

Nursery Rhyme Allusions



JACK & JILL—nursery rhyme that dates back to the 18th century. The phrase “Jack & Jill” was used earlier, even by Shakespeare, to signify a boy and girl. Authors might reference it to show togetherness or might refer to part of the story (Jack falling down or Jill tumbling after Jack) to make connections with what happens to a character in a story.

LITTLE BO PEEP—written in 1805, is a simple nursery rhyme about a little shepherdess who lost her sheep. To be a Bo Peep is to have lost something in one’s care.

HUMPTY DUMPTY—English nursery rhyme from the late 1870s, also popularized in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). Originally written as a riddle, the overall meaning when referenced can range from describing an awkward, clumsy person to explaining a situation that can’t be remedied.

OLD WOMAN IN A SHOE—English nursery rhyme with an early version dating back to 1797. Possibly written about King George (and Queen Caroline) who had eight children, the poem refers to a parent at wit’s end taking care of a large number of children (this is evident in the [1986 KFC ad](#)).

OLD MACDONALD’S FARM—children’s song/nursery rhyme about a farmer with various animals in his care. The song can include any animal as children insert the name of a different animal in subsequent verses. If a person is referred to as Old MacDonald or a place is said to be like Old MacDonald’s Farm, you can count on lots of animals.