

---

## Mary Engelbreit

**Mary Engelbreit's Mother Goose**  
**ISBN13: 9780060081713**

### **Why did you decide to illustrate Mother Goose?**

It's classic and I wanted to put my own spin on the old familiar lines.

### **Did you have a Mother Goose book growing up?**

Yes, but it's not one I remember vividly. I believe it was just a generic version. Frankly, I always was a little confused by that Mother Goose – some of it didn't make sense to me and the pictures were dull. I remember my mother singing "Three Blind Mice," "Hickory Dickory Dock," and "Sing a Song of Sixpence" to me. So I have very fond memories of those classics.

### **Who did you have in mind when you illustrated this?**

I thought about my granddaughter Mikayla – she's four – and about children in general. Some of the rhymes don't really make sense when you listen to the words, and I wanted to give the kids really great illustrations to help the rhymes make more sense. And I wanted them to find plenty of things to look at in the pictures, so I've added lots of detail.

### **Why do you think the Mother Goose rhymes have endured through the years?**

The rhymes are such fun to read aloud. I'm always amazed at how quickly kids memorize the words! They have a rhythm that is easy to catch on to and repeat, which is really important for young children. And because they are so catchy and easy to remember, they've been around for a long time!

### **It seems like you've been working on a lot of "classic" projects?**

I've really been into the "classic stuff" lately – The Night Before Christmas, Mother Goose, etc. Raising Mikayla has been an inspiration for me! I want my granddaughter to know the classic rhymes. Parents and grandparents are so tired of the commercialism of everything these days. These poems are innocent and remind us of simpler and slower times.

### **Why do you think your "style" makes so much sense for this book?**

I've been told my artwork has a nostalgic feel to it, so it goes really well with the old-fashioned poems and rhymes of Mother Goose. Also, the little twists in the poems that make kids laugh make me laugh, too. I like my art to be witty like that, with little unexpected details.

### **In the past, you've drawn a few "Mother Goose" cards and baby announcements.**

Yes, I have drawn a few cards and baby announcements with Mother Goose imagery in the past. I guess I was leading up to this! They were different images, though – but the same style.

### **How did you get inspired to create each image?**

I read the poem and paid attention to the first image that came into my head. Actually, I visualize the completed drawing before I ever start putting ink to paper. It changes as I work on it but, usually, I picture the completed drawing before I start and can even "see" where the text will go a lot of times. I don't make a lot of "drafts" of my images – there's just one sketch and it usually turns into the finished image, all on one piece of paper!

### **Which image did you do first?**

"Little Miss Muffet." It was the one that most grabbed me. I wanted to draw the spider. And I wanted him to be a friendly looking spider.

### **Which ones were the hardest to draw and why?**

The ship with twenty-four mice was hard because I'd never drawn a ship before. And "The Man on Moon" was difficult. I really had to think a lot about how a man would look on the moon, but that picture turned out to be one of my favorites.

### **Any "artist block" on any of them?**

Not really. The poems have so much in them. They give your imagination a place to start and so much to go on.

### **How did you and HarperCollins select the specific poems you included since all Mother Goose compilations are a bit different?**

There are so many Mother Goose rhymes. HarperCollins asked Leonard Marcus, who's a children's literature specialist, to select about 150 of the rhymes for me to read. I had the freedom to choose which ones to include, and I picked the ones that inspired a visual when I read them. I wanted to include the best-known rhymes, but also lesser-known ones that appealed to me.

### **Which of the poems are your favorites and why?**

My favorite is "Bat, Bat, Come Under My Hat." It makes absolutely no sense, but it's my favorite. And I also really like "Three Little Ghostesses." It's really fun to say.

### **How did you decide the order for the rhymes?**

We wanted to start with a picture of Mother Goose and end with children on their way to bed. Everything else flowed and changed once we got under way and saw all the rhymes and how they fit together. My art director, Stephanie Barken, laid out the entire book and designers Dave Arnold, Jen Hahn and Pam Dobek, and art directors Martha Rago and Stephanie Bart-Horvath from HarperCollins, gave me a lot of help with the initial layout. It really isn't a static process – we adapt to the creative flow as we go along.

### **How did you decide which words to update?**

All the Mother Goose rhymes are in the public domain, but after all this time some of the words are so obscure that I wanted to update them so children today would understand them. Some rhymes sounded mean or even a little scary, and I didn't want to do a mean book for young children. Tweaking a few words here and there really made a difference.

**Did you have to change anything with the drawings once the illustrations were all completed?**

When we went back and saw the whole book laid out with all of the pictures in sequence, we realized we needed to add some more detail. We were trying to keep the illustrations simple, but decided we wanted them to be a little richer, so we added more sky, flowers, ground and detail to give it more punch and anchor the images. When you draw each picture on its own, it's different from when they are all put together. In the end, a lot of thought went into the look and pacing of the book.

**How is this different than illustrating other / more traditional children's books?**

Doing Mother Goose was much easier, actually, because each illustration can stand on its own – but it does all have to hang together at the end. I didn't have to make all the characters (how they look, what they wear, etc.) consistent throughout the book as I do in *The Night Before Christmas* and the *Ann Estelle Books*. In *Mother Goose*, each illustration tells a complete story and, for me, that allowed so much more creative freedom.

**We understand you are working on *Nursery Tales*, a companion volume of classic short stories that will be out in 2006.**

I'm really looking forward to beginning work on that too. It should be fun. There will be about fifteen stories, including "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "Little Red Riding Hood," which are longer and will have repeated characters, so consistency will come into play.

**Any final words about your illustration of *Mother Goose*?**

I just hope people understand how very proud I am of this *Mother Goose* and I hope they genuinely like it. I hope it gets great reviews. *Mother Goose* is definitely my favorite book to date. I love *My Symphony*, and of course, *The Night Before Christmas*, but *Mother Goose* is so big and so lush, and we put so much into it. I do hope, as our publishers believe, that it will be a defining *Mother Goose* for generations. Now that would be an honor!