

Name:

Teacher:

Class:

Date:

HISTORY of Nursery RHYMES



Everyone grew up with the well-known set of nursery rhymes, such as Jack and Jill, Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater, and all the others. The visual imagery invoked by these stories is vivid, such as three blind mice running away from a madwoman with a knife, while Jack made a wild leap over a flaming candle. The actual history of nursery rhymes goes back centuries to when the written language was scarce or limited to the highly educated gentry. A quarter of nursery rhymes are believed to be at least 200 years old. While their reflections of society may be outdated, their popularity and message is not.

Most of these nursery rhymes came from historical events or situations. Rhymes were written for many different reasons. Some rhymes were written to honor a particular local event that had since been forgotten, while others were written to express feelings of love.

The popular rhymes came from British politics and were invented as a way of spreading gossip about royalty. Rhymes were used to hide real meanings, such as when someone wanted to express displeasure toward the government or the sovereign without being executed! Once upon a time, a long, long time ago...people were punished by death if they were caught gossiping or talking about the events of the time.

Another reason for rhymes is that they were easy to remember, and therefore could be spread by word-of-mouth—an essential feature for a large population of people who could not read or write. People cleverly disguised their conversations with short, easy to remember rhymes. These rhymes stuck and are still popular today.