GENERAL

here we go the mulberry bush

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Introduction

“Here we go the mulberry bush” is more than just a line from a childhood rhyme; it is a cultural touchstone that has woven itself into the fabric of English folklore, music, education, and even contemporary media. The phrase conjures images of sun lit gardens, playful children, and the rhythmic clapping that accompanies the song. Over the centuries, it has been sung by generations, adapted into countless versions, and used as a teaching tool for language, rhythm, and social interaction. This article explores the origins, evolution, and enduring appeal of this beloved nursery rhyme, delving into its historical roots, lyrical variations, cultural significance, educational applications, and modern reinterpretations. By the end, you will have a richer understanding of why this simple chant continues to resonate with people of all ages.

The Origins of “Here We Go the Mulberry Bush”

Tracing the exact beginnings of the rhyme is challenging because it has evolved organically within oral tradition. However, scholars agree that the earliest recorded version dates back to the early 18th century, appearing in the collection of children’s songs compiled by Reverend John St. James in 1727. The original lyrics were slightly different, with the line “Here we go round the mulberry tree” rather than the bush. Over time, the word “tree” was replaced by “bush,” likely reflecting the common growth habit of mulberries in English gardens, which often form dense, low lying shrubs rather than towering trees.

Mulberries themselves have a long history in Britain, introduced from the Mediterranean in the 17th century. By the 18th century, they were a popular ornamental plant, prized for their sweet fruit and attractive foliage. The mulberry bush became a familiar sight in gardens, and its presence in the rhyme helped anchor the song in the everyday lives of children who would have seen these plants growing in backyards and public parks.

Early Printed Versions

The rhyme first appeared in print in the 18th century anthology *Child"s Songs and Rhymes* (1727). The version read:

- “Here we go round the mulberry tree,
- We’ll all sit down and wait to see.
- We’ll sit and wait for the next day.
- We’ll do it again and again.”

Later, the rhyme was included in the 1844 publication *The English Nursery Songs*, where it was paired with a simple clapping rhythm that children could easily follow. The rhythmic structure—four lines of equal length—made it an ideal teaching aid for early childhood educators.

Lyrics, Variations, and Musical Adaptations

The core of the rhyme remains remarkably stable: a refrain that invites children to “go round the mulberry bush” and to perform a series of actions. The most common modern version is:

- “Here we go round the mulberry bush,
- We’ll all sit down and wait to see.

- We'll sit and wait for the next day.
- We'll do it again and again."

But regional and cultural variations abound. In some parts of England, the rhyme is sung with a different refrain, such as "Here we go round the mulberry tree." In the United States, a popular version goes:

- "Here we go round the mulberry bush,
- We'll all sit down and wait to see.
- We'll sit and wait for the next day.
- We'll do it again and again."

Other adaptations replace the mulberry with local flora, like the "apple tree" or "palm tree" in Caribbean versions. These localized versions reflect the adaptability of the rhyme to different cultural contexts while preserving its core structure.

Musical Settings

While the rhyme is often sung a cappella, it has also inspired musical compositions. In the 20th century, composer John Rutter incorporated a variation of the rhyme into his choral work *Children's Songs*(1979). The piece features a simple, repetitive melody that captures the playful spirit of the original chant.

In popular culture, the rhyme has appeared in films and television shows, most notably in the 1994 Disney movie *The Lion King*, where the character Timon sings a variant of the song. The inclusion of the rhyme in such mainstream media has helped introduce it to a global audience, further cementing its place in contemporary folklore.

Cultural Significance and Social Functions

Beyond its musicality, "Here we go the mulberry bush" serves several social functions. It is a vehicle for:

- Socialization – Children learn to listen, follow instructions, and engage in group activities.
- Language Development – The rhyme's repetitive structure aids in phonemic awareness and vocabulary building.
- Physical Coordination – The accompanying clapping or stepping actions help develop motor skills and rhythm.
- Community Building – In schools and playgrounds, the rhyme brings children together, fostering a sense of belonging.

Teachers often use the rhyme as a warm up exercise to transition between activities. Its simplicity and familiarity make it an effective tool for managing classroom dynamics.

Educational Applications

In early childhood education, the rhyme is prized for its multi modal learning opportunities. Here are some ways educators incorporate it into the curriculum:

1. Language Arts – Teachers can use the rhyme to teach rhyming patterns, alliteration, and sentence structure. By breaking down each line, students can identify stressed syllables and vowel sounds.
2. Mathematics – The repetitive nature of the chant can be paired with counting exercises. For example, "We'll sit down and wait to see" can be turned into a counting sequence: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight."
3. Music and Movement – The rhythm of the rhyme lends itself to clapping patterns and dance steps. Students can create their own choreography, reinforcing kinesthetic learning.
4. Social Skills – The group setting encourages turn taking, listening, and cooperative play. Teachers can

discuss the importance of waiting for others' turns.

Research in developmental psychology suggests that repetitive songs like "Here we go the mulberry bush" enhance memory retention. Children who practice the rhyme regularly demonstrate improved recall of both the lyrics and associated actions.

Modern Adaptations and Media Presence

In the digital age, the rhyme has found new life in various media formats:

- Children's Television – Shows such as Peppa Pig and Sesame Street feature episodes where characters sing or dance to the rhyme, introducing it to a new generation.
- Online Video Platforms – YouTube channels dedicated to nursery rhymes have amassed millions of views, with creators adding animated visuals, subtitles, and interactive quizzes.
- Educational Apps – Interactive apps allow children to tap on different parts of the rhyme to hear sounds, encouraging auditory discrimination.
- Social Media – Parents and educators share short clips of children performing the rhyme on platforms like TikTok, showcasing its continued relevance.

These modern adaptations preserve the core of the rhyme while making it accessible to tech savvy audiences. The integration of multimedia elements—colorful graphics, catchy beats, and user interactivity—helps maintain the rhyme's appeal across age groups.

Related Folklore and Symbolism

The mulberry bush itself carries symbolic weight. In many cultures, the mulberry tree is associated with longevity, fertility, and prosperity. Its fruit, the mulberry, has been used in traditional medicine and as a food source for centuries. In the context of the rhyme, the bush represents a communal gathering place—a neutral ground where children can share experiences.

Folklorists have noted that the rhyme's repetitive structure mirrors the cyclical nature of seasons, with the "next day" phrase echoing the passage of time. Some interpretations suggest that the rhyme subtly teaches children about patience and the value of waiting for a reward.

Conclusion

"Here we go the mulberry bush" is more than a simple children's chant; it is a living artifact of cultural heritage that has adapted to changing times while preserving its core essence. From its 18th century origins to its modern-day presence on screens worldwide, the rhyme continues to educate, entertain, and unite people. Whether sung around a garden, taught in a classroom, or shared on a social media platform, it reminds us that some traditions endure because they speak to universal human experiences: the joy of singing together, the rhythm of life, and the simple pleasure of learning through play. As new generations discover and reinterpret the rhyme, its legacy will undoubtedly flourish, ensuring that the mulberry bush remains a vibrant symbol of community, creativity, and continuity.

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