



Ten of the Best Nursery Rhymes

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Ten of the Best

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Rosemary Stones chooses her top ten titles.

What better way to introduce children to the richness of the English language than via the shared pleasures of nursery rhymes? Our nursery rhyme tradition is so much a part of our culture that they will continue to resonate throughout the child's life. **Rosemary Stones** selects her top ten nursery rhyme books.

Baa, Baa, Black Sheep!

Illustrated by Emma Dodd and Bianca Lucas, *Amazing Baby*, 978 1 90451 376 6, £6.99 novelty hbk

The eponymous nursery rhyme is here converted into a small format touch-and-feel board book for the very young. Touch the black sheep's woolly coat; feel the hessian of one of the three bags full; touch the rubber of the master's Wellingtons and the cloth of the dame's apron; stroke the towelling of the little boy's babygro. Illustrated with a thick black line filled in with blocks of colour, this sturdy little book is a splendid introduction to this much loved nursery rhyme. (0-3)

First Picture Nursery Rhymes (with seven sing-along tunes)

Illustrated with models by Jo Litchfield, music arranged by Anthony Marks, *Usborne*, 978 0 7460 9839 4, £9.99 novelty board

Don't know nursery rhyme melodies? Can't read music? This large format board book collection of seven rhymes each with a musical soundchip is the answer to your prayer. Open, for example, the spread for 'Hey diddle, diddle' and press the companion soundchip button. You and your child can now sing along with the music. Illustrated with pictures of Jo Litchfield's curious, doll-like models whose bland blankness gives a surreal Stepford wives frisson to this jolly production. (0-5)

Round and Round the Garden: Play Rhymes for Young Children

Compiled by Sarah Williams, ill. Ian Beck, *Oxford*, 978 0 19 275478 3, £7.99 pbk and CD

A collection of 25 'play' rhymes ('Hickory Dickory Dock', 'Incy Wincy Spider' etc) with step by step drawings of the actions to follow. The texture, light and shade of Ian Beck's fine illustrations with their muted palette and subtle line and hatching convey the drama and humour of the stories within the rhymes perfectly. Children can sing along to the rhymes on the accompanying CD which features traditional melodies and some specially composed music. (0-5)

The Puffin Mother Goose Treasury

Raymond Briggs, *Puffin*, 978 0 14 132966 6, £14.99 hbk

This is a 'revised' edition (ie c. 250 rhymes as opposed to the original 408) of Briggs's 1966 Kate Greenaway Medal winning **The Mother Goose Treasury**. Still, it is a pleasure to have even a truncated version of this classic collection of nursery rhymes, jokes and riddles (whose selection owes a debt to the Opies) illustrated as it is with Briggs's distinctive pictorial narratives, full of confident drama and pithy humour. (0-5)

Each Peach Pear Plum

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, 978 0 14 050919 9, £5.99 pbk

One of the many pleasures of our splendid nursery rhyme tradition is the range of memorable characters that children meet and come to regard as old friends. They pop up everywhere including in this playful rhyming game of 'I spy?' where once Tom Thumb is glimpsed, Mother Hubbard appears and so forth. Deceptively simple, the comedy is expanded yet perfectly controlled by Janet Ahlberg's customary framed or vignettted pictures bursting with delicious detail. A treat! (0-5)

Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes and How She Came to Tell Them

Illustrated by Axel Scheffler, with stories by Alison Green, Macmillan, 978 0 333 96136 0, £14.99 hbk

Interspersed with some saccharine stories about Mother Goose and her goslings (ignore them), this wide-ranging collection of 88 nursery rhymes is a must-have for Axel Scheffler's wonderfully brooding illustrations with their vibrantly intense line and colour which, whether framed or in vignettes, display a consummate ability to create both character and a visual story in response to the mood and drama of each rhyme to which he adds his own wistful or witty touches. Nursery rhymes can be threatening as well as cuddly and Scheffler's tautly anxious characters, whether animal or human, convey this dichotomy making him the nonpareil nursery rhyme illustrator *de nos jours*. (3-5 and upwards)

Not Last Night but the Night Before

Colin McNaughton, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Walker, 978 1 4063 2556 0, £5.99 pbk

Colin McNaughton plays with the characters and incidents of nursery tradition in this entertaining story told in rhyme. A little boy has to keep opening the door to, amongst others, the Man in the moon, Little Bo-peep, Jack and Jill, and the Three blind mice. Why have they come? Drama and pace are beautifully conveyed in Emma Chichester Clark's decorative yet humorous artwork that shapes the tale to its satisfying denouement. (3-5)

Lavender's Blue: A Book of Nursery Rhymes

Compiled by Kathleen Lines, ill. Harold Jones, Oxford, 978 0 19 278227 4, £14.99 hbk, 978 0 19 278225 0, £10.99 pbk

This is the 50th anniversary facsimile edition of a nursery rhyme collection first published in 1954. Jones's decorative, beautifully designed pen and ink illustrations with their muted colour wash feature a child's world of toy-like figures and animals that enhance Lines's wide-ranging selection of rhymes. A nursery classic to treasure. (3-5 and upwards)

The Selfish Crocodile Book of Nursery Rhymes

Faustin Charles, ill. Michael Terry, Bloomsbury, 978 0 7475 9524 3, £6.99 pbk and CD

Poet Faustin Charles subverts nursery tradition in this entertaining collection of rhymes with a twist - each familiar rhyme is hijacked by an animal ('High-uppity giraffe standing tall,/ High-uppity giraffe had a great fall?') whose character is wittily and dramatically evoked in Michael Terry's densely muscular illustrations. 'The crocodile's teeth go/ CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH,/ Whenever he's having fruit for lunch.' Scheffler-like, Charles and Terry know how to balance the cuddly and the menacing. On the accompanying CD the rhymes are read and sung by Faustin Charles in a rich Caribbean voice plus a few roars and bits of music. (3-5)

Ride a Cock-Horse and other nursery rhymes

Mervyn Peake, Chatto & Windus, 978 0 7011 5015 0, hbk (OP but the 1972 edition is available from Amazon or Abe books at a reasonable price)

First published in 1940, this small collection of nursery rhymes (14 including 'Old King Cole', 'Little Jack Horner' and 'Jack Sprat') is designed so that each double page spread features one rhyme opposite its companion illustration. Peake's ferocious energy and imagination here applied to the particularity of each rhyme lends this little book an intensity of experience and mystery far removed from the faux-historic platitudes so many illustrators apply to the world of nursery rhyme. (All ages)

Rosemary Stones is Editor of **Books for Keeps**.

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