

HALF-ALPHABET NURSERY RHYMES

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In July 2006 B.D. Stillion wrote

Everywhere [on the Web] I see mentioned Eckler's clever and masterful nursery rhyme lipograms, but nowhere do I see a reference of where they might be available to read (other than "Mary Had a Little Lamb")... You are [also] credited with "Little Jack Horner" and most [Web] pages at least imply if not outright state that there is an entire collection. Can you please refer me to a place where I can find them?

Well, no, I can't—because no such place exists. In the Aug 1969 Word Ways I wrote "Mary Had a Lipogram" which featured her minus the letters A,E,T,H,S in turn, and as a lagniappe I wrote of her using only half the alphabet. It's time to validate these Internet claims and provide readers with such a collection. Single-letter lipograms are not much of a challenge, so I have written half-alphabet ones for a variety of nursery rhymes. To keep the job from becoming inordinately difficult, I have tailored the half-alphabets to the individual stories.

Old King Cole (20 letters ABCDEFGHIKLMNOPRSUWY, using ACEFHILMNOPRS)

*Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe, and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three*

Emperor Chan is a frolicsome man,
A frolicsome man is he;
He calls for his pipe and he calls for his fan,
As he hears a fine cello (Chinee)

Hickory, Dickory (18 letters ACDEHIKLMNOPRSTUWY, using ACDGKLNOPRTUW)

*Hickory dickory dock, the mouse ran up the clock;
The clock struck one, the mouse ran down,
Hickory dickory dock*

Pocono rococo rock, a pack-rat ran up a clock;
Clang, clang! Clock rang, and rat ran down—
Pocono rococo rock

Little Jack Horner (21 letters ABCDEGHIJKLMNORSTUWY, using ADEILNOPRSTUY)

*Little Jack Horner sat in a corner,
Eating his Christmas pie;
He put in his thumb and pulled out a plum,
And said, "What a good boy am I!"*

Little Sid Snell sat in an ell
 To eat a Yuletide pie;
 Sid put in a spoon, pried out a prune,
 And said "No one's sated as I"

Jack Be Nimble (20 letters ABCDEHIJKLMNOPQRSTU, using ABEFILMNOPRTV)

*Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,
 Jack jump over the candlestick*

Bill be nimble, be not lame,
 Bill leap over an open flame

Rock-a-Bye Baby (20 letters ABCDEFGHIKLNOPRSTUWY, using ABCDEFIKNORTW)

*Rock-a-bye baby on the treetop,
 When the wind blows the cradle will rock;
 When the bough break the cradle will fall
 And down will come cradle, baby and all*

Rock, tender infant, in crown of a tree,
 To-and-fro wind can rock crib for free;
 Wind tore crib off crown—it went down in a trice,
 And infant went too (eek! not a bit nice)

Jack Sprat (21 letters ABCDEFHIJKLMNOPRSTUWY, using ACDEFHILMNOST)

*Jack Sprat could eat no fat,
 His wife could eat no lean;
 And so between them both, you see,
 They licked the platter clean*

Daniel Chat did eat no fat,
 His mate did eat no lean,
 So he and she (as one can see)
 Left all the dishes clean

Jack and Jill (21 letters ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPRSTUW, using ACDEFHILNORTW)

*Jack and Jill went up the hill
 To fetch a pail of water;
 Jack fell down and broke his crown,
 And Jill came tumbling after*

Nance and Will did reach the hill
 To fetch a can of water;
 Will fell down with dented crown,
 And Nance then followed after

Humpty Dumpty (20 letters ACDEFGHIKLMNOPRSTUWY, using AEF GHILNORSTW)

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again*

Willie Nillie sits on a wall;
Willie Nillie has a great fall;
All regal horses and all regal men
Fail to get Willie together again

Little Miss Muffet (20 letters ABCDEFGHILMNOPRSTUWY, using ABDEHIMNORST)

*Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey;
There came a big spider,
And he sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away*

Barbara Barber sat in her arbor
To eat tender raspberries (smart!);
A horrid red spider
Appeared there beside her,
Made timid Miss Barber depart

Little Bo-Peep (21 letters ABCDEFGHIKLMNOPRSTVWY, using ABDEHILNORSTW)

*Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep,
And doesn't know where to find them;
Leave them alone, and they will come home,
Bringing their tails behind them*

Little Boo-Hoo has lost her ewe—
Where, oh where, did it wend?
Don't sweat it! Ewe's near, and will soon be here,
With a tail on its little rear end

Three Blind Mice (21 letters ABCDEFGHIKLMNORSTUVWY, using ABDEFHILMNRST)

*Three blind mice, see how they run.
They all ran after the farmer's wife;
She cut off their tails with a carving knife.
Did you ever see such a sight in your life
As three blind mice?*

Three blind rats—see them all near.
All ran after the farmer's maid;
She trimmed their tails with a fine steel blade,
A terrible drama, a shambles it made—
These three blind rats

A Diller, a Dollar (18 letters ABCDEHIKLMNORSTUWY, using ACEHIKLMNORST)

A diller, a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar.

What makes you come so soon?

You used to come at ten o'clock,

But now you come at noon

A killer, a choler, a ten o'clock scholar

Once came to school too soon.

Last term he came at ten o'clock—

This term he comes at noon

Mary Had a Lamb (21 letters ABCDEFGHILMNOPRSTUVWY, using ACDEHILMNPRST)

Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow,

And everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go;

He followed her to school one day, that was against the rule;

It made the children laugh and play to see a lamb in school

Maria had a little sheep, as pale as rime its hair,

And all the places Maria came, the sheep did tail her there.

In Maria's class it came at last (a sheep can't enter there);

It made the children clap their hands—a sheep in class, that's rare!

Pat-a-Cake (21 letters ABCDEFHIKMNOPRSTUVWY, using ABCDEIKMNOPRT)

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man,

Bake me a cake as fast as you can;

Bake it and prick it and mark it with a T,

And put it in the oven for Tommy and me

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker man;

Make me a cake at once in a pan.

Pack it and prick it and cook to a tee;

No better cake tendered to Tammie and me!

Hey Diddle Diddle (21 letters ACDEFGHIJLMNOPRSTUVWY, using ACDEILMNOPRST)

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,

The cow jumped over the moon;

The little dog laughed to see such sport,

And the dish ran away with the spoon

Mae diddle daddle, a cat stole a paddle,

A raccoon leapt on a moon slope;

A poodle did snort to see real odd sport,

And plate and spoon did elope

Sing a Song (21 letters ABCDEFGHIKLNOPRSTUWXY, using ADEGILNOPRSTW)

*Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye;
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing;
Was not that a dainty dish to set before the king?*

Sing a song (no sadness!)—don swallowtail and tie;
Two and nineteen swallows are made into a pie.
Pie is now torn open—listen! Swallows sing;
Great leader eats a tender ort—swallows a swallow wing!

Simple Simon (19 letters ADEFGHILMNOPRSTUVWY, using ACEFGILMNOPST)

*Simple Simon met a pieman, going to the fair.
Says Simple Simon to the pieman, "Let me taste your ware".
Says the pieman to Simple Simon, "Show me first your penny."
Says Simple Simon to the pieman, "Alas, I have not any"*

Simple Simon met a pieman going to the mall.
Calls Simple Simon to the pieman, "Can I sample all?"
States the pieman to Simple Simon, "Slip me one small pence."
Notes Simple Simon to the pieman, "I possess no cents (sense)"

See-saw, Margery (22 letters ABCDEFGHJKLMNORSTUVWY, using AEFIKLMNORSTW)

*See-saw, Margery Daw,
Jackie shall have a new master;
He shall have but a penny a day
Because he can't work any faster*

See-saw, Lorelei Law,
Walter will seek a new master,
Will toil for a florin or less, for a week,
For Walter works slower, not faster

Old Mother Hubbard (17 letters ABCDEGHLMNOPRSTUW, using ABDEFGHLMNORT)

*Old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none*

Old Mother Barber foraged her larder
To get her lean dog a bone;
Mother got there, noted larder all bare;
For the moment her dog garnered none

Would anyone care to rewrite Mother Goose using the same thirteen letters for all? Of the 22 different letters used, their ranks are AN 19, ET 18, IOR 17, L 16, DS 13, M 12, CFHP 10, BW 7, GK 5, U 2, and VY 1. In the classic ETAOIN SHRDLU, letters CFMP equal or outrank H and U.