

Hi, this is Ross from Learning without Borders and today we're going to learn about nursery rhymes.

You probably know a lot of nursery rhymes, everybody does. They appear in nearly every culture and are often some of the first things we remember. You might even know some nursery rhymes in English, like *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, or *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. We usually learn these happy songs as children. But did you know that many English nursery rhymes have a dark side?

One example is the song "Ring-a-ring-a-roses". British children love to dance and sing "Ring-a-ring-a-roses/a pocket full of posies/a-tissue, a-tissue/we all fall down", and at the end of the song, the children all lie on the floor. But what does it mean? Let's start with the first line, "ring-a-roses"; simple, right? The song's about a ring of red flowers. Well, no. The song is actually about the Plague: a disease that killed around half of the population of Europe in the 1300s. One of the first signs of the plague was of itchy red rings on the skin. Like rings of roses.

So what about the second line? A posie *is* actually a bunch of flowers. At this time, people believed that diseases were caused by bad smells, and there were a lot of bad smells around. To keep themselves safe, people would carry posies of flowers in their pockets which they could hold to their noses whenever they smelled something bad. This, of course, did nothing to help them.

As for the final two lines, the first is simple. A tissue is the piece of paper you sneeze into, and it also sounds like the noise you make when you sneeze: "a-choo!" Sneezing was another sign of the plague which came after the rings, and it meant you were close to death. Then, in the final line, the disease reaches its final stage: death. The line "we all fall down" is another way of saying "we all die".

So there you have it... What a nice song to teach your children! Check out my other podcasts to find out the dark truth behind some other popular nursery rhymes.