



Music has the power to engage all the emotions – from excitement to relaxation, from tears to laughter. But why does it have such power over us? The clue lies in babies.

The word *lullaby* has been in English since the Middle Ages. It's one of several, such as *rockaby* and *hushaby*, which show how generations of mothers have helped their children fall asleep through music.

- 5 Babies can hear in the womb about two months before they're born. Newborns prefer their mother's voice to that of a stranger. And they show preferences in music too. One research study played the same tune to a group of mothers every day throughout pregnancy; another group of mothers didn't hear the tune. When all the babies were born, their heart-rate was monitored while the tune was played to them. Only the 'musical' babies reacted to the tune.
- 10 There's something special about the music of the voice. From the moment a baby is born, the mother talks to it in an unusual way. Her voice ascends and descends from very high to very low – almost like singing in speech. And infants soon copy. You can hear them trying to sing from around nine months of age.

Melody, of both speech and music, is especially

- 15 significant. In another study, infants were shown pictures of their mother while she was singing and while she was speaking. They looked for longer at the singing one.

Singing also simplifies vocal behaviour: words tend to

- 20 be shorter, sounds are clearer and repeat more often, and they often rhyme. Nursery rhymes work so well because they combine these effects – clear rhythm, repeated sounds and rhyme. In the music of speech lies the foundation of poetry.

## Glossary

**clue** (*noun*) – a piece of information that helps you to understand something

**monitor** (*verb*) – to regularly check something

**stranger** (*noun*) – someone who you do not know



## Warm up

- 1 Complete the nursery rhyme with the words in the box. Do you know this rhyme?

all   blows   fall

Rock-a-bye baby on the tree top,  
when the wind \_\_\_\_  
the cradle will rock,  
when the bough breaks  
the cradle will \_\_\_\_,  
down will come baby,  
cradle and \_\_\_\_.

- 2 Can you remember any nursery rhymes in your language? What are they?

## Reading

- 1 Read the text. Which sentence is the best summary?
  - a Music and poetry are linked.
  - b We are affected by music from a very young age.
  - c Babies are more sensitive to music than adults.
  - d Lullabies are an English invention.

- 2 Read the text again. What do these words refer to?

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 it (line 2)   | 5 them (line 12) |
| 2 It (line 3)   | 6 one (line 18)  |
| 3 that (line 6) | 7 they (line 21) |
| 4 it (line 11)  | 8 they (line 22) |

- 3 Which of the facts in the text do you think are the most interesting? Compare your ideas with a partner.

## Language focus

Look at the words in the box and put them into two groups: *music* or *babies*. Then translate them into your language.

born   infant   melody   musical   nursery  
pregnancy   rhyme   singing   tune   womb

## Speaking

Work in pairs and ask each other these questions.

*When you were a child ...*

- did your mother or father sing to you? What songs?
- did you have a favourite record or group? What was it?
- did you play an instrument? Which one?
- did you have music class at school? Did you enjoy it?
- did you use to sing? What songs?