

# Listen, Hear!

by Geoff Plant



## Using Rhythm and Rhymes with Children

### Introduction

I've always loved children's rhymes and poetry, but I came to see them in a new light when our older son was around two years old. Every night, before he went to bed, he would want to hear Dr. Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham," and try as we might, we could never persuade him to accept a different book. It always had to be the same one. "Green Eggs and Ham" every night for months!

It got to the point where I could recite the poem without even looking at the pages, but our son never tired of hearing it. He just seemed to love the simple rhythms and rhymes of this poem, where Sam-I-am tried to persuade the narrator to at least try some "Green Eggs and Ham." A short time later, he fell in love with a record of nursery rhymes that we had found, and he would listen to it as often as he could.

Although he didn't realize it at the time, these experiences were teaching him many things about language and speech. He was learning about rhyming words, the rhythmic nature of speech, and practicing how to produce quite complex strings of phonemes. None of this was of any importance to him, of course. He was doing these things because they were fun.

### Rhymes for Deaf Children

In the mid-1990's, I was involved in a project at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf and saw rhymes being used very effectively by many children with hearing losses. I was working with a group of profoundly deaf children, however, and noticed that they weren't getting the same benefit as some of the hard-of-hearing children in the school. The reason for this was quite simple; many rhymes use very complex multi-syllabic words and these were beyond the speech production skills of many of my students.

I decided to see if I could write some poems, which would be easier for them to say. The first one was very simple:

I see a sheep.	Baa, baa, baa!
I see a baby.	Wah, wah, wah!
I see a ghost.	Boo, boo, boo!
I see a cow.	Moo, moo, moo!
I see a bee.	Bee, bee, bee!
Who is the best?	Me, me, me!

but the children seemed to enjoy it very much. I would say the first line and the children would respond by making the appropriate sound. It was good practice in producing the point vowels of English, and also helped in the development of turn-taking.

The success of this one poem encouraged me to try to write others to use with my students. In writing the poems, I was very conscious of the need to use simple one-syllable words as much as possible. I wanted the children to be able to say the poems, not sit back and have them recited to them. As far as I can see, the real joy of simple rhymes is in producing them, and I wanted the children to have that experience.

Here a few more that I wrote during that period. I hope that you will find them useful in your work with younger children.



### Bad, bad bee

One, two, three.      I saw a bee.  
One, two, three.      The bee saw me.  
Wah, wah, wah!      The bee bit me!  
Wah, wah, wah!      Bad, bad, bee!  
Wah, wah, wah!      Why bite me?

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### One, two, three

One, two, three      One two, three  
Me and you.      You and me.  
One and two.      One and two.  
You and me.      Me and you.

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### In my house

In my house.      I saw a mouse.  
The mouse was bad.      He bit my Dad!  
I was sad.      He bit my Dad!  
I don't like mice.      They are not nice.

### I know more

One, two.      I know you.  
Two, three.      You know me.  
Three four.      I know more.  
I know more.      I know more.  
You know me,      but I know more!

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### In a tree

In a tree.    In a tree.    In a tree, I see a bee  
In a boat.    In a boat.    In a boat, I see a goat.  
On a mat.    On a mat.    On a mat, I see a cat.  
On a dish.    On a dish.    On a dish, I see a fish.

Most of these rhymes allow for the teacher and child to take turns in producing alternate lines. This is especially important in the early stages of speech production, when the child's speech production skills may limit her/his participation to repetition of counting patterns or simple syllables. As the child's skills improve, however, s/he can produce the poem in its entirety.

### Rhymes with Older Children

I've also used many of my rhymes with older children and have been very pleased by how much they seem to enjoy this activity. I remember working with one group of 10 – 12 year old hard-of-hearing children, and introducing them to "I know more" and being surprised by how they produced it.

Once they had learned the words, one of the children asked if they could beat out a rhythm while they were saying it. I agreed, and was surprised when they started to produce exactly the same rhythm as used by the rock group Queen, in their hit "We will rock you." It worked very well, and encouraged older children to use a poem which they might have rejected in other circumstances.

Although this particular poem was a success, I knew that I would have to produce more complex ones if I wanted to retain the children's interest. I decided that poems might also serve as a way to teach some of the more complex rules of English. The first one I attempted introduced some of the irregular past tenses of verbs. These "rule-breakers" create special problems for many deaf children, and I wanted a way in which forms such as "send/sent," "sell/sold," "run/ran," etc., could be introduced. The poem on the next page, "Now and Before," was the result. Try saying using a simple "rap" rhythm and see what you think.

The final poem "Summer Friends" is on the last page of this newsletter. It's relatively simple, but I've found it suitable for use with older children. I've written a number of other poems which can be used with this age group, and encourage teachers and therapists to try to do the same. I'm sure that you'll gain a great deal of satisfaction from hearing children using your poems to improve their speech.

## Now and Before

Now I know, but before I knew.  
Now I throw, but before I threw.  
Now I feel, but before I felt.  
Now I kneel, but before I knelt.  
KNOW KNEW THROW THREW  
FEEL FELT KNEEL KNELT

Now I think, but before I thought.  
Now I fight, but before I fought.  
Now I grow, but before I grew.  
Now I fly, but before I flew.  
THINK THOUGHT FIGHT FOUGHT  
GROW GREW FLY FLEW

Now I buy, but before I bought.  
Now I bring, but before I brought.  
Now I see, but before I saw.  
Do you want to hear some more?

You do? You do? Well, that's just great!  
Now I eat, but before I ate.  
Even more? I knew you would.  
Now I can, but before I could.

Now I feed, but before I fed.  
Now I say, but before I said.  
Now I sell, but before I sold.  
Now I tell, but before I told.  
FEED FED SAY SAID  
SELL SOLD TELL TOLD

Now I wear, but before I wore.  
Now I tear, but before I tore.  
Now I drive, but before I drove.  
Now I dive, but before I dove.  
WEAR WORE TEAR TORE  
DRIVE DROVE DIVE DOVE

Now I light, but before I lit.  
Now I bite, but before I bit.  
Now I go, but before I went.  
Now I send, but before I sent.  
LIGHT LIT BITE BIT  
GO WENT SEND SENT

Now I find, but before I found.  
Now I grind, but before I ground.  
Now I flee, but before I fled.  
Now I bleed, but before I bled.  
FIND FOUND GRIND GROUND  
FLEE FLED BLEED BLED

Now you see it's just a game.  
Now I come, but before I came.  
There's even more, there's more to tell.  
Now I fall, but before I fell.

Now I bite, but before I bit.  
Have you had enough? Do you want to quit?  
You don't? You don't? You're quite a kid!  
Now I do, but before I did.

I've had enough. How about you?  
Now I draw, but before I drew.  
I said enough! It's time to close.  
Now I choose, but before I chose.  
Please let me go! Let me off the hook!  
Now I take, but before I took.

Please let me go. I'm really done.  
Now I win, but before I won.  
I know! Here's one doesn't change a bit.  
Now I hit, but before I hit!  
We're at the end. It's time to say.  
Good-bye, until another day.

## Contact

This is the first issue of "Listen, Hear," and I hope that we'll have another one out soon. If you have any comments, feedback, or suggestions for future issues, please contact me at:

Post: Geoff Plant  
MED-EL  
35 Medford Street  
Somerville, MA 02143

email: [hearf@aol.com](mailto:hearf@aol.com)

I look forward to hearing from you.



## Summer Friends

In a small town by the sea.  
I met you, and you met me.  
I was five and you were three.  
In that small town by the sea.  
Summer friends we'd always be,  
In that small town by the sea.



Every summer we'd have fun.  
Swimming, running in the sun.  
Happy as we'd ever be,  
In that small town by the sea.

In Mom's boat we'd sometimes sail.  
Once we even saw a whale.  
Spouting water, swimming free.  
Near that small town by the sea.



When summer ended, home we'd go.  
Fall and winter went so slow.  
But spring meant that soon we'd be  
In that small town by the sea.  
Summer friends, just you and me.  
In that small town by the sea.