

The recent foot and mouth scare in Britain brought forth this version of the nursery rhyme, 'Mary had a Little Lamb':

*Mary had a little lamb,
Its feet were covered in blisters
Now its burning in the paddock
With all its brothers and sisters.*

Playground rhymes with a specific New Zealand flavour can be seen to have a Maori – Pacific Island influence. The popular pastime of skipping has developed rhymes based on the Maori language:

*Rahina, rahina, one, two, three,
Ratu, ratu, skip with me.
Rapa, rapa, turn around,
Rapere, rapere, touch the ground
Ramere, ramere, touch the sky
Rahoroi, the rope swings high
Ratapu, you're too slow,
End of the week, so out you go.*

A rhyme touching on a more taboo subject of sexuality and body parts:

*I am the ghost of a place named Venus,
Come near me and I'll bite your penis.
I am the ghost of Hone Heke
Come near me and I'll bite your teke.*

Maori language is also included in parodies of traditional nursery rhymes:

*Twinkle, twinkle little star,
Hemi had a paru car,
Like a diamond in the sky,
Hemi lives in a pig sty.
Twinkle, twinkle little star,
Hemi had a paru car
(paru = dirty)*

The coconut trees of the Pacific Islands are part of this counting out rhyme. In this ritual participants hold out a fist for the counter to tap as they rhyme is chanted. The person who receives the 'crack' is out, and the ritual continues:

*Co – co – nut, co – co –nut, co – co – nut.
CRACK!*

Mary, her lamb and her little 'bro' – a New Zealand slang term used by both Maori and Pakeha - feature in these variations:

*Mary had a little bro
She took him to the fair.
She saw a lamb that she loved so
And swapped him then and there!*

*Mary had a little lamb,
She called it Little Bro
One day she took it skiing
And lost it in the snow.*



Taunts against pakeha, and our sporting rivals, the Australians, are also prevalent in the playground:

<i>Catch a little pakeha, Put him in the pot, Mix him up with puha, And what have you got? Puha and pakeha stew</i>	<i>God of Nations, in the scrum, Kick the Aussies, in the bum. If it hurts, serves them right. Blow them up with dynamite.</i>	<i>I'm an Australian, Born and bred, Long in the legs, And thick in the head.</i>
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Variations of our national anthem abound, with some creative examples shown here:

<i>God of Nations, smell my feet, In the local pub we meet, Don't buy whisky, it's too dear, Buy our local DB beer.</i>	<i>God of Nations, smell my feet, In the bonds of Shortland Street. Hear our voices, tweet, tweet, tweet. God defend our toilet seat.</i>	<i>God of nations, in thy toes, In the bonds of panty hose!</i>
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Playground rhymes are not spared the effects of commercialism and media influence. Many of the trendy food brand names, such as McDonalds, Pepsi, Coke, Barbie and our own icons of Marmite and barbed wire fences are included in the folklore of New Zealand children. A 'step on a crack, marry a rat,' variation:

*Step on white,
Marry Marmite,
Good night.'*

As a challenge we find:

<i>Wanna fight? – Marmite If you wish. – Jellyfish Bring it on – Tampon</i>	<i>Cows are in the meadow, Sheep are in the corn. Don't climb the barbed wire fence. You'll get your knickers torn!</i>
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An action rhyme involving precise hand movements features the ever favourite takeaway brands:

*McDonalds, McDonalds. (make a big M with hands)
Kentucky Fried Chicken (flap arms like a chicken)
And a Pizza Hut (form a ^ with arms)*

Popular drink brands form part of a partisan school chant:

*Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola, Lion Brown
We're gonna hypnotise, paralyse and knock them down.
With a F-I-G-H-T
We're gonna score S-C-O-R-E
We're gonna fight, we're gonna score
We're gonna win 'em all
Goooooo _____ (name of school)*



And also as playground taunts:

Boys are spastic, made out of plastic.

Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi.

Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi.

Boys are rotten, made out of cotton.

Girls go to the gym, to get more slim.

Boys go to rugby, to get more ugly.

Elastics, the girls' playground game, also features these traditional food favourites, including pavlova:

Ice cream soda, pavlova

Coca Cola, my friend out.

Passion fruit and ice cream soda,

Yum, yum, yum, it's pavlova.

Fanta, Fanta, my friend Fanta.

Is the nicest of them all

My friend Fanta.

The television advertising has a feature in this parody of 'Jingle Bells':

Jingle bells, jingle bells

Santa Claus is dead.

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,

Shot him in the head.

Barbie doll, Barbie doll,

Tried to save his life.

But a GI Joe from Mexico

Stabbed her with a knife.

Television and movie stars, The Simpsons, Barney, Batman, Xena, Warrior Princess, Men in Black and the Spice Girls are included in recently collected rhymes:

Bart versus Lisa,

Who will win

Their father's fat

And their mother's thin.

Their grandpa smells of whisky and gin.

A parody on the theme song of the beloved Barney, the purple dinosaur, shows no finer feelings for the sensitivities of the younger children:

I hate you, you hate me,

Let's get together and kill Barney.

With a one punch, two punch, three punch, four

No more purple dinosaur!

Batman and Robin have long been favourites, and I'm sure many are familiar with the problems Wonder Woman had with her bosom:

Jingle Bells, Batman smells,

Robin laid an egg.

Oh what fun it is to see,

The duo split today.

HEY!



Our own super heroine, Xena the warrior princess, is featured in a hand clapping rhyme as a starter to the traditional game of paper, scissors, rock and stone:

*Xena (clap) Warrior (clap) Princess,
Came here last year.
Xena Warrior Princess
Came here last year.
Over, over, over.
(This is followed by the game paper, scissors, rock)*

Hand clapping rhymes feature variations on the 'double this, double that' rhyme:

<i>Double, double, men, men.</i>	<i>Double, double spice, spice.</i>
<i>Double, double, black, black.</i>	<i>Double, double, girls, girls.</i>
<i>Double men, Double black.</i>	<i>Double spice, double girls.</i>
<i>Double, double Men in Black.</i>	<i>Double, double Spice Girls.</i>

When considering this selection of 'playground rhymes that change with the times', I also became aware of the many different categories of rhymes that have been collected by students of the Patterns of Language course over the last few years. Many of these rhymes have changed very little over the passage of time and those that were favourites of parents and grandparents are still around today. Some of the other categories of playground rhymes include parodies of songs and nursery rhymes, insults and taunts, counting-out rhymes, tongue twisters, chants, nonsense rhymes, skipping, clapping and elastics rhymes, politically incorrect sexist and sexy rhymes and rhymes that are simply just for fun.

Despite concerns that the technological revolution is responsible for taking the play out of our children's lives, these collections show that the rhymes of the New Zealand playground are still alive and well.

References and Acknowledgements

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Christchurch College of Education. National Diploma of Children's Literature Folklore Collection. Collected by students of Patterns of Language CL713, 1994 – 2001.

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