

The Counting House

A PLAY FOR EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN
BY NORA LOUISE SYRAN
FOR A CAST OF 11+

The children form an ensemble on stage the entire play, playing various roles. Costumes can be late 19th/early 20th century or modern day; props can be real or mimed.

Teacher: *Four and Hickory*

Dickery, six and seven

Alabone, Crackabone

Ten and Eleven

Spin, spun

Muskidun

Twiddle 'em, twaddle 'em

Twenty-one

(The students don't understand a thing and scratch their heads etc.)

Students: Multiplication is vexation

Division is as bad;

The Rule of Three doth puzzle me,

And Practice drives me mad.

(The bell rings and they begin to play: hopscotch, jump rope etc)

All: One, two, buckle my shoe

Three, four, knock at the door

Five, six, pick up sticks

Seven, eight, lay them straight

Nine, ten, a good fat hen.

(All think: "look at the audience" then say)

All: TEN!

(Ten children move about in a circle as if they are Pirates.)

All: One little, two little, three little Pirates
Four little, five little, six little Pirates
Seven little, eight little, nine little Pirates
Ten little Pirate boys (and girls!).

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: NINE!

(Nine children line up in a row.)

9 Sailors: When I was nine, I learned to dine
going over the sea.
I jumped aboard a sailor-man's ship
and the sailor-man said to me
Going over, going under
Stand attention like a soldier
With a one, two, and a three

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: EIGHT!

(Eight Milk Maids gather and gossip. "Mary" mimes eating cherries.)

8 Milk Maids: One, two, three, four
Mary at the kitchen door.
Five, six, seven, eight

Eating cherries off a plate

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: SEVEN!

(All the children enact the following nursery rhyme. If possible, eight Milk maids, seven wives, seven cats...grouped center stage at different levels if possible. Lines divided as the director feels appropriate.)

All: As we were going to St. Ives,
We met a man with seven wives,
Each wife had seven sacks,
Each sack had seven cats,
Each cat had seven kits;
Kits, cats, sacks, and wives,
How many were going to St. Ives?

All think: "look at the audience" then say:

All: SIX!

(6 children "swim" about like ducks in a circle.)

All: Six little ducks that I once knew
Fat ones, skinny ones,
Fair ones, too
But the one little duck
With the feather on his back
He led the others
With a quack, quack, quack

Little Duck: Quack, quack, quack,

Quack, quack, quack

All: He led the others with a

Little Duck: Quack, quack, quack

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: FIVE!

(5 children jump up and down like monkeys. A Doctor stands on one side, a Mommy on the other.)

All: Five little monkeys jumping on the bed

One jumped off and bumped his head

Mommy called the doctor and the doctor said:

Doctor/Mommy: "No more monkeys jumping on the bed!"

All: Three, four

Shut the door!

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: FOUR!

(Four girls seek a bird's nest. A little boy counts on his fingers.)

Four Girls: Elizabeth, Elspeth, Betsy, and Bess,

We all went together to seek a bird's nest;

We found a bird's nest with five eggs in,

We all took one, and left four in.

A Little Boy: Huh?

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: THREE!

(Three fiddlers gather around a King.)

All: Old King Cole was a merry old soul
And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe,
And he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three
And every fiddler, he had a fine fiddle
And a very fine fiddle had he.

Fiddlers: "Twee tweedle dee, tweedle dee," went the fiddlers.

All: Oh, there's none so rare
as can compare
With King Cole and his fiddlers three

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: TWO!

(Two children enter as cats. They pose and begin to "fight".)

All: There were once two cats of Kilkenny.
Each thought there was one cat too many;
So they fought and they fit,
And they scratched and they bit,
Till, excepting their nails,
And the tips of their tails,
Instead of two cats, there weren't any.

(The Cats look up in shock and "disappear")

(All think: "look at the audience" then say:)

All: ONE!

(Lines divided as the director feels appropriate.)

All: If all the seas were one sea

What a great sea that would be!

And if all the trees were one tree

What a great tree that would be!

And if all the men were one man,

What a great man he would be!

And if all the axes were one axe,

What a great axe that would be!

And if the great man took the great axe,

And cut down the great tree,

And let it fall into the great sea

What a splish-splash that would be!

(The students begin to play again: hopscotch, jump rope etc.)

All: Eleven, twelve, dig and delve

Thirteen, fourteen, maids a-courting

Fifteen, sixteen, maids a-kissing

Seventeen, eighteen, maids a-waiting

Nineteen, twenty/

(They drop their jump ropes, games etc)

All: I've had plenty!

END OF PLAY