

Mary had a Little Lamb

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.

Alchin, L. (Feb. 2017). Nursery Rhymes Lyrics and Origins . Retrieved from
http://www.rhymes.org.uk/mary_had_a_little_lamb.htm
(Original work written by Sarah Hale, 1830)

I found it to be quite interesting to read about the history of various nursery rhymes while making my selection. While teaching children words, concepts, and in some cases dexterity through actions, nursery rhymes also had an important role in recording events and opinions. Throughout much of history, common people were illiterate, so verbal communication and memory development was crucial. According to Alchin, the above is an historically correct version of this nursery rhyme, originally written by Sarah Hale from Boston, in 1830.

I often found it difficult to memorize that last few lines of this rhyme. From what I recall from my own childhood, and from reciting this poem with my own children, the historical version differs from that which I have known. I have now found out that there are indeed differing versions. In modern versions, the poem is broken up into stanzas, with repeating groups of words at intervals for emphasis and pacing. The following uses repeating phrases such as; little lamb, little lamb, little lamb, Mary went, Mary went, Mary went, and school one day, school one day, school one day, for such purpose.

Mary had a little lamb
Little lamb, little lamb
Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went
Mary went, Mary went
Everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go

He followed her to school one day
School one day, school one day
He followed her to school one day
Which was against the rule
It made the children laugh and play
Laugh and play, laugh and play
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school

And so the teacher turned him out
Turned him out, turned him out
And so the teacher turned him out
But still he lingered near

And waited patiently
Patiently, patiently
And waited patiently
Til Mary did appear

Mary had a little lamb
Little lamb, little lamb
Mary had a little lamb
Its fleece was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went
Mary went, Mary went
Everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go

Kidsongs. (2018). Retrieved from
<https://kidsongs.com/lyrics/mary-had-a-little-lamb.html/>

While still following the same plot line, the more recent version has a format more suited for a song adaptation. The repetition makes the rhyme really fun for kids and adds the possibility to incorporate actions for each part. Adding actions to reciting the words helps brain development because it engages more parts of the brain. The more senses that can be engaged, the better. This does not have to be directly related to memorizing a poem or song. For example, science has shown that one who learns music has greater ability to retain information and learn in general, as opposed to reading a page only.

If anyone thinks that this rhyme is tough to memorize, try “Hush, Little Baby”! There isn't much in the way of repetition, save for the last and first lines of adjacent stanzas. Although, when reciting with children, we could always just be creative and make up our own lines, kids love the spontaneity.

Baby Center. (2019). Lullaby Lyrics: Hush, Little Baby. Retrieved from
https://www.babycenter.com/0_lullaby-lyrics-hush-little-baby_6730.bc