

Why is Winnie the Pooh Called a Pooh?

By [Simon Brew](#) | Jan 16, 2019

Since A.A. Milne published the first official Winnie the Pooh story in 1926, the character has become beloved by children across many generations. Milne's writing clearly struck a chord, and the character's many subsequent [TV](#) and [film](#) adaptations have endeared him to an even wider audience.

But why is Winnie called a *Pooh* rather than a bear? Given that most children (and grown-ups, for that matter) have a different idea of what a *Pooh* is, how has the name stuck?

The answer lies back in the 1920s.

In fact, when first introduced by Milne, Winnie wasn't even Winnie. Initially, he went by the name of Edward Bear, before changing to Winnie in time for that aforementioned official 1926 debut. The "Winnie" part of the name came from a visit to the London Zoo, where Milne saw a black bear who had been named after the city of Winnipeg, Canada.

As for Pooh? Well, originally Pooh was a swan, a different character entirely.

In the book *When We Were Very Young* (the same book that introduced Edward Bear), Milne wrote a poem, telling how Christopher Robin would feed the swan in the mornings.

He told how Christopher Robin had given the swan the name "Pooh," explaining that "this is a very fine name for a swan, because if you call him and he doesn't come (which is a thing swans are good at), then you can pretend that you were just saying 'Pooh!' to show him how little you wanted him."

Milne indeed knew what he was doing by using such a word. The names "Winnie" and "Pooh" were soon brought together, and Winnie the Pooh was born. Milne still took a little time out to explain why Winnie was a Pooh, though.

As he would write in the first chapter of the first *Winnie the Pooh* book, "But his arms were so stiff ... they stayed up straight in the air for more than a week, and whenever a fly came and settled on his nose he had to blow it off. And I think—but I am not sure—that *that* is why he is always called Pooh."

It's not the most convincing explanation, but it's a formal explanation nonetheless.

Not that the reasoning ultimately mattered too much. The name stuck, having never seen a focus group in its life. A much loved childhood character, with a vaguely funny name, would go on to superstardom. And even honoured with his own holiday, Winnie the Pooh Day, which occurs annually on January 18th.