

START

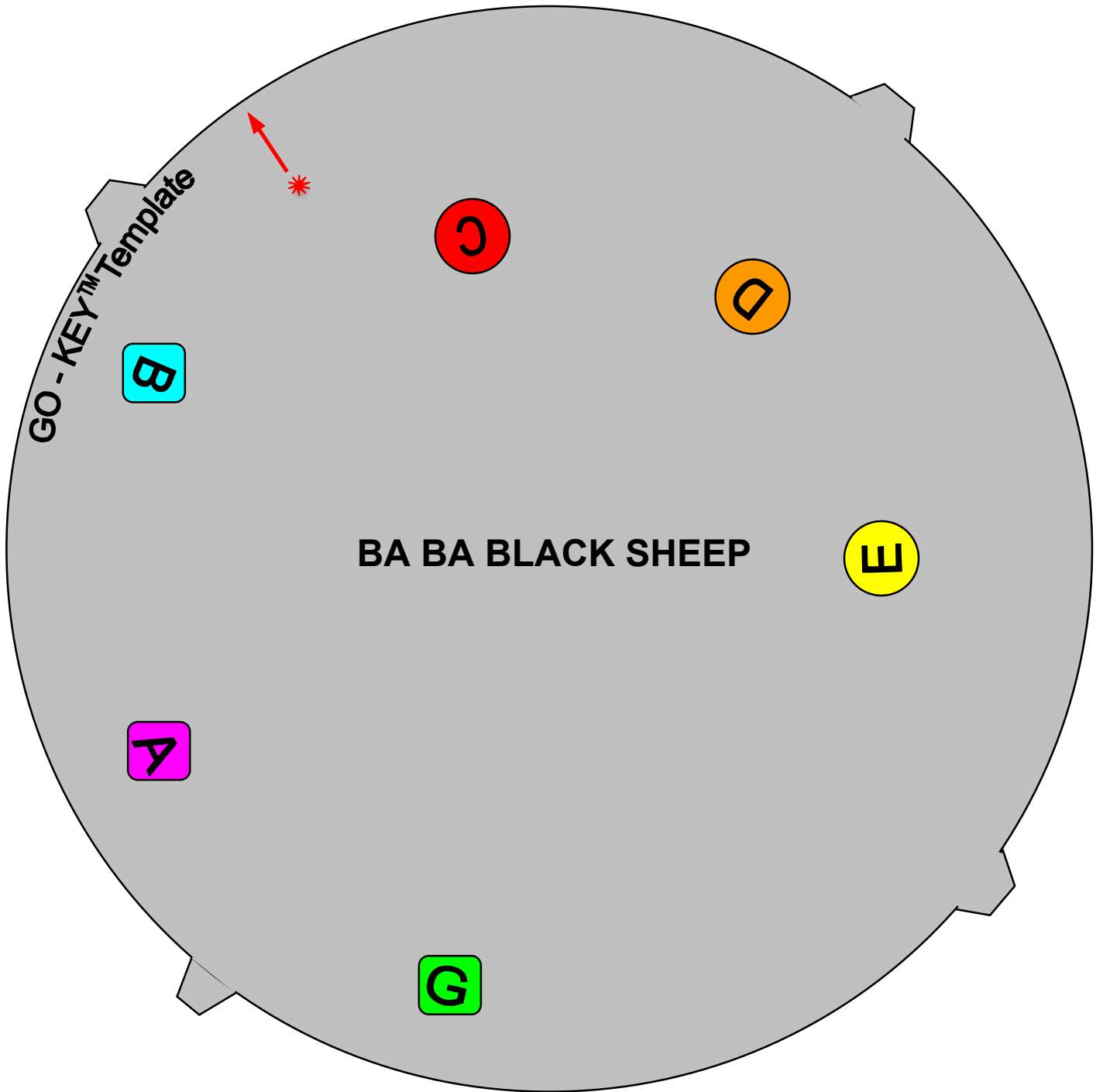
G	G	D	D	E	E	E	D	C	C	B	B	A	A	G
BA	BA	BLACK	SHEEP	HAVE	YOU	ANY	WOOL	YES	SIR	YES	SIR	THREE	BAGS	FULL
D	D	D	C	C	C	B	B	B	A	A	D	D	D	
ONE	FOR	MY	MASTER	AND	ONE	FOR	THE	DAME	AND	ONE	FOR	THE		
C	D	E	C	B	A	A	G	END						
LITTLE	BOY	WHO	LIVES	DOWN	THE	LANE								

The rhyme for this song "**Ba Ba Black Sheep**" was first printed in Tommy Thumb's *Pretty Song Book*, the oldest surviving collection of English language nursery rhymes, published c. 1744 with the lyrics very similar to those still used today:

Original Lyrics

Bah, Bah, a black Sheep,
 Have you any wool?
 Yes merry have I,
 Three bags full,
 Two for my master,
 One for my dame,
 None for the little boy
 That cries in the lane.

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History and Origin

"Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" is an English nursery rhyme, the earliest surviving version of which dates from 1731. The words have not changed very much in two-and-a-half centuries. It is sung to a variant of the 1761 French melody *Ah! vous dirai-je, maman*. Uncorroborated theories have advanced to explain the meaning of the rhyme, such as that it is a complaint against taxes levied on the Medieval English wool trade. In the twentieth century it was a subject of controversies in debates about political correctness. It has been used in literature and popular culture as a metaphor and allusion. The Roud Folk Song Index classifies the lyrics and their variations as number 4439.

The rhyme is a single stanza in trochaic metre, which is common in nursery rhymes and relatively easy for younger children to master. The Roud Folk Song Index, which catalogues folk songs and their variations by number, classifies the song as 4439 and variations have been collected across Great Britain and North America.

The rhyme is usually sung to a variant of the 1761 French melody *Ah! vous dirai-je, maman*, which is also used for "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and the "Alphabet song". The words and melody were first published together by A. H. Rosewig in (Illustrated National) Nursery Songs and Games, published in Philadelphia in 1879.

Illustration for the rhyme from *Mother Goose's Melody*, first published in 1765

As with many nursery rhymes, attempts have been made to find origins and meanings for the rhyme, most which have no corroborating evidence. Katherine Elwes Thomas in *The Real Personages of Mother Goose* (1930) suggested the rhyme referred to resentment at the heavy taxation on wool. This has particularly been taken to refer to the medieval English "Great" or "Old Custom" wool tax of 1275, which survived until the fifteenth century. More recently the rhyme has been connected to the slave trade, particularly in the southern United States. This explanation was advanced during debates over political correctness and the use and reform of nursery rhymes in the 1980s, but has no supporting historical evidence. Rather than being negative, the wool of black sheep may have been prized as it could be made into dark cloth without dyeing.

In the next surviving printing, in *Mother Goose's Melody* (c. 1765), the rhyme remained the same, except the last lines, which were given as, "But none for the little boy who cries in the lane".

A controversy emerged over changing the language of "Baa Baa Black Sheep" in Britain from 1986, because, it was alleged in the popular press, it was seen as racially dubious. This was based only on a rewriting of the rhyme in one private nursery as an exercise for the children there and not on any local government policy. A similar controversy emerged in 1999 when reservations about the rhyme were submitted to Birmingham City Council by a working group on racism in children's resources, which were never approved or implemented. Two private nurseries in Oxfordshire in 2006 altered the song to "Baa Baa Rainbow Sheep", with black being replaced with a variety of other adjectives, like "happy, sad, hopping" and "pink". In 2012, a private nursery in Kingston upon Thames replaced "black" with "little" for their Easter show. Commentators have asserted that these controversies have been exaggerated or distorted by some elements of the press as part of a more general campaign against political correctness.

In 2014, there was reportedly a similar controversy in the Australian state of Victoria.

The rhyme has often been raised in literature and popular culture. Rudyard Kipling used the rhyme as the title of a semi-autobiographical short story he wrote in 1888. The name Black Sheep Squadron was used for the Marine Attack Squadron 214 of the United States Marine Corps from 1942 and the title *Baa Baa Black Sheep* was used for a book by its leader Colonel Gregory "Pappy" Boyington and for a TV series (later syndicated as *Black Sheep Squadron*) that aired on NBC from 1976 until 1978. In 1951, together with "In the Mood", "Baa Baa Black Sheep" was the first song ever to be digitally saved and played on a computer.