SOFTWARE & TECH

Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush

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The Origins and Enduring Appeal of a Childhood Classic

For generations, children across the English-speaking world have joined hands, formed a circle, and sung the cheerful refrain of "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**." This simple nursery rhyme, often accompanied by a playful game, is a staple of early childhood education and playground tradition. Its catchy melody and repetitive lyrics make it easy for even the youngest toddlers to learn and enjoy. But beneath its simple surface lies a fascinating history, with debated origins, cultural variations, and a surprising resilience that has kept it alive for over two centuries. This article explores the full story of the "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" rhyme, from its possible beginnings to its role in modern classrooms, while examining the plant that gives the song its name.

The Most Common Theory: A Prison Connection

The most widely cited theory regarding the origin of "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" links it to Wakefield Prison in West Yorkshire, England. According to this popular narrative, female prisoners in the 19th century were allowed to exercise by walking around a mulberry tree planted in the prison yard. The phrase "here we go round the mulberry bush" is said to describe this circular activity. However, historical evidence for this specific claim is thin. The prison did have a mulberry tree, but the rhyme itself was already in circulation before the prison's most famous era. Despite the lack of concrete proof, the story remains the most frequently repeated explanation for the song's origin, demonstrating how folklore can attach itself to historical sites and create a powerful, if unverified, narrative.

The Role of the Mulberry Tree in Victorian England

Regardless of the prison theory's accuracy, the mulberry tree was a well-known feature in British landscapes during the 17th and 18th centuries. King James I famously attempted to establish a silk industry in England by planting thousands of mulberry trees. Unfortunately, he planted black mulberries rather than white mulberries, which silkworms prefer, dooming the project to failure. Nevertheless, the trees remained, and many became prominent landmarks in gardens, workhouses, and institutional grounds. The mulberry's distinctive fruit and spreading branches made it a memorable fixture. It is entirely plausible that the "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" rhyme emerged from a real, local tree that children or workers would circle as part of a game or daily routine. The tree's bushy, rather than tall, growth habit matches the "bush" description in the song.

The Lyrics and Their Meaning

The most commonly sung version of the rhyme goes as follows:

- Here we go round the mulberry bush,
- The mulberry bush,
- The mulberry bush.
- Here we go round the mulberry bush,
- On a cold and frosty morning.

Subsequent verses replace the first line with different actions, such as "This is the way we wash our clothes," "This is the way we go to school," or "This is the way we sweep the floor." These verses describe the daily routines of children in the 19th century. The "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" song, therefore, functions as both a

circle game and a teaching tool for everyday tasks. The "cold and frosty morning" refrain adds a seasonal element, grounding the song in the realities of life before central heating and modern conveniences. Children mimic washing, ironing, and other chores, learning through physical play what was expected of them in their daily lives.

Regional Variations of the Rhyme

Like many traditional nursery rhymes, "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" has numerous regional and international variations. In some parts of the United Kingdom, the mulberry bush is replaced by a gooseberry bush or another local shrub. In the United States, the song is often sung with identical lyrics but sometimes with slightly different actions or additional verses. In other countries, the tune has been adapted to fit local languages and customs. For example, in some Scandinavian versions, children sing about going around a juniper bush. These variations highlight the adaptability of the rhyme. The core structure of the game—circling and performing actions—remains constant, but the specific details change to reflect local flora and cultural practices. This flexibility is a key reason why "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" has survived and thrived across continents.

The Game: How to Play

The game associated with "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" is simple and requires no equipment, making it accessible for any group of children. Here is a step-by-step guide to the traditional game:

1. Players stand in a circle, holding hands.
2. During the first verse ("Here we go round the mulberry bush"), everyone walks or skips clockwise in a circle.
3. On the second verse, which typically starts "This is the way we wash our clothes," players stop circling and instead perform the action described. They mimic washing, scrubbing, or whatever chore is named.
4. After completing the action verse, the group repeats the first verse, circling again.
5. The game continues with new action verses, allowing each child to suggest a different daily activity.

The game aspect of "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" is central to its educational value. It encourages cooperation, physical activity, and creativity. Children learn to follow instructions, take turns suggesting actions, and move in rhythm with a group. The repetitive structure is ideal for language development, as young children can predict the chorus and join in even if they do not yet know all the words. The game also provides a safe, structured way for children to express themselves through movement.

Educational Uses in Modern Classrooms

In contemporary early childhood education, "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" remains a valuable tool. Teachers use the rhyme to teach a range of skills beyond simple entertainment. The song helps with:

- Language Development: The repetitive phrases and rhyming structure build vocabulary and phonemic awareness. Children learn words for actions, objects, and weather.
- Motor Skills: Performing the actions while singing develops coordination and fine motor skills. Washing, sweeping, and other motions require controlled movement.
- Social Skills: Holding hands, moving together, and waiting for turns during the game teaches cooperation, patience, and social awareness.
- Routine and Sequence: The song mirrors the daily routines of waking up, dressing, eating, and going to school. This helps children understand the sequence of their own day.
- Cultural Literacy: Learning a traditional rhyme connects children to a shared cultural heritage. "Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush" links modern classrooms to the playgrounds of the past.

Many educators also use the song as a springboard for creative activities. Children might draw a mulberry bush, act

out additional verses, or discuss the concept of morning routines in different climates. The simple framework of the rhyme allows for endless expansion, limited only by the imagination of the teacher and students.

The Mulberry Bush: A Closer Look at the Plant

Given the prominence of the mulberry bush in the rhyme, it is worth examining what a mulberry bush actually is. The mulberry is a deciduous tree or shrub known for its sweet, dark purple berries. While the song refers to a "bush," mulberries can grow into sizable trees if left unpruned. However, they are often maintained as bushes in gardens and institutional settings. The black mulberry *(Morus nigra)* is the most common species in the United Kingdom, though the white mulberry *(Morus alba)* and red mulberry *(Morus rubra)*are also found. The fruit is highly perishable and stains easily, which may explain why children were often told not to play too close to the bush. The mulberry has a long history in mythology and medicine, and its presence in a children's rhyme underscores its familiarity to people in previous centuries.

Why Has This Rhyme Survived for Over 200 Years?

The longevity of "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" is no accident. Several factors contribute to its enduring popularity. First, the tune is simple and memorable. It uses a limited musical range, making it easy for young children to sing. Second, the game requires no props, equipment, or special setting. It can be played indoors or outdoors, with as few as three children or as many as thirty. Third, the content is universal. While specific chores like "washing our clothes" may be less common today due to modern appliances, the concept of daily routines remains relevant to every child. The song can be easily updated to include contemporary activities like "This is the way we brush our teeth" or "This is the way we put on our shoes." Finally, the rhyme benefits from oral tradition. Passed down from parents to children and from teachers to students, it is continuously refreshed and relearned. The act of singing and playing together creates a positive social experience that makes the song self-perpetuating.

Modern Interpretations and Media Appearances

The "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" rhyme has appeared in numerous books, films, and television shows. It has been recorded by countless artists, from children's music groups to mainstream performers. The tune is often used in educational programming to signal a transition or to engage young viewers. In literature, the rhyme has been referenced as a symbol of childhood innocence or as a metaphor for repetitive, circular routines. Some modern adaptations have rewritten the lyrics to address contemporary themes, such as environmental awareness or diversity. The core melody remains instantly recognizable, even when the words are changed. This adaptability ensures that the rhyme remains relevant, even as society evolves. The game itself has also been adapted for children with special needs, using simplified movements or visual cues to ensure inclusion.

Conclusion

From its murky origins in 19th-century England to its place in modern classrooms around the world, "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**" is far more than a simple children's song. It is a living piece of cultural history, a tool for learning, and a joyful expression of community. The rhyme teaches language, movement, and cooperation while connecting children to the generations that came before them. Whether performed around a literal mulberry bush or simply sung in a classroom circle, the song continues to fulfill its original purpose: bringing children together in shared play. Its survival across centuries and continents is a testament to the power of simple, well-crafted folklore. The next time you hear the familiar words "**Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush**," take a moment to appreciate the rich tapestry of history, education, and human connection that this humble nursery rhyme represents.

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