

**Play Chants &  
Singing Games of  
City Children**



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# Circle Round the Zero

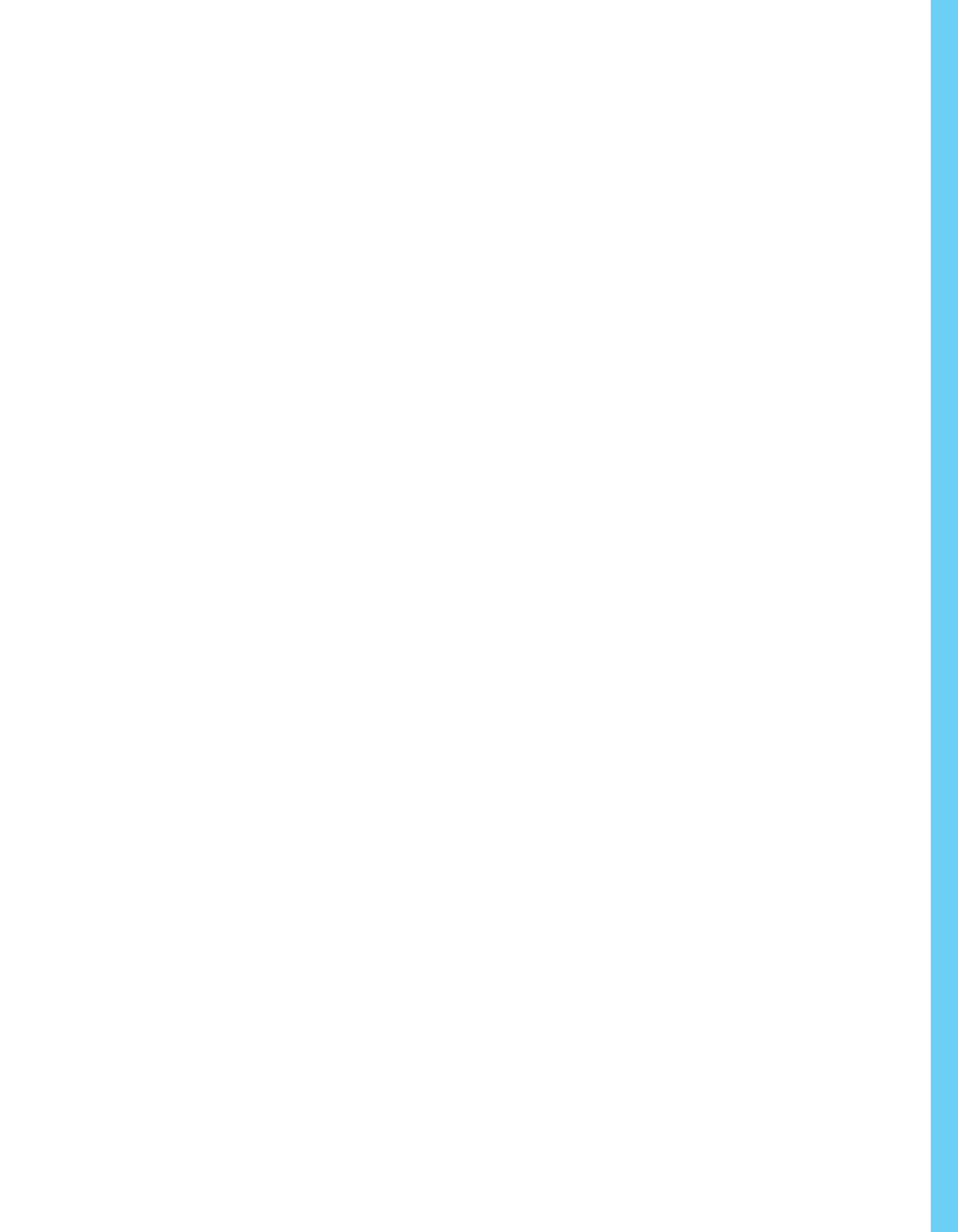


**Collected by Maureen Kennedy  
Illustrations by Robin Reikes**

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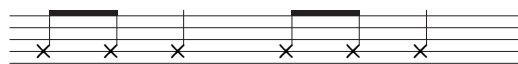




# Jump Rope Chants

The chants in this section begin with spoken rhymes and then are arranged by melodic content - from very simple two- and three-tone chants

to pentatonic songs, to diatonic major and minor melodies. When a chant is mostly melodic but includes small interspersed spoken phrases, the notation continues on the staff with X note heads.



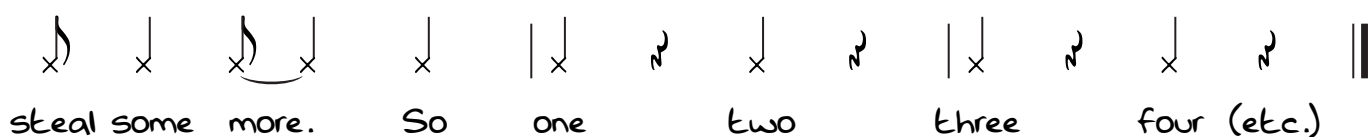
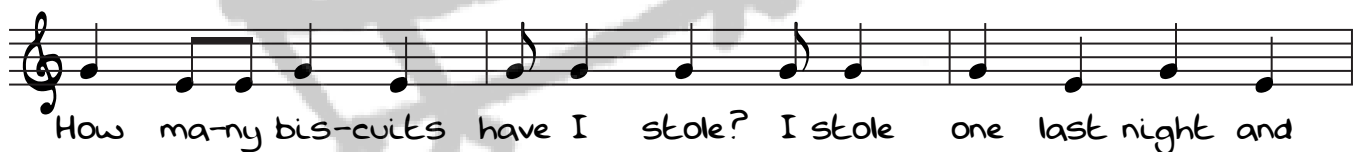
When a chant begins with a tune but ends with several phrases of rhythmic speech or is only rhythmic, the notation is made up almost entirely of note stems, except for the addition of the note head for the half note  $\circ$  to distinguish it from the quarter note  $\times$ .



# TEDDY BEAR

Teddy Bear turns around and touches the ground and does some of the other things we remember from childhood, but in this version he goes on to lament, "Lord have mercy on my soul, How many biscuits have I stole?"

From Alcy School, Memphis, Tennessee.



# Clap Pattern Songs



Wherever I've watched children playing clapping games, I've noticed they seem to do a favorite or "basic" clap pattern. It is often changed, either by adding to it or by interrupting it for special actions which fit the particular story told in the song.

Curiously, a three-beat pattern (see drawing, page 26) always accompanies a two-pulse song. Almost all songs in American folk tradition are in duple meter, either 2/4 or 4/4 time. Many rhymes and chants are in 6/8 time, but this meter is basically a duple rhythm with three eighth notes being equal to one beat. Say the nursery rhyme *Hickory Dickory Dock* out loud and see if you can feel it both in 6/8 and 2/4.

Introducing young children to polyrhythms would not be considered seriously by many music teachers. It would be too difficult for them; it would forever discourage them or at least hopelessly mix them up. And yet kids happily combine two meters as they clap and sing their play chants. Of course, it is play, and no one disturbs the natural processes by intellectualizing or "teaching" children what they are already doing so well!

Most often done with a partner, this pattern can be done with three players or any number in a circle. It is often done very fast. When you first try, it seems awkward. Once the pattern is in your muscles, however, you can do it without thinking, and your hands never seem to forget where to go. The same is true of the more difficult patterns included in this section. So it's really not as hard as it might seem to sing and clap two very different rhythms.

*Patschen* is the German word for leg-slapping or knee-slapping. We have no one-word English equivalent. I shorten it to "patsch."



## ALABAMA MISSISSIPPI

*Alabama Mississippi* is the first chant I learned from Tracey, Rhonda, Brenda, Karen, and Ronda, the five little girls who agreed to share their repertoire of games and songs with me at Hartwell School in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Al - a - ba - ma Mis - sis - sip - pi, Al - a - ba - ma New Or -

leans, Al - a - ba - ma, num - ber one, you're gon - na

work it, work it, work it, Work it, ba - by.

Repeat as many times as desired, changing number each time to two, three, etc.

In Memphis I watched children at Alcy School play Alabama, Mississippi. There, the rhythm is more syncopated and the lowered seventh, characteristic of the blues, is added.

Al - a - ba - ma Mis - sis - sip - pi, Al - a - ba - ma

New Or - leans, Al - a - ba - ma, num - ber one, you're gon - na

work it, work it, work it, Work it, ba - by.

## CONCENTRATION



Con-cent-ra-tion, let-ter A, May I re-peat the let-ter A,



Al-ice be-gins with let-ter A.

And so on, through the alphabet, until player either misses a bounce or can't think of a name in time to say it on a beat.

## A MY NAME IS ABBIE

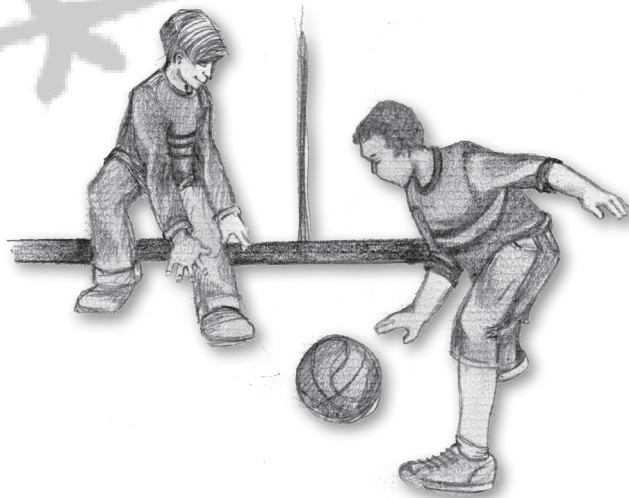


A my name is Ab-bie, My hus-band's name is Al- bert, We



come from Al-a-ba-ma, With a bas-ket-ful of ap-ples.

Player's leg must go over the ball on every "A" word. He may continue until he misses a word or the ball.





## BUBBLE GUM

Bub - ble gum, bub - ble gum in the dish,

How ma - ny pie - ces do you wish?

This rhyme is related to the jump rope chant, *Jellyfish* ("Jellyfish, jellyfish, in the dish..."). Each time around, the player pointed to at "wish" is eliminated.

## EENIE, MEENIE, GYPSA LEENIE

Ee - nie, mee - nie, gyp - sa - lee - nie, Oo ah um - ba - lee - nie,

A - chie, ca - chie, Li - ber - a - ce, How are you?

Played in a circle with the three-pulse clap pattern described on page 26, each time faster. Children must drop out if they miss a clap. The last one left is the winner, or "It."

Remembered from her childhood by Deborah Williams (a variant of *Thumalina*, page 49).

**My mother baked a cake,**  
 How many eggs did it take?  
 1 2 3 etc.

## COOM-A-LOT-EE

Call and response chants are what the name implies; each phrase is sung first by a leader and then echoed by the group. This form may be the most direct link to African song tradition in which chanted phrases are introduced by a solo singer.

The musical score is written in 2/4 time and consists of seven staves of music. The lyrics are as follows:

Flee, Flee fly, Flee fly flow.

Vish-ka, Coom-a - lot - ee coom-a - lot - ee coom-a - lot - ee

vish - ka. Oh no, oh no no vish - ka.

Es - ka mee-nie, so - la mee-nie, Oo ah, oo ah na mee-nie,

Ee skid - dle - ee oat - en doat - en, Oo ah oo

ah na an choo!

Taught to Chris and Justin Kenney by Brian Almeida of Fall River, Massachusetts, who learned it at summer camp. It is done to the accompaniment of a patsch-clap ostinato.

## Elimination Games

### T - Telephone

The object of the game is to think of a new word beginning with the last letter of the previous word. Each letter or word is chanted with a four-pulse ostinato or repeated pattern (patsch, clap, snap, snap).

T - Telephone

E - Elephant

T - Tomato

O - Omaha

With several players, each must think of a word on her turn. If she's late or misses the hand pattern, she's out.

### Colors

This game is similar to *T...Telephone*. The first player says two colors (red, red, orange, orange) while doing a patsch, patsch, clap, clap ostinato. The next player must repeat the first player's second color and add a new one (orange, orange, green, green). The pattern is repeated around the group of players. Anyone who repeats a color or can't think of one in time is out.

### Cookie Jar

Who stole the cookies from the cook-cookie jar?

First Leader: Well, Billy stole the cookies from the cook-cookie jar.

Billy: Who me?

All: Yes you!

Billy: Couldn't be!

All: Then who?

Billy: Well, Peggy stole the cookies from the cook-cookie jar, etc.

The game is usually done sitting in a circle with patsch-clap accompaniment. Again if the player is late with a name or makes a mistake in the chant ritual, he's out. Sometimes as the game goes on, speed increases. Numbers can be used instead of names.

## Memory Games

### Going on a Trip

The players sit in a circle. Each player must add another item. (Silly things are fun to add.)

First Player: I'm going on a trip and I'm taking a suitcase.

Next player: I'm going on a trip and I'm taking a suitcase and an umbrella.

etc.

### Telephone

The players sit in a circle. The first player whispers a secret sentence to the person on her right. Each player in turn whispers the same sentence to the next person on the right until the last player, who must say the sentence out loud. The surprise is finding out how much the sentence has changed.



## A TISKET, A TASKET



A tis - ket, a tas - ket, A green and yel - low bas - ket, I



wrote a let - ter to my ma - ma, On the way I lost it, I



lost it yes - ter - day, (clap) I found it a - gain to - day, (clap)



Oh dir - ty dish - rag, I be - lieve I threwed it a - way, Do I be -



lieve I threwed it a - way, Do I be - lieve I threwed it a - way.

"It" skips around outside of circle. At "I believe I threwed it away," "It" drops dirty dish rag behind a player who then becomes "It."

Bluebells, cockleshells  
 Eevey, ivey, overhead.  
 Here comes the teacher with a big fat  
 stick.  
 You'd better learn your arithmetic!  
 One and one are two.  
 Two and two are four.  
 Now it's time for spelling -  
 C A T spells cat.  
 D O G spells dog.  
 Now it's time for music.

(Jumper sings any song while jumping.)  
 1 and 1 make 2.  
 2 and 1 make 3.  
 2 and 2 make 4.  
 Come girls and skip some more.  
 4 minus 1 makes 3.  
 3 minus 1 makes 2.  
 2 minus 1 makes 1.  
 Now our arithmetic is done!

# ***Circle Round the Zero***

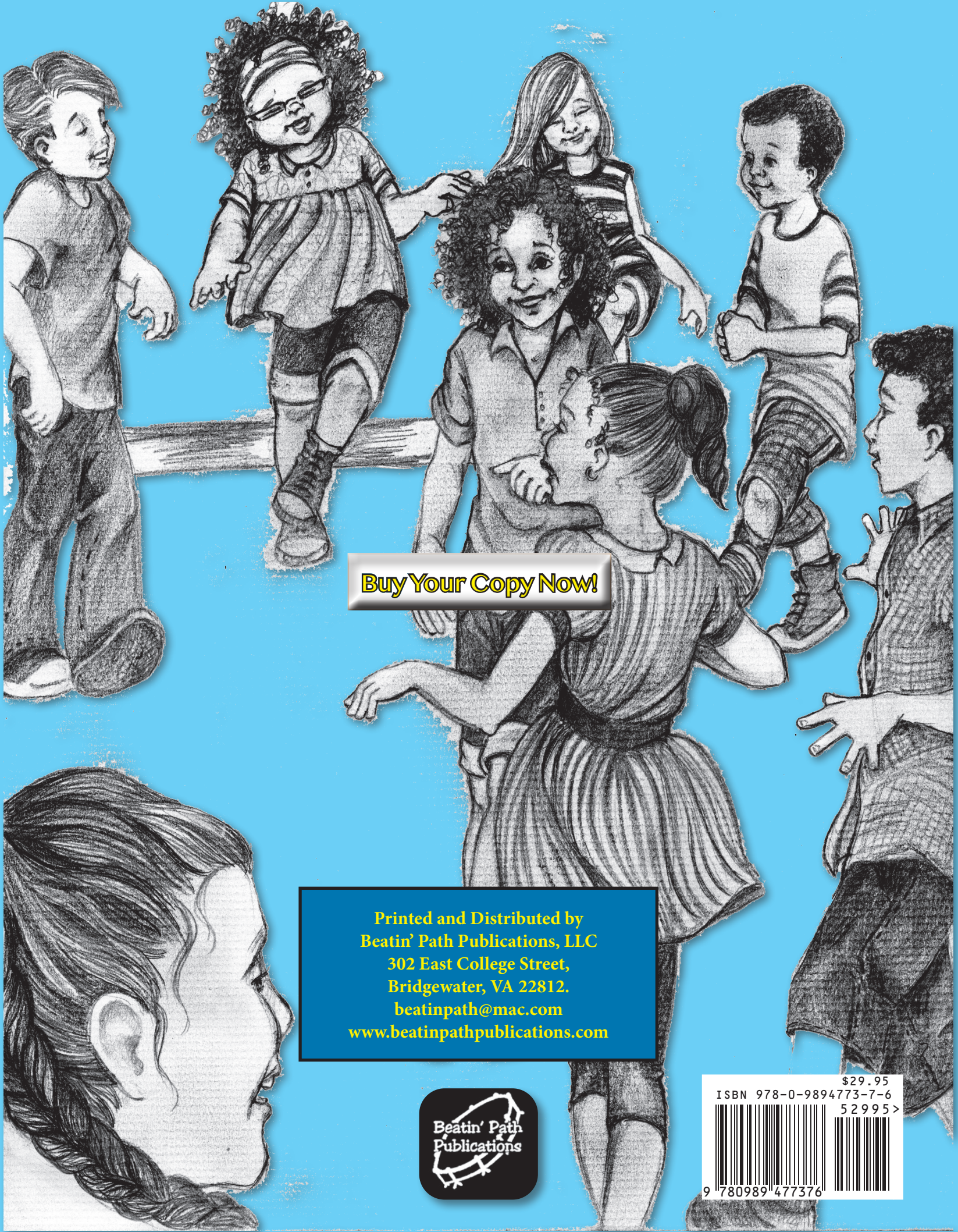
**Songs, games, Jump Rope**

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