



The response to the first number of the A.C.F.N. has been so warm and welcoming that it has reassured us of the value of such a publication, and made us even more determined to make the Newsletter a significant forum for all those interested in Australian children's folklore.

Once again, we invite our readers to contribute material for future issues, and also to pass the Newsletter on to friends and colleagues who might be interested. Any part of the Newsletter may be copied -- with acknowledgement -- including the subscription page at the back! If you have forgotten to send your subscription, please do so as soon as possible -- our postage costs keep rising.

.....

We have had no response to our request for information concerning existing courses on children's folklore in this country -- not surprising, but nonetheless regrettable (not the lack of response, but the lack of courses). As far as we know, there is no tertiary institution in Australia which offers such courses, apart from some components in courses at the Institute of Early Childhood Development.

When will an Australian university or college of advanced education begin to match the considerable intellectual vigour in this field of Scandinavia and Germany, the U.S.A. and to a lesser extent Britain? Perhaps the A.C.F.N. can help to develop a climate of opinion that will make it impossible to ignore the 'underground' world of childhood for much longer.

June Factor
Gwenda Davey
(Joint Editors)

Produced at the Institute of Early Childhood Development, 4 Madden Grove, Kew, Victoria, 3101.

ISSN 0728-5531

If you're visiting Melbourne, pop in to the Institute of Early Childhood Development to see the exhibition of children's traditional play artefacts: knucklebones (sheep of course!), swap card collections, autograph albums, skipping ropes, elastics and marbles -- two glass cabinets full of old and contemporary play materials. The exhibition is in the basement of the Library, and is open Monday and Thursday 9.00 am - 5.30 pm, Tuesday and Wednesday 9.00 am - 9.30 pm, Friday 9.00 am - 5.00 pm.



Greek Speakers, Help Please!

One of the most interesting aspects of the cross-cultural study of folklore for children lies in identifying which genres are widespread in different language groups and which are not. To date, the most popular types of folklore for children I have collected in various languages are *nonsense rhymes*, which I have in Greek, Italian, Turkish, Spanish, Serbian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Dutch and German. Among my favorites are the Macedonian MATSE, translated loosely as

*The cat sits on the chair
With crossed paws.
He's crying
"Ob, my God;
Why haven't I got butter
To smoothe my moustache?"*

A Greek rhyme I collected in Melbourne in 1976 asks "Where shall we put the Bride?"

*It's raining and snowing,
The Priest is shouting
"Where are we going to put the Bride?"
"Under the bed", they all say.
But the mouse finds her there
And bites her nose.
So the Priest says
"Run, boys;
Go to the Virgin Mary,
Who has attics and cellars,
And the keys of Paradise."*

Now here's a mystery; at a recent discussion with a number of Greek speaking teachers involved in a bilingual teaching programme in Melbourne, none could think of any Greek *counting rhymes*. Furthermore, there are none in the Folklore Collection at I.E.C.D., despite numerous examples in other languages.

Is there a gigantic repertoire of Greek counting rhymes out there which we don't know about? Or is this not a culturally significant form? Help, please!

G.D.

Second National Child Development Conference

I.E.C.D., MELBOURNE

AUGUST 18 - 21, 1982

This Child Development Conference is the second in a series of National Conferences to be held in Australia on a biennial basis. The first conference was held at the University of Western Australia in August 1980, and attracted over thirty research papers and provided several keynote addresses from major Australian researchers. The proceedings were published early in 1981 in a volume entitled "Advances in Child Development".

Guest Speakers: Professor Jerome Kagan,
Dr. Philip Dale,
Dr. Dante Cicchetti.

Three themes have been selected to provide three concurrent sessions during the major paper-presentation programmes of the Conference.

a) Early Development from Birth to Eight Years.

Conveners: Dr. Beryl McKenzie,
Dr. Toni Cross.

b) Social influences in Child Development.

Convener: Prof. Jacqueline Goodnow.

c) Children with Special Needs.

Convener: Dr. Fred Perry.

It is proposed to organise a session on children's lore and language during the conference, as part of the theme 'Social Influences in Child Development'. Abstracts for papers are requested by April 30 (no more than 500 words).

Further information may be obtained by writing to the CONVENTION SECRETARIAT,
P.O. Box 29,
Parkville, Victoria, 3052.

SUPERSTITION: Before World War 1



(Mrs. Ethel Beed was born in 1904. She grew up in inner-suburban Sydney, in Newtown.)

The dictionary gives one meaning of "superstition" as "misdirected reverence". Well, I must have been brought up with a lot of misdirected reverence. My mother was very superstitious.

When I grew up I tackled my mother about this. She was a practising Christian and regular churchgoer. I said to her that I thought these two things were incongruous. She replied that of course she didn't believe in these superstitions, but "it was just as well to be on the safe side".

When my sister and I were children we were never allowed to wear a green dress. Green was very bad luck. I've heard my mother say "I've never had a green dress but I've had to put it off for a black one" (mourning). Not being very financial she probably dyed it!

Another thing which was absolutely taboo was cutting your nails on a Friday. I remember on one occasion I was in hospital and the nurse came around to cut my nails on a Friday. I cried, and she made me tell her why I was crying. When I told her she said "what rubbish" and went on cutting the nails. I was so upset, I really thought I would die. I didn't, but I'm sure the worry didn't do me any good.

There were lots of things one shouldn't do on a Friday. If you had an itchy foot it was a sign that you were going to take a journey, but you must never, never, make it on a Friday.

There were many other superstitions that were rife in my home. Don't put shoes or boots on a table or you'll have a row with someone. Don't ever allow knives to be crossed. Don't walk under a ladder. I've read that the ladder superstition arose from the fact that before gallows were invented criminals were hanged from the top of a ladder and their ghosts remained there. I still wouldn't walk under a ladder, but it's because I am afraid that something would fall on me.

We children would say that to see a black cat was lucky, but I've also read that it was considered unlucky. When we saw a white horse we would wet our finger and put a cross on our shoe toe, then we made a wish. If you stepped on a crack it was said you would marry a black man, and if you walked on different sides of a pole with it between you, you would have a quarrel.

If you would like a good day (and who wouldn't?) put your right sock and shoe on first. If you spill salt be sure to throw a pinch over your left shoulder.

If you bite your tongue, it's a sure sign you've been telling lies. It is very unlucky to have 13 people seated at a table. I think the superstition is that one of them will die before you meet again.

I was out at supper recently, and the hostess wouldn't sit down as she had twelve guests.

The wishbone from poultry was lucky. Two had to pull it apart using their little fingers. They each had to make a wish whilst pulling. The one who succeeded in getting the larger piece would have their wish granted, and the other was supposed to tell what he or she had wished.

Ethel Beed

Years of the Disabled:

FOLKLORE AND THE 'IMPERFECT' PROTAGONIST

Folklorists who also keep a weather eye on the popular culture of childhood and adolescence might have been interested in the recent controversy caused by the English rock singer Ian Drury with his song 'Spasticus Autisticus'. The song was banned by some of the British media, but was played on Australian radio and television, and became something of an anthem for some Australian victims of cerebral palsy who adopted Ian Drury as a folk hero - albeit temporarily. Drury is himself a polio victim, and in a television interview in 1981 he stated that his aim in producing 'Spasticus Autisticus' was to confront public fears of the disabled and to encourage more disabled people to 'come out'.

Anglo-Western societies have until very recent times tended to (metaphorically) sweep the disabled - whether mentally or physically handicapped - under the carpet. Segregated institutions kept the disabled away from interaction with the 'normal' population, and written literature or film (whether for adults or children) rarely involved protagonists who were physically or mentally handicapped.

Changes ARE taking place as regards recognition of the disabled, but it is interesting to note that traditional folklore of many nationalities has for centuries acknowledged the fact that there are in most societies some individuals who are 'different' from the norm. During my field collecting for the Multicultural Cassette Series I made the acquaintance of several 'handicapped' protagonists, including some children and young people, and I noted that the significance or function of their disablement varied considerably.

In a popular story of Arabic origin, Queen Zaynab is armless, and she is cast out into the desert by her cruel mother-in-law while her husband the King is away at war. Ultimately, Zaynab has her position - and her arms - restored by divine intervention. Queen Zaynab is clearly a heroic figure, ill-treated for her deformity and defencelessness.

Another physically 'imperfect' protagonist, *Medio Pollito* (Little Half Chick) is by contrast, equally clearly a villain.

In this famous Spanish story, Medio Pollito callously refused help to the fire, the water and the tree, and is punished for his hardness of heart by transformation into a weather-cock on the church steeple. Although I collected this rather grim little story from a Chilean informant not long ago, I also remember it from one of the Victorian State School Readers of my childhood. I always felt rather sorry for Little Half Chick, despite his villainy. Even at the age of seven or eight, it seemed to me that a half-person was entitled to be unpleasant!

A similar Sumatran story called Tondi (Soul) in Alan Garner's book *The Guizer* is also about a half-person. Here the moral lesson of resignation to one's lot is quite clear. 'Oneside' is not punished for this anger (as in Medio Pollito), but is offered a worse alternative by the gods, and so decides to accept his fate.

Keloglan is a bald-headed boy who is a very well-known character in Turkish folklore - almost as well known as the great folk hero Nasreddin Hodja himself. I was offered many Keloglan stories by Turkish adults and children in Melbourne, but none could tell me the significance of Keloglan's baldness. There are other folkloric references to hairless personages, such as the Spanos (baldchin) in Greek folktales or *paramythia*. These 'hairless ones' are sometimes tricksters, but Keloglan appears to have a number of differing characteristics, according to the requirements of the story or anecdote. A Turkish writer who had published some Keloglan stories in Turkey, and whom I met in Germany in 1978, told me that Keloglan symbolises the 'ambitious commoner', and that during the heyday of Ottoman rule in Turkey there were opportunities for a clever but poor young man to rise to power through government service. Keloglan's youthful baldness certainly characterises him as an 'unlikely hero', to use Thompson's classification.



SWAP CARDS:

Rules & Regulations

There is of course a whole genre of what Aarne calls 'Numskull Stories', and no doubt *Simple Simon* would be the best-known English example. In his collection of Italian folktales, the prominent Italian writer Italo Calvino has included some of the numerous Sicilian tales about *Johnny*, a young simpleton who nevertheless emerges triumphant from his misadventures (like wise *Jack and the Beanstalk!*). The element of wish-fulfilment is clearly strong in these 'numskull' stories, where even the most unlikely of heroes or heroines can achieve desirable goals.

Traditional folklore also focusses on the disabled as subjects of humour. Thompson's Motif Index has a substantial category for *Humour of the Disabled*, and it is not long since 'moron' jokes were popular in Australia and other parts of the English-speaking world. It will be interesting for folklorists among others to see whether increasing sensitivity to the needs and rights of the disabled (exemplified, albeit strangely, by Ian Drury's 'Spasticus') will bring about a decrease in this type of folklore. Interestingly enough, the 9000-odd items in the Australian Children's Folklore Collection here at I.E.C.D. contain very few references to any kind of disablement - despite many sexual and scatological references! There are a few 'taunts and insults' using the well-known 'spas' or 'spastic', but almost no *rhymes* referring to disablement of any kind were contributed by the informants, who were children up to 14 years of age. About the only one is a feeble parody of Frere Jacques, 'You are mental', which has a decided one-off or 'home-made' quality. Apart from these examples, disablement is a *non est* in the Collection.

The Year of the Disabled has ended, although unhappily, disablement has not. I would be most interested to receive (and publish in the Newsletter) any comments on my 'few thoughts' above. G.D.

References:

- Aarne, A., *Types of the Folktale* 1973, Helsinki, (c. 1961)
Garner, A., *The Guizer: A Collection of Stories about Fools*. 1980, London, Fontana/Lions.
Thompson, S., *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, 1955, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde & Bagger.
Calvino, I., *Italian Folk Tales*, 1975, London, Dent. (First published in Italian as *L'Uccel Belverde e altre Fiabe Italiane* c. 1956).

How old is the collection and swapping of playing cards? In Australia there is some evidence that it dates back to the early years of this century when packs of cards became widely available on a commercial basis.

What happens: individual children collect (through being given, buying or swapping) a number of picture-backed playing cards which they then arrange in hierarchies of value, theme, scarcity etc. The cards may be kept loose or in albums similar to those used for holding photographs. Usually, some part of a collection e.g. duplicates is regarded as for swapping purposes.

The following rules and terminology were collected in Melbourne in 1981 by Kerrie North.

Rules:

1. Acquired over time. Beginner collectors were easily tricked because they had no idea of the true value of their cards.
2. Generally, new cards were regarded as more valuable than 'oldies'.
3. A rare card was more valuable than a common card.
4. Once a card was swapped it was for 'keeps'.
5. Most collectors aimed for a 'set' i.e. cards of the same kind, or about the same subject, e.g. pictures of dogs, Blue Boy and Blue Girl, etc.
6. Cards could be 'reserved' - bespoke to a particular would-be swapper - and therefore not available for swapping to anyone else.

Contd.

Terminology:

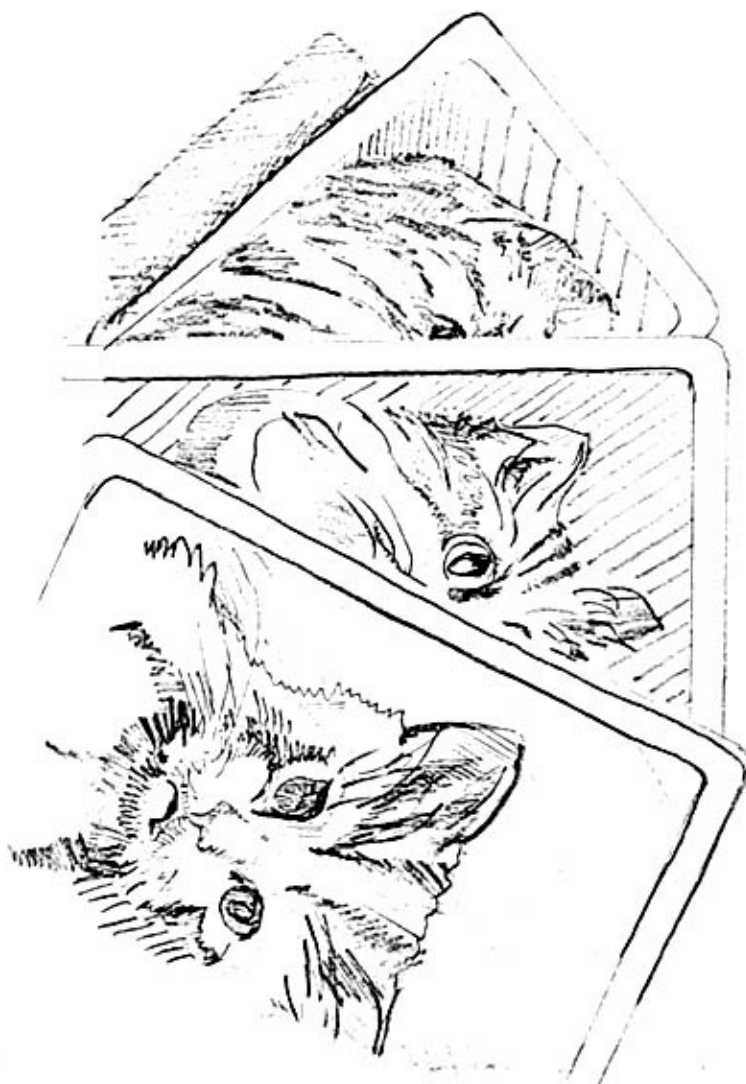
- Pairs* Two cards that belong together because of some common element: colour, opposition, subject matter, rim of the card etc.
- Sets* Three or more cards that are placed together because of a common attribute.
- Swappies* The plural of swap card.
- Keeps* Said by the person who has just obtained a card which is turned over face down and cannot be swapped to any person but the one for whom it was saved.
- Home-made* A swap card which resembles a swap card bought in a shop. It is made by tracing around a normal swap card or a Christmas or birthday card on to a piece of white cardboard. If it is too thin, another piece of cardboard is attached to the back.
- Pack* The collection of cards held in a person's hand. Usually held together by a 'lacka' (elastic) band.
- Uncommon* A card which has fine vertical or horizontal lines running across it. This gives the appearance of a rough surface.
- Four Corners* A swap card which has a number or letter in each corner of the card, totalling four.
- Oldies* A card that is very creased or worn. Any card that has a crease on it may be referred to as an 'oldie'.
- Puppy dog sale* A swap with someone who isn't sure if they really want to swap. Permission might be granted to take the card home and consider the matter. It could be returned but often the reluctant swapper forgot so the swap proceeded.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The detailed description of the game of elastics was written in 1981 by JOANNE DYER, a 10 year old from Adelaide.

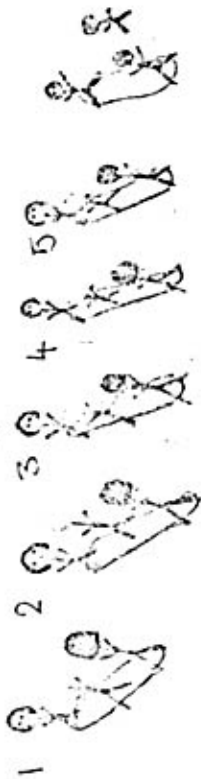
This issue was typed by Sue Brush.

Illustrated by Don Oliver.



Elastics

To play Elastics you need a piece of elastic approximately 4 metres long, which is tied together at the ends to make a loop. Three people are needed to play but you can have as many people as you like to play. Two people stand at each end with the Elastic around their ankles. The remaining person goes in the middle and does the following movements.



You then repeat the action on knees and thighs although you don't have to go on the elastic on thighs. If the person jumping does something wrong they are out, and they take the elastic while someone else takes jumps.

Scissors

Scissors are only done on thighs. If some people can't do thighs then, if the others agree, they may do scissors. A scissor is when you put one leg before the other. It makes it a lot easier.

Skinnies

After you have done ankles, knees and thighs you then do skinnies. Skinnies is exactly the same except the feet are together making it harder.

ELASTICS

By Joanne Dyer

After you have done skinnies you do skinnie-skinies or one. That is the same as well.

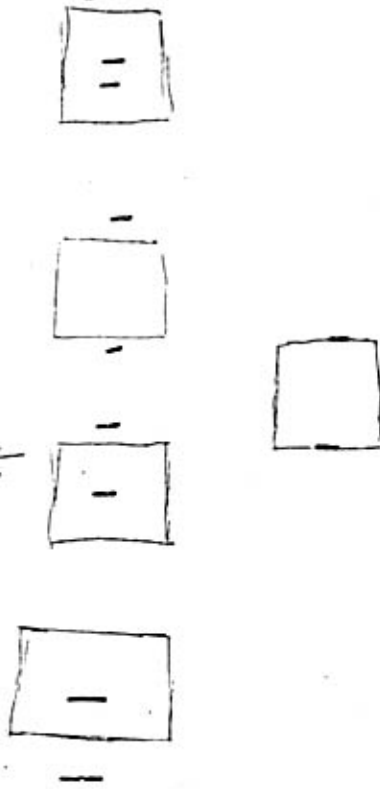
Dips

In skinnie-skinies most people have dips. A dip is when you pull the elastic out before putting your foot down.



After

After skinnie-skinies, there is wides. Wides is where you make the elastic stretched as wide as possible. You then repeat.



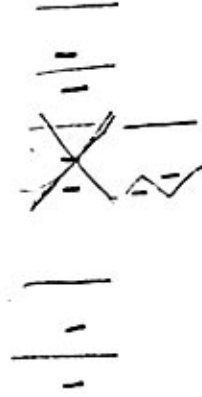
You can pull it in but then you lose the point of wides.

Then you do sevens. Sevens goes like so. 3

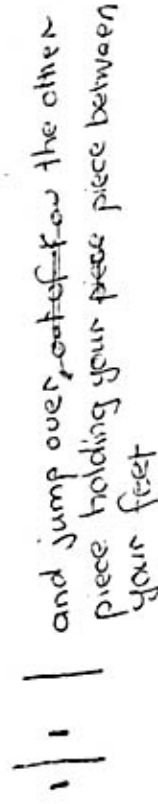


which is repeated in skinnies and skinnies. Then you do running, in which you run in and out of the elastic, walkies, which is walking in and out of the elastic, jumpies or doubles which some people call it, where you jump twice in the start, with one foot in the elastic and go on. Cross-cross is where you jump in the elastic and cross-cross it like

so.



when you go in you go like so



and they jump in and on.



In thights once you are up to this you just jump out

Ending

One eye is jumping with one eye shut, then blind which is blind. Once in the elastic, in blind you must not feel it. The game ends when you like or when someone finishes everything.

Doubles

Doubles is a different game of elastics. You do the same things except 2 people jump at once, being able to hold the elastic down.

Continuous

Continuous is like doubles except when 1 person makes a mistake that person is out and not both. Then another one comes and carries on.

BOOK REVIEW

One of the last publications of the ill-fated Education Research and Development Committee is an important one for people interested in children's folklore. P.L. Lindsay and D. Palmer, two Queensland academics, set out to examine 'the structure and elements of the children's games as they spontaneously erupt in the playground'. With the help of an ERDC research grant they undertook a most ambitious project: to provide a descriptive record of children's games found in Brisbane during 1975-1976.

From a population sample of 10,797 children (one State school was randomly selected from each of the twenty-one electoral wards of Brisbane), they observed 4824 children in game situations -- by far the largest study of its kind in Australia. The report of their research, *Playground Game Characteristics of Brisbane Primary School Children* (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1981 ISBN 0 642 06008 8), is a landmark in the description and evaluation of Australian children's play activities.

Lindsay and Palmer approach some of their research from the perspective of teachers of physical education, but their conclusions, as well as the fascinating detail of the games they record, are of more general interest:

1. Teachers should encourage children to play spontaneous games. The activities provide an environment wherein children can be children and so satisfy their needs for growth and development. They learn to co-operate with one another in achievement of a common goal for, without co-operation, there can be no play and the game can terminate as quickly as it started. Not only is there a bond established between players, but any teacher or person who shows genuine interest in the games is immediately welcome. No better medium exists through which to establish good teacher-pupil relations than in play. A teacher can learn much about children and the way they think by observing them at play in a child's world.

2. Playgrounds should not be divided into play areas on the basis of sex. Children establish their own play areas based upon needs. Sex stereotyping is a thing of the past; children are to be children, unhindered by adult play values.

3. Playgrounds should contain a variety of play areas, viz. open areas, confined areas, walls for ball bouncing, grass-covered areas, artificial surfaces, dirt areas, adventure play grounds, under school areas, inclement weather play areas, shaded areas. The playground is to be regarded as an effective learning environment such that a variety of play experiences is possible.

4. The characteristics of children's play should be monitored so that syllabus planners and construction engineers can keep abreast of the changing needs of children in an everchanging world and can make provision for these in the school environment.

(p.14)

The book contains 147 pages of games, together with photographs and occasional diagrams. The Preface is written by one of the editors of this Newsletter, Gwenda Davey. In it she raises issues concerning sex roles in children's play, the effect of large-scale post-war immigration on the play patterns of Australian children, the nature of the learning that is part of the children's self-selected, self-initiated play, and a number of other matters relevant to this subject. She comments:

Those who would understand children must try to understand all aspects of their reality. For too long adults have believed that theirs was all the insight, all the knowledge and all the humanity. Perhaps at last we are beginning to achieve some humility in the presence of other cultures, including the culture of childhood, and to appreciate the virtues of listening and learning.

Strongly recommended

J.F.

.....

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

2 issues per year

SUBSCRIPTION

NAME:

ADDRESS:

.....

OCCUPATION/POSITION:

SUBSCRIPTION ENCLOSED:

Australian subscribers \$4.00 p.a. including postage

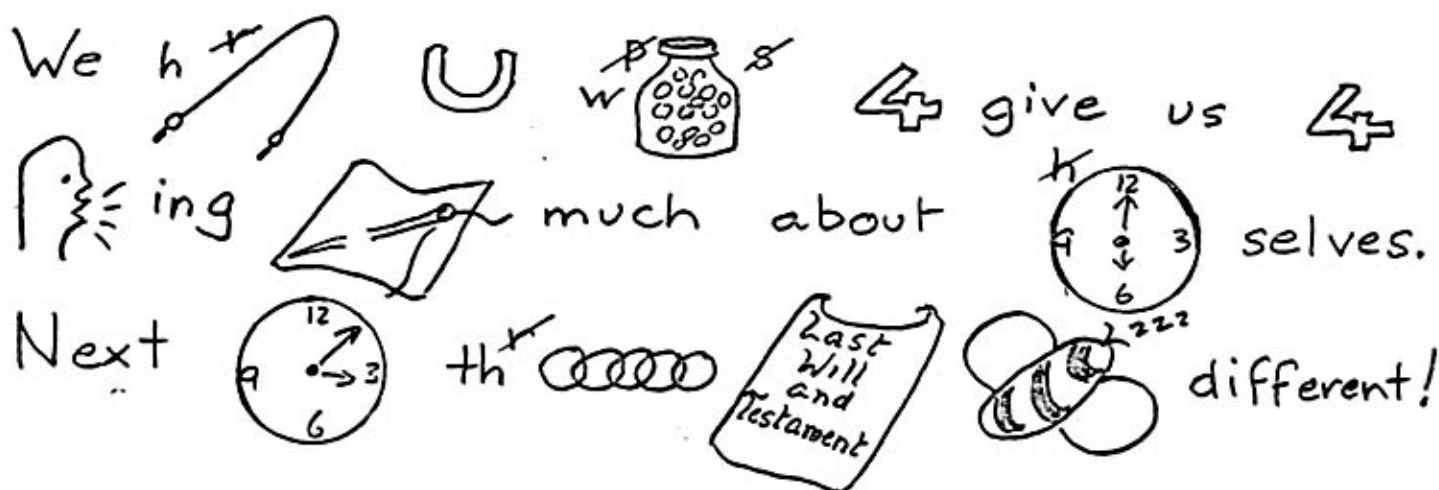
Overseas subscribers \$6.00 p.a. including postage.

SEND TO:

*The Editors,
Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter,
C/- I.E.C.D.,
4 Madden Grove,
KEW, 3101, VICTORIA.*

Comments, suggestions for subsequent issues, etc.

.....



TWELVE AND TWELVE ARE TWENTY-FOUR
SHUT YOUR GOB AND DON'T SAY MORE!