

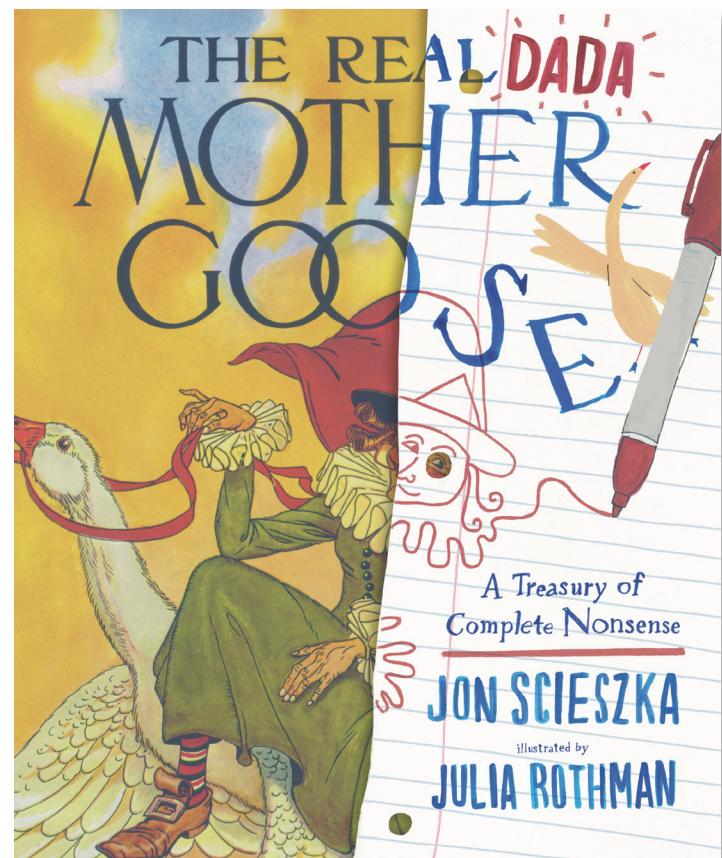
THE REAL DADA MOTHER GOOSE: A TREASURY OF COMPLETE NONSENSE

JON SCIESZKA

ILLUSTRATED BY JULIA ROTHMAN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Mother knows best, but sometimes a little nonsense wins the day. Inspired by Dadaism's rejection of reason and rational thinking, and in cahoots with Blanche Fisher Wright's *The Real Mother Goose*, this anthology of absurdity unravels the fabric of classic nursery rhymes and stitches them back together (or not quite together) in every clever way possible. One by one, cherished nursery rhymes—from "Humpty Dumpty" to "Hickory Dickory Dock," "Jack Be Nimble" to "Mother Hubbard"—fall prey to sly subversion as master of fracture Jon Scieszka and acclaimed illustrator Julia Rothman refashion them into comic strips, errant book reports, anagrams, and manic mash-ups. Playfully reconstructed, the thirty-six old-new rhymes invite further baloney, bringing kids in on the joke and inviting them to revel in reimagining. Featuring robust back matter, this irreverent take on the rhymes of childhood is a great gift for child readers, a rich classroom resource across grade levels, and a love song to a living language.

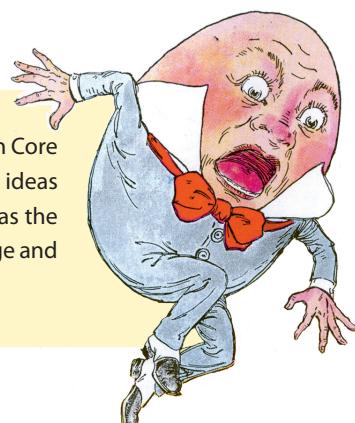


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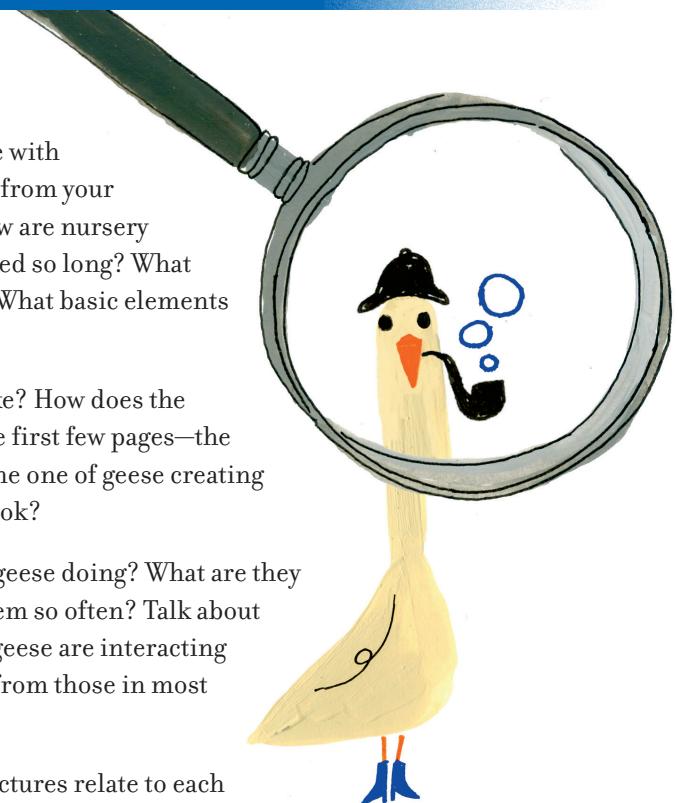
Common Core Connections

This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Nursery rhymes have a long tradition across many cultures. Share with one another by reciting or singing nursery rhymes that you know from your childhood or from books, including those in other languages. How are nursery rhymes passed on? Why do you think nursery rhymes have endured so long? What makes a nursery rhyme appealing to babies and young children? What basic elements do nursery rhymes have in common?
- What clues does the cover give you about what the book will be like? How does the cover compare with most book covers you see? Look closely at the first few pages—the one from *The Real Mother Goose* that seems to be taped on and the one of geese creating art. What do those pages lead you to expect about the art in the book?
- Locate the Dada geese throughout the illustrations. What are the geese doing? What are they wearing or holding? Why do you think the illustrator included them so often? Talk about the table of contents and the opening for each section where the geese are interacting with the words and typeface. In what way do these look different from those in most books you read?
- Focus on a few pages you especially like. How do the words and pictures relate to each other or expand on each other? What would the pages be like without the pictures? Or without the words? How would you describe the overall feeling conveyed by the illustrations?
- Find places in the text and pictures that use repetition. What parts are repeated? What parts are changed? What is the effect of using repetition with a few elements changed?
- Which of the formats, such as the map, normally have a practical purpose? Explain the practical purposes; for example, codes are used by the military and spies. Brainstorm other practical formats that could be used to retell a nursery rhyme. What's the result of combining nursery rhymes with serious formats?
- Read the version of “Old Mother Hubbard” on page 20 and then read the poem “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll aloud. How does the rewritten nursery rhyme draw from “Jabberwocky”? How do you think Jon Scieszka chose which words or parts of words to use? Can you find other words from “Jabberwocky” that would also work?
- Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines *parody* as “a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect.” Do you think this book qualifies as parody? Why or why not? Do you know of other books or media that you would call parody?
- Which parts of the book do you find the funniest? The goal of this book seems to be having fun. Is that a worthy goal for a book? Do you also find it educational in any way? Does a book need to teach something to be worth reading?
- In a speech called the Zena Sutherland Lecture, Jon Scieszka talked about how difficult it is “to explain or discuss what’s so funny about anything. The very nature of humor works against explanation.” Do you agree? Is it easier to analyze or discuss serious or sad books than funny ones? If so, why do you think that is? Why do you think awards more often go to serious books than funny books?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACCIDENTAL COLLAGE

Start by sharing the Dada artwork on the two websites below. Note that Dada artists rebelled against traditional art by “embracing chance, accident, and improvisation.” Then ask students to create their own Dada art, possibly tied to a nursery rhyme. MoMA suggests making a collage by collecting “five objects, images, or fragments” or a photocollage with “images from magazines, newspapers, photocopies, and photographic prints.” Students should alter the materials as desired, assemble the collage, and then write a paragraph about their choices.

www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/dada/chance-creations-collage-photomontage-and-assemblage/

<https://kids.kiddle.co/Dadaism>

A DAZZLING DADA DISPLAY

Invite students to take familiar nursery rhymes not in the book and rewrite them using formats from the book. Students can work alone or in pairs to create at least six new versions of rhymes. Then designate a bulletin board or wall to display their creations along with their Dada collages.

FUNNY BUSINESS

Ask students to bring in jokes, either their favorites or some from friends and relatives. Let students choose to tell the jokes or share them in writing. Then ask them to consider how different jokes work, touching on elements like surprise, wordplay, repetition, and so on. For example, a listener hearing the question “Which building has the most stories?” might expect the factual answer, “A skyscraper,” instead of the surprising one based on wordplay, “The library.” The famous knock-knock joke about bananas and oranges uses repetition as a setup.

CABARET IN THE CLASSROOM

Dadaism started in 1916 at a Zurich, Switzerland, nightclub called Cabaret Voltaire, now a museum. The nightclub featured experimental poetry, visual art, dance, and music, including concerts where performers played typewriters and lids from pots and pans. Have small groups plan and give a multimedia performance drawing on the innovative nature of Dadaism.

WHO OWNS THE WORK?

How can the author and illustrator include so many words and illustrations from someone else’s book, *The Real Mother Goose* by Blanche Fisher Wright, as acknowledged in the Notes? Wright’s book is now in the public domain, which means it’s no longer protected by copyright, laws that makes sure creators like writers and illustrators legally own, and can get paid for, their work. Watch the video below and hold a discussion about why copyright matters and why creative works eventually enter the public domain.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-QI4oLouFo



ABOUT JON SCIESZKA



Photo by JSWW Non Sense Lab

JON SCIESZKA is the author of many acclaimed and best-selling books for children, including the Caldecott Honor Book *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, illustrated by Lane Smith, the Time Warp Trio series, illustrated by Lane Smith and Adam McCauley, and the AstroNuts series, illustrated by Steven Weinberg. He was the first National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and is the founder of Guys Read. Jon Scieszka lives all around the world.



ABOUT JULIA ROTHMAN



Photo by Alex Antitch

JULIA ROTHMAN is the creator of the best-selling illustrated Anatomy series and other books. Her witty illustrations have appeared in newspapers, magazines, and more. Cofounder of Women Who Draw—an open directory of female professional illustrators, artists, and cartoonists—Julia Rothman lives in Brooklyn.

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award committees.

