

1,000 Fingerplays & Action Rhymes

A Sourcebook & DVD

Barbara A. Scott

Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
New York London

Published by Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
100 William St., Suite 2004
New York, NY 10038

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Scott, Barbara A., 1956-

1,000 fingerplays & action rhymes : a sourcebook & DVD / Barbara A. Scott.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-55570-695-1 (alk. paper)

1. Children's libraries—Activity programs—United States. 2. Storytelling—United States. 3. Finger play—United States. 4. Rhyming games—United States. I. Title. II. Title: One thousand fingerplays and action rhymes.

Z718.3.S395 2010
027.62'5—dc22

2010017967

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Preface

I still remember feeling dread and stage fright all too well. I had been a children's librarian for all of a month when my director told me, "You will be responsible for doing preschool storytime." Up until this point, parent volunteers had been filling in for the former children's librarian (who was out on extended sick leave). Fear struck my heart! What did I know about presenting a storytime? My experience with young people, up to that point, had been three years of teaching high school. Next week's audience members would be much smaller and, as far as I was concerned, way more demanding and intimidating!

I am glad to report that I jumped in with both feet and, 20-something years later, am still doing (and loving!) preschool storytime. I consider it a barometer of success (and steel nerves) that instead of running away years ago, I now get the pleasure of telling stories to the children of my first listeners.

Whether you're holding this book because you're looking for some fresh fingerplays or whether, like I was decades ago, you're quivering in fear of presenting your first storytime in front of real live children and their caregivers (not to mention your boss!), don't fear! Storytime preparation is a matter of finding a routine with which you feel comfortable. *1,000 Fingerplays & Action Rhymes: A Sourcebook & DVD* is designed to get you started.

Why Use Fingerplays?

Fingerplays are a staple of library storytime sessions. They:

- increase manual dexterity and muscular control;
- help children develop an understanding of rhythms, size, shape, direction, and number concepts;
- provide fun and relaxation;
- give children a legitimate opportunity to move and wiggle;
- let children express themselves;
- help children learn to follow directions; and
- provide another way for librarians to make the library a fun place children want to visit.

And, as if all of these weren't enough benefits, fingerplays also help increase attention span, foster listening and memory skills, build vocabulary, and aid language development. Fingerplays are key for developing crucial early literacy pre-reading skills.

What's in This Multimedia Resource?

1,000 Fingerplays & Action Rhymes: A Sourcebook & DVD has five components. The Introduction covers what fingerplays are and why we use them. Anyone who needs to convince an administrator that fingerplays aren't just "entertainment" will find convincing ammunition here. It discusses how to organize a storytime; create effective routines, using everything from singing to poetry; use book tie-ins; market storytime programs; and what to do when the storytime is over.

The second and largest part of this book—the "meat" of this publication—contains 42 themed chapters with rhymes. Each one contains fingerplays and action rhymes I've used myself with great success. You'll find not only the words to speak but also the actions to perform as you present and teach the rhyme. Each chapter ends with lists of books to share, musical selections (and where to find them), and the sources reprinted rhymes are drawn from.

Toward the end of this book is "The Source Finder," which has two sections. The first provides sources for ready-made puppets and storysets—everything from felt pieces to hand puppets to finger puppets. The second section lists multimedia resources, ranging from music CDs to parachutes and bean bags. At the very end of the book, the fourth component is a title index of the rhymes that put them all literally "at your fingertips"!

The final, fifth component is the companion DVD you will find on the inside back cover. It is designed especially for those new to storytelling. In one section I'll walk you step-by-step through a typical session. I'll also take you on a visit to my workroom so that you can see how I organize my storyhour themes by folders and check out some of the puppets, props, and other items that I use on a regular basis.

The remainder of the DVD contains demonstrations of 18 fingerplays and action rhymes. These were done with a live audience at my library. You will see me actually doing the movements that accompany the rhymes and see the children do them as well. The rhymes include the following themes: ants, bees, dinosaurs, farms, firefighters, ice cream, kites, outer space (stars), owls, penguins, pigs, pizza, scarecrows, spiders, stir and bake (cookies), teeth, transportation (boats), and the zoo. Look for the DVD icon——next to the rhyme title in the book.

Fingerplays are an integral part of storytimes. They are opportunities for the librarians, daycare providers, and preschool teachers to interact with children and their caregivers. Anyone who presents early childhood programming on a regular basis is always looking for new activities and themes.

In my own personal storytime planning, I have spent much time looking through multiple sources to find fingerplays on a specific theme that I might be using. Needless to say, this takes a lot of time. I have designed this book and DVD to be a "one-stop" resource for busy librarians and early childhood professionals. I hope both experienced and new children's librarians will find it to be a source of ideas and inspirations throughout the year.

Acknowledgments

When I undertook this project, little did I realize the size and scope of research time that it would entail!

I would like to thank all of the authors who so graciously allowed me to use many of their fingerplays and action rhymes for this book. They are listed below.

My appreciation goes out to my original editor, RoseMary Honnold, my second editor, Mike Kouri, and my current editor, Charles Harmon. All of you have been a tremendous help guiding me along in this long process! Thank you so much!

Finally, to my family and friends, thank you for your patience and encouragement!

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Introduction

What Are Fingerplays and Action Rhymes?

Fingerplays and action rhymes are activities that tell stories. They can range from simple rhymes involving just the fingers to full-blown action rhymes that involve the whole body. Rhymes that use the fingers, eyes, or toes help children develop small motor coordination, and the action rhymes work on the larger muscle movements.

Fingerplays and rhymes also expose children to memorization, rhythm, and the concept of rhyming. Not only that, it prepares them to listen to stories by helping them to concentrate and to be actively involved in telling the story. Furthermore, it exposes them to the concept of following directions and to the idea of actions happening in a sequence, which, of course, is one of the important elements of a story.

For toddlers and other young children, exploring language while moving arms, fingers, and sometimes whole bodies is exciting! But what is most exciting are the early literacy concepts that are found wrapped in the rhymes.

Early childhood professionals and much research tell us that exposure to early literacy concepts is the foundation of reading and school success in later years. Children can begin learning six important prereading skills from birth:

Print Motivation	Being interested in and enjoying books
Print Awareness	Figuring out how books “work”; noticing print; knowing how to follow the words on a page (left to right)
Vocabulary	Knowing the names of things
Phonological Awareness	Recognizing the sounds of letters and words; being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words (Fingerplays, rhymes, and songs are a great vehicle for teaching this concept. Words are broken up so that there is a note or sound for each word or part of a word!)
Narrative Skills	Learning how to tell a story; being able to describe things and events
Letter Knowledge	Learning what letters are; knowing letters are different from each other and have different names and sounds; being able to recognize letters no matter where they are seen

Fingerplays and action rhymes are wonderful ways to begin helping a child develop these skills.

According to *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*, published by the U.S. Department of Education in January 2000 and revised in 2005, rhyming activities help children to pay attention to the sounds in words.¹ This is the concept of phonological awareness. The authors suggest playing rhyming games and singing rhyming songs with children. And what better type of activity to work with rhyming than fingerplays? Then there's the added benefit of learning numbers as well!

Also, nursery rhymes (which can be in the form of fingerplays) help children to match sounds. Listening for and saying sounds in words will help children to learn that spoken words are made up of sounds, which prepares children to match spoken sounds to written letters—an important first step toward becoming a reader.² This covers both the literacy concepts of phonological awareness and letter knowledge. Helping children learn to pay attention to sounds in words can prevent reading problems later on.³

But wait! There's more! Think about the different learning styles of children: spatial/visual learners (those children who learn through images); kinesthetic learners (those who are active and find it hard to sit still, learning with the body); and language-oriented learners (they learn through word play). Then, consider the multiple intelligences: musical/rhythmic (children who think and learn in sounds, rhythms, and rhymes); bodily/kinesthetic (children who learn and think in terms of action and movement and can use their bodies in expressive ways); visual/spatial learners (those children who think and learn in pictures and use their imaginations); verbal/linguistic (those children who love everything about stories and storytelling; they think in words and use language well). Acting out a fingerplay allows verbal/linguistic types of learners to express themselves. When children act out a rhyme, they are showing their understanding of what it is about. They are growing as a reader by connecting emotions with written words.⁴ And singing of fingerplay songs (and songs in general) help children with rhythm and breaking words into syllables.⁵

Phonological awareness skills are fostered by most of the rhymes, songs, and movements in this book. Hearing the rhythm of language and making animal sounds contribute to phonological awareness.⁶ Nursery rhymes are fun to sing and say, and they also expose children to words that are not used in everyday conversation. Researchers have found that children who know rhymes find it easier to learn to read.⁷

The final word on the benefits of fingerplays and rhymes comes from Carolyn Munson-Benson in her article "Making Time for Rhyme" in the May 2007 issue of *Book Links Magazine*,⁸ which begins:

Literary language gives young brains a buzz. This "buzz" results in a boost—growth of synapses in the brain, 90 percent of which develop in the first few years of life. "By repeating the same words and phrases, you rapidly reinforce specific neural pathways," notes Dr. Lise Eliot in *What's Going On In There? How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life* (Bantam, 2000). Thus, patterns peculiar to poems, nursery rhymes and lullabies are of special value. Repeated rhyming sounds as well as recurring phrases and refrains stimulate brain growth.

A Step-by-Step Guide for Organizing a Storytime

I have found it easier to plan my storytimes when I work with a specific theme. Throughout the year, holidays just beg to be programmed around, so for most months this gives

you a good start. Of course, there are the themes that will appeal to preschoolers, such as dinosaurs, colors, counting, and most any type of animal. I also make an effort to do a series focusing on nursery rhymes at least every couple of years. You might think that there is no need for this, but you would be surprised at the number of children who have not been exposed to the traditional rhymes that we baby boomers grew up with! Once you choose your theme, here are some steps that will work for any storytime.

Step 1: Set the Scene

Find a special place to present your storytime. The children's areas of most public libraries may already have an area set aside for storytimes. As with real estate, it's all about location! Preschoolers thrive on routine, and holding your storytime in a certain area time after time makes them feel comfortable.

You may wish to use a special chair. I use a rocking chair in my area. I also leave room for my easel, which holds my flannel/Velcro board, and a cart that holds my CD player, rhythm instruments, bean bags or scarves (if used), and my books and other storytime materials. You may wish to provide carpet squares for the children to sit on. My little ones sit on them during storytime, and it provides an area for them to go back to if we are using instruments or need a specific area to be (e.g., "take your shakers back to your carpet square"). The children choose them prior to the beginning of the session and are responsible (at my prompt at the end of the session) to place them in a pile before leaving the storytime area. Do you have a carpet store in your town? Most times they will donate whatever number you need! Library supply catalogs also supply seating cushions that you may wish to use.

Step 2: Let's Read!

Find one to two books that relate to your theme. Use one book at the beginning of your storytime session. The second can be used later, if needed.

Step 3: My Name Is . . .

What a boon to librarians Ellison dies are! I use these to make the name tags that the storytime participants receive at each session. If you are not familiar with Ellison dies, visit Ellison's website at www.ellison.com. Its catalog boasts die cuts for hundreds of shapes that are just right for storytime name tags, and it sells the Sizzix machine as well. AccuCut also offers dies similar to Ellison's. Visit AccuCut online at www.accucut.com. If you have parent or even teen volunteers, what a great project for them to do for you!

At the beginning of my storyhours, each child receives a personalized name tag. This not only gets me familiar with the children's names but also provides a reference point for their names if I need to call on them during an activity later in the storytime session. You may wish to provide just one name tag that you will laminate and use week after week. I have seen librarians string them on yarn, or you can use inexpensive lanyards. Children are responsible for getting these back to the librarian at the end of the storytime session. Personally, I like the idea of using different name tags each week according to the theme. Many parents will place them on the coloring sheet or craft we have done and then take

them home. Sometimes they'll include the name tags in a scrapbook of their child's activities. I have also been told that the name tags decorate refrigerators, bedroom doors, and headboards of beds at home!

Step 4: It's All Routine!

When you are ready to begin your storytime series, it is good to have a structure that is the same time after time. I usually begin by saying, "OK, storyhour friends, if everyone has their carpet square and has a place to sit, it's time to get started!" This alerts children and parents both inside and outside of the specific area that we are ready to get underway.

Ask your participants to identify what their name tag is, if you choose to do the personalized ones every week. Simply query, "Who can tell me what your name tag shape is?" This will result in a chorus of voices. Specifically asking about the shape of the tag most times takes care of the participants just telling you it says their name (which it does). You may wish to ask about the color of the tag, to reinforce that concept.

Step 5: Please Use Poetry!

I love to use poetry in my storytime sessions! I attended a workshop many years ago at which Caroline Feller Bauer spoke. She is a big proponent of using poetry in the classroom. So, I figured why wait until children are in school to expose them to this wonderful use of language! There are just so many great poems out there! Of course, the poem relates to the theme of the week. Where do you find poetry? *Mailbox Magazine* (the preschool edition) is a great source, as well as the poetry section of your juvenile nonfiction area. This might seem a little labor intensive, but it is worth it! Especially around the holidays, there are compilations out there. I always read from a copy of the poem that is typed and illustrated.

Step 6: Everybody Sing!

I am also a big proponent of using music in storytime. Music exposes children to rhythm and rhyme and gives them a chance to get those wiggles out! I use the same song for my opening every week: Jim Gill's "Oh Hey, Oh Hi, Hello," a song that he says he started singing on one of his many trips through Ohio. The lyrics mention specific towns in Ohio (great for Ohio librarians) and gives participants a chance to wave and sing the chorus in a variety of ways (in the library, quietly; outside, very loud; underwater in a swimming pool, very unusual, etc.). At the end of the song, everyone gives themselves a great big hand for doing such a fantastic job. It is unreal the number of parents who say that their little ones sing this song at home all the time, or in the car, sometimes even at church! Some other songs you might want to consider are Debbie Clement's "Jambo Hello" (saying hello in different languages) or "Howdy Song" by Monty Harper, which also teaches children how people around the world say "hello"!

Step 7: Read . . . with Feeling

Once the song is done, I introduce the first book of the session. I begin by saying something like, “This is one of my favorite books” or “This is a very silly (scary, etc.) story about . . .” and introduce the book by title and author. I then proceed to share the book, using a concept called “dialogic” or “hear-and-say” reading. Dialogic reading is a method that helps young children become involved in the story. Although it works best in a one-on-one situation, I have found that it works well in my storytime setting when sharing a book. Literacy research has shown that children learn more from books when they are *actively* involved in the story, and dialogic reading is a powerful means to that end. On tests of language development, young children who are actively involved in the reading process with “hear-and-say” reading have more advanced language and prereading skills!

With dialogic reading, ask “what” questions as you read the story. Examples are “What is that?” or “What’s going on here?” or “What color is that?” or “What animal is that?” This will encourage children to speak. Ask more questions. Repeat what the children say. This reinforces! For example: “Yes, that’s a cow! What sound does a cow make?” Help children as needed. If they don’t know what to say about a picture, say something and have them repeat. If children are pointing and/or commenting on a particular item in a picture, engage on that! There are other ways to engage children too:

- Ask open-ended questions! Preschoolers love guessing what will happen next or giving their opinion on the story!
- When you read, it is important that you read with ENTHUSIASM! Make sound effects, give characters unique voices, use dramatic pauses, or raise and lower your voice. If a character sings, sing the lines! It is a good idea to read through or rehearse your story before presenting it to your storytime group.

Step 8: Use Puppets and Clowns

After sharing the first book, I always do the same two activities each week. The first is a fingerplay that is an abridged version of “Open Them, Shut Them.” My version is:

Open them, shut them,
Open them, shut them,
Give a little clap.
Open them, shut them,
Open them, shut them,
Lay them in your lap.

I take this opportunity to use a hand puppet to “help” me do the fingerplay. I keep the puppet hidden behind my flannel/Velcro board until right before we do the fingerplay. I bring it out and introduce it to participants with the patter: “I have someone who is going to help us do our fingerplay. Who can tell me who/what this is?” The puppets that I normally rotate are Ernie, Bert, and Cookie Monster from *Sesame Street*; Clifford, and a giraffe. Basically, any hand puppet that you can manipulate your hand in will work. I also change up the *Sesame Street* ones. For example, Bert has dressed as a bee (with wings

and antennae taped on), and Ernie has dressed as a pig, complete with nose and ears to go along with themes. If you can find small hats (perhaps in a local craft store), you can accessorize the puppets for holidays!

The second activity that we do is a counting rhyme that I found called “Five Silly Clowns.” I begin with the patter: “All right, it’s time to help me count my clowns” as I place them, one by one, on the flannel/Velcro board. Each week, as the theme dictates, I “dress up” these laminated clowns. My clowns have been everything under the sun (including it!). I allow participants to guess what the clowns will be and praise them for being “so smart” when they guess correctly. Once the clowns are on the board and “dressed” (simply a laminated picture of something to do with the theme placed, with Velcro, on top of the clown), and participants are ready with “five fingers up in the air,” we begin counting down as follows:

Five silly clowns, jumping all around.
Jump so high, then touch the ground!
One silly clown says, “I can’t stay,”
So she turned and (fill in action) away!

Move arm with five fingers up and down.
Move arm up in air; then down to the floor.
Remove one clown from board; shake head “no.”
Put clown aside or in pocket.
Ask participants to count the number of clowns left.
Continue counting down four, three, two, one.

Depending on the theme, the clowns use all types of locomotion to go “away.”

Step 9: Bring in Fingerplays, Action Rhymes, and Flannel Boards

At this point in the storytime, begin introducing fingerplays and action rhymes or flannel or Velcro board stories. A good rule of thumb is to have at least three of each to round out your program. Always plan with more than you think you will need. These flannel/Velcro board stories may come from a variety of sources, as there are a lot of great titles out there. Luckily for me, I “inherited” a good number of stories from the children’s librarians who preceded me.

The fingerplays can be done as simply that or with flannel or Velcro board props. The Monkey Mitt and accompanying kits (available from a number of library catalogs and online) is a wonderful prop to use. Simple patterns are also available online to make your own, or you can use something as simple as a gardening glove with Velcro added! If you do not wish to use a large board, small Velcro boards are available (or can be made cheaply). On a personal note, I much prefer the Velcro board to the traditional flannel ones. The added security of the pieces sticking is a big plus! In addition to the Monkey Mitt, great props for fingerplays can be found in catalogs from companies such as Oriental Trading and U.S. Toy. Homemade fingerplay props work well also. Your copy machine and crayons and/or markers will definitely be your friends when creating small characters for fingerplays! What fingerplays to use? That’s the purpose of this book: to provide you with a seemingly endless supply on a variety of topics!

Step 10: Let's Play a Game

At this point, we usually play a matching game. Depending on the theme, I use Ellison dies shapes (two of each color) that have been cut and laminated. If you don't wish to use colored paper, wallpaper with distinct patterns is a great alternative! Be sure to make enough shapes so that each participant gets one of the pair. The librarian keeps the other in a pocket of an apron, a basket, or some sort of container. Once everyone has received a shape, tell them you have the matches to the ones that they are holding. One by one, remove a shape from your pocket and ask who has the match. In my experience, participants have a ball with this simple game! Continue until all shapes have been matched by participants. We end with a big round of applause for all. Use this idea if it works for you. I've found it to be very successful!

Step 11: If You Have Time, Use Music and Movement

Many times, I will insert music here. This can be everything from dancing to using rhythm instruments, bean bags, scarves, or a parachute. The sky is the limit here! I try to use music related to the theme. One thing that you will discover once you start using music with your preschoolers is that there is a ton of it available.

Step 12: Share More Books

Share your second book here, if desired.

Finally, After the Story Is Over

Be sure to supply a post-story activity of some sort, and keep it related to the theme. Supplying a coloring sheet is the simplest, but you may wish to do a theme-related craft. We do a craft one time per month and also provide a Snack-and-Play Day one time per month where parent volunteers bring a snack or drink. Afterwards (and for the most part, during), children and parents have a chance to socialize.

A Few Tips

- Always, always, always have books on display that relate to your theme, and encourage parents/caregivers to check them out.
 - It is not necessary, but I provide a handout each week for parents detailing books that we own relating to the theme, as well as activities and recipes that they might enjoy doing with their children.
 - What about those children who may misbehave during storytime? There are several schools of thought on this. You may wish to discuss appropriate behavior with participants and children before you begin your storytime session. You may also choose to simply correct inappropriate behaviors as they occur. There is much discussion of letting parents sit in on storyhour sessions and, personally, I have no problems with it. If there are behavior problems, most parents are great about taking care of any problems as they occur, leaving you free to continue your activities.
 - Don't feel overwhelmed! With practice and sticking to a routine, storytimes are not something to dread! Remember: you, as a children's librarian, are introducing the children of your community to new concepts, new ideas, and, best of all, working on literacy and pre-reading skills by helping them increase their vocabulary and listening skills!
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How to Market Your Storytimes

If your library does a great storytime, of course you want to get the word out! Here are some ideas to spread the news:

- Produce in-house fliers and displays detailing days and times storytimes are held.
- If you know your themes well enough in advance, provide a calendar or flier detailing dates and themes. Have these available at both the circulation desk and in the children's area.
- Local radio and television stations are usually glad to support your efforts. Consider doing a Public Service Announcement or television spot highlighting your storytimes. Be available to appear on local radio and TV shows to promote your programming.
- Be a presence at preschool and/or kindergarten registration events. Be sure to have copies of your storytime fliers available! To that end, also be available for parents' nights at local schools. Chances are that parents may have younger ones who would benefit from storytimes.
- Be available to visit local preschools and/or Head Start classrooms. You will be able to tailor the same routine that you do for a storytime to your audience at these locations! No doubt it will be much abbreviated, but you can still share books (remember that dialogic reading) and share simple fingerplays and action rhymes!

Fun . . . movement . . . and brain growth to boot? How can you go wrong?

How to Choose the Right Fingerplay/Action Rhyme

The aim of this book is to provide librarians, teachers, daycare workers, and other educators with a listing of topics and several pages of fingerplays on each of those topics. Fingerplays and action rhymes can be about nearly any subject that is of interest or that your program theme calls for. And, while there are lots of new rhymes out there, don't forget the old tried-and-true Mother Goose rhymes that we have all grown up with.

Personally, I use fingerplays as part of my preschool storytimes as transitions (from opening song and story, then again between flannel or Velcro board stories or games). They are short enough to teach easily and are just that perfect break between longer parts of the storytime.

How to Teach a Fingerplay/Action Rhyme

When teaching a new fingerplay, it is best to repeat the rhyme at least a couple of times. I usually do the rhymes at least twice. The first time through, I go through slowly enough so that the children (and parents who may sit in on storytime) can catch onto the words. I also explain the motions, taking time to help with any motions that are unfamiliar. For example, when we did one of our opening fingerplays and the theme was spiders, I used the American Sign Language (ASL) sign for spider (wrists of hands overlapping, fingers on both hands wiggling). Here are some quick tips for teaching fingerplays and rhymes:

- Be enthusiastic and excited! Your interest will carry over to your audience.
- Be sure to demonstrate actions as you share the words with your group.
- Repeat the rhyme, encouraging the audience to imitate the actions.
- Do the fingerplay again, allowing those who wish to participate with both words and actions to do so.
- Keep the actions and rhythm of the rhyme slow enough so that your audience does not have trouble keeping up. This is important, especially for the first time through. (To see me demonstrating a couple of simple fingerplays, check out Videos 1.1 and 1.2 on the companion DVD.)
- Repeat fingerplays and rhymes often enough for children to become familiar with them. For example, I have a particular opening fingerplay that I do each week at storyhour. You will be surprised what happens if you forget to do it or have someone filling in for you who doesn't know the "drill." The kids will be sure to let you (or your replacement) know!
- Send the words and actions home with parents so that they can be used/practiced at home.
- Always, always, always repeat old favorites!
- Try out some of the new variations of old favorites out there!

Ready? Let's Have Fun!

Now that you know the elements of a successful storytime and what a fingerplay/action rhyme is and how to present it, you are ready for the "meat" of this book: *1,000 Fingerplays & Action Rhymes*. In the following pages, you will find pages of fingerplays and action rhymes on a variety of topics. Each fingerplay/action rhyme includes easy-to-follow motions.

Notes

1. Office of Communications and Outreach. 2005. *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, p. 23.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

5. Ghoting, Saroj. "Storytime Programs Based on Research from Public Library Association and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Early Literacy Initiative." Montgomery County Public Libraries. Available: www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/ecrr/ecrrinpractice/storytimeapplications/researchbasedprograms/prereaderstresearch.pdf (accessed May 18, 2010).

6. Ghoting, Saroj, and Pamela Martin-Diaz. 2005. *Early Literacy Storytimes @ Your Library: Partnering with Caregivers for Success*. Chicago: American Library Association, p. 243.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Munson-Benson, Carolyn. 2007. "Making Time for Rhyme." *Book Links Magazine* (May): 26.