Why Children Still Need the Delightful Language of Mother Goose

- Research shows that children who have memorized nursery rhymes become better readers because they develop an early sensitivity to the sounds of language. (See Marie Clay article.)

- Nursery rhymes are short and full of alliteration and rhymes. Children can quickly internalize the language and make them their own. These memorized rhymes are ideal vehicles for playing with language and developing phonemic awareness.

- Children delight in the visual images and strong rhythmic character of nursery rhymes. Visual imagery and the rhythms of sound have a powerful effect on cognition.

- Many authors of children’s books assume knowledge of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. (See Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown and Each Peach, Pear, Plum by Janet and Allan Ahlberg.) The Common Core State Standards include memorizing rhymes.

- Memorizing nursery rhymes effortlessly plants the grammatical structure (or syntax) of language in the child’s long-term memory. This accelerates both language and literacy development.

- Nursery rhymes invite movement and dramatic interpretation, allowing children to personalize meaning and build language concepts and vocabulary. This is especially vital for children acquiring English as a second language.

- Every culture has its own “nursery rhymes” or “out-loud culture.” See Tortillas Para Mama.

- Reading rhymes that children have first memorized supports them in self-concepting or role-playing themselves as successful readers. Repeated experiences with “magical memory reading” develop fluency, teach concepts about print and lay the foundation for “guided reading” instruction. (See article on Magical Guided Reading.)

- Nursery rhymes feature consistent decodable words (rimes) conducive to explicit phonics instruction within a meaningful context; they also reinforce high-frequency words.

- “Parents as partners” can engage their children in memorizing nursery rhymes.

- Many nursery rhymes have survived since the time of Shakespeare. They have been polished by children into a form that is almost indestructible.

- When children memorize, recite and perform nursery rhymes they are developing listening and speaking skills in a joyful, non-threatening context.

- Active, imaginative teaching with nursery rhymes takes advantage of how the brain learns best – it is meaningful, memorable, and multisensory.

- Pre-school and kindergarten children can adapt nursery rhymes and use the patterns to make their own individual books or contribute innovations for group books. See examples in Making Class Books in Kindergarten. Children love being authors and illustrators.

- Nursery rhymes are basic cultural literacy – they are gifts of language that all children deserve to own. Common Core Standards emphasize the importance of learning rhymes.