LIT102: Building Literacy Through Nursery Rhymes and Children’s Poetry

Handout

Welcome to LIT102

This course explores the use of nursery rhymes and children’s poetry as learning tools in the Early Care and Education (ECE) environment. Course participants will learn why rhymes and poems are good for the brain and overall child development and techniques for using poetry in the ECE environment. This course also focuses on teaching a basic understanding of poetic forms and literary devices every ECE professional should know.

Course Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Identify the benefits of nursery rhymes in relation to development of early literacy skills
- Identify specific benefits of nursery rhymes in relation to language, cognitive, physical, and social-emotional domains of early childhood development
- Define literary devices relevant to the early childhood environment, such as alliteration and onomatopoeia
- Identify essential poetry terminology ECE professionals should know, such as voice, speaker, rhyme scheme, rhythm, and verse
- Define and differentiate between subject and theme in a poem
- Identify characteristics of specific forms of poetry common in the early childhood environment, such as limericks and nonsense poems, haiku, acrostic, and cinquains
- Identify developmentally appropriate methods and strategies for incorporating nursery rhymes and other poems across the early childhood curriculum

References:

Course Notes:

*Use the space below to record important information from the course.*

**Nursery Rhymes and Early Literacy**

**Nursery Rhymes in the Research**

What does the evidence tell us?

**The Reading Brain**

What is the “reading brain” and what does it have to do with rhymes and poetry?

**The Benefits of Rhymes and Poems**

**Language Development and Poetry**
The reading brain needs to learn about words and patterns and sounds and concepts that are unlikely to arise in the course of everyday speech. Listening to nursery rhymes, children can:

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Sounds and Structure

Pitch, Volume, Inflection, Rhythm

Vocabulary Building

Before Mastery, Exposure
Cognitive Development and Poetry

Making Connections

Math

Physical Development and Poetry

Poetry Makes us Move!

Social-Emotional Development and Poetry

Experience Emotions

Play with Poetry!
What Is Poetry?

Poetry Terms

Important Fact

What is voice in poetry?
What is the *speaker* in a poem?

**Rhyme Scheme**

**Subject vs. Theme**

**Types of Poems**

**Poetry in the Public Domain**

**Public Domain Poetry and Cultural Diversity**
Nursery Rhymes

Possible Resources

Rich Vocabulary

Tier 2 words

Limericks and Other "Nonsense Literature"

Haiku
Acrostic

Cinquain

Elements:

Rhymes and Poetry for All Ages

Finding Meaning

Point to it

Act it out

Tell it like it is

Infants and Toddlers

Preschool and Up
Try This!

Play-Acting

Along came a spider  
Who sat down beside her    
and frightened Miss Muffet away.

Every nursery rhyme contains at least one crucial, meaningful moment of action. Those last three lines of the age-old “Miss Muffet” provide a useful example of the tremendous opportunity for fun, meaningful play.

- Children love to act out that moment when Miss Muffet notices the spider; the whole group can take turns reenacting or illustrating that moment. This is considered “play,” but there can still be some rules.
- Safe, appropriate behavior is essential. Poetry-play activities might get a little loud and boisterous, but children need to be respectful and listen to one another’s ideas.
- Children need to exercise self-control; for example, when acting out the Miss Muffet scene, some children might be tempted to jump and run screaming across the room, but that is inappropriate indoor behavior, so they need to figure out how to express themselves in different ways.

Have all play-actors act out the same scene from the poem—in this case, we just want to play out that moment when she’s frightened away. After each child’s initial “performance,” the teacher briefly invites children to describe what they saw—what exactly did the “actor” do in order to express emotion and meaning. Children take turns acting; some may imitate or build on what others do, and some will add creative twists or try a different approach altogether (there is more than one way to express fright).

Try This!

Shape Poems

Shape poetry, known formally as concrete poetry, is poetry in which the meaning is conveyed in part or whole by visual means using patterns of letters or words. If you want to see examples by a true master of the form, purchase the book Types of Shape, by the great John Hollander (1929–2013). You can browse some of his shape poems here.

There are different ways to go about it. For example, if you want to make a shape poem about a fish, you can simply try to write a poem in the shape of a fish. However, it might be easier to write the poem first and then arrange it in the shape of the fish. Or, draw an outline of a fish using a dark marker and then place a paper over top of it and “trace” the picture with words. Whatever method you choose, children will enjoy the activity and, like other forms, it really makes you think and choose your words carefully!

Try This!

Fingerplays

Search the web and you can probably find lots of “fingerplays,” which are little poems (sometimes rhymes, often not) with which you can easily create actions or “plays” using your fingers. Fingerplays might involve pointing or acting. Popular, classic examples of "fingerplay" rhymes include

- This Little Piggy (extremely popular with infants!)
- Itsy Bitsy Spider
- Five Little Monkeys
- I’m a Little Teapot
- The Grand Old Duke of York
- This Old Man
- Here Is a Bunny