One, two, three, four, five.

Once I caught a fish alive,

Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,

Then I let it go again.

Why did you let it go?

Because it bit my finger so.

Which finger did it bite?

This little finger on the right.

Origins: The lyrics of the poem "one two three four five (1 2 3 4 5)" are not based on any events in history. "One two three four five (1 2 3 4 5)" is an educational rhyme with the words devised with the specific intention of teaching children to count thus increasing their numeric powers. Strangely enough the title of "one two three four five (1 2 3 4 5)" is often changed to "Once I caught a fish alive". The earliest traceable publication is 1888.
Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!
One for the master, one for the dame,
And one for the little boy who lives down the lane.

**Origins:** The wool industry was critical to the country’s economy from the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century so it is therefore not surprising that it is celebrated in the Baa Baa Black Sheep Nursery Rhyme. An historical connection for this rhyme has been suggested - a political satire said to refer to the Plantagenet King Edward I (the Master) and the export tax imposed in Britain in 1275 in which the English Customs Statute authorized the king to collect a tax on all exports of wool in every port in the country.
Georgie Porgie pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away.

**Origins:** The origins of the lyrics to "Georgie Porgie" are English and refer to the courtier George Villiers, 1st duke of Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628). King James I took Villiers as his lover and nicknamed him "Stenie" (a reference to St. Stephen whom in the Bible describes as having the "face of an angel"). Villier's good looks also appealed to the ladies and his highly suspect morals were much in question!

Villiers most notorious affair was with his liaison with Anne of Austria, (1601–1666) who was the Queen of France and married to the French King Louis XIII badly injured both of their reputations. This, however, was overlooked due to his great friendship with the English King, James I (1586 - 1625). George Villiers (Georgie Porgie) exercised great influence over the King who allowed him many liberties. Villiers private liaisons and political scheming were questioned and Parliament who finally lost patience and stopped the King intervening on behalf of "Georgie Porgie". The romantic elements of George Villiers and Anne of Austria are featured in the novel 'The Three Musketeers' by Alexander Dumas.
Goosey Goosey Gander where shall I wander,
Upstairs, downstairs and in my lady's chamber
There I met an old man who wouldn't say his prayers,
I took him by the left leg and threw him down the stairs.

Origins: Goosey Goosey Gander is a Rhyme with Historical undertones. The origins of the nursery rhyme are believed to date back to the 16th century and refer to necessity for Catholic priests to hide in 'Priest Holes' (very small secret rooms once found in many great houses in England) to avoid persecution from zealous Protestants who were totally against the old Catholic religion. If caught, both the priest and members of any family found harboring them were executed. The moral in Goosey Goosey Gander's lyrics implies that something unpleasant would surely happen to anyone failing to say their prayers correctly - meaning the Protestant Prayers, said in English as opposed to Catholic prayers which were said in Latin!
Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such fun
And the dish ran away with the spoon!

**Origins:** Hey diddle diddle is a fantasy rhyme designed to delight children with impossible images such "the Cow jumped over the Moon"! The term 'Hey diddle diddle' can be found in the works of Shakespeare and was a colloquialism used in much the same vein as "hey nonny no" which can be found in traditional English folk ballads. The original title was 'High Diddle Diddle' but this has been altered to 'Hey Diddle Diddle' over the years with changes to the English language. The first known date of publication for the words of the Hey diddle diddle rhyme is 1765.
Hickory dickory dock
The mouse ran up the clock
The clock struck one
The mouse ran down
Hickory dickory dock

**Origins:** A nonsense poem which uses alliteration where children mimic the sound of a clock chiming at the relevant point in the song. Hickory, dickory dock is intended to introduce children to the fundamentals of telling the time. The first publication date for the "Hickory, dickory dock" rhyme is 1744.
Hot Cross Buns

Origins: Hot cross buns are a small, spicy fruit cake decorated with a white cross. Generally Hot Cross Buns are served with a butter spread. Hot cross buns were hawked by street sellers to the cry of "Hot cross buns!" around the nineteenth century. This particular way of selling is demonstrated in the movie "Oliver!" based on the novel by Charles Dickens. Hot Cross Buns are generally sold at Easter to celebrate the religious significance of the resurrection of Christ following his death on the cross in the Easter Christian festival.
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses, And all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again!

Origins: Humpty Dumpty was a colloquial term used in fifteenth century England describing someone who was obese. This has given rise to various, but inaccurate, theories surrounding the identity of Humpty Dumpty. However, Humpty Dumpty was not a person pilloried in the famous rhyme!

Humpty Dumpty was in fact believed to be a large cannon! It was used during the English Civil War (1642 - 1649) in the Siege of Colchester. 1648 the town of Colchester was a walled town with a castle and several churches and was protected by the city wall. Standing immediately adjacent the city wall, was St Mary's Church. A huge cannon, colloquially called Humpty Dumpty, was strategically placed on the wall next to St Mary's Church.

A shot from a Parliamentary cannon succeeded in damaging the wall beneath Humpty Dumpty which caused the cannon to tumble to the ground. The Royalists, or Cavaliers, 'all the King's men' attempted to raise Humpty Dumpty on to another part of the wall. However, because the cannon, or Humpty Dumpty, was so heavy ' All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty together again!' This had a drastic consequence for the Royalists as the strategically important town of Colchester fell to the Parliamentarians after a siege lasting eleven weeks. Earliest traceable publication 1810.
Itsy Bitsy spider climbing up the spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
Now Itsy Bitsy spider went up the spout again!

**Origins:** The lyrics to the song "Itsy Bitsy Spider" create a finger rhyme for children. All children love trying to mimic the actions of Itsy Bitsy Spider song. The movements and actions of Itsy Bitsy Spider help children to improve their manual dexterity while repeating the words of the song. The name of the spider seems to vary but 'Itsy Bitsy spider' is believed to be the most popular version although in England Itsy Bitsy Spider is known as Incy Wincy spider!
Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after.
Up got Jack, and home did trot
As fast as he could caper
He went to bed and bound his head
With vinegar and brown paper

**Origins:** The roots of the story, or poem, of Jack and Jill are in France. The Jack and Jill referred to are said to be King Louis XVI - Jack - who was beheaded (lost his crown) followed by his Queen Marie Antoinette - Jill - (who came tumbling after). The words and lyrics to the Jack and Jill poem were made more acceptable as a story for children by providing a happy ending! The actual beheadings occurred during the Reign of Terror in 1793. The first publication date for the lyrics of the Jack and Jill rhyme is 1795.

It was the custom that following execution, the severed head was held up by the hair by the executioner. This was not, as many people think, to show the crowd the head, but in fact, to show the head the crowd and it’s own body! Consciousness remains for at least eight seconds after beheading until lack of oxygen causes unconsciousness and eventually death.
Jack be nimble
Jack be quick
Jack jump over
The candlestick.

Origins: The most commonly agreed origin for the Jack Be Nimble rhyme is the connection to Black Jack, an English pirate who was notorious for escaping from the authorities in the late 16th century, hence Jack be nimble.

The lyrics could also be associated with the old tradition and sport of 'candle leaping' which used to be practiced at some English fairs. The tradition of candle-leaping originated from an old game of jumping over fires. This dangerous game was banned and replaced by the far less dangerous sport of Candle leaping.
Jack Sprat could eat no fat
His wife could eat no lean
And so betwixt the two of them
They licked the platter clean

Origins: The Jack Sprat alluded to in this English poem is reputed to be King Charles I (1625-1649) and Henrietta Maria, his Queen (1609-1669). Apparently, when King Charles (Jack Sprat) declared war on Spain, parliament refused to finance him (leaving him lean) So his wife imposed an illegal war tax (to get some fat) after the angered King (Jack Sprat) dissolved Parliament.

Another interpretation of the Jack Sprat Nursery rhyme relates to the story of Richard I (Richard the Lionheart 1157 - 1199) and his younger brother King John (1166 - 1216). Both of whom feature strongly in the traditional legend of Robin Hood.

In 1189 John (Jack Sprat) married Joan, the ambitious and greedy daughter and heiress of the Earl of Gloucester ("Joan ate all the fat"). When King Richard went on Crusade, from 1190 to 1194, John attempted to take the crown of England (a ruthless and treacherous usurper). On his return from the Crusades, King Richard was taken hostage by Duke Leopold demanding a ransom of 150,000 marks. John reluctantly had to raise the ransom, leaving the country destitute for years and reducing John's inheritance ("They picked it clean"). The ransom was paid and Richard was released. John was crowned King of England following the death of Richard in 1199. He had his marriage to Joan annulled, she was never acknowledged as queen. She then married again to Geoffrey de Mandeville and her third husband was Hubert de Burgh.
John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt,
His name is my name too.

Whenever we go out,
The people always shout,
There goes John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt.

Dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah

Origins: The words of the Nursery Rhyme, 'John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt ' originate in the USA and possibly reflect the enormous numbers of German immigrants at various points in American history. The surname Schmidt and the surname suffix -heimer are of Germanic origin. The pseudo-German word 'Jingleheimer' was probably used to mock the longer names often found in this language.
Little Bo peep has lost her sheep
And doesn’t know where to find them.
Leave them alone and they’ll come home,
Bringing their tails behind them.

**Origins:** The Little Bo Peep rhyme builds the picture of a young shepherdess and the advice given to her by someone more experienced. The morale of the words in the song are that one must take responsibility of falling asleep or face the consequences...
Little Boy Blue come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow the cow's in the corn.
But where's the boy who looks after the sheep?
He's under a haystack fast asleep.
Will you wake him? No, not I - for if I do, he's sure to cry.

**Origins:** Origins of the Little Boy Blue story - A Connection with Tudor History? There is a theory that 'Little Boy Blue' refers to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1475-1530) dating back to English Tudor history and the reign of King Henry VIII. Wolsey was an extremely rich and arrogant self-made man with many enemies at court and was unpopular with the people of England. He was called the "Boy Bachelor" after obtaining his degree from Oxford at the unusually early age of fifteen. The expression "Blowing one's own horn" meaning to brag was certainly practiced by Cardinal Wolsey. The Little Boy Blue rhyme may have been a secret message of dissent concerning the greed of the statesman prior to his downfall. Open criticism of the Cardinal would have lead to imprisonment, confiscation of property or even death.
Little Jack Horner sat in the corner
Eating his Christmas pie,
He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum
And said "What a good boy am I!"

Origins: Little Jack Horner was reputed to have been the Steward to Richard Whiting (1461 - 1539) the Bishop of Glastonbury. The Steward had an important role and was responsible for managing the household, collecting taxes and keeping accounts.

It is rumored that the Bishop tried to bribe the King. He sent his Steward, Richard Whiting, with a gift of twelve title deeds to various English manorial estates. The deeds were said to have been secreted in a pie (valuables were often hidden in this bizarre fashion to thwart thieves). Whiting (Little Jack Horner) realized that the bribe would do no good and was said to have stolen the deeds to the manor of Mells (it being the real 'plum' of the twelve manors).

The remaining eleven manors are given to the crown but to no avail. The old Bishop was convicted of treason for remaining loyal to Rome. The jury included his treacherous steward Horner who found Bishop Whiting guilty and sent the old man to a terrible death of being hung, drawn and quartered on Glastonbury Tor. The Abbey was destroyed. Following the destruction of the abbey the steward, Horner moved into the Manor of Mells. Whether Horner actually stole the deeds to the Manor or was rewarded with them for helping to convict the Bishop of Glastonbury is not known but the Manor of Mells became the property of the Horner family who lived there until the 20th century. The first publication date for the lyrics to the Little Jack Horner rhyme is 1725.
Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey,
Along came a spider,
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

Origins: Little Miss Muffet was a small girl whose name was Patience Muffet. Her stepfather, Dr. Muffet (1553-1604) was a famous entomologist who wrote the first scientific catalogue of British Insects. Whilst eating her breakfast of curds and whey Little Miss Muffet was frightened by one of his spiders and ran away! This particular Nursery Rhyme of Little Miss Muffet reputedly dates back to the late 16th century as indicated by the birth date of Dr Muffet.
London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair Lady.

 Origins: The 'London Bridge is falling down' Nursery Rhyme is based on one of the most famous landmarks in London. It's history can be traced to the Roman occupation of England in the first century. The first London Bridge was made of wood and clay and was fortified or re-built with the various materials mentioned in the children's nursery rhyme. Many disasters struck the bridges - Viking invaders destroyed the bridge in the 1000's which led to a fortified design, complete with a drawbridge.
Mary had a little lamb its fleece was white as snow;
And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.
It followed her to school one day, which was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play, to see a lamb at school.
And so the teacher turned it out, but still it lingered near,
And waited patiently about till Mary did appear.
"Why does the lamb love Mary so?" the eager children cry;
"Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know" the teacher did reply.

**Origins:** The words of the American nursery rhyme Mary had a little lamb would appeal to a small children and introduces imagery of similes (white as snow) as part of use of the English language. The words also convey the hopeful adage that love is reciprocated.
Mary Mary quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty maids all in a row.

**Origins:** The Mary alluded to in this traditional English nursery rhyme is reputed to be Mary Tudor, or Bloody Mary, who was the daughter of King Henry VIII. Queen Mary was a staunch Catholic and the garden referred to is an allusion to graveyards which were increasing in size with those who dared to continue to adhere to the Protestant faith - Protestant martyrs.

The silver bells and cockle shells referred to in the Nursery Rhyme were colloquialisms for instruments of torture. The 'silver bells' were thumbscrews which crushed the thumb between two hard surfaces by the tightening of a screw. The 'cockleshells' were believed to be instruments of torture which were attached to the genitals. The 'maids' were a device to behead people called the Maiden. Beheading a victim was fraught with problems. It could take up to 11 blows to actually sever the head, the victim often resisted and had to be chased around the scaffold.
Old King Cole was a merry old soul, and a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe in the middle of the night
And he called for his fiddlers three.
Every fiddler had a fine fiddle, and a very fine fiddle had he;
Oh there's none so rare as can compare
With King Cole and his fiddlers three.

**Origins:** The origins of the Nursery rhyme lyrics of Old King Cole are based in history dating back to 3rd century. There is considerable confusion regarding the origins of Old King Cole as there are three possible contenders who were Celtic Kings of Britain, all who share the name Coel (which is the Celtic word for the English word Cole).
Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard
To get her poor doggie a bone,
When she got there
The cupboard was bare
So the poor little doggie had none.

Origins: The Old Mother Hubbard referred to in this rhyme’s words allude to the famous Cardinal Wolsey. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey was the most important statesman and churchman of the Tudor history period in 16th century England. Cardinal Wolsey proved to be a faithful servant but displeased the King, Henry VIII, by failing to facilitate the King’s divorce from Queen Katherine of Aragon who had been his queen of many years. The reason for seeking the divorce and hence the creation of the Old Mother Hubbard poem was to enable him to marry Anne Boleyn with whom he was passionately in love. In the Old Mother Hubbard song King Henry was the "doggie" and the "bone" refers to the divorce (and not money as many believe). The cupboard relates to the Catholic Church although the subsequent divorce arranged by Thomas Cramner resulted in the break with Rome and the formation of the English Protestant church and the demise of Old Mother Hubbard - Cardinal Wolsey.
One two buckle my shoe
Three, four, knock at the door
Five, six, pick up sticks
Seven, eight, lay them straight
Nine, ten, a big fat hen
Eleven, twelve, dig and delve
Thirteen, fourteen, maids a-courting
Fifteen, sixteen, maids in the kitchen
Seventeen, eighteen, maids in waiting
Nineteen, twenty, my plate's empty

Origins: 'One, two buckle my shoe' is partly about lacemaking and partly about other 'working' class roles from the 16th, 17th or 18th century. One, two, buckle my shoe: refers to the lacemaker, or anyone else, getting ready in the morning for work. Three, four, shut the door: the lacemaker (or other) closed the door to the shop (or their own front door behind them) to begin work for the day. Five, six, pick up sticks: the sticks are wooden pins used on a lacemaking 'machine'. Seven, eight, lay them straight: the pins are placed on the machine to go straight across the fabric from side to side. Nine, ten, a big fat hen: which is a type of 'pillow' that supports and holds the lacework. 11 and 12 refers to the gardeners and 13 and 14 maids in waiting to a large house or estate and so on up to 19 and 20 being served dinner by the kitchen staff with plates empty.
Pat a cake, Pat a cake, baker's man
Bake me a cake as fast as you can;
Pat it and prick it and mark it with a 'B',
And put it in the oven for Baby and me.

**Origins:** The origins of the Pat a cake poem are unknown, but the tradition of decorating cakes with the name or initial of a child is still adhered to today. The song Pat a cake is always accompanied by a clapping game - much loved by children everywhere. The actions which accompany Pat a cake probably account for the ritual of passing this particular song from one generation to the next. Earliest traceable publication 1698.
Peter Peter pumpkin eater,
Had a wife and couldn't keep her!
He put her in a pumpkin shell,
And there he kept her very well!

Origins: The lyrics of the "Peter Peter pumpkin eater" rhyme (unlike most) originate not in Europe, but in America. This rhyme has become known to British children only in recent years as for most British children it has only just become clear exactly what a pumpkin is! As it is not indigenous to the British shores, the vast majority of the British population have never eaten pumpkin!
Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of treacle.
That’s the way the money goes,
Pop! goes the weasel.
Up and down the City road,
In and out the Eagle,
That’s the way the money goes,
Pop! goes the weasel.

Alternative Lyrics
All around the cobbler’s Bench
The monkey chased the weasel.
The monkey thought it all in fun,
Pop, goes the weasel.

Origins: These words are derived from Cockney Rhyming slang which originated in London. Cockneys were a close community and had a suspicion of strangers and a dislike of the Police (they still do). Cockneys developed a language of their own based roughly on a rhyming slang - it was difficult for strangers to understand as invariably the second noun would always be dropped. Apples and Pears (meaning stairs) would be abbreviated to just 'apples', for instance, "watch your step on the apples". To "Pop" is the slang word for "Pawn". Weasel is derived from "weasel and stoat" meaning coat. It was traditional for even poor people to own a suit, which they wore as their 'Sunday Best'. When times were hard they would pawn their suit, or coat, on a Monday and claim it back before Sunday. Hence the term "Pop goes the Weasel".

The words to the Rhyme are "Up and down the City road, in and out the Eagle - That’s the way the money goes - Pop! goes the weasel". The Eagle refers to 'The Eagle Tavern' a pub which is located on the corner of City Road and Shepherdess Walk in Hackney, North London.
Rain rain go away,
Come again another day.
Little Johnny wants to play;
Rain, rain, go to Spain,
Never show your face again!

**Origins:** The origin of the lyrics to "Rain rain go away" are said to date back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), one of the English Tudor monarchs. During this period of English history there was constant rivalry between Spain and England culminating in the launch of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The Spanish Armada consisted of many Spanish galleons and was sent to invade England. The Armada was led by Duke of Medina Sedonia and the fleet numbered over 130 ships. The English fleet, under Admiral Lord Howard, totaled 34 small Navy vessels and 163 armed merchant ships.

But the great Spanish Armada was defeated. Only 65 Spanish galleons and just 10,000 men returned to Spain. The attempt failed, not only because of the swift nature of the smaller English ships but also by the stormy weather which scattered the Armada fleet. Hence the origin of the "Rain rain go away" Nursery rhyme.
Ring around the rosy
A pocketful of posies
"Ashes, Ashes"
We all fall down!

Ring-a-Ring o' Rosies
A Pocket full of Posies
"A-tishoo! A-tishoo!"
We all fall Down!

**Origins:** The historical period for this rhyme dates back to the Great Plague of London in 1665 (bubonic plague) or even before when the first outbreak of the Plague hit England in the 1300's. The symptoms of the plague included a rosy red rash in the shape of a ring on the skin (Ring around the rosy). Pockets and pouches were filled with sweet smelling herbs (or posies) which were carried due to the belief that the disease was transmitted by bad smells. The term "Ashes Ashes" refers to the cremation of the dead bodies! The death rate was over 60% and the plague was only halted by the Great Fire of London in 1666 which killed the rats which carried the disease which was transmitting via water sources. The English version of "Ring around the rosy" replaces Ashes with (A-tishoo, A-tishoo) as violent sneezing was another symptom of the disease.
Rock a bye baby on 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.

**Origins:** The words and lyrics to the "Rock a bye baby" rhyme are reputed to reflect the observations of a young pilgrim boy in America who had seen Native Indian mothers suspend a birch bark cradle from the branches of a tree. Thus enabling the wind to rock the cradle and the child to sleep! This rhyme is also known as "Hush a bye baby" which is the correct title. The confusion regarding these lyrics occurred due to the popularity of the old Al Jolson classic song "Rock a bye my baby with a Dixie melody".
Rub-a-dub-dub,
Three men in a tub,
And who do you think they be?
The butcher, the baker,
The candlestick-maker,
All put out to sea.

**Origins:** The oldest printed version of the rhyme, dating to the fifteenth century, reveals how changing just a few words can alter a story completely, putting an entirely different complexion on it:

“Rub-a-dub-dub, Three maids in a tub, And who do you think were there? The butcher, the baker and candlestick maker, And all of them gone to the fair.”

Peep shows were popularized by the Victorians during the nineteenth century, but their origins can be traced back much further, to Europe in the 1400s. In those days, wandering artists and entertainers came up with the idea of presenting their art or shows in a large portable wooden box. The inside could be decorated to create scenery and customers would pay to watch the action through holes in the side.
Simple Simon met a pieman going to the fair;
Said Simple Simon to the pieman, "Let me taste your ware"
Said the pieman to Simple Simon, "Show me first your penny"
Said Simple Simon to the pieman, "Sir, I have not any!"

Simple Simon went a-fishing for to catch a whale;
All the water he had got was in his mother's pail.
Simple Simon went to look if plums grew on a thistle;
He pricked his fingers very much which made poor Simon whistle.
He went for water in a sieve, but soon it all fell through;
And now poor Simple Simon bids you all "Adieu"

**Origins:** In the days before fast food and convenience stores were invented, food was sold from street sellers from trays of food. A fair was an extremely popular place to sell 'your ware'. The tradition and history of fairs dates back to Medieval England. The four verses of “Simple Simon” form an integral part of the chapbook history of the same name, printed in 1764. Chapbooks were small books or pamphlets containing poems, ballads, and stories printed early as 1570. As a character, Simple Simon’s origins date back to the late-seventeenth-century ballad, “Simple Simon’s Misfortunes and his Wife Margery’s Cruelty.” The modern day version of Simple Simon can be found in the song and a game where children have to do exactly what "Simple Simon" says!
Sing a song of sixpence a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Oh wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?
The king was in his counting house counting out his money,
The queen was in the parlor eating bread and honey
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
When down came a blackbird and pecked off her nose!

**Origins:** The rye (a pocketful of rye) was purchased to feed birds. Blackbirds, and other songbirds, were actually eaten as a delicacy! However a court jester may well have suggested to the court cook to bake a pie pastry crust and place this over some live blackbirds to surprise and amuse the King. It would not be unreasonable for the blackbirds to look for revenge hence "When down came a blackbird and pecked off her nose!" It is interesting to note that the references to the counting house and eating honey were the common man's perception of what a King and Queen spent their time doing. The nursery rhyme Sing a song of sixpence or blackbirds baked in a pie always end with the tweaking of a child's nose.
There was a crooked man and he walked a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence upon a crooked stile.
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse.
And they all lived together in a little crooked house.

Origins: The content of "There was a crooked man" poem have a basis in history. The origin of this poem originates from the English Stuart history of King Charles I. The crooked man is reputed to be the Scottish General Sir Alexander Leslie. The General signed a Covenant securing religious and political freedom for Scotland. The 'crooked stile' referred to in "There was a crooked man" being the border between England and Scotland. 'They all lived together in a little crooked house' refers to the fact that the English and Scots had at last come to an agreement. The words reflect the times when there was great animosity between the English and the Scots.
There was an old lady who swallowed a fly
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady who swallowed a spider,
That wriggled and wiggled and tickled inside her;
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady who swallowed a bird;
How absurd to swallow a bird.
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider,
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady who swallowed a cat;
Fancy that to swallow a cat!
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird,
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider,
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady that swallowed a dog;
What a hog, to swallow a dog;
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat,
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird,
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider,
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady who swallowed a cow,
I don't know how she swallowed a cow;
She swallowed the cow to catch the dog,
She swallowed the dog to catch the cat,
She swallowed the cat to catch the bird,
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider,
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly;
I don't know why she swallowed a fly
Perhaps she'll die!

There was an old lady who swallowed a horse...
She's dead, of course!

**Origins:** A favorite Nursery rhyme amongst children whose famous lyrics of "There was an old lady" aid memory retention. The poem is a relatively modern rhyme and therefore has no origin in history! The imagery of "There was an old lady" paints a very strong picture which stimulates the imagination whilst emphasizing the relative sizes and order of the creatures mentioned. The lyrics to "There was an old lady" become more incredulous as they progress and there is almost a sense of relief and also astonishment at the startling ending of the story! "There was an old lady" is perhaps better described as a traditional folksong, the words of which have been set to music and recorded by many various artists.
There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,
She had so many children she didn't know what to do!
So she gave them some broth without any bread,
And she whipped them all soundly and sent them to bed!

Origins: At first glance the words to "There was an old woman" would appear to be nonsense but in fact it is believed to have origins in English history! There are two choices of origin. The first relates to Queen Caroline (There was an old woman) wife of King George II who had eight children. The second version refers to King George who began the men's fashion for wearing white powdered wigs. He was consequently referred to as the old woman! The children were the members of parliament and the bed was the Houses of Parliament - even today the term 'whip' is used in the English Parliament to describe a member of Parliament who is tasked to ensure that all members 'toe the party line'.
Three blind mice, three blind mice,
See how they run, see how they run,
They all ran after the farmer's wife,
Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,
Did you ever see such a thing in your life,
As three blind mice?

Origins: The origin of the words to the Three Blind Mice rhyme are based in English history. The 'farmer's wife' refers to the daughter of King Henry VIII, Queen Mary I. Mary was a staunch Catholic and her violent persecution of Protestants led to the nickname of 'Bloody Mary'. The reference to 'farmer's wife' in Three Blind Mice refers to the massive estates which she, and her husband King Philip of Spain, possessed. The 'three blind mice' were three noblemen who adhered to the Protestant faith who were convicted of plotting against the Queen - she did not have them dismembered and blinded as inferred in Three Blind Mice - but she did have them burnt at the stake!
Twinkle twinkle little star,
How I wonder what you are?
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky
When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light, twinkle, twinkle all the night.
Then the traveller in the dark, thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go, if you did not twinkle so.
In the dark blue sky you keep, and often through my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye, 'till the sun is in the sky.
As your bright and tiny spark lights the traveller in the dark,
Though I know not what you are - twinkle, twinkle little star.

Origins: The beautiful words of Twinkle twinkle little star have been immortalised in the poem and music has been added thus increasing its popularity. The simile 'like a diamond in the sky' teaches children how words can be used to paint a picture in the imagination. The words create a comparison between the twinkling of the star to a sparkling diamond thus providing a perfect illustration of clever imagery and excellent use of the English language.