

## Eight Rhyme Challenge

Time to rhyme in Dudley. Alyson Bryant, Early Years Development Librarian from Dudley library explains how a “rhyme challenge” for children in early years settings provided a fun way to help children learn the essential skill of rhyming.

Child development research shows that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they are four years old, they are usually among the best readers by the time they are eight\*. So I decided that an “Eight Rhyme Challenge” for children in early years settings would be a great opportunity to get the “rhyme ball” rolling.



**Children on a visit to Stourbridge Library**

I sent an invitation to all early years settings and childminders in the Dudley area, as well as our own “Rattle and Rhyme” groups we have in the library. The initial uptake for registering for the challenge was slow mainly because the email was sent out in the autumn term when settings were practising for Christmas concerts and plays and did not have the time for another event. So we initially had 27 settings signed up for the challenge. I sent out another invitation in the new year, extending the challenge until Easter and had an excellent response with 75 settings registering for the challenge.



**Let's rattle and rhyme!**

Once participants had registered for the challenge, the children set about learning eight nursery rhymes off by heart. They could do any rhymes, as long as the emphasis was on fun. When they were ready to perform their rhymes I asked the settings to contact me to arrange a visit to their local library, to one of our Rattle and Rhyme sessions or a visit from me to their setting to listen to the children.

Most of the children used actions when they recited the rhymes. It was lovely watching their faces full of concentration and some of them sang really loudly. Some nurseries invited the parents and families in to listen to the children too and they were delighted with the event. One grandmother commented, "My granddaughter has thoroughly enjoyed learning the rhymes and I thought the



certificate was a nice idea". It was so good to see the quieter children join in. One parent said, "The Eight Rhyme Challenge has helped to develop my son's speech and given him more confidence". Each child received a certificate and a library sticker for their efforts, which they got very excited about. As a reward for learning the rhymes we read a story together, which was a nice way to end the session and promote the library to the families. For the three childminding groups I visited I gave out community tickets for the childminders who did not have one. These tickets are for nurseries and playgroups so they can keep books for up to three months.

I have made quite a few new friends and contacts through doing the challenge, and several settings are bringing their groups into one of our libraries during the summer term. It was such an enjoyable event and so worthwhile that the Early Years Advisory Team has requested that we repeat it annually. I cannot wait for next year.

\*Reading Magic: How Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their lives Forever, Harcourt, 2001.