the Children's FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

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Counting-out rhymes: A dictionary. edited by Roger D. Abrahams and Lois Rankin. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980, introduction, 243 pp. $17.50.

As advertised, this volume is close companion to Abrahams' earlier (1969) *Jump-rope rhymes: A dictionary*, its origins, too, in a manuscript first compiled in the mid-1960's. Like the earlier volume, Abrahams and Rankin provide a compilation of almost 600 rhymes, alphabetized by first line and cross-referenced by first line to variant forms (though few complete variants of the more "common forms" of the rhyme are included). For each, we find references to similar forms in other genres of children's folklore, to collections, books and journal articles containing references to particular rhymes, and where known, the approximate year and general geographical area of collection. Sources consulted extend beyond the U. S. to the British Isles, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, providing the reader with an extensive and varied bibliography of English-speaking children's folklore.

The shifting focus of the introductions to the two volumes reflects enormous changes in the field over the intervening ten years or so. In 1969, interest lay in historical shifts in children's play patterns, and in historical sources and regional variations in texts. In 1980, we find ourselves negotiating the play frame, and inquiring into the possible psychological and cognitive developmental significance of the forms and the games to which they are linked. What's missing, of course, goes beyond the task at hand ("to give order to a mass of items of childlore in English") and highlights the limitations of much of the currently available material on children's counting-out. With only the isolated texts, Abrahams himself has some difficulty deciding whether to characterize these rhymes as a way of moving into a game frame (as ways of "making complex the simple activity of getting into play") or whether they are more properly viewed as games in themselves (as Goldstein's 1971 study strongly suggests). We now have a useful compilation of available textual materials, but it seems we still don't know much about how, when and why they are employed by children. The sources here cannot directly support inquiry into many of the types of questions folklorists are currently asking, but they do help define the problem.

Linda A. Hughes

Abrahams, R. D. (Ed.) *Jump-rope rhymes: A dictionary*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1969

Goldstein, K. S. Strategy in counting-out. In E. M. Avedon & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), *The study of games*. NY: Wiley, 1971, 167-178.