Why Use Classic Nursery Rhymes?

When I've been asked why I decided to use the classic nursery rhymes as the basis for WIL's phonological awareness program, the first answer that always comes to my mind is simply that the rhymes are fun. Children for generations have enjoyed the silliness of the characters' antics. But there's much more to these rhymes than simply their good humor and their aboundingly enthusiastic rhythm. The rhymes are the canon of our youngest set.

Nursery rhymes introduce young listeners to story structure in its most basic form. There's an orientation -- Peter Pumpkin eater has a wife. There's a problem -- He's having trouble keeping her. And, there's a resolution -- He puts her in a pumpkin shell and there he keeps her very well.

Nursery rhymes also introduce children to a cast of characters who are likely to reappear throughout their school lives. You can't enjoy the Ahlberg's delightful *Each Peach Pear Plum* if you don't get the allusions to the nursery rhymes.

Nursery rhymes also greatly enrich young children's vocabularies and supply some early lessons in the ways our language works. Jack Sprat is *lean*; when we read this rhyme to children, we have to explain that word. And children add another word to their developing vocabularies. When a child asks, "What does it mean -- Molly my sister and I fell out?", you explain that "fell out" is an expression we don't use much anymore. It used to mean "had an argument". And children get a glimpse of how words and expressions work in English.

Then, too, nursery rhymes encourage thinking skills. Particularly entertaining are the riddle rhymes like *Little Nancy Etticoat* or *Hick-A-More, Hack-A-More*. Children like the challenge of a riddle. We've followed Mother Goose's lead, including riddle rhymes as part of our weekly instruction.

Finally, the nursery rhymes provide short, simple texts. While their uncontrolled vocabulary may occasionally make them tough to decode, their unrelenting rhythm makes them perfect for emerging readers who are developing their concepts of what a word is.

http://curry.virginia.edu/go/wil/home.html