



DECEMBER 2014

A Nursery Rhyme in the Round

Albert A. Southwick | *Child's Cup, "Old King Cole"*



VISIT THE BMA
and see the Old
King Cole cup in the
American Wing.

Albert A. Southwick (American, 1872–1960).
Manufacturer: Tiffany & Company (1853–
present). Detail, *Child's Cup, "Old King Cole."*
c.1905. Sterling silver. 3½ x 3 inches.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase
with exchange funds from Gift of Michael
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*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....*

Little children love the rollicking sounds of nursery rhymes. A book of verses and a comfortable lap to sit on can be one of childhood's greatest pleasures. Mealtimes become more fun when familiar characters from nursery rhymes or other stories appear on a treasured cup or bowl.

The little boy or girl who drank milk from this silver cup was probably born into a well-to-do family that served elegant dinners on silver platters and poured tea from silver teapots. While those platters and teapots might have been decorated with the kind of twisting vines and gorgeous flowers that appeal to grownups, this child's cup was enlivened with pictures of Old King Cole and his fiddlers three.

Silversmith Albert Southwick fit all four characters into a space just three inches tall (see figures 1-4, next page). A bearded Old King Cole sits on his throne, wearing a robe with puffy sleeves and fur collar. Holding his bowl in one hand and the hose of his water pipe in the other, the king has called for his musicians. A curly-haired fiddler takes his place beyond a pillar entwined in vines. He grins as he works his long fingers over the instrument's strings. A second fiddler with short straight hair appears next. He is similarly dressed in a short cape and belted tunic. Finally, a third fiddler, balding with long stringy hair, tucks his fiddle under his chin, closes his eyes, and listens intently to the music.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Use markers to draw scenes or characters from a nursery rhyme or other story on a Styrofoam cup. Make the illustration reach all the way around the cup.

Young children today often drink from "sippy cups" with lids. Compare Southwick's silver cup with the modern Old King Cole sippy cup, pictured at <http://bit.ly/1D3RENS>. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of cup? How is the illustration on the modern cup different from the one on the silver cup?

Study the picture-book illustration of Old King Cole and his fiddlers on page 3, below. Do you think Southwick might have seen that illustration before making his cup? Explain your opinion.

PRINT THE IMAGES ON PAGE 2 & 3 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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1



2



3



4



1



2



4



3

Albert A. Southwick. *Child's Cup, "Old King Cole."*

Manufacturer: Tiffany & Company (1853–present). c.1905. Sterling silver. 3½ x 3 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from Gift of Michael and Anis Merson, BMA 2012.209.1.



King Cole is an illustration by English artist Walter Crane. It is one of many illustrations prepared for *The Baby's Opera*, a book of nursery rhymes set to music. The book was published in 1877 and again in 1900, just a few years before Southwick made his Old King Cole silver cup.

Do you think Southwick might have seen Crane's illustration before he made his cup? Make a list of their similarities and differences. Pay close attention to the figures' clothing and hairstyles as well as the angle of their fiddles and the position of their fingers. Notice the location of the king's bowl and the details of the throne, floor, and background. How is Crane's composition suitable for a flat piece of paper? How is Southwick's arrangement of figures suitable for a round cup?

Walter Crane. *King Cole*.

From *The Baby's Opera: A Book of Old Rhymes with New Dresses* by Walter Crane (1845–1915).
Originally published 1877.
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