

# Research and Tips: Why Children Still Need Mother Goose Rhymes



- Research shows that **children who have memorized nursery rhymes become better readers** because they develop an early sensitivity to the sounds of language. (See Marie Clay article.)
- Nursery rhymes are short and **full of alliteration and rhymes**. Children can quickly internalize the language and make them their own. These memorized rhymes are ideal vehicles for playing with language and developing **phonemic awareness**.
- Children **delight in the visual images** and strong rhythmic character of nursery rhymes. Visual imagery and **the rhythms of sound have a powerful effect on cognition**.
- Many **authors** of children's books **assume knowledge of nursery rhymes** and fairy tales. (See *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown and *Each Peach, Pear, Plum* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg.)
- **Memorizing nursery rhymes effortlessly plants the grammatical structure** (or syntax) of language in the child's long-term memory. This **accelerates both language and literacy development**.
- Reading rhymes that have been first memorized allows **children to monitor their own reading behavior** and build stamina and independence.
- Nursery rhymes feature **consistent decodable word chunks (rimes) conducive to explicit phonics instruction** within a meaningful context; they also reinforce high-frequency words.
- Repeated experiences with **"magical memory reading" develops fluency**, teaches concepts about print and lays the foundation for "guided reading" instruction. (See article on *Magical Guided Reading*.)
- Nursery rhymes invite movement and dramatic interpretation, allowing children to **personalize meaning and build language concepts and vocabulary**. This is especially vital for children acquiring English as a second language.
- **Every culture** has its own "nursery rhymes" or "out-loud culture." See *Tortillas para Mama*.
- Reading rhymes that children have first memorized supports self-monitoring behavior.
- **"Parents as partners"** can engage their children in memorizing nursery rhymes.
- Many nursery rhymes have **survived since the time of Shakespeare**. They have been polished by children into a form that is almost indestructible.
- When children memorize, recite and perform nursery rhymes they are **developing listening and speaking skills** in a joyful, non-threatening context.
- Active, imaginative teaching with nursery rhymes **takes advantage of how the brain learns best** – it is meaningful, memorable, and multisensory.
- Pre-school and kindergarten children can adapt nursery rhymes and **use the patterns** to make their own individual books or contribute **innovations for group books**. See examples in *Making Class Books in Kindergarten*. Children love being authors and illustrators.
- Nursery rhymes are **basic cultural literacy** – they are gifts of language that all children deserve to own.

