

## Phonetic Symbolism

Words can be fun to say, and there are many invented words, or groups of words, which sound fun and interesting. “Phonetic symbolism” refers to a relationship between the sound of a word and its meaning. Such words are more fun to say than an alternative word. Here are some examples:

- ping-pong                    Noun: table tennis
- flip-flop                    Noun: footwear
- see-saw                    Noun: children’s balancing toy
- fiddle-faddle              Noun: trivial matters, nonsense
- flim-flam                  Noun: gossip
- chit-chat                  Noun: non-important conversation, small talk
- pitter-patter               Noun: the sound of quick light steps or gentle taps
- riff-raff                    Noun: disreputable or undesirable people
- mish-mash                Noun: a confused mixture
- hodge-podge              Noun: a confused mixture
- knick-knack               Noun: a small worthless object
- bric-a-brac               Noun: miscellaneous objects of little value
- zig-zag                    Noun: a line or course having abrupt alternate right and left turns
- sing-song                 Adjective: having a repeated rising and falling tone
- ding-dong                 Noun: an argument, or Adverb: like the sounds of a bell
- criss-cross                Noun: a pattern of intersecting straight lines
- shilly-shally             Noun/Verb: indecisive behavior
- hee-haw                  Noun: the sound of a donkey or mule
- hip-hop                    Noun: a genre of music
- hippity-hop               Adverb: with a bouncing rhythm or motion
- tick-tock                 Noun: the sound of a clock, or Noun: the representation of time passing
- clickety-clack            Noun: a fast rhythmic sound such as train wheels or a typewriter
- dilly-dally                Verb: to waste time by walking slowly (to dawdle)
- hokey-pokey              Noun: deception
- hokey-cokey              Noun: a song and dance for children
- fuddy-duddy              Noun: a person who is old-fashioned, and doesn’t like modern things
- hanky-panky             Noun: improper behavior
- rumpy-pumpy             Noun (slang): sex
- willy-nilly                Adverb: without direction or planning
- nitty-gritty               Noun: the details of a subject or situation
- hurly-burly              Noun: busy, noisy activity
- wishy-washy             Adjective: weak and watery
- argy-bargy               Noun: noisy argument
- razzle-dazzle            Noun: noisy, exciting display designed to impress
- razzamatazz             Noun: same as “razzle-dazzle”
- heebie-jeebies         Noun: a state of nervous fear or anxiety
- tic-tac                    Noun: a small mint
- tic-tac-toe               Noun: a simple game on paper for 2 people

**Exercise:** Use the website [YouGlish.com](https://www.youglisch.com) to hear some real-life examples of these words.

## Children's Nursery Rhymes

Many children's nursery rhymes use phonetic symbolism or word groups that are fun to say. For example:

- Hickory Dickory Dock
- Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo
- Itsy-Bitsy Spider
- Georgie Porgie
- Rub-a-dub-dub
- Skidamarink-a-Dink-a-Dink
- Humpty Dumpty
- Betty Botter
- Diddle Diddle Dumpling
- Hey Diddle Diddle
- Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake
- Wynkyn, Blynkyn and Nod
- Knick-Knack, Paddy-Whack

**Exercise:** Use [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com) to listen to some of these nursery rhymes.