

## Nursery Rhymes, Games and Songs

Gretchen Eckroat  
Spring Hill/Horace Mann Elementary

### **Overview**

### **Rationale**

### **Objectives**

### **Strategies**

### **Classroom Activities**

### **Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

### **Appendices-Standards**

### **Overview**

For my curriculum unit I am going to research Nursery Rhymes, Jump Rope Games and Song games. Over the last couple of years I have noticed that students don't know basic nursery rhymes or games to play on the playground. Children don't seem get to participate in creative play anymore. Everything is regimented or designed; even during recess there is structured play to control behaviors on the playground. As a result, students are losing the important oral folk traditions of games, rhymes, and songs. Therefore I started thinking of ways that I can incorporate these traditions in my music classroom. Because I teach music, this type of tradition can easily fit in into my curriculum, plus I get to see everyone in the building each week. Games and rhymes can also be used to reinforce music elements such as: steady beat, rhythmic patterns, ostinato, and creative movement to name a few

### **Rationale**

As I started to research rhymes and nursery rhymes I was amazed to see how much information was available about the history or hidden meanings behind some of these nursery rhymes and nursery rhyme songs. . I was surprised to see what the real meanings behind some of these rhymes and songs were. Take Little Jack Horner for instance:

*Little Jack Horner  
Sat in the corner  
Eating his Christmas pie.  
He stuck in his thumb,  
Pulled out a plum*

***And said” What a good boy am I!”***

This rhyme is actually about Thomas Horner who was steward to the Abby of Glastonbury during the time of King Henry VIII. The King showed great interest in Glastonbury and other abbeys. The Abbot sent Thomas Horner to the king with a pie containing the title deeds to twelve manor houses in hope that the King would take those instead of the abbey. On his way to the King, Thomas Horner decided to stick his hand in and pulled out a deed to keep for himself. The bribe failed and the King took the abbeys anyway. Thomas Horner however got to keep the deed and the Abbot was killed. The moral of this tale: treachery and greed payoff, but bribery is a bad idea (Roberts 1, 2). The nursery rhyme song Old King Cole also has an interesting background, it was believed to be written about King Coilus. King Coilus was an English king who was set up as a puppet by the Romans. He was also believed to be a jovial person who had a lack of purpose.

***Old King Cole  
Was a merry old soul  
And a merry old soul was he  
He called for his pipe  
He called for his bowl  
And he called for his fiddlers three.***

The British call these rhymes Nursery Rhymes. Americans refer to them as Mother Goose rhymes, but Mother Goose originally referred to what we now call fairy tales such as “Cinderella and “Puss and Boots,” etc. The name, Mother Goose, first appeared in print in 1697 (Rollin 3). Mother Goose is a fictional old woman, reputed to be the source of the body of traditional children’s songs and verses known as nursery rhymes (Danielson 5). The persistent legend that she was an actual Boston woman, Elizabeth Goose, whose grave in Old Granary Burying Grounds is still a tourist attraction, is false (Danielson, 5). According to Delmar (1987), author of Mother Goose: From Nursery to Literature, a Mother Goose rhyme is given that label if it meets various criteria. Some say it’s the subject matter. Others say it is the pattern and the rhythm of the verse. Some even say it’s the length of the piece. Some insist that the author must be unknown. These arguments do not apply to nursery rhymes in general-only to the traditional verses that commonly are now classified as Mother Goose (Danielson 6). The rhymes at first were devised for the adult population. They were used to make fun of royalty, politics, and class. These rhymes tended to be short and easy to memorize since people were not educated. They also tended to be quite violent. An interesting example of a lullaby that has a very violent background and we still sing today this song today.

**Rock A Bye Baby  
In the tree top  
When the wind blows  
The cradle will rock  
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall  
And down will come baby cradle and all.**

It is believed that parents took out their frustrations with parenting and an unreasonable baby by singing a lullaby with very horrible lyrics about a baby falling out of a tree. A nursery game that has truly survived the test of time that is still played on many playgrounds today is Ring around the Rosy. This game is believed to represent what would happen to people who have caught the Black Plague.

**Ring around the Rosy  
Pockets full of posies  
Ashes, Ashes we all fall down.**

The first line represents the rosy ring people would get before they would die. The second line talks about the funeral flowers and the last line is the ashes from the burning of all of their possessions in hope to stop the spread of the plague.

Besides these rhymes, songs, and games being easy to learn often they were turned into songs and games. Soon these rhymes were learned and adopted by children. As early as the seventh century, our stern forefathers considered many of these verses unfit for childish ears. Their adult perceptive saw brutality, dishonesty, and irresponsibility rather than silliness and nonsensical fun. In more recent years, harsh criticism has been leveled at the apparent sexism in verses (Cullinan 1989). Rhymes started changing for children and were used to teach letters of the alphabet, days of the week, and counting. The earliest known published English collection of nursery rhymes was Tommy Thumb's Song Book, published in London in 1744 (Danielson 5).

Research seems to suggest that one of the best indicators of how well children will learn to read is their ability to recite nursery rhymes when they walk into the kindergarten. (Danielson 3) This will be a great opportunity for me to help reinforce reading skills in my music class room with not only kindergarten students but also 1<sup>st</sup> grade students.

I never realized how much research has been done on this subject already. There are many research papers written about using music to help reinforce beginning reading strategies; even starting with children as young as 3 years old. One study took a group of 64 children from ages 3 to 6 to see if learning nursery rhymes

would affect children's reading skills. "They reported a strong relationship between early knowledge of nursery rhymes and success in reading and spelling over the next three years even after controlling differences in I.Q., social background and children's phonological skills at the beginning of the project were taken into account". (Partridge 3) These researchers went on to explain their reasons to support this idea of connecting nursery rhymes with reading. They said:

*Our evidence suggests that the pathway is through the child's growing sensitivity to the component sounds in words. There are two steps to our argument. First, the nursery rhyme scores (with one exception) also predict success in phonological tasks over two years or more and do so even after their initial levels of phonological sensitivity have been controlled. So knowledge of nursery rhymes may affect the development of phonological sensitivity. Of course, we need to acquire this knowledge. Trevarthen's work suggests that it may start early and the prosodic cues and the rhythm in mothers' speech to their babies may play an important part (Trevarthen and Marwick 1986). This work also suggests that nursery rhymes are an ingredient of mother-infant dialogues and thus are a part of intersubjective routines which may play a significant role in language acquisition. Secondly, the relation between nursery rhymes and reading and spelling disappears when subsequent rhyme scores which predict reading and spelling very well, are entered in the equation. So it is possible that nursery rhymes enhance children's sensitivity to rhyme and this in turn helps them to learn to read. Much of the same argument can be made about phoneme detection and reading. The relation between nursery rhymes and reading disappears when phoneme detection scores are entered. The rhyme detection measures account for the connection between nursery rhymes and spelling but the phoneme measures do not. Thus rhymes are an essential ingredient of the connection between nursery rhymes and spelling. In rhyme the phonological unit is grosser and less specific than it is in phoneme detection tasks. But we also have evidence that children with reading problems make better progress in spelling (though not in reading) if they can rhyme. (Partridge 3-4)*

As I looked for ways to help students learn rhythm, dynamics, improvisation, and steady beat in the music class room, I learned that using nursery rhymes also helps to strengthen beginning reading skills, which students in my schools need. Nursery rhymes appear to help children: (a) learn the intonation patterns of a language, (b) learn new words and concepts, (c) understand the basis of learning to read and write, (d) gain appreciation of poetry (Danielson 7).

A study done in Illinois took a group of below average 1<sup>st</sup> grade readers and used nursery rhymes and rhythm to help build up their reading skills in the class room.

Each week the students would focus on a new nursery rhyme. The process was as follows: day one-children sang or chanted the rhyme; Day two-students acted out the rhyme; Day three-students drew pictures of the main idea of the rhyme; Day four-students found the rhyming words in the rhyme; and day five- all activities were reviewed(Rogers 3). The results of the study showed that the use of nursery rhymes improved the students' knowledge of letters and letter sounds. The students also gained confidence in their reading ability, and one to one matching was improved (Rogers 3). After reading this study I felt really encouraged that by using nursery rhymes in my music class room that they will really help with the students reading abilities.

“The spontaneous disposition children have toward rhythm and melody makes music an ideal tool for assisting them with the interwoven faucets of language: listening , speaking, reading and writing”(Kolb 76-77). Think back to when you started to learn the alphabet, days of the week, or even the months of the year. Did you say the alphabet or did you learn by singing the song? Langfit wrote, “Music is a powerful medium that educator can and should incorporate into their classrooms” (Roberts 12). Nursery rhymes and poems lend themselves to teaching rhythm and steady beat. Let’s take the poem Alligator Pie for an example.

*Alligator Pie, Alligator Pie,*

*If I don’t get some I think I’m going to die,*

*Take away the green grass, take away the sky,*

*But don’t take away my Alligator Pie.*

If you were to just read this poem without any kind of beat or rhythm, the poem would not be fun or interesting to students but if you were to keep a steady beat on your legs while you say the poem you add interest to the poem. By speeding up or slowing down the beat you add more rhythmic interest to the poem. Most children like to learn rhymes, make up their own verses or rhymes. Rhymes can also be used to help reinforce things that children might be having problems learning. Take the following poem

**Windshield wipers wipe the windshield**

**Wipe the water from the pane**

**This way**

**That way**

**This way**

**That way**

**This way                      That way**  
**In the rain.**  
(Partridge 6)

This poem could be used to help children learn their left from their right. There are so many possibilities on how these rhymes can be used to help children learn. Not just right and left, steady beat, but also vocabulary, and higher level thinking questions. These things can take just a few minutes for each class to learn a poem and apply it to music class.

Butzlaff believed there is a connection between reading and music. “...when students learn lyrics of songs they may engage in reading written text. The lyrics of songs are often repetitive and hence predictable. It is possible that experience in reading such predictable text may train reading skills” (Roberts 13).

As for Jump rope rhymes and games, “Anna Banana” is a treasure trove of easy to hard rhymes and games for the children to learn and play. This is something that I can start in Kindergarten, and as the students get older, we can progress to the harder games and rhymes. Jump rope games help with coordination and steady beat, tempo changes. “The New England Dance Masters” is another resource I found for song games and dances. They have several CD’s and books published that teach song games and American Folk Dances. This is an indispensable resource. I already use many of their CD’s and dances in my classroom with every grade level. It’s amazing to see how much students like these

### **Objectives**

The focus of my curriculum unit will be with 1<sup>st</sup> grade and kindergarten students. I am planning to start the unit at the beginning of the school year. I see my students once a week for 45 minutes, which is a long time for kindergarten to continually stay, focused at the beginning of the school year. I am hopeful that this unit will be able to add some variety to the music class. My main objective for this unit is to help build an oral library of nursery rhymes, songs, and games. Other objectives will be to say the poems using simple rhythms, improvisation, ostinato patterns, and dramatic movement to name a few music concepts. With reading we will be focusing on identifying rhyming words and sounds, sight words, and beginning and ending sounds as well as patterns in the poems, songs, and games. I am also planning to work with the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and kindergarten teachers and make them aware of what poems, songs, and games I am planning to use so they can supplement in their classroom if time allows. I am eager to see if there is any improvement with the students’ reading skills at the end of the unit. If the teachers see a change I might extend this throughout the rest of the year.

Many of my students start school without any prior schooling or focus. This year we are a reading first school. I am hoping that in using these poems, songs, and games with the students we are able to get them off to a good start in reading and music class. I am hoping that students and teachers will learn that music can be useful in their classrooms and their curriculum. Music is not just another class where the classroom teacher gets a break and the students play for 45 minutes a day.

### **Strategies**

I have included a chart for kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade that includes what poems I have chosen along with what musical concepts I am planning to use. I do tend to use the Orff Schulwerk approach to music in my teaching style. The Orff Schulwerk method was created by composer Carl Orff with help from Gunild Keetman. The Orff Schulwerk method uses movement, rhythmic patterns, improvisation; this is an easy method that engages all students in learning it is great for students of all ages. Both melody and rhythm are often determined by the words. This is a great tool for working with nursery rhymes. There are also 2 other pedagogies of music education that I will also try to use the Kodaly, and Dalcroze methods. The Kodaly method is named after Zoltan Kodaly who was a prominent Hungarian composer. He and Bela Bartok felt there was a great need to concentrate on the folk music of Hungary. Kodaly is also known for incorporating solfege (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do) hand signs in teaching his folk songs. This helped students to learn to sing in tune and in harmony easily. Many of the nursery rhymes I am planning to use have very simple do-mi-sol-la melodies to them. The last method I am planning to incorporate will be Dalcroze method. This method is a movement based method. Dalcroze might also be more commonly known to people as Eurhythmics. Eurhythmics is an approach to music through rhythmic movement, improvisation, and aural training. This method also uses Solfege to train the ear and voice, while Eurhythmics trains the body to move in rhythm and feel the rhythm. The improvisation is putting the solfege and eurhythmic together. For use in an elementary general music class the movement and solfege are used together. Orff, Kodaly, and Dalcroze all stress, the importance of using movement, singing, and improvisation in their music class; whether it is vocal or on instruments, these teachers also all used forms of folk songs and poems to teach their students.

From a reading standpoint I would like to have my students be able to say the poems on their own. Recognize word patterns in the poems and songs. Also be able to find rhyming words in a poem or song and maybe explore changing the nursery rhymes by making up their own verses or changing the rhyming words. I also plan to have the students learn the poem by rote then I will introduce the text in a later lesson. The charts are broken into 3 sections poems, songs, and games. I made one for kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

## **Classroom Activities**

The poems I have selected to use for Kindergarten are: Wee Willie Winkie, Jack be Nimble, Humpty Dumpty, One, Two Tie Your Shoe, and Hey Diddle Diddle. I plan to concentrate on students' being able to say these poems while keeping a steady beat on their legs. Once students have mastered keeping a steady beat we will move into using the Orff instruments (xylophones, metalophones, and glockenspiels) set up in a pentatonic scale ( a 5 note scale using only whole steps no ½ steps example C pentatonic scale C,D,E, G, A) to have the students play the rhythm of the words on the Orff instruments. Thus creating their own melody to the poem. This form of improvisation works really well with Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade students. You can have several students play at the same time as long as the instruments are in a pentatonic scale this is harmonically pleasing to the ear. Also most of these poems have simple and easy melodies using sol, la, mi, and do combinations. So they students pick up on the melodies easily while being able to learn to sing in tune. Other Nursery Rhymes songs I am planning to use would be Mary Had A Little Lamb, Hot Cross Buns, Twinkle, Twinkle, Three Blind Mice, and I'm A Little Tea Pot. With these songs I am going to work on the students' learning the words and being able to sing these songs in tune. We might even come up with motions for the songs if time allows. All of the games I am planning to use come from the "New England Dance Masters" I find these games easy for the students' to learn and fun to play. Some of these games have songs and poems that the students' learn easily. The games are Circle Round the Zero, Old King Glory of the Mountain, Old Brass Wagon, Razzama Tazzama, and a Hambone that uses Hush Little Baby. I will use jump rope rhymes to help enforce steady beat. I will need to make sure the Kindergarten aid is with me so 2 adults are turning the rope. Rhymes I am going to use are:

### **Cup and Saucers ( Cole 20)**

Cup and saucers  
Plates and dishes  
My old man wears  
Calico britches.

### **Tomatoes ( Cole 18)**

Tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, peas.  
Mother said you have to eat a lot of these.

I have included two lesson plans for Wee Willie Winkie.

### **Lesson One Wee Willie Winkie**

Wee Willie Winkie  
Runs through town  
Up stairs and downstairs  
In his night gown  
Rapping at the windows  
Crying through the locks  
Are the children in their beds  
For it's eight o'clock.

Objectives:

Students Will Be Able To (SWBAT) say poem patting steady beat.  
SWBAT keep at steady beat using rhythm sticks.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. Teacher will say poem while keeping a steady beat on legs (patting legs).  
(twice)
2. Teacher will ask students to keep a steady beat on legs while they say the poem 2 more times.
3. Teacher will ask students questions about what happens in poem.  
Where does Wee Willie run? (***In town***)  
What is he wearing? (***His nightgown***)  
What does he rap on? (***The windows***)  
What does he cry through? (***The locks***)  
Where should the children be? (***In their beds***)  
What time is it? (***8 o'clock***)

Teacher should not ask all the questions at once but keep repeating the poem after asking a question so students are focused on listening for the answers.

4. Now that the students are familiar with the poem, have them say the poem while keeping a steady beat on their legs
5. After they have mastered this, pass out rhythm sticks and have students keep a steady beat with them.
6. Play a game with the students. The Teacher says the first line while keeping the steady beat then the students say the second line while

keeping the beat. This will take some time but the students have lots of fun trying not to miss a beat.

7. After the students mastered this with the Teacher you can divide the class into groups and they can do the same thing.

Evaluation: Give the students a worksheet that has the lines of the poem in pictures and have them sequence the poem.

## **Wee Willie Winkie Lesson 2**

Wee Willie Winkie  
*(Using your thumb and pointer finger show a small space)*

Runs through town  
*(Run in place)*

Up stairs and downstairs  
*(Point up and point down while walking up steps)*

In his night gown  
*(Motion wearing a skirt)*

Rapping at the windows  
*(Motion knocking)*

Crying through the locks  
*(Motion crying with both hands under your eyes)*

Are the children in their beds  
*(Put both hands under your chin and pretend to sleep)*

For it's eight o'clock.  
*(Hold up eight fingers)*

Objectives:

Students Will Be Able To (SWBAT) say poem keeping a steady beat.  
SWBAT learn motions to the poem/song

SWBAT learn song to poem using so,mi,la,do

#### Materials

Piano or Recorder to use for pitches

Rhythm sticks

Wee Willie books

#### Procedure

1. Review poem words while keeping a steady beat.
2. Teach motions to poem. Teacher will demonstrate motions while saying poem.
3. Have students copy motions while teacher says poem and demonstrates poem again.
4. Split class into 2 groups one will use rhythm sticks to keep a steady beat while saying poem and the other group will do the motions of the poem at the same time.
5. Switch parts.
6. Teacher will sing patterns using so,mi,la,do having students echo back.
7. Teacher will sing first line song using solfege having students echo back. Repeat for each line.
8. Then have students echo back song using words and motions.
9. Have students sing on their own.
10. Have students use rhythm sticks and keep a steady beat while singing the song
11. Repeat step 4 but have students sing poem.
12. Have students create a Wee Willie book. See Appendix for book directions

For the 1<sup>st</sup> graders I am planning to review the kindergarten poems, songs, and games adding ostinatos (repeated melody: a short musical phrase or melody that is repeated over and over, usually at the same pitch.)(Encarta Dictionary 2006) Also poems, songs and rhymes that use higher vocabulary and decoding skills. Students will be required to create their own movements for songs and poems, they will also begin to keep a rhyme journal where they can create their own verses or write down their favorite poems. At the end of this review I would like to divide the students into groups of 4 to 6 students and each group will pick a poem and create movement, use Orff Instruments, create a new verse and present it for the class. I will create some type of reoccurring theme or beat and we will

create a Nursery Rhyme Rondo to perform for Kindergarten students, parents, and teachers.

An example of the Rhyme Rondo might be: Rondo Form (A,B,A,C,A,D,A)  
All students will be seated in 3 groups on the floor.

- A- Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star
- B- Group 1 – Star Light, Star Bright
- A- Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star
- C- Group 2 – The man in the moon
- A- Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star
- D- Group 3 – Wee Willie Winkie
- A- Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

All students will sing song Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star one time through. As students are singing the song they will perform simple movements that they have created to the song. After they finish the song the teacher will play the finger cymbals 8 times to let the group that is going to perform next stand up and get ready. After each group performs the teacher will again play the finger cymbals 8 times as a short interlude to let each group get ready for their next section. For the words to these poems please see Appendix B

### **Bibliography/Resources**

Cole, Joanna. Anna Banana: 101 jump-rope rhymes. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1989.

Danielson, Elaine. "The Importance of Nursery Rhymes." Opinion Paper00-00-2000 1-12. May 2006 <[http:// www.eric.com](http://www.eric.com)>.

Partridge, Susan. "Nursery Rhymes, a Pathway to Reading?." Viewpoints 00-00-1992 1-16. May 2006 <[http:// www.eric.com](http://www.eric.com)>.

Roberts, Chris. Heavy Words Lightly Thrown: The Reason Behind the Rhyme. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.

Rollin, Lucy. Cradle and All: A Cultural and Psychoanalytic Reading of Nursery Rhymes. Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1992.

Rogers, Nancy. "Improving Studnets' Literacy through the Use of Rhythm and Rhyme.." Disseration/ Theses 00/05/2003 1-25. May 2006 <[http:// www.eric.com](http://www.eric.com)>.

"The Secret History of the Nursery Rhyme." Secret History of the Nursery Rhyme. 14 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.rhymes.org.uk/nursery-rhymes.htm>>.

"History of Nursery Rhymes." SimpleToRemeber. 14 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.simpletoremember.com/what/nurseryrhymeshistory.htm>>.

"Origins and History of Nursery Rhymes." Rhymes and Songs. 14 Feb. 2006 <[http://www.rhymesandsongs.com/nursery\\_rhymes/rhymes\\_and\\_songs.html](http://www.rhymesandsongs.com/nursery_rhymes/rhymes_and_songs.html)>.

## **Appendix-Content Standards**

## National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

### Appendix A

Wee Willie Winkie book.

### Appendix B

Words to Poem used in the Rondo

**Wee Willie Winkie Book**

**Wee Willie Winkie**

**Upstairs and downstairs**

**Rapping at the windows**

**Are the children in their beds?**

**Runs through town**

**In his nightgown**

**Crying at the locks**

**For it's eight o'clock.**

## Appendix B

Words to the poems used in the rondo

Twinkle, Twinkle

Twinkle, Twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are?  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky.  
Twinkle, Twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are?

Star Light, Star Bright

Star light, star bright,  
First star I see tonight;  
I wish I may, I wish I might  
Have the wish I wish tonight.

The Man in the Moon

The man in the moon  
Looked out of the moon,  
Looked out of the moon and said,  
“It’s time for all the children on earth  
To think about going to bed.”

Wee Willie Winkie

Wee Willie Winkie  
Runs through town,  
Upstairs and downstairs  
In his nightgown,  
Rapping at the window,  
Crying through the lock,  
Are the children in their bed,  
For it’s eight o’clock.

