



## USING NURSERY RHYMES TO TEACH PRIME AREAS

### INTRODUCTION



I am Grace Garrett, a childminder and ex early years' leader in a primary school for over 9 years. I studied Primary Education BA HONS with an early year's specialism and have since worked in 3 schools in Nottingham city as a teacher and early years' leader. I recently made the change from teacher to childminder in order to continue using my passion for child development and early years' pedagogy whilst fitting around my own young children's lives. I look after up to 4 children (including my own) daily under the age of 5 and have created a home from home setting which uses the EYFS curriculum to give families a unique childcare experience.

### INTENT

As I have come from a school background, **nursery rhymes** have always played an important role in teaching children about certain topics, phonological awareness, vocabulary, musicality and for having fun! As a childminder, I wanted to ensure that there was still a large emphasis on this despite not having the set 'carpet times' you may have at a nursery or school setting. It was important to me that the rhymes we explored were planned for carefully to reflect the children's language needs, developmental stages and interests. When finding out about the children before they started with me, the question of 'What are their favourite rhymes and songs?' was one I liked to explore with parents. I would then ensure that during settling-in this gave the children some familiarity by adding the songs to the environment. However, it was clear from asking this question that a lot of the children's exposure to these songs was through screens. This made me even more motivated to ensure that children were experiencing a **variety of songs in real life**, being able to hear the intonation, feel the rhythm and be encouraged to join in with actions and rhyming words.

Claire Bennet who helps run the *World Nursery Rhyme week* every November states that **"Nursery rhymes are fantastic vocabulary boosters"**. It has been noticed that because of the pandemic, there has been a gap in children's exposure to rhymes, due to no-one being able to attend toddler groups and library sessions. With advances in technology and the wide range of toys children have access to now, the old fashioned ways can often be wrongfully dismissed and I wanted to ensure that traditional rhymes were an integral part of our routine and day.

## IMPLEMENTATION

As the environment is often referred to as the third teacher in the early years foundation stage, I wanted to ensure that my home still offered some specific areas that the children could explore in different ways. I created a cosy story and song area in the bay window of my living room. This included a rug, bean bag, book shelves with a variety of texts, an interactive music and story box, instruments and a nursery rhyme bag.

During the settling-in of my new starters I used the information I got from parents about their favourite songs and collected props to reflect some well-known nursery rhymes. I also chose songs that encouraged interaction between the children such as 'Row, Row Your Boat' where children would need to hold hands and 'Round and Round the Garden,' so children could go round each other's hands and be tickled at the end. This was in the hope that they would begin to develop peer relationships and feel more confident playing with and alongside each other.

My aim was for the youngest children (aged 9 months- 18 months) to begin to copy words and gestures during singing time and the older children (aged 2-3 years) to recognise some of the rhythm and rhyme in songs and anticipate these.

Every day I ensure that there is a dedicated 'singing bag' time and the children anticipate this by me singing a **"What's in the Bag?"** song. During these sessions the children are developing their personal and social skills by learning to take turns at choosing something from the bag.

Research from the Education Endowment Foundation suggests *"that strategies to sustain relationships can be taught and acquired during play. This might involve role-play, games that involve turn-taking."*

As well as communication and language through their understanding of which song relates to which prop and the actions and words associated with it. We use **simple Makaton actions** to compliment the songs and they are repeated over a few weeks to really embed them. This also helps develop children's fine and gross motor skills such as balance, coordination and the ability to follow instructions. Many of the songs relate to the time of year or the current book we are reading. This continues language exposure related to the learning focus. Others are simply in the bag to ensure a wide variety, and to reflect children's preferences. I feel it is important to have a wide range of songs including **traditional, modern, action, number and ones with environmental sounds** to ensure that the children stay engaged and are gaining a wide range of skills from the EYFS prime areas, whilst singing them.



An example of props in our nursery rhyme bag. Can you guess the rhyme for each one?



My cosy reading and rhyme area in my living room.

## IMPACT

The children in my setting are now excited and engaged when the time comes to use **our singing bag**. Not only do they anticipate it each day, but we now have to do it several times a day as requested by them! They love self-selecting the bag and having a go at choosing the items or even being the one to pass the bag to the next child. One child who has some speech delay, is attempting to sing many of the words and is using some of the Makaton signs in everyday routines such as 'Thank you' from 'Baa Baa Black Sheep,' and 'Quack' from '5 Little Ducks' for when we go to the local pond to feed the ducks. The singing bag is always hanging up and available for the children to play with during free play. Having the **songs represented as real props** has also prompted some role play such as treating the sick doll from 'Miss Polly had a Dolly,' and '5 Little Monkey's Jumping on the Bed.'

Being a childminding setting, and having a wide range of ages (8 months to 4 years) can often mean children are engaged in different activities and toys at different times. However, **singing time is one that brings all ages together** and almost creates a sense of self and community in our tiny little home from home setting each day.

## SUMMARY

The many learning opportunities singing nursery rhymes gives to support children in the prime areas of learning are endless. Whether it be the **fine motor skills** whilst singing 'Incey Wincey Spider,' the **environmental sounds** for phonological awareness in 'Old Macdonald' or the **vocabulary** in 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,' children and parents are inevitably going to be engaged with the fun that can be had whilst singing them.

More modern songs such as 'The Little Green Frog' encourages children to blink, frown and stick their tongue out which is great for **building strong facial muscles** for speech. The Literacy Trust state that "Introducing new and alternative versions of rhymes and songs will enthuse children with their quirky rhythms and lyrics." However traditional nursery rhymes are still important not only to engage the parents but also to ensure that these beautiful rhymes live on for many more years and continue to be such great (free!) resources for the foundations of our young children's learning.

## REFERENCES

[National Literacy Trust](#)



[World Nursery Rhyme Week](#)



[EEF Evidence Store - PSED](#)

