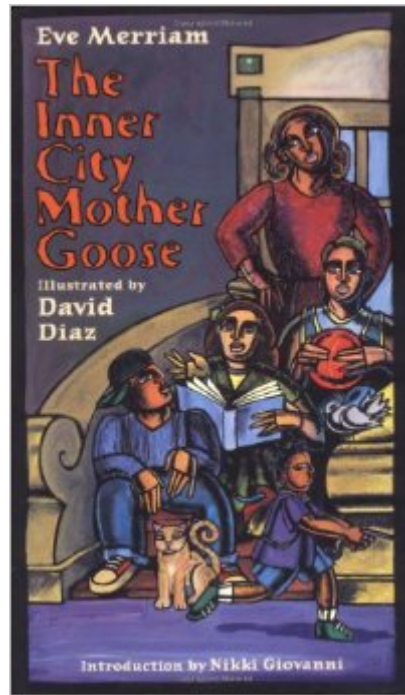


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# The Inner City Mother Goose



## Synopsis

Commenting on political and social issues related to the conditions of the inner city and inner city life, provocative new versions of the classic Mother Goose rhymes, originally published in 1969, are accompanied by new full-color illustrations by the Caldecott Medalist for Smoky Night.

## Book Information

Age Range: 12 and up

Hardcover: 80 pages

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Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.1 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,357,676 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in [Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Collections](#) #208 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Poetry](#) #1362 in [Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Fairy Tales & Folklore](#)

## Customer Reviews

I first heard Eve Merriam's "The Inner City Mother Goose" in 1971, when it was part of the Oral Interpretation performed by Richard Quezada that won the New Mexico State Speech contest. Rick had a wonderful deep voice, the sort that radio DJs would die for, and he made these poems really come alive. Today people get all excited by politically correct fairy tales, but for our generation it was Merriam turning nursery rhymes on their head to reflect the realities of the urban ghetto that were a sign of the times. These are not parodies, but telling satires that take beloved nursery rhymes as their point of departure. Most of the time her starting points are perfectly clear, as with "Simple Simon, "Jack Be Nimble, Jack Be Quick," and "If." Besides, not all of her reference points are nursery rhymes, because you will also see the echoes of Christmas carols (e.g., "Twelve Rooftops Leaping"). Other poems simply are in the general style of children's rhymes, albeit with more serious intent (but then remember, "Ring Around the Rosie" was about the Black Death). The language of some of these poems was shocking back in 1969, but, of course, today these words would not cause a ripple on a rap album. However, what is important is that here we are decades later and do

any of us doubt that the world of which these poems speak still exists? This volume contains the text of the 1982 expanded edition, with a new introduction by poet Nikki Giovanni, and ten full-color paintings by David Diaz. Final Note: You know, the "real" Mother Goose (Elizabeth Vergoose) is buried in Boston's Old Granary Burial Ground, along with the victims of the Boston Massacre, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and Paul Revere. Given her final resting place is amongst the patriots of the American Revolution, no, I do not believe she is spinning in her grave over Merriam's poems.

While the language of Eve Merriam's *Inner City Mother Goose* seems shocking at first glance, it is a very accurate depiction of the happenings in the inner city. As a future educator, I firmly believe that the words in this book can be used to reach these less fortunate children far better than the book's counterpart. Not only did Merriam's book create controversy, but it created a bridge for those who live in that world to those who have not experienced it. The language is depictive of the society, and Diaz's illustrations and use of color illuminate the child's eye view of their world. This book is a required reading for any person who deals with children from this background in order to not only gain a better understanding of the child, but of your own world.

Dubbed a "powder keg" by *LIBRARY JOURNAL* when it was first published in 1969, *THE INNER CITY MOTHER GOOSE* is probably Eve Merriam's most influential, provocative, and controversial book. It was the source of two musical plays, *INNER CITY*, which opened on Broadway in 1971, and *STREET DREAMS*, which opened in 1982, the same year a new edition of the book was released. A third edition, with an introduction by poet Nikki Giovanni, was published in 1996. Like the original Mother Goose rhymes, *THE INNER CITY MOTHER GOOSE* delivers social and political commentary. It is less subtle than Mother Goose rhymes, however. It will take many readers outside their own neighborhoods -- and their own comfort zones -- as it vividly depicts the brutal reality of life in contemporary urban areas: the poverty, the violence, the oppression, the filth, the corruption, the desperation. Still, readers are likely to recognize that they share many dreams with the *INNER CITY* characters: for love, fairness, education, a decent home, gainful employment. Many of the rhymes echo the words and/or the rhythm of familiar Mother Goose rhymes, creating the illusion of playfulness and innocence. Often the last line of a poem takes an unexpected twist that ambushes the reader as if he or she were being mugged on a dark street. Eve Merriam said, "I have been told that *THE INNER CITY MOTHER GOOSE* was at one time the second most banned book in the country. I didn't write it for children. It was never intended to be a children's book. But it has percolated down, certainly to high school and junior high." *THE INNER CITY MOTHER GOOSE*

offers much food for thought and discussion -- from the forms it mimics to the social situations it portrays. Teen and pre-teen readers might need guidance to distinguish between a lifestyle described and a lifestyle endorsed.

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