

## The big ship sails through the alley : Teacher's Notes

This is a traditional, and very popular action song for older children. It is ingenious and intricate, hard to describe but fun to play.

Age : 6 +

Number of children : any

1. The children form a long line, holding hands. One of the end children rests his hand against a wall to form an arch. The child at the other end leads the line under the arch, and everybody starts to sing.
2. As the last child goes through the arch, he twists the first child's arms so that they are crossed against the wall. The last child now stands next to the first child, and puts his hands on the wall to form another arch.
3. There are now two arches. The line of children come back under them and the last child to go through forms another arch and so on. The first verse is repeated until all children have crossed arms.
4. The children now form a ring, holding hands with arms still crossed. For verse two everybody shakes their head gravely. For verse three the ring squats down and rises up again keeping arms crossed. For verse four, everybody bends their heads as low as possible.

## History :

The rhyme and song was often sang by children playing skipping games, the lyrics suited the ritual chants for children 'jumping in' the skipping ropes. Perhaps the term 'big ships' provide a clue to the origins. The Manchester Ship canal was opened in 1894 and is the eighth-longest ship canal in the world, being only slightly shorter than the Panama Canal in Central America. The MSC was built for ocean-going ships - there were only six ships in the world too big to use the Ship Canal. These big ships started their journeys on the canal which led to the sea. The Manchester Ship Canal connected Manchester, W England, with the Mersey estuary at Eastham, Birkenhead. Perhaps this is the origin of the song...