



# Two Children Tell: Nicholas and Raymond Briggs

Article Author:

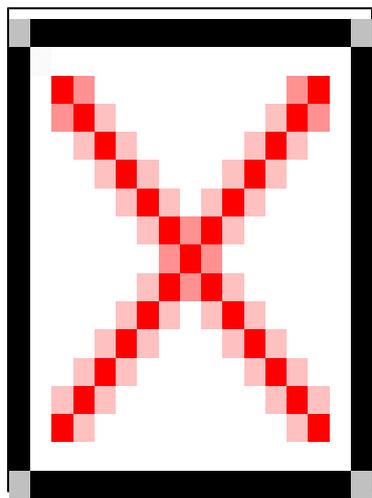
[Virginia Lowe](#) [1]

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Byline:

Nicholas discovers **Raymond Briggs**

In the latest of her series describing children's early responses to stories and language, **Virginia Lowe** recalls how **The Mother Goose Treasury** and Raymond Briggs' illustrations inspired her son Nicholas.



After his afternoon nap, Nicholas lay awake for about an hour, then called me.

N: I was hiding under there [blankets]. I was playing hide and seek.

V: Who were you playing with?

N: The clouds and the sun. I was hiding in there and they couldn't see me! I was playing a bakers' game with them.

V: Were you? How do you play a bakers' game?

N: You get put in a pie and somebody cooks it!

V: Like in the book this morning?

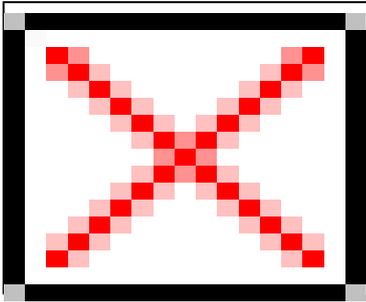
N: Yes.

We had bought for Nicholas (3y5m) our third copy of Briggs' **Mother Goose Treasury**. (We kept losing it). The only rhyme he had actually requested as he studied the pages and pages of pictures was **Baby and I**. Briggs accompanies this with a big picture of a pie with a baby and a boy under the crust. Baby and I must have made an impression. Nick obviously saw it clearly as not-real because he called it a bakers' game.

**The Mother Goose Treasury's** verses are taken from the Opies' **Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes**, and there were, in this first edition (1966), 408 rhymes and 897 illustrations. A new, abridged edition was published 34 years later in 2010, with only half the rhymes, and illustrations though sadly that too is now out of print.

The new edition starts with an introduction from Briggs himself, where he tells us: "All human life is here: birth, love, marriage and death. Underneath their jolly, rollicking rhythm and rhymes there is a depth and a truth about life." The rhymes inspire games like Nick's "hide and seek". At the end of **Hey Diddle Diddle** if the two children were listening together, it was always "Come on Spoon - let's run!" and off they rushed, hand in hand, for a quick trip round the house, before returning for another rhyme.

The first Briggs book Nick knew was written by Vipont, **The Elephant and the Bad Baby**. As so often with Briggs,



there was the interest in size " who would have thought of exaggerating the hugeness of an elephant! This was significant for the emotions Nick noticed. He was only 1y7m when Rebecca, from across the room, noticed and asked with a laugh " R: Why is he looking like that? Glancing over, I saw Nick with a fierce frown on his face " an expression we had never seen before. John was reading the page on which all the shopkeepers are chasing the elephant and the baby, and they are all frowning fiercely at him. Whether he was copying their expressions (consciously or unconsciously) or worried for the baby himself, we can't know. But as soon as he'd traced across the page and located the baby, his face lit up. He was 3y7m when he suddenly pointed to a customer;

N: Why is she looking mad? [Then thinks of a reason himself] The grocer sells bacon, and it cost infinity dollars, so she's mad.

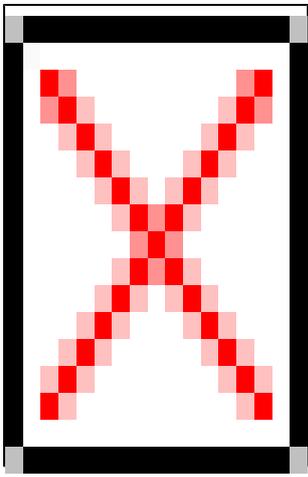
At 1y6m he made his elephant noise pointing to where only the trunk can be seen. And a month later, where the elephant is almost hidden behind the fruit barrow, Nick discovered his eyes peering over. "Pop!" he cried, as he did when his own head emerged from a neck hole " a form of peek-a-boo. Then he discovered the elephant's feet below the barrow, and said "Pop" to each of them too.

**The Mother Goose Treasury** gave Nicholas so many treasures. Firstly, knowing that there are endless nursery rhymes and folk songs " a lot of the more obscure ones we knew from a BBC tape; then that there can be different ways of interpreting the same rhyme " comparing the four nursery rhyme books we had in the house, and others from the library, soon showed that different artists had quite different ways of looking at the rhyme and its meaning (the cow jumping over the moon, for instance); then the value of an "index of first lines". Nick often wanted to hear specific rhymes.

Finally **Mother Goose** demonstrated that one illustrator can work on different books. This first occurred to Nick at 3y9m, when he suddenly realised of the baby in "Bonaparte" "

N [grins]: It's like the baby and the ewfewent " the Bad Baby. Where's that book? and of course we found and read it, and he gloried in the experience of Vipont's rollicking rhythms and repetition as well as the similarity in Briggs' style.

Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is the proprietor of [Create a Kids' Book](#) [3], a manuscript assessment agency, which also runs regular workshops, interactive writing e-courses, mentorships and produces a regular free e-bulletin on writing for children and children's literature generally. Her book, **Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two Children Tell** (2007) is published by Routledge (978-0-4153-9724-7, £29.99 pbk).



On Thursday 9 February Raymond Briggs was awarded the **BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award**.

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