

# I SAW ESAU: OPIE AND SENDAK'S CELEBRATED CLASSIC



*First published in an illustrated hardcover edition in 1992, with U.S. sales of more than 100,000 copies,*

*I Saw Esau: A Schoolchild's Pocket Book—edited by renowned English folklorists Iona Opie and the late Peter Opie, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, and published by Candlewick Press—met with instant and extraordinary acclaim.*

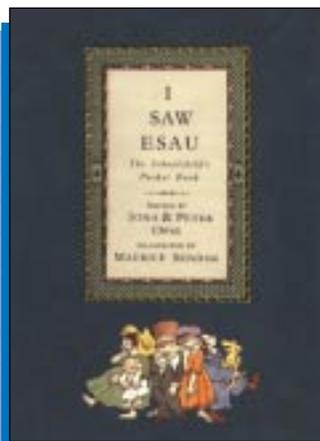
## The culture of childhood

"From lamentation, pun, and insult to rebuttal, tongue-twister, and comic complaint," said *Booklist*, "these schoolyard folk rhymes are vulgar, absurd, fierce, and utterly compelling. . . . This splendid anthology makes us love words and know their power." *Publishers Weekly*, in a boxed review, applauded "Sendak at his finest." The *Boston Globe* called the illustrations "brilliant threads . . . weav[ing] the universal lore and intriguing language of children into a rich, colorful tapestry that celebrates the culture of childhood."

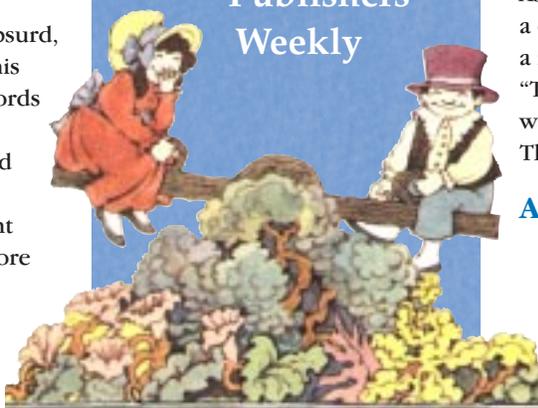
## In Sendak's illustrations, the child always wins

Although he had not—at the time the project was presented to him—collaborated for many years, Maurice Sendak jumped at the chance to work with Iona Opie. The book, he says, "seemed to summarize in a way, poetically, everything I believed in about children and always have."

In her introduction, Iona Opie notes that "in Maurice Sendak's pictures, the child always wins." After all, she says, these selections are "not rhymes that a grandmother might sing to a grandchild on her knee. They have more oomph and zoom; they pack a punch. . . . They pass from one child to another without adult interference." Roger Sutton affirms this in an editorial in *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*: "Sendak knows the



"Sendak at his finest."  
—Publishers Weekly



heart of these rhymes, the subversive passions that feed them, and the important part they play in the rebellion necessary to independence."

## Warding off frightening things

Some adults may find all this nose-thumbing unsettling. But in *Child* magazine, Betsy Hearne, Ph.D.—author of *Choosing Books for Children*—argues that folk rhymes like "Tell her! Smell her! Kick her down the cellar!" and the other delicious insults, retaliations, riddles, taunts, and tongue-twisters in *I Saw Esau* offer "a necessary release of tension, an escape valve from the enormous value system imposed on kids."

As Sendak sees it, the rhymes speak to a child's frustration and fear of being a miniature person in a big world. "These enchantments," he says, "are a way of warding off frightening things. They lull a child into a sense of safety."

## A feast of laughter

"Now, with Sendak illustrations," says Opie, "the book is more than ever a declaration of a child's brave defiance in the face of daunting odds. . . . The best antidote to the anxieties and disasters of life is laughter; and this children seem

to understand almost as soon as they are born. If laughter is lacking, they create it; if it is offered them, they relish it. Here in this book is a feast of laughter."

It's a feast that has brought many to the table. *I Saw Esau* was named a *New York Times Book Review* Notable Book of the Year, an ALA Notable Children's Book, a *Booklist* Editors' Choice, and a *Parenting* Reading Magic Award Winner. It won a *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* Blue Ribbon and a Parents' Choice Award. *School Library Journal* called it "a notable event in book publishing." Now in paperback, this classic little volume is available to an even wider audience—a notable event indeed.



CANDLEWICK PRESS  
2067 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140



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