



## Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists

*Chris Duffy (Editor), Leonard S. Marcus (Introduction), Vanessa Davis (Contributor), Eleanor Davis (Contributor), Nick Abadzis (Contributor), Richard Thompson (Contributor), James Sturm (Contributor), Craig Thompson (Contributor), more... Gahan Wilson (Contributor), Drew Weing (Contributor), Stan Sakai (Contributor), Richard Sala (Contributor), Roz Chast (Contributor), Raina Telgemeier (Contributor), Mike Mignola (Contributor), Tao Nyeu (Contributor), Mathew Forsythe (Contributor), Cyril Pedrosa (Contributor), Sara Varon (Contributor), Laura Park (Contributor), Marc Rosenthal (Contributor), Patrick McDonnell (Contributor), Jen Wang (Contributor), Jordan Crane (Contributor), Jaime Hernández (Contributor), Lark Pien (Contributor), George O'Connor (Contributor), Dave Roman (Contributor), Ben Hatke (Contributor), Kate Beaton (Contributor), Bob Flynn (Contributor), Theo Ellsworth (Contributor), Nick Bruel (Contributor), Alexis Frederick-Fost (Contributor), David Macaulay (Contributor), Tony Millionaire (Contributor), Mark Martin (Contributor), Eric Orchard (Contributor), Gilbert Hernández (Contributor), Gene Luen Yang (Contributor), Mo Oh (Contributor), Mark Siegel (Contributor), Stephanie Yue (Contributor), Lilli Carré (Contributor), Rebecca Dart (Contributor), Jules Feiffer (Contributor), Lucy Knisley (Contributor), J.P. Coover (Contributor), Aaron Renier (Contributor), Vera Brosgol (Contributor), Scott Campbell (Contributor) ...less*

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First Second is very proud to present *Nursery Rhyme Comics*. Featuring fifty classic nursery rhymes illustrated and interpreted in comics form by fifty of today's preeminent cartoonists and illustrators, this is a groundbreaking new entry in the canon of nursery rhymes treasuries.

From *New Yorker* cartoonist Roz Chast's "There Was a Crooked Man" to *Bad Kitty* author Nick Bruel's "Three Little Kittens" to First Second's own Gene Yang's "Pat-a-Cake," this is a collection that will put a grin on your face from page one and keep it there.

Each rhyme is one to three pages long, and simply paneled and lettered to ensure that the experience is completely accessible for the youngest of readers. Chock full of engaging full-color artwork and favorite characters (Jack and Jill! Old Mother Hubbard! The Owl and the Pussycat!), this collection will be treasured

by children for years to come.

## Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists Details

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## From Reader Review Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists for online ebook

### Brandi says

I simply adore "Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists". I love the artwork and the rhymes reminiscent of childhood. My favorites are Eleanor Davis's "The Queen of Hearts" (I love the color scheme) and Laura Park's "Croak, Said the Toad" (I think the artwork just looks really cool). I also enjoyed Nick Bruel's "Three Little Kittens" just because I had read it so many times as a child. I would recommend this collection to cartoon/comic and nursery rhyme enthusiasts alike.

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### A. Somers says

This would be a great book to use to teach dialogue and setting. Plus it's a fun way to teach Nursery Rhymes. Too many students today are unfamiliar with traditional nursery rhymes.

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### Margaret says

I don't love all the cartoons but my kids are really into this book. It is a fun take on old nursery rhymes--some of which are quite creepy.

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### Beverly says

It is so fascinating how different illustrators decide to depict these nursery rhymes. While the rhymes stick to the traditional words we all know, many of the illustrations are wildly interpretive.

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### Betsy says

Nursery rhymes. What's up with that? (I feel like a stand up comedian when I put it that way). They're ubiquitous but nonsensical. Culturally relevant but often of unknown origins. Children's literary scholar Leonard Marcus ponders the amazing shelf life of nursery rhymes himself and comes up with some answers. Why is it that they last as long as they do in the public consciousness? Marcus speculates that "the old-chestnut rhymes that beguile in part by sounding so emphatically clear about themselves while in fact leaving almost everything to our imagination" leave themselves open to interpretation. And who better to do a little interpreting than cartoonists? Including as many variegated styles as could be conceivably collected in a single 128-page book, editor Chris Duffy plucks from the cream of the children's graphic novel crop (and beyond!) to create a collection so packed with detail and delight that you'll find yourself flipping to the beginning to read it all over again after you're done. Mind you, I wouldn't go handing this to a three-year-old any time soon, but for a certain kind of child, this crazy little concoction is going to just the right bit of weirdness they require.

Fifty artists are handed a nursery rhyme apiece. The goal? Illustrate said poem. Give it a bit of flair. Put in a plot if you have to. So it is that a breed of all new comics, those of the nursery ilk, fill this book. Here at last you can see David Macaulay bring his architectural genius to “London Bridge is Falling Down” or Roz Chast give “There Was a Crooked Man” a positive spin. Leonard Marcus offers an introduction giving credence to this all new coming together of text and image while in the back of the book editor Chris Duffy discusses the rhymes’ history and meaning. And as he says in the end, “We’re just letting history take its course.”

In the interest of public scrutiny, the complete list of artists on this book consists of Nick Abadzis, Andrew Arnold, Kate Beaton, Vera Brosgol, Nick Bruel, Scott Campbell, Lilli Carre, Roz Chast, JP Coover, Jordan Crane, Rebecca Dart, Eleanor Davis, Vanessa Davis, Theo Ellsworth, Matt Forsythe, Jules Feiffer, Bob Flynn, Alexis Frederick-Frost, Ben Hatke, Gilbert Hernandez, Jaime Hernandez, Lucy Knisley, David Macaulay, Mark Martin, Patrick McDonnell, Mike Mignola, Tony Millionaire, Tao Nyeu, George O’Connor, Mo Oh, Eric Orchard, Laura Park, Cyril Pedrosa, Lark Pien, Aaron Renier, Dave Roman, Marc Rosenthal, Stan Sakai, Richard Sala, Mark Siegel, James Sturm, Raina Telgemeier, Craig Thompson, Richard Thompson, Sara Varon, Jen Wang, Drew Weing, Gahan Wilson, Gene Luen Yang, and Stephanie Yue (whew!). And as with any collection, some of the inclusions are going to be stronger than others. Generally speaking if fifty people do something, some of them are going to have a better grasp on the process than others. That said, only a few of these versions didn’t do it for me. At worst the versions were mediocre. At best they went in a new direction with their material without getting too crazy. Nick Bruel, for example, does a great “Three Little Kittens”, filling it with pie-obsessed felines, while Craig Thompson gives his “The Owl and the Pussycat” a kind of John Steed/Emma Peel flair.

The artist couldn’t necessarily agree on who the intended audience was either. Amazon, interestingly enough, lists this book as intended for “Baby-Preschool” readers. Um . . . yeah, probably not so much. Though some of these rhymes would be just fine for that age range if you read them aloud, but others just aren’t going to go over with the ankle biter set. Of course, there’s not a lot of consistency from one rhyme to another. You might read Lucy Knisley’s “There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe” where Knisley has justified the line “Then whipped them all soundly” by making the kids play the instruments of the Old Lady’s now defunct band “The Whips” (it’s a bit of a stretch, I know) then follow that up with the Eleanor Davis poem “The Queen of Hearts” which takes the line “And beat the knave full sore” and pretty much does just that. Or you might see Raina Telgemeier’s highly innocent “Georgie Porgie” followed up with Mike Mignola (the creator of Hellboy) and his dark mannequin-laden contemplation of mortality in “Solomon Grundy”. The tone shifts about a bit. That’s not a problem for a nine or ten-year-old capable of enjoying the dichotomies but for a kid learning them for the first time it’s going to be just too much.

The choice of artists to include must have been fun. Some of these illustrators aren’t your standard go-to comic book creators for kids either. For example, Tony Millionaire has spent the better part of his professional life inspiring my nightmares with his alternative strip *MAAKIES* while I associate Gahan Wilson best with his *New Yorker* comics more than anything else. Other artists are part of the First Second family, like Gene Yang or Sara Varon. And then there are folks that editor Chris Duffy must have taken a chance on. Kate Beaton, creator of the hilarious and brilliant online strip *Hark a Vagrant* shines here with her “Duke of York”. Meanwhile *Cul de Sac* creator Richard Thompson gets to shine with his own “There Was an Old Woman Tossed Up in a Basket”. Finally, there are the picture book illustrators like Tao Nyeu or Marc Rosenthal who fit in so well you’d never imagine comics weren’t their first love. Personally, I hope that maybe a graphic novel is in their own futures someday.

The advantage of having such a deep well of artists to pull from is that you can usually find folks to fit your own tastes. Personally I felt that Cyril Pedrosa’s “This Little Piggy” and “The Lion and the Unicorn” by Aaron Renier were worthy of their own, albeit very short, books. And then there are the visual styles one prefers. I liked it the most when artists referenced some of the great illustrators of the past. Theo Ellsworth’s “As I Was Going to St. Ives”, for example, seems clearly influenced by Wanda Gag’s *Millions of Cats*, for

example. And I can attest that it is a sheer delight to read a book of this sort in full color. From Cyril Pedrosa's hot pink borders to Dave Roman's penchant for purple, this book just wouldn't be the same if the publisher hadn't splurged on a couple shades and tones here and there.

Of course the danger of a book like this is that the reader gets greedy. A mere fifty artists? Couldn't they get Harry Bliss, Jeff Smith, Art Spiegelman, Barry Deutsch, Hope Larson, yadda yadda yadda? Give people something awesome and they'll always find a way to kvetch and demand more. *Nursery Rhyme Comics* deserves better than that, and will hopefully find its way onto many a child's shelf. And it pairs rather splendidly with a similar collection of American Indian folktales illustrated by a range of graphic novelists called Trickster. If, however, you'd like to pair this book with its literary opposite (authors paired with a single piece of art rather than artists paired with a single short text) consider placing it alongside the fabulous *Chronicles of Harris Burdick* with art by Chris Van Allsburg. There are as many way to pair and display and talk up this book as there are artists inside of it. Likewise, there are as many ways to read and enjoy this book as there are children out there who would get a kick out of its pages. Whether they're reading familiar rhymes or discovering new ones, *Nursery Rhyme Comics* gives kids everywhere a new way of encountering some essential cultural touchstones. Great good stuff.

For ages 9-12.

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## Alex Telander says

Everyone knows what a nursery rhyme is; many of us can still remember a number of them, or at least what they were about; and still a few more of us can recall certain nursery rhymes word for word; but ask any of us what they mean or how they got made up, and you'll be greeted with a look of dumbfoundedness. What exactly is the deal with an egg falling off the wall, or two kids falling down a hill, or even a cow jumping over a moon?

In *Nursery Rhyme Comics*, the artists explore these familiar nursery rhymes with detailed illustrations, exploring the nuances and possible meanings behind various nursery rhymes. The book features great original and entertaining illustrations from many known comics' artists and cartoonists, including Craig Thompson, Scott Campbell, Mike Mignola, Kate Beaton and many, many more. 50 well-known nursery rhymes are explored and elucidated upon by the skillful hands of 50 cartoonists, revealing these strange short stories to be the bizarre, confusing, and yet entertaining and unforgettable tales that they are.

You may not find all the answers in *Nursery Rhyme Comics*, or the reasoning behind each of these nursery rhymes, but you will certainly be laughing out loud and enjoying yourself as you read them, and perhaps showing them to your kids, if you have any!

Originally written on November 20, 2011 ©Alex C. Telander.

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## Sylvester says

5\* art

5\* concept

Nursery rhymes are strange things. Part poetry, part history (what is peas porridge? or a posie?), part vocabulary lesson, part introduction to all the literary genres, and all weirdness. Squirt has never been very interested - until this book, and he just couldn't get enough of it. Each rhyme is illustrated by a different artist, and their take on it is individual and modern and sometimes very funny. Squirt's favorite by far is the "Jack Jumped Over a Candlestick" one. Only one page, but we had to read it over and over and over in one sitting. Squirt had it memorized. And it IS very funny, Jack just says what we've all been thinking every time we've read that rhyme. A purist might think we should be keeping these rhymes as they were - but who even knows what that was? And there's a lot to be said for variations on a theme. It keeps our language fresh.

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## Lidya says

This is such a kool book. Classic Nursery Rhymes and Comics all in one. I love it and so does my son, definitely one for his/my collection :)

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## Earl says

I'm not a big reader of graphic novels although I've been trying to remedy that. And, one of the standout writers of that genre has been Gene Luen Yang of "American Born Chinese" and "The Eternal Smile". It was while checking on what other things he's written that I ran across "Nursery Rhyme Comics".

This is an anthology where cartoonists had free reign to re-imagine nursery rhymes. I was surprised by how many illustrators I recognized- like Patrick McDonnell, Nick Bruel, Jules Feiffer, Craig Thompson, and David McCaulay.

I thought this was a great way to sample different styles. These and certain interpretations really stood out- Mo Oh (Hush, Little Baby), Gene Luen Yang (Pat a Cake), Vera Bosgol (There Was a Little Girl), Mark Martin (Little Miss Muffet), David McCaulay (London Bridge is Falling Down), Ben Hatke (Pussycat, Pussycat, Where Have You Been?), Mike Mignola (Solomon Grundy) Stephanie Yue (Hickory, Dickory, Dock) and Patrick McDonnell (The Donkey) were the ones I liked most.

(As someone who wants to break into the children's picture book market, I'm also taking special effort to give credit to those who illustrate the books I read.)

(Also, I've also been trying to notice publishers and First Second always seems to release books I want to read! I couldn't believe how many of them artists owned cats!)

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## Emily says

"Great fun."

A year after posting my succinct review, I've picked up this nursery rhyme cartoon anthology again at the library and still think it's wonderful, as do my children -- we definitely need our own copy. My hands down favorite rendition is Cyril Pedrosa's "This little Piggy." A few of the entries are a shade ho-hum, but that just makes one appreciate the quirky ones more. Keen scrutiny of Craig Thompson's "The Owl and the Pussycat" reveals that the runcible spoon is in fact a spork; that explains so much.

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## Calista says

There are 50 Nursery Rhymes in this collection by 50 different artists. It's a fun book that tells the classic rhymes, some of them in an updated setting. Many of these I have forgotten and I certainly didn't remember. It's a nice book that kids will enjoy seeing the pictures that go with the rhymes.

They have a companion called Fairy Tale Comics with the same format. First second pushes boundaries. They are a great company and this is for younger kids. They have older comics as well.

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## Karissa says

I got a copy of this book through the Amazon Vine program. It was a very fun read and something that I think kids of all ages and adults will both enjoy.

There are a number (fifty to be exact) of nursery rhymes illustrated and retold in various ways. Some of them are just beautiful renditions of the nursery rhymes, some of them are ironic retellings, and some of them are fantastic re-imaginings.

For example Jack Be Nimble has a little boy making asides about how stupid you would have to be to jump over a candlestick, then when he turns around at the end his pants have a hole burned in them. Three Little Kittens showed how the kittens lost, found, and even made more trouble with their mittens. Little Bo Peep loses her sheep, but her sheep are dream sheep that she counts to stay asleep.

The above are just a few examples of the wonderful collection included. All of them were well done. Some were ironic and surprising, some just plain beautiful. The illustration style is all over the place; some are beautiful fantasies, some are cartoony, some are folk-art-like, there is even a sci-fi themed rendition. All are in full color and wonderful.

My son, who is four, really enjoyed reading through this with me. He loved some of the twists on the nursery rhymes he already knows. Even my husband who walked by while we were reading this, ended up drawn in and sat down to finish the book with us. It was just such a creative take on a lot of the nursery rhymes; very entertaining and enjoyable to read.

Overall I adored this book and am so glad I have it. It will be something I keep in my library so that my son and I can take it out and read it. Fans of nursery rhymes or graphic novels in general should give this a look through. It was wonderful to find something creative like this that both me and my four year old son really enjoyed reading. So if you have kids definitely buy this book and sit down and read it with them! It adds some wonderful excitement to old nursery rhymes and you will see them in a new light after reading this book!

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## Jency says

Such a cute book. I love such clever comics which helps relive my childhood!

I esp love the illustration on 'There was an Old Lady who lived in a Shoe'. Such a cool spin. Every rhyme is so beautifully illustrated. I havent shared it with my toddler yet. Maybe when the time is right, she will love it too.

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## Scott Robins says

What a fantastic collection of the best cartoonists today and their personal takes on classic nursery rhymes - so fascinating with who went traditional and who went with a completely different interpretation.

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## Scope says

It's no secret we are living in the age of superstar team-ups. With Watch the Throne on the top of the Billboard charts, The Miami Heat making waves in the NBA, and The Avengers one of the most highly anticipated films of 2012, it's hard to say otherwise. The beautiful Nursery Rhyme Comics is a superstar team-up of a different kind. No less than 50 of our best cartoonists and illustrators have contributed their interpretations of classic (and a number of lesser-known) nursery rhymes. While this collection may prompt you to reexamine your concept of audience, Nursery Rhyme Comics is a unique endeavor brimming with creativity.

After a short introduction by children's book historian Leonard S. Marcus, things get rolling with Patrick McDonnell's comic take on The Donkey, a four line ditty that I likely haven't heard since nursery school:

Donkey, donkey, old and gray,

Ope your mouth and gently bray;

Lift your ears and blow your horn,

To wake the world this sleepy morn.

The accompanying illustrations show a seemingly glum donkey coming to life and blowing a saxophone solo, shocking a nearby bird. This opening cartoon makes something very clear: it's all in the interpretation. What follows is a murderer's row of cartoonists and illustrators, each playing by their own rules. Jules Feiffer turns in one of the more literal entries with Girls and Boys Come Out to Play, Eleanor Davis's retelling of The Queen of Harts fits with her detailed Secret Science Alliance M.O., James Sturm gets cheeky with Jack Be Nimble, and if you can show me a more absurd take on One, Two, Buckle My Shoe than the one by Dave Roman, I'll give you a pat on the back, then proceed to eat my wicker hat. The roster is impressively varied, the results almost always interesting.

Paging through the book is an experience unto itself, as the variety of styles – all rendered in full color – are a striking sight.

The concept of audience can be a tricky thing at times. Catering to your audience is often viewed in a negative light, but not taking the assumed reader into consideration also draws ire. Nursery Rhyme Comics may fall into the latter camp for some, as many of the comics will be most successful with 1st-4th graders rather than the standard preschool/kindergarten Mother Goose crowd. The paradox is that many nursery rhymes contain themes that already go over the heads of the PreK set.

Another interesting side effect of this wildly interpretive cartoon overhaul is that it sometimes moves the story away from the familiarity of a song. Occasionally this is due to inserted dialog, but it is mostly due to the fact that reading a comic requires pauses to absorb the artwork. Long story short, it feels a bit weird to read *There Was a Crooked Man* or *Hush, Little Baby* without the familiar tempo. While this is part of the uniqueness of the book, it does add a layer of sophistication that will work best with slightly older readers.

So here's my recommendation: *Nursery Rhyme Comics* shouldn't be a child's introduction to the genre, but consider this a wholly original next step.

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