

= Ring a Ring o ' Roses =

" Ring a Ring o ' Roses " or " Ring Around the Rosie " is a nursery rhyme or folksong and playground singing game . It first appeared in print in 1881 , but it is reported that a version was already being sung to the current tune in the 1790s and similar rhymes are known from across Europe . It has a Roud Folk Song Index number of 7925 . Urban legend says the song originally described the plague , specifically the Great Plague of London , or the Black Death , but folklorists reject this idea .

= = Lyrics = =

It is unknown what the earliest version of the rhyme was or when it began . Many incarnations of the game have a group of children form a ring and dance in a circle around a person and stoop or curtsy with the final line . The slowest child to do so would be faced with some penalty or become the " rosie " ( literally : rose tree ) from the French rosier ) and take their place in the center of the ring . Numerous variations , corruptions and even several vulgarized versions were noted to be in use long prior to the earliest printed publications . One such variation was dated to be in use in Connecticut in the 1840s .

Common British versions include :

Common American versions include :

The last two lines are sometimes varied to :

= = = Early attestation = = =

The first printing of the rhyme was in Kate Greenaway 's 1881 edition of Mother Goose ; or , the Old Nursery Rhymes :

A novel of 1855 , The Old Homestead by Ann S. Stephens , describes children playing " Ring , ring a rosy " in New York . William Wells Newell reports two versions in America a short time later ( 1883 ) and says that another was known in New Bedford , Massachusetts around 1790 :

There are also versions from Shropshire , collected in 1883 , and a manuscript of rhymes collected in Lancashire at the same period gives three closely related versions , with the now familiar sneezing , for instance :

In 1892 , folklorist Alice Gomme could give twelve versions .

= = = Other languages = = =

A German rhyme first printed in 1796 closely resembles " Ring a ring o ' roses " in its first stanza and accompanies the same actions ( with sitting rather than falling as the concluding action ) :

Loosely translated this says : " Ringed , ringed row . We are three children , sitting under an elder bush . All of us going hush , hush , hush ! " The rhyme is well known in Germany with the first line " Ringel , Ringel , Reihe " ( as the popular collection Des Knaben Wunderhorn gave it ) ; it has many local variants , often with " Husch , husch , husch " ( which in German could mean " quick , quick " ) in the fourth line , comparable to the " Hush ! hush ! hush ! hush ! " of the first printed English version . Notable also this popular variant :

The translation is : " A ring , a ring of roses . Beautiful apricots . Blue violets , forget @-@ me @-@ nots . All children sit down . " Swiss versions have the children dancing round a rosebush . Other European singing games with a strong resemblance include " Roze , roze , meie " ( " Rose , rose , May " ) from The Netherlands with a similar tune to " Ring a ring o ' roses " and " Gira , gira rosa " ( " Circle , circle , rose " ) , recorded in Venice in 1874 , in which girls danced around the girl in the middle who skipped and curtsied as demanded by the verses and at the end kissed the one she liked best , so choosing her for the middle .

= = Meaning = =

The origins and meanings of the game have long been unknown and subject to speculation . In 1898 , A Dictionary of British Folklore contained the belief that an explanation of the game was of pagan origin , based on the Sheffield Glossary comparison of Grimm 's Teut . Myth . The theory states that it is in reference to Pagan myths and cited a passage which states , " Gifted children of fortune have the power to laugh roses , as Treya wept gold . " Believing the first instance to be indicative of Pagan beings of light . Another suggestion is more literal , that it was making a " ring " around the roses and bowing with the all " fall down " as a curtsy . In 1892 , the American writer , Eugene Field wrote a poem titled Teeny @-@ Weeny that specifically referred to fey folk playing ring @-@ a @-@ rosie . According to Games and Songs of American Children , published in 1883 , the " rosie " was a reference to the French word for rose tree and the children would dance and stoop to the person in the center . Variations , especially more literal ones , were identified and noted with the literal falling down that would sever the connections to the game @-@ rhyme . Addy 's interpretation failed to account for the sneezing , which had not carried over to the United States and was losing ground in Britain , as another instance of the Pagan influence . Again in 1898 , sneezing was then noted to be indicative of many superstitious and supernatural beliefs across differing cultures .

Since the 20th century , the rhyme has often been associated with the Great Plague which happened in England in 1665 , or with earlier outbreaks of the Black Death in England . Interpreters of the rhyme before the Second World War make no mention of this ; by 1951 , however , it seems to have become well established as an explanation for the form of the rhyme that had become standard in the United Kingdom . Peter and Iona Opie , the leading authorities on nursery rhymes , remarked :

The invariable sneezing and falling down in modern English versions have given would @-@ be origin finders the opportunity to say that the rhyme dates back to the Great Plague . A rosy rash , they allege , was a symptom of the plague , and posies of herbs were carried as protection and to ward off the smell of the disease . Sneezing or coughing was a final fatal symptom , and " all fall down " was exactly what happened .

The line Ashes , Ashes in colonial versions of the rhyme is claimed to refer variously to cremation of the bodies , the burning of victims ' houses , or blackening of their skin , and the theory has been adapted to be applied to other versions of the rhyme . In its various forms , the interpretation has entered into popular culture and has been used elsewhere to make oblique reference to the plague .

Folklore scholars regard the theory as baseless for several reasons :

The plague explanation did not appear until the mid @-@ twentieth century .

The symptoms described do not fit especially well with the Great Plague .

The great variety of forms makes it unlikely that the modern form is the most ancient one , and the words on which the interpretation are based are not found in many of the earliest records of the rhyme ( see above ) .

European and 19th @-@ century versions of the rhyme suggest that this " fall " was not a literal falling down , but a curtsy or other form of bending movement that was common in other dramatic singing games .