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Poetry and Literacy

“Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be offered to them as a precious gift.”

—Kate DiCamillo

What better gift to give students than fun rhymes to read in order to build literacy skills? Did you grow up singing a song of sixpence, hoping the kittens would find their mittens, and wondering why Georgie Porgie wouldn't leave those little girls alone? We did, along with generations of children. Mother Goose nursery rhymes have helped children achieve literacy since at least the 18th century. Today, we find that many of our children are missing out on nursery rhymes and poetry. Over the years, poetry and rhymes have been called the “neglected component” and “forgotten genre” in our homes and in our school literacy curricula (Denman 1988; Gill 2011; Perfect 1999). Many teachers think that is a shame, and we heartily agree!

There is a growing chorus of scholars who are advocating the return of poetry and poetry lessons in the classroom (Rasinski, Rupley, and Nichols 2012; Seitz 2013). Moreover, there is a growing body of classroom and clinical research demonstrating the power of poetry in growing readers (Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, and Zimmerman 2013; Rasinski, Rupley, and Nichols 2008; Zimmerman and Rasinski 2012; Rasinski and Zimmerman 2013; Zimmerman, Rasinski, and Melewski 2013). The following information describes the benefits of using poetry and rhyme to enhance literacy skills in the classroom.

Phonological Awareness

Rhymes provide the context for developing phonological awareness. Dunst, Meter, and Hornby (2011) reviewed twelve studies that examined the relationship between nursery rhymes and emergent literacy skills in more than 5,000 children. All of the studies pointed to a relationship between early knowledge of nursery rhymes and phonological awareness, which is a strong predictor of early reading acquisition (Adams 1990; Ball and Blachman 1991; Griffith and Klesius 1990; Templeton and Bear 2011). In fact, one literacy expert, Keith Stanovich, claims phonological awareness as a predictor of reading success is “better than anything else we know of, including I.Q.” (Stanovich 1994, 284). Rhymes provide an opportunity for children to play with words and thus learn how language works (Maclean, Bryant, and Bradley 1987).



Poetry and Literacy *(cont.)*

Phonics

The alliteration of *Goosie Goosie Gander* and the rhyming words of *Jack Sprat Could Eat No Fat* lay the groundwork for phonics instruction. Children can't *sound out* words if they don't hear the sounds. Decades of research have demonstrated that rhymes help children develop an ear for language. In one longitudinal study, researchers found a strong correlation between early knowledge of rhymes in children from ages three to six and success in reading and spelling over the next three years, even when accounting for differences in social background and I.Q. (Bryant, Bradley, Maclean, and Crossland 1989). Poetry and rhymes surround children with the sounds of language—sounds that must be applied in the letter-sound relationships of phonics instruction.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

Even a strong foundation in phonemic awareness and phonics is not enough. Students who can decode words but do not know their meanings usually struggle with comprehension, which is, of course, the ultimate goal of reading. Research has consistently shown a strong correlation between vocabulary and comprehension (Bromley 2007; Chall 1983; National Reading Panel 2000). Typical correlations between standardized measures of vocabulary and reading comprehension are in the .90 or higher range regardless of the measure used or the populations tested (Stahl 2003). Vocabulary development is just one more benefit of using poetry and rhymes with children. If you think it's too late for your third graders to read nursery rhymes, think again! Most nursery rhymes present opportunities to learn new vocabulary words that are relevant today but may not be familiar to many eight-year-olds (e.g., *platter* [Jack Sprat], *dainty* [Sing a Song of Sixpence], and *hickory* [Hickory Dickory Dock]).

Fluency

The repeated reading of poems and rhymes provides ample opportunities for students to develop reading fluency. Rasinski and Padak (2013) describe fluency as “a bridge that connects word decoding to comprehension . . . Fluency includes automatic word recognition, interpretive and prosodic reading, and appropriate expression and rate. Fluency is the ability to read expressively and meaningfully, as well as accurately and with appropriate speed” (252). Research into repeated readings indicates that reading a particular passage several times, which we suggest you do with the nursery rhymes and poems in this book, leads not only to fluency with that text but also transfers to new, unfamiliar text (Dowhower 1987, 1997; Rasinski et al. 1994; Samuels 1997; Stahl and Heubach 2005).



“Purposeful practice is essential for improvement and mastery of literacy skills. When given proper instruction, materials, and opportunities to practice and apply what they learn, all students can experience literacy success” (Hackett 2013, 4).

Poetry and nursery rhymes send the all-important message that reading is fun. What children can resist the tickle in their mouths when they say *Fuzzy Wuzzy* or the onomatopoeia of *Baa Baa Black Sheep*? The natural rhythm and meter beg children to recite nursery rhymes over and over, increasing fluency skills more and more each time. Enjoy watching your students light up as they say each and every one of the rhymes in this book.

How to Use This Book

Implementing the Lessons

The following information explains the various activities in the lessons and how to implement them with students. Additional tips on how to implement the lessons can be found on pages 134–135.

Introducing the Rhyme

This section helps teachers introduce the poem to students. Use the steps listed below to introduce all of the poems in this book. Then, continue with the specific tasks mentioned in each lesson.

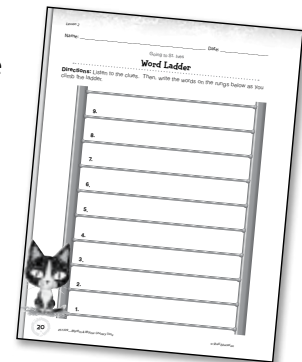


1. Copy the rhyme on a sheet of chart paper or on the board. (*optional*)
2. Read the rhyme to students.
3. Distribute copies of the rhyme to students.
4. Read the rhyme chorally several times to develop fluency.
5. Have students illustrate the rhyme and add it to their individual poetry notebooks. For more information about how to set up the poetry notebooks, see page 135.

Word Ladders

This activity allows students to build and examine words on an activity sheet. To begin, students are given a key word from the rhyme. In order to “climb the ladder,” students must follow the teacher’s clues and change the first word progressively, thus creating a new word at each step. Clues can require students to add, remove, change, or rearrange letters. The final word relates to the first word. For example, for the rhyme “Jack Sprat,” students follow your instructions to progressively change the following words: *fat, cat, hat, hate, cake, lake, lame, lane, lean*.

Since this activity is teacher-led (the teacher reads the clues), it should be done as a whole-class activity, or you may wish to work with some students in a small group. Be sure to clarify any clues or word meanings that students may be unfamiliar with.



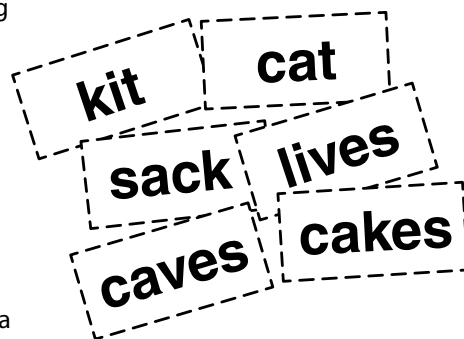
How to Use This Book (cont.)

Word Sorts color size shape

The *Word Sort* activity helps students explore relationships among words. Students are given a set of word cards related to the rhyme and work individually, in pairs, or in groups to sort the cards into two or more categories. Some will be *open* word sorts and some will be *closed* word sorts.

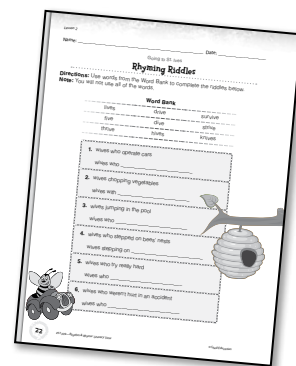
For open sorts, the categories are not predetermined. Students look for commonalities among the words and create their groups or categories accordingly. Then, they share their word sorts with classmates, explaining the groups they created. For example, given a set of picture cards (*skates, sandwich, doll, donut*) students could sort the cards by initial sounds (/s/ or /d/) or by function (toys and food). As long as they can justify their groups, the sorting is accepted. **Note:** You may find open word sorts are effective as pre-reading activities. The sorting allows students to become familiar with the words they will encounter in the rhymes. In addition, the sorting can help students predict what the text will be about. If used as a pre-reading activity, you will want to have them sort again after reading the rhyme in order to see if their categories change.

For closed word sorts, the categories are predetermined. The teacher instructs students to sort their words into specified categories. After the sorting, students discuss the words and why they were placed in the given categories. **Note:** For each closed word sort, we suggest categories for sorting the words. You can also come up with other categories for your students to use.



Rhyming Riddles ???

Each lesson includes a *Rhyming Riddles* activity. Students are instructed to use words in a word bank to answer riddles related to a key word or phrase from the rhyme. Students may be able to do this independently, or it can be conducted as a large group activity. Have students say as many rhyming words as they can to partners before implementing the activity sheets so that students know which rhyming sounds they are focusing on. You may wish to have them use the *My Rhyming Words* template (page 136) to write all of the rhyming words they brainstorm.



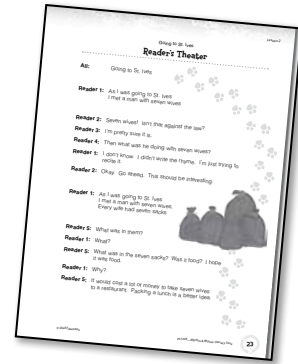
How to Use This Book (cont.)

Writing Connections

Each lesson includes a *Writing Connection* activity that relates to the rhyme in some way. The activities vary from students writing their own poems, to writing letters to characters in the rhymes, to making lists. We suggest that you use these lessons to generate enjoyment of writing rather than to teach grammar and spelling. **Note:** Have writing paper available for the *Writing Connection* in all lessons.

Reader's Theater

Each lesson includes a *Reader's Theater* script that focuses on the rhyme, where students are assigned parts of a script to read aloud. Oral language fluency is an important precursor to oral reading fluency. Fluent speakers actually help their listeners make sense of words and ideas by speaking at an appropriate pace, using meaningful phrases, and embedding expression and pauses into their speech—essentially the same skills needed for fluent reading (Rasinski and Padak 2013).



Have students rehearse the poem several times by themselves or in small groups to enhance listening and speaking skills and improve students' confidence. Arrange for various ways that students can then perform the poem as well as the accompanying script. Students can perform for classmates, another class, parents, the school principal, other teachers, or even record their reading for later performance. **Note:** There are not enough parts for every student in your class. Be sure to look over the amount of parts before assigning them to students.

All of the scripts provide opportunities for repeated reading, the benefits of which we discussed above. Rasinski and Padak (2013) call it "deep reading" (5) and suggest the following routine: "I'll read it to you. You read it with me. Now you read it alone" (66). The problem teachers sometimes face with repeated reading, particularly with older students, is motivating students to read a text multiple times. As one solution to that dilemma, each lesson has a suggestion for tying the repeated reading to a performance. Students should not be required to memorize the text for the performance but simply be prepared to read it aloud with confidence and with good expression.



If you think it's too late for your third graders to read nursery rhymes, think again! To make sure you're convinced, we've included a subtle humor into the reader's theater scripts, which will challenge your third graders to think at high levels about the rhymes (all the while laughing!) as they address the language arts standards.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Jack Sprat

Rhyming Riddles

Directions: Use words from the Word Bank to complete the riddles below.

Note: You will not use all of the words.

Word Bank

meat

cheat

beat

treat

feet

seat

wheat

heat

beet

1. eat something on Halloween

eat a _____

2. eat a steak

eat some _____

3. eat in a chair

eat in your _____

4. eat when it's hot outside

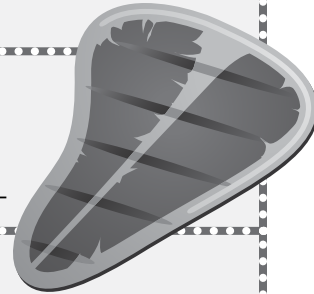
eat in the _____

5. eat grain

eat _____

6. eat with drums playing

eat to the _____



Hickory Dickory Dock

Traditional Rhyme

**Hickory, dickory, dock,
The mouse ran up the clock.
The clock struck one
And down he run
Hickory, dickory, dock.**



Name: _____ Date: _____

Hickory Dickory Dock

Word Ladder

Directions: Listen to the clues. Then, write the words on the rungs below as you climb the ladder.

9.

8.

7.

6.

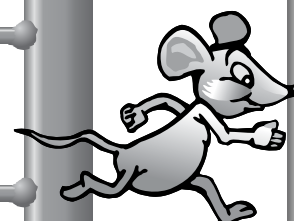
5.

4.

3.

2.

1.



Hickory Dickory Dock

Open Word Sort

Directions: Cut apart the cards. Then, sort them into groups or categories that you choose. Be ready to explain your groups.

mouse	clock	down
grandfather	alarm	strike
mice	hickory	pendulum
elm	dock	up
chimes	bell	boat
rings	buzz	ran
one	three	battery
oak	mice	wristwatch