



Verse and Virtue through an Early American Alphabet Rhyme

Curriculum Unit 94.02.08

by Francine C. Coss

Early American verse is a highly neglected form of expression in the primary grades, especially in Kindergarten. The opportunities for exposure to Early American verse are very often overlooked or replaced by other curriculum-required poetry. Most Kindergarten students are steered toward less meaningful forms of rhyme, such as nursery rhymes and fingerplays. The sing-song, meaningless rhymes of today's Kindergarten curriculum reflect the fear of teaching topics that seem doctrinaire to diversity-minded planners of curricula. The religion-fortified rhymes of old have been currently replaced with fluff-filled fingerplays. This could be due to the shift from in-school religion to the taboo on religion in the classroom. However, it could also be due to the lack of personal understanding and comprehension of such verse among classroom teachers. Due to the religion taboo, many teachers shy away from poems not found in the Language Arts or Social Development curriculum. The fear of controversy prevents the classroom teacher from experimenting with a non-curriculum based topic. Sticking to the planned and segmented curriculum areas becomes the teacher's only guarantee of parental happiness. Expected, however, to carry through a Social Development and a Language Arts curriculum in the classroom, I find it appropriate to fill the void of Early American verse for Kindergartners and for Kindergarten level teachers by offering a morality-based, alphabet rhyme of old as a contribution to issues in Social Development and to concepts in Language Arts. I plan to increase awareness of the education and lifestyles of Early American life. I also expect to encourage the study of the Early American verse as a resource for reinforcing proper social and moral behavior by exposing other teachers and students to the characters and virtuous personalities found in a typical Early American alphabet rhyme.

Kindergarten and the primary grades encourage the use of hands-on activities in the classroom curriculum. Early American verse yearns for the opportunity to relate its topics in a hands-on fashion. The morality-based rhymes of old were created to commit topics to memory as well as to pass the time during particularly tedious chores (i.e., churning cream to butter and carding wool for spinning to thread). Planning and structuring a full-bodied, hands-on curriculum unit for the study of Early American school-rhymes in grade K is meant to do the same. To this end, *Verse and Virtue through an Early American Alphabet Rhyme* will provide the necessary research and comfort level of knowledge to pursue the study of Early American verse in the classroom.

Placing a strong emphasis on Phonics-based activities, this unit will be used in conjunction with the regular social development strategies taught throughout the school year. The unit's objectives will be implemented through integration with phonics methods used in the present Kindergarten Language Arts curriculum. Beginning in early September, students will review the well known ABC Song (See Figure A). An alphabet book will be made containing only the letters of the alphabet and the rhyming phrase at the end of the ABC Song

(See Appendix A). Once the introduction to the entire alphabet is complete, one letter of the alphabet, beginning with A, will be taught each week. All aspects of each letter will be taught (i.e., sound, symbol, usage) and objects beginning with the letter under study will be emphasized. The meaningless symbols, or letters, in the alphabet book will be reviewed as each new letter is introduced. Future recitations of the ABC Song will also be used as a rote method of review. To enhance the traditional phonics strategies, an Early American alphabet rhyme will be read (See Appendix B) and a coloring book containing illustrations for the Early American alphabet rhyme¹ will be used for reinforcement and hands-on activities. A comparison of the two alphabet books will allow the students to determine the similarities and differences between the two rhymes. The original ABC Song book, with its letter symbols and nonsense rhymes, will become a stepping stone to hands-on phonics activities. New terminology and vocabulary found in the Early American alphabet rhyme book will be defined with the introduction of each new letter of the alphabet. Historic references found in each stanza will be discussed and related to modern, familiar terms. Each letter-story, or stanza, within the Early American alphabet rhyme will be mimed by the students for further understanding. Occupations and behaviors mentioned in the Early American alphabet rhyme will be illustrated through active participation and present-day examples. The rote method of learning the symbol and sound for each letter of the alphabet will be supplemented with a full-bodied, hands-on approach of virtue-teaching verse. Each child will embrace each letter sound and symbol through the characters and personalities defined in the Early American alphabet rhyme. Alas, the alphabet rhyme satisfies the necessary Language Arts and Social Development curriculum simultaneously.

Figure A

Author Unknown

A, B. C, D, E, F. G...

H. I, J. K-

L, M, N. O. P...

Q,R, S-

T, U. V-

W, X, Y and Z.

Now I know my ABCs, next time won't you sing with me?¹

After twenty-six weeks of study, each letter-story in the Early American alphabet rhyme will be familiar and almost common knowledge to the students. With the historic background filled in for each letter-story of the poem, an insight about Early American life will come to fruition in mid-April. As a method of phonetic review and unit closure, a tour of the Pardee-Morris House will be planned to provide concrete examples of life in Early America, especially in New Haven. As each character in the rhyme is mentioned during the tour, the students will remember not only the personality traits of the historic character but the letter symbol and sound that begins their name. A guest speaker on Colonial times from the New Haven Colony Historical Society will also be scheduled to supply a strong foundation and historical review in preparation for the Pardee-Morris House tour.

The Nineteenth Century Schoolhouse program offered by the New Haven Colony Historical Society will be used

as a precursor for the culminating activity of the unit: A visit to the Nathan Hale Schoolhouse in New London, Connecticut. Poems and verse relating directly to school life and childhood chores will be explored following the eight month unit on Early American life. Rhymes regarding school work, getting to school on time and expectations for boys and for girls in Early America will enhance the foundation laid by the study of the Early American alphabet rhyme.

The unit will end with the completion of the two alphabet rhymes. A review of all Early American life topics and concepts will occur through participation in a schoolwide Poetry Fair. The students will be assigned to miscellaneous projects which revolve around the various occupations and behaviors mentioned in the Early American alphabet rhyme. Some students will recite moral-based rhymes revealing modes of behavior which will be dramatized by other students. Still other students will complete actual household chores, such as churning butter while singing a butter song or stitching a sampler while reciting an alphabet rhyme.

The Early American verse void will disappear as other students notice the newfound knowledge displayed by Kindergarten students in their own school. Other teachers will become more interested in studying Early American verse topics with their own classes when they witness the enthusiasm shown by my Kindergarten students. Primary (and possibly even secondary) teachers will no longer opt to avoid Early American Verse; they will encourage its use and feel at ease teaching Early American verse in their classrooms. The separation of Social Development as a school subject will dissolve as it is successfully integrated with the unrelated subject area of Phonics. The creativity-stifling, rote methods of learning letter sounds and symbols will be incorporated into the foundation for the hands-on exploration highlighted through the use of an Early American alphabet rhyme. Verse and virtue will again go hand-in-hand in school curriculum, and the meaningless, fluff-filled rhymes will be viewed as inadequate for promoting proper social development.

1-. The ABC Coloring Book. Scotia, New York: Americana Review,(Reproduced from The Picture Alphabet Book of 1830) 1963.

(figures available in print form) LESSON PLANS

The Alphabet: An Introduction Level K

Learning Center:

Provide the children with a set of sandpaper alphabet cards and a pegboard with pegs. Display the "Alphabet Song" on chart paper. Instruct the children to thumb through the alphabet cards and find their favorite leant, tracing each card as they thumb through the pile. Encourage the children to retrace their favorite letter and form it with the pegs on the pegboard You may wish to expand the activity to forming all the letters of the alphabet, individually, on the pegboard.

Books:

Brown, Ruth. If at First You Do Not See. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.Hoban, Tana. A! B. See! New York: Greenwillow, 1982.

Related Materials:

“Go Fish” or other matching card games

Number or alphabet recognition and sequencing games

Copying games

Objectives:

To understand that the alphabet is a series of letters.

Concepts:

The alphabet song illustrates the order of the twenty six letters of the alphabet. The letters of the alphabet have a specific order called alphabetical order.

Vocabulary:

alphabet order capital series
letters owercase alphabetical order

Materials:

alphabet chart; post-it notes;
Alphabet Song chart; alphabet cards

Motivation:

Display an alphabet chart and encourage the children to sing the “Alphabet Song” while you point to the letters. Select a child to point to the letters with you while the children re-sing the song. Then use post-it notes to cover up five letters at different places on the alphabet chart. Sing the song again, inviting the children to fill in the hidden letters orally. Explain that the alphabet is a series of letters in a specific order called alphabetical order. Emphasize that the children knew which letters were missing and therefore know the specific order of the alphabet.

Lesson:

Distribute the alphabet cards among the children. Encourage the children to work cooperatively to arrange the letter cards in alphabetical order according to the alphabet chart and song.

Subject Integration:

Mathematics: Serial Order

The Letter of the Week: A/a Level K

Learning Center:

Provide the children with a set of A/a picture cards to be used in a game of concentration. Using an identical

set of cards, display the picture cards and the A/a word that identifies each card on a nearby bulletin board. Encourage the children to play the game of concentration with the picture cards. You may wish to expand the game to include non-A/a picture cards, or to add new cards to the game as each "Letter of the Week" is studied.

Books:

McMillan, Bruce. Apples: How They Grow. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979. Loof, Jan. Who's Got the Apple? New York: Random House, 1975.

Related Materials:

"Go Fish" or other matching games-Alphabet Picture Lotto

Objectives:

To recognize the relationship between the letter A/a and the sound(s) for A/a.

To identify the sound(s) for A/a

Concepts:

The letter A/a has a specific sound.

The letter A/a's sound is heard at the beginning of many words.

Vocabulary:

A/a	long A sound	short A sound
abacus	afghan	alligator
acorn		
alphabet	ambulance	anchor
animal	ant	apple
angler		
concentration	apron	apricot

Materials:

A/a picture cards
A/a objects
A/a word cards "LETTERBAG"(any style bag) 2
chart paper markers
A/a picture card chart

Motivation:

Sing the following lyrics to the tune of "London Bridge:"

THE LETTERBAG IS HERE TODAY,

HERE TODAY, HERE TODAY,

THE LETTERBAG IS HERE TODAY,

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TELL ME THE LETTER...

(Encourage guessing from the students)

THE LETTER BAG HAS BROUGHT AN A,

BROUGHT AN A, BROUGHT AN A,

THE LETTERBAG HAS BROUGHT AN A;

THIS WEEK'S LETTER.

Then ask the children what they know about the letter A/a, while writing their responses in a web format on chart paper. Explain that the class will be studying the letter A/a for an entire week. Emphasize that the letter A/a has a special symbol and sound that they will be discussing everyday that week. Ask the children what they think they will find inside of the LETTER BAG Review the LETTER BAG song and reveal each object and picture card, identifying it orally and in writing on chart paper. Explain that the words you have said all begin with the letter A/a and will help them when they play the game of alphabet concentration.

Lesson:

Display the A/a picture card chart Encourage the children to match the A/a picture cards found in the LETTERBAG to the cards displayed on the chart. When all of the cards are matched, reveal an identical set of A/a picture cards and discuss the rules and strategies of the game of concentration. Begin to play the game of concentration as a class, taking turns finding a match. When all of the cards are matched, place the picture cards and the A/a picture card chart at a learning center for reuse.

Subject Integration:

Mathematics: Matching

Same/Different

The Letter of the Week Revisited: Early American Rhyme Level K

Learning Center:

Provide the children with a mock fishing rod, a blue-papered area for a pond and various colored paper fish. Attach a strong magnet to the end of the fishing line and four or five paper dips to each paper fish. Place the fish on the blue-papered area and encourage the children to act the part of an Angler. Encourage the children to count the fish they catch and draw the identical number of fish on Me counting chart.

Books:

Seuss, Dr. One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish. New York, Random House, —.

Related Materials: -

Counting/Graphing games

Objectives:

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To understand the characteristics of an Angler.

To recognize the relationship between the letter A/a and the sound(s) for A/a.

Concepts:

An Angler is a name of a person in Early America. An Angler is a fisherman. The word Angler begins with the sound for A/a.

Vocabulary:

Angler perch roach dace
fishing pole fish catch hook rod

Materials:

a mock fishing pole/rod string a strong magnet
blue construction paper markers paper clips
various colored construction paper scissors
masking tape chart paper
a real fishing pole (if available)

Motivation:

Hold up the real fishing pole and ask the children to tell you what it is called. Remind the children that they are studying only the letter A/a that week and ask them how a fishing pole relates to the letter A/a. Display the lines from the Early American alphabet rhyme that deal with the letter A/a and read them. Ask the children how the fishing pole relates to the letter A/a after re-reading the first stanza of the Early American alphabet rhyme. Discuss the characteristics of an Angler and list them in a web format on chart paper. Compare the characteristics of an Angler to those of a modern-day fisherman. Invite the children to pretend to catch a perch, roach or dace fish.

Lesson:

Place the blue-paper pond on the floor. Show the children the various types of fish in the pond and display the mock fishing pole. Encourage the children to become an Angler and try to catch the fish, keeping track of how many they catch by drawing a fish on the board for each one caught.

Subject Integration:

Mathematics: Counting
Graphing
Drama Character Acting

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Farr, Roger C. and Dorothy S. Strickland. *The Treasure Tree: Volumes 1 and 2*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1993 (current Language Arts text for Kindergarten level in New Haven Public Schools)

Hylles, Thomas. *The Arte of Vulgar Arithmike*. —: —, 1620.

Janeway James A *Token for Children. being and Exact Account of the Conversion. Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children. by James Janeway. To which is added A Token for the Children of New England or Some Examples of Children in whom the Fear of God was remarkably Budding before they died: in several Parts of New England. Preserved and Published for the Encouragement of Piety in other Children*. —: —, ?. (Popular religious text for children found in MUDD library)

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Speare, Elizabeth George. *Child Life in New England 1790-1840*. Strubridge, MA: Old Strubridge Village, 1973.

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Tuer, Andrew W. *History of the Hornbook*. —: — ?.

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Anno, Mitsumasa. Upside-Downers. New York Walkert Weatherhill, 1971. (Use when studying the letter U)

Balestrino, Philip. The Skeleton Inside You. New York Scholastic Incorporated, 1971. (Use when studying the letter X)

Bridwell, Norman. Clifford. the Small Red Puppy. New York Scholastic Incorporated, 1972. (Use when studying the letter E/The main character's name is Emily Elizabeth)

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Brown, Ruth. If at First You Do Not See. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982. (Use for alphabet review or introduction; hidden letter pictures)

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Flack, Marjorie. Ask Mr. Bear. New York: Macmillan, 1932. (Use when studying the letter B)

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Seuss, Dr. Yertle the Turtle. and Other Stories. New York: Random House, 1958. (Use when studying the letter Y)

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Waber, Bernard. Ira Sleeps Over. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972. (Use when studying the letter I)

Wells, Rosemary. Noisy Nora. New York: Scholastic Incorporated, 1973. (Use when studying the letter N)

Zolotow, Charlotte. The Quarreling Book. New York: Harper and Row, 1963. (Use when studying the letter O)

—, —. The ABC Coloring Book. Scotia, New York: Americana Review,(Reproduced from The Picture Alphabet Book of 1830) 1963. (Use the Early American alphabet rhyme contained in this book)

—, —. Goosey Goosey Gander. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1982. (Use when studying the letter G)

MATERIALS LIST This list contains all necessary materials for completing the three lessons listed above.

Miscellaneous Materials:

a mock fishing pole/rod string a strong magnet blue construction paper markers paper clips various colored construction paper scissors a real fishing pole masking tape chart paper A/a objects alphabet chart post-it notes Alphabet Song chart alphabet cards A/a picture cards A/a word cards "LETTERBAG"(any style bag) A/a picture card chart

Books:

Brown, Ruth. If at First You Do Not See. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

Hoban, Tank A. By See! New York: Greenwillow, 1982.

Loof, Jan. Who's Got the Apple? New York: Random House, 1975.

McMillan, Bruce. Apples: How They Grow. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

Seuss, Dr. One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish. New York, Random House, —.

Games:

- "Go Fish" or other matching card games-Number or alphabet recognition and sequencing games-Copying games-Alphabet Picture Lotto-Counting/Graphing games

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