

# Ring Around the Rosy

Kodaly Method

Ring a - round the ros - y, Pock - et full of pos - y,  
Ash - es, ash - es, All fall down!

## Game:

Children join hands and dance or skip in a ring. On "down" the tumble down or, alternatively, squat down on their heels. In one version of the game, one child stands in the middle (she is the "rosy" - French rosier, or rose-bush. When the children squat down, the last child down takes her place.

## Note:

It has often alleged that this rhyme refers to the Black Plague, but there is no basis for this belief. Examination of older sources shows that the fall was originally a curtesy, part of a dramatic singing game which has been lost. Oral tradition in England and Ireland often includes a second verse providing for the players to get up again, such as:

***The cows are in the meadow Lying fast asleep A-tishoo! A-tishoo! We all get up again.***

Similar rhymes are found in many European countries.

From: <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/ring-a-ring-of-roses.html>: **Ring a ring o'roses, a pocketful of posies, atishoo, atishoo, all fall down**

**Meaning:** Verse from a nursery rhyme.

**Origin:** ring a ring 'o roses There are many versions of this rhyme, some of which use entirely different words to the roses/rosy variants. The most commonly seen are 'ring a ring of (or o') roses (or rosy)' and 'ring around a rosy'. The many versions aren't surprising as, being lines from a playground rhyme, they would have been spoken/sung/chanted rather than read from a book.

It is sometimes suggested that the rhyme relates to the Black Death - the bubonic plague that spread through Europe in the 1340s, or to the Great Plague of London, 1665/6. The plausible-sounding theory has it that the 'ring' is the ring of sores around the mouths of plague victims, who subsequently sneeze and fall down dead.

ring a ring of roses The first appearance of the rhyme in print is in Kate Greenaway's Mother Goose, which wasn't published until 1881, suggesting that the rhyme originated far too late for the Great Plague to have been the origin:

Ring-a-ring-a-roses,  
A pocket full of posies;  
Hush! hush! hush! hush!  
We're all tumbled down.

Some of the refutations of the plague origin theory are rather too emphatic in their dismissing of this idea. Firstly, the 1881 date that is part of the refutations is a little misleading. That is the first known printing of the complete rhyme, but the game and the 'ring a ring of roses' line were known well before that. The game and the rhyme were known in the USA, and quite probably elsewhere, by at least 1855, when it was included in *The Old Homestead*, a novel by Ann S. Stephens. This depicts children playing 'Ring, ring a rosy' in New York.

William Wells Newell, the author of *Games and Songs of American Children*, 1884, wrote that Ring a Ring a Rosie, with the familiar tune, was in use by children in Bedford, Massachusetts, circa 1790. The version he recorded was:

Ring a ring a rosie  
A bottle full of posie,  
All the girls in our town,  
Ring for little Josie

Newell was a respected folklorist, although he didn't supply documentary evidence for his assertion.

The argument that the lyric couldn't have lasted in common playground parlance but without being recorded in print from the days of the 1340s until 1881 has some weight. From the Great Plague of 1665 until 1790 isn't such a stretch. An unrecorded period of 125 years doesn't seem entirely impossible - many phrases have lain dormant for longer than that. Children's rhymes would have been of little interest to authors in the 17th century and printing was then still an expensive process. There's no evidence to suggest that these lines originated as anything other than a children's rhyme and would inevitably have been known to children for some time before appearing in print. How long a time is open to conjecture, but 125 years - well, why not?

However, showing that something is possible doesn't make it true. It is a common urge to try to ascribe meaning to obscure lyrics and poems - for example, 'Pop goes the weasel'. The 'atishoo, atishoo, all fall down' lyric isn't present in many of the numerous versions and also doesn't tally with the actual symptoms of people suffering from plague. The adherents to the Great Plague derivation may be trying too hard, but it may just be true.

An alternative and more probable explanation, which is a commonplace one in regard to nursery rhymes, is that the words are playful nonsense.

The etymology of this lyric is a good example of how untruths can so easily spread. In attempting to deny what they had pre-judged as a false 'bubonic plague' explanation several websites have begged the question by swallowing the 'first time the phrase appears in print is 1881' as fact. As a French wine producer who tasted a poor imported wine which was labelled 'Appellation d'origine contro'le'e' once said, "the paper never refuses the ink" - that goes double for digital paper.

Further reading: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring\\_a\\_Ring\\_o'\\_Roses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_a_Ring_o'_Roses)