary can be very different. The word "fetch" is one that they will understand once defined but is probably not a word they use. We are led to believe Jack and Jill are "fetching" water from a well and this is something that needs to be described also. The word crown is used here to describe the top of Jack's head. Most children know tumbling as an afterschool activity, in this sense it is meant as falling.
- What are the rhyming words found in the nursery rhyme? I would suggest highlighting the words with another color or underline. Jill and hill, down and crown are the rhyming words. Have the children come up with other words that also rhyme with these.
- Look for any other bonuses that can be found in the nursery rhyme. Look at the common letters such as the J as the beginning sound in each of their names. What other J names can you think of? The other important aspect to share with the children are the opposites of up and down. Opposites are fun and important to teach. If you have not introduced these to your class, now is the time. The term "after" here is used to describe Jill following Jack. Who fell "before" Jill?
- Once it has been introduced do your best to repeat the rhyme daily. It can be done waiting in line for the bathroom or at any other transition. By the end of the month your children will know Jack and Jill and be reciting it for their baby brother and sister.

I hope you now see the importance of a nursery rhyme. Each rhyme presents your students with new literacy skills.

(Please see other ways and ideas to help enhance the rhyme in your classroom.)

## Fun Activities to use with Nursery Rhymes

- Make a craft for each rhyme, they are all over Pinterest (see my pictures of crafts)
- Make puppets to help retell the rhyme.
- Clap or pat out the rhythm of a nursery rhyme, you can use rhythm sticks, drums etc.
- Storytelling basket to go with the rhyme – ex. Hey Diddle Diddle, a toy cow, cat, fiddle, dish and spoon. The children will enjoy pulling out the basket and playing with the objects all the while you are reinforcing the rhyme.
- Recite the rhyme, leave off a word and let the children fill in the blank, Jack and Jill went up the \_\_\_\_\_
- Recite the rhyme incorrectly and let children correct you, ex. Humpty Dumpty sat on a table! This is sure to get all kinds of laughter.
- Charades, see if the children can act out the rhyme and the others guess.
- Act out the rhymes, give each child a part and present for parents or other classes. I did this at one of my schools and it was so fun. The parents loved it!
- Repeat the rhymes in different voices, silly, whisper, rock n’roll etc.
- Have each child make a Mother Goose Book, save a piece of art or drawing from each rhyme, put together as a book and send it home at the end of the year.
- On a cube, purchased or a box you make (tissue box is perfect), write a nursery rhyme on each side. Have the children take turns rolling the cube and recite the nursery rhyme that lands face up.
- Create a bag and in the bag place one object from each nursery rhyme, ex. star for Twinkle Twinkle, sheep for Baa Baa Black Sheep etc., During a moment when you have a few spare minutes, pull something out of the bag, which nursery rhyme does this come from? When they guess correctly, have the class recite the rhyme.
- Sequence events of any given nursery rhyme. See if the children can tell you what happens first, next, etc. Again, there are many worksheets available on Pinterest or create your own by drawing the events in order.
- Journal – ask questions and children draw their answer and dictate to you, ex. Baa Baa Black sheep had three bags of wool, who would you give three bags of wool to? Mom, dad and sister!
- Create patterns with objects from rhymes such as die cuts, ex. Cow and moon, make a pattern and have child continue or create their own pattern.