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Image: NilouferWadia/DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images When it comes to old nursery rhymes, stories and singing games, most of us adults remember a lot more than we think we do. Teaching these traditions to our children and grandchildren is a wonderful way to bond and teach them about the past. But how much do we know about the stories behind the beloved tales? The first-ever recorded speech was a tinfoil phonograph recording of which nursery rhyme? The words to "Mary Had a Little Lamb" were the first ever recorded on Thomas Edison's phonograph. "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" refers to which British monarch? Queen Mary I. "Bloody" Mary, tortured Protestants and burned them at the stake. Quite contrary, indeed! Mary II (of "William and Mary" fame) Bloody Mary's penchant for burning people at the stake also inspired this rhyme. "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" The "blind mice" were a trio of Protestant bishops who were executed for plotting to kill Queen Mary. Which member of Henry the Eighth's court is being lampooned in "Little Boy Blue"? Some theorize that "Little Boy Blue" was created and used as propaganda to bring down an unpopular member of Henry the Eighth's court, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. In "Jack Sprat," to what do the "fat" and "lean" really refer? peasant demands and eventual uprising "Jack Sprat" is reputed to be a stand-in for King Charles I, who was "lean" after Parliament refused to finance his war on Spain. His queen, Henrietta Maria, imposed an illegal war tax (creating more "fat") once he'd angrily dissolved Parliament. Which of these unlikely rhymes is actually based on a real event? "The Old Woman Who Lived In the Shoe" "Little Miss Muffet" was a real girl named Patience Muffat, whose father was a famous entomologist. One of his spiders escaped, and the rest is history. Which rhyme is commonly believed to detail the fate of Marie Antoinette, among others? "Jack and Jill" refers to the first actions in the French Revolution against the aristocracy and monarchy, in which Louis XVI "lost his crown" (first symbolically, then literally). Jill -- Marie Antoinette -- soon followed suit. Gruesome! "The Little Girl With a Curl" To what does Humpty Dumpty's "great fall" really refer? a literal fall from a wall Among all these tales of uprisings, you might assume that "Humpty Dumpty" was one king or another, but in fact he was a large-bellied cannon that stood on a wall in the town of Colchester during the English Civil War. Eventually, the Roundheads destroyed the wall, bringing down Humpty Dumpty and leaving that part of town undefended. "Rock-A-Bye Baby" is about which real-world situation? a literal treehouse, in the boughs of which lived a Derbyshire family "Rock-A-Bye Baby" refers to a family who lived in Derbyshire in the 1700s. Their house was formed by the wood of a 2,000-year-old yew tree: a literal treehouse! the practices of Native Americans as described by European colonists the tenuous peace in Ireland after the 20th-century uprising Which of these historical figures is immortalized in the words of "Georgie Porgie"? Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General Jack the Ripper, who was never caught the Duke of Buckingham, known for his many lovers "Georgie Porgie" refers to George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham in the early 17th century. Among his lovers were King James I and France's Queen Anne of Austria, a notorious affair that is also a plotpoint in Alexandre Dumas' "The Three Musketeers". What was the organization that denounced many of the most popular nursery rhymes for "harbouring unsavoury elements"? Mothers For Wholesome Nursery Rhymes The Nursery Clean-Up Society British Society for Nursery Rhyme Reform The mission of the British Society for Nursery Rhyme Reform was to protect innocent children from the hidden (and not-so hidden) dark sides of their favorite songs. Which nursery rhyme purportedly references peep shows? "Do You Know the Muffin Man?" On closer reading, the familiar version with "three men in a tub" actually doesn't sound so innocent. But the original version involved "three maids," an apparent reference to the traveling peep shows that were common in England for centuries. "Ride a Cock-Horse to Banbury Cross" What was the job of the real-life "Lucy Locket"? Lucy Locket was apparently an 18th-century London prostitute who had a well-known beef with fellow prostitute Kitty. Which nursery rhyme was involved in a lawsuit in 2009? Two women sued Southwest Airlines in 2009 because a flight attendant sang part of "Eeny Meenie Minie Moe" over the plane's loudspeaker. They claimed to have suffered severe emotional distress because the original version of the rhyme used a racial slur in place of the "tiger" that gets caught by its toe. (The suit was not successful.) This still-popular rhyme gets negative marks for both racism and violence. "Ten Little Indians": a wholesome, child-friendly tune about the violent deaths of members of a single racial group. Which nursery rhyme can also be read as an exploration of child labor? Don't let the sing-songy playground chant fool you -- "See Saw, Margery Daw" references crushing poverty and possibly prostitution. "Polly Put the Kettle On" Legend has it that Sarah Josepha Hale wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb" after Sawyer and her lamb made a scene at school. "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" What's the "macaroni" in "Yankee Doodle Dandy"? the latest in European fashion The patriotic American ditty was actually a British song disparaging dumb colonists who would put feathers in their caps and think they were as stylish as Italians. code for the American Revolution Which English king's failed request for an annulment allegedly inspired "Old Mother Hubbard"? There's Henry the Eighth and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey again. Apparently, Old Mother Hubbard is Wolsey, who couldn't persuade the Pope to grant the annulment from Katherine of Aragon. The cupboard is the Catholic Church, the bone is the annulment, and the "poor dog" is the king. These two boys' names are frequently used in nursery rhymes because they were historically used as a generic name for any Englishman. Jack and John/Johnny have long been derogatory shorthand for Englishmen. The lion's share of the nursery-rhyme canon originated in this century. For whatever reason, the nursery-rhymes that started in 18th-century England had major staying power. Which character lends his name to the title of the first published nursery-rhyme collection? "Tommy Thumb's Song Book" was published around 1744. When was the first mention of Mother Goose? Mother Goose first appeared in Charles Perrault's fairy-tale book in 1695. The Great Custom, an unpopular 13th-century tax, inspired which nursery rhyme? The general consensus is that "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" was inspired by the Great Custom wool tax of 1275. Who's the titular character in "Ladybird Ladybird"? a Quaker in Protestant England a Catholic in Protestant England It's certainly not obvious to a modern listener, but "ladybird" is an English Catholic, forbidden to practice her religion. a Protestant in Catholic England This rhyme is probably about a cash-strapped guy who goes out for a night on the town. There's a surprising amount of old-timey drinking slang in "Pop Goes the Weasel." "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" Which of these nursery rhymes is about a title-selling scam by the Bishop of Glastonbury? "Little Jack Horner" refers to a bribery scandal which resulted in multiple deaths and the destruction of a whole abbey. "The Lion and the Unicorn" Which nursery rhyme originated in a women's prison? "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" The female inmates at England's Wakefield Prison sang a tune as they exercised around a mulberry tree -- it eventually became the wholesome children's ditty "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush." The myth-debunking site Snopes.com discredits a common theory about which nursery rhyme? "Ring Around the Rosie" is often said to be about the Great Plague of London (or various other disease outbreaks), but Snopes says it's a straight-up "play-party" song. "Rain, Rain, Go Away" originated during a war between England and this country. The rarely recited second verse of the classic is "Rain, rain go to Spain/Never show your face again." NilouferWadia/DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images A mother's love knows no bounds--just ask Sergeant James Givens, of the Cincinnati Police Department, who recently had a heartwarming encounter with a mother goose. According to WKRC, Sergeant Givens was on duty last May when a goose walked up to his squad car and tried to get his attention. The veteran cop tried to feed her, but the bird wasn't interested in a meal. The goose, James eventually realized, needed his help. He explained what happened next to The Dodo:[The goose] led me about 100 yards away to this grassy area near a creek. That's when I saw one of her babies all tangled up in some string from a balloon. His little feet were kicking. She led me straight to him.Cautious that the mother bird might become violent if he approached her baby, the officer called for some backup: his colleague Cecilia Charron. After the two officers determined that the local SPCA wasn't immediately available to help, Officer Charron decided to slowly untangle the gosling from the balloon, while the mother goose patiently stood by. Meanwhile, Sergeant Givens captured a video of the special moment, which had a happy ending: The baby was finally set free and swam off with his mother. View full post on YoutubeBoth officers were moved by the unique experience. "It seems like something made up. It was just incredible...I honestly don't know why I decided to follow her, but I did. It makes me wonder -- do they know to turn to humans when they need help?" Sergeant Givens told The Dodo. Cecilia, who has reportedly been an officer for over 24 years, also called the event the highlight of her career.(h/t The Dodo)Follow Country Living on Pinterest.



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