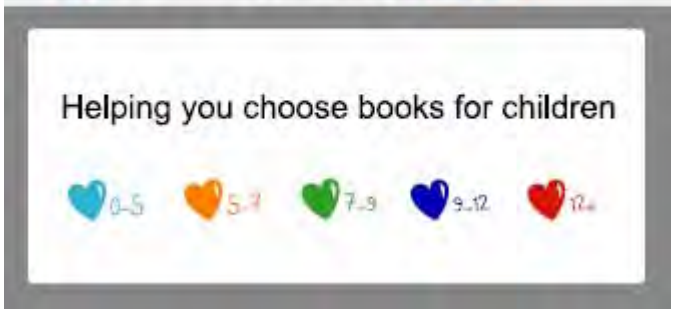
Lovereading4kids.co.uk



Opening extract from

The Ultimate First Book Guide

Edited by

Leonie Flynn, Daniel Hahn & Susan Reuben

Published by

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Contents

Introduction by Julia Donaldson 4

About the Editors 6

About the Consultants 7

0–2 years 8

2–5 years 64

5–7 years 202

Notes on Contributors 306

Acknowledgements 309

Index 316

INTRODUCTION
by Julia Donaldson

I have to confess to a horror of the 'I' word. Not 'I' as in 'me', but as in 'Important'. I hate being asked, as I often am, 'Is it Important to Read to Your Child?' (The capital letters are always there in the tone of the journalist's voice.) Yes, shared reading doubtless does confer all sorts of benefits but, as I hope most of you with this book in your hands will agree, that's not why we do it. We do it because we love it. Also, sometimes, because it's miraculously easy – take one parent, one child and one pile of books; result: total pleasure.

My own love affair with picture books started, at the age of two or three, with some endpapers. I'm sure I liked sitting on my mother's knee, too, and that I enjoyed the story about a duckling who went in search of rain, but I absolutely adored the book as an object, and in particular the endpapers, which had a diamond pattern with alternating pictures of jolly suns and slanting rainfall.

In those days (the early 50s) there probably weren't a lot of books specifically for sevens and under, and we moved quite quickly on to the gory Grimms and heartbreaking Hans Andersen. By the time I had children myself all that had changed, and my love affair could continue. I discovered what a huge variety of stories and styles there were, and how a picture book can be or do almost anything. One night we would be wiping a tear over the realistic Shirley Hughes story *Dogger*, about a little boy with a battered soft toy and a noble older sister; then we would be roaring with laughter over Arnold Lobel's wonderful **Frog and Toad** fables (not so good for bedtime, as my kids had hysterics every time Toad said 'Blah!'); another night we might agonise together over

the questions posed by John Burningham's *Would you Rather...* (well, it *is* hard to decide if you'd rather eat spider stew or mashed worms, or if you'd rather an elephant drank your bathwater or a pig tried on your clothes). There were rhyming texts, quickly memorised; there were factual texts imparting fascinating knowledge about the planets or how wood is made into paper, and some books – like Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* – had no text at all!

Two more decades have passed since then, and the array is even vaster. It can be quite perplexing to walk into a bookshop where there are vast stacks of a few 'three for two' titles, and scores of other titles of which there is only one copy, spine out, on the shelves. How do you decide? One way is to arm yourself with this book. The thoughtful and varied recommendations are made by people who know what's out there and have read countless books to countless children. The descriptions of the books are lively and tempting, and the selections for each age group are interspersed with lots of tips about choosing books, discussing books and reading books aloud. There's also an excellent section for children who are beginning to read themselves and making that transition from picture books to 'chapter books' – though of course that doesn't mean you should stop reading aloud to them. I still read Richmal Crompton's **William** stories to my sons who are in their twenties.

And don't worry – although the contributors are all experts, they are never earnest. Not once did I come across the dreaded 'I' word.

Julia Donaldson

Julia Donaldson

ABOUT THE EDITORS

LEONIE FLYNN is the librarian at a prep school in north London. She combines her work there with editing *The Ultimate Book Guide* (*UBG*) and writing, and sadly finds that there are not enough hours in the day for either of the above. Since the teen *UBG* she has managed to get married and also to find herself collecting cookery books – though there is apparently no correlation between the two.

Since completing *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* with Leonie and Susan, **DANIEL HAHN** has spent a year and a half as editorial director of ICONS, a website commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (a real job!); he has also translated a second Angolan novel and the autobiography of Brazilian footballer Pelé, co-edited a new reference book for Oxford University Press and written a history of north London's Roundhouse. He has continued to work regularly with Shakespeare's Globe and Human Rights Watch, and started making plans to write a new history book, but, umm... hasn't got very far with that just yet.

SUSAN REUBEN co-owns Baobab Editorial and Design Limited (www.baobabltd.com), a company that carries out freelance work for children's publishers. Her recent commissions have covered wizardry, the Bible, and tips for entering the financial sector. Her leisure activities have included clambering around a soft play area in pursuit of a small child and learning to make good chocolate cake. She has a husband called Anthony and a son called Isaac, both of whom are very nice, if a handful at times.

ABOUT THE CONSULTANTS

WENDY COOLING works as a consultant to a range of children's publishers. She was the creator of Bookstart, a national project which aims to encourage parents and carers to read to their children from a very early age and which provides three packs of books to all pre-school children. She has also been chair of the British Section of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People). In 2006, Wendy was given the Eleanor Farjeon Award for distinguished service to the world of children's books.

LINDSEY FRASER was a children's bookseller in Cambridge before becoming executive director of Scottish Book Trust. She is now a partner in Fraser Ross Associates, an Edinburgh-based literary agency and consultancy. She and Kathryn Ross are also the national co-ordinators of Read Together (www.readtogether.co.uk), the Scottish Executive's initiative to encourage parents and carers to share books with their children.

NICOLA MORGAN is an award-winning children's author, writing mainly for (and about) teenagers. A former English teacher and then literacy / dyslexia specialist, she has also written best-selling home learning books for three-to-nine-year-olds, including Egmont's **I Can Learn** series, with her constant aim being to help parents help their children. She founded and runs The Child Literacy Centre (www.childliteracy.com), giving free advice to parents about all aspects of reading and writing development.

KATHRYN ROSS is a former English teacher, independent children's bookseller and deputy director of Scottish Book Trust. Since 2002, she has been a partner in Fraser Ross Associates, an Edinburgh-based literary agency and consultancy. She and Lindsey Fraser are also the national co-ordinators of Read Together (www.readtogether.co.uk), the Scottish Executive's initiative to encourage parents and carers to share books with their children.

0–2 years

Can there be anything more exciting than the arrival of a new baby? And along with the excitement comes worry, and a wish to do the very best possible for the new child. There's so much to think about at first, but do try to find time for reading, talking and singing, as these contribute so much to your child's growing view of the world. Books for babies today are more wonderful and varied than ever before. They offer pleasure to both baby and adult as they're shared, and very soon become an important part of family life. So check out some of the titles recommended in the following pages, and involve everyone in the book sharing – not just Mum and Dad, but grandparents, too, and of course older siblings, who love the grown-up feel of reading to a smaller child.

Don't see reading as quiet time – soon your baby will gurgle and point and try to join in with lifting flaps and turning pages. Later, as language develops, baby will try out the rhyming words at the end of pages, or the animal sounds in the story, and a favourite book will be demanded again and again and again... You may be fed up with it but your child won't be – there are

Special Features

Talk to Your Baby **14**

Sharing Books Right From the Start **22**

Nursery Rhymes **30**

Concept Books **38**

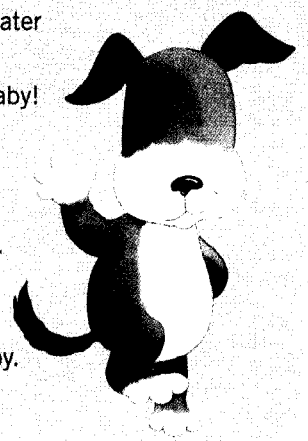
Characters to Grow Up With **46**

Novelty Books **56**

so many new things for babies to take in that they will love and respond to something safe and known.

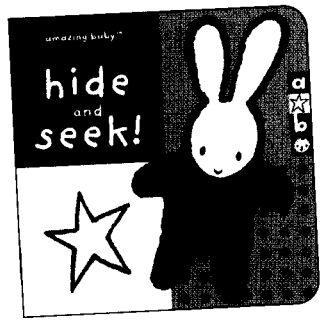
Be comfortable with early book sharing; try a mix of voices if you feel like it and remember that five minutes is sometimes enough for a baby. The time will grow as baby learns to listen and concentrate and to take some part in the experience.

Very young babies will try to turn pages – they're already learning how books work – and this, along with the growing ability to listen and talk, will be valuable later when it's time for school. Learning to read is important eventually, but not for your baby! For now, relax and have fun with books to touch and feel, books full of noises and animal sounds; these can give your child a love of books that will last for ever. The early years pass by all too quickly: enjoy them as you share the wonder of stories, pictures and rhymes with your baby.



Wendy Cooling

AMAZING BABY series



This award-winning series reflects how babies learn and develop in their first two years – from starting to focus on individual objects to imitating sounds and actions and enjoying picture books. If that makes them sound too 'educational', one look at these bright, attractive and robust board, activity and bath books, with their jolly photos of babies, mirrors and foil, textures and shapes, will banish all thoughts of worthiness. The rhyming texts, eye-catching images and novelties have great baby appeal and will intrigue the adults who share them, too.

Kathryn Ross

BABIES Ros Asquith

This first book for babies is just as good for those toddlers who like to shout 'baby!' at every child they see. As the book says, there are big babies and little babies, and all the others in between, including the 'I'll-show-you-who's-boss' baby and the 'Oh-no-not-the-honey!' baby. And, of course, the very best baby appears in a mirror, on the last page.

A lovely, warm book, full of teddies and tickles, and perfect for sharing with a cuddle, it will remind you of all the wonderful things babies do. It's also great for restoring a sense of sanity in an overwrought parent!

Yzanne Mackay

Board Books

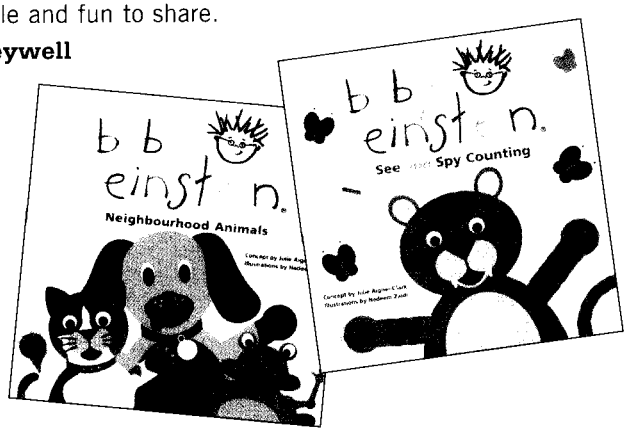
Elmer's Colours by David McKee
Baby Touch Playbook (*UFBG* 12)
Bear in a Square by Stella Blackstone (*UFBG* 13)
Boo Barney by Alex Ayliffe (*UFBG* 15)
Five in the Bed, **DK Baby Fun** series (*UFBG* 26)
Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes by Annie Kubler (*UFBG* 32)
Maisy's Favourite Clothes by Lucy Cousins
What's at the Zoo, Miffy? by Dick Bruna
Number One, Tickle Your Tum by John Prater (*UFBG* 43)

BABY EINSTEIN series

Baby Einstein books are just one part of the **Baby Einstein** empire, which includes DVDs and CDs and a book for interested adults reminding us that Great Minds Start Little. Galileo, Wordsworth, Da Vinci and Mozart are all drafted in to enforce the truth of the motto upon the reader. As the babies and toddlers enjoy the brightly coloured pictures and features such as mirrors and lift-up flaps, adults are given prompts about how to maximise the educational potential. Whether they promote genius or not is debatable but, either way, the books are portable, durable and fun to share.

Antonia Honeywell

■ Among the many **Baby Einstein** titles available are *Colours*; *Shapes*; *See and Spy Counting*; *Neighbourhood Animals*; *Wild Animals*; and *Wheels, Wings and Moving Things*.



BABY FACES Sandra Lousada

Baby Faces is a book for the very young, with its focus clearly on babies and early language. 'Is it a book or is it a toy?' you may ask, and the answer is that it really doesn't matter, as what it does is associate reading, the voice of someone who loves you, with pleasure and fun. The tough, circular pages are securely joined by a braid, which also holds a rattle. Sandra Lousada's stunning black and white photographs – there's a baby on every right-hand page – are a joy to look at, for of course babies like nothing more than seeing other babies. The short text – just 13 words in total – works perfectly, and the whole is a brilliant first book that is quite at home in the toy box.

Wendy Cooling

■ Look out for other books by the same author, such as the **I Love Baby** series, including *Noisy Baby*; *Happy Baby*; *Bath Baby*; *This Little Baby* (the mirror at the end makes every baby giggle!) and *My Nose, My Toes*.

BABY GOES Verna Wilkins, illustrated by Derek Brazell

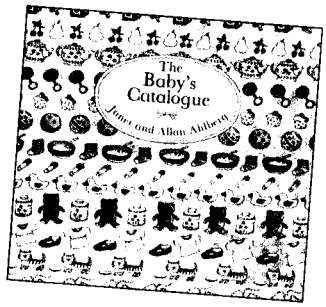
This book of opposites for the very young features babies of various ethnic origins, all beautifully illustrated in bold colours. The rhyming text is one to read again and again, and will ease tiny children into the world of language, and black and white vignettes on every spread support the main, full-colour picture. There's plenty to chat about as you share this book, packed as it is with the normal events of a baby's day.

Wendy Cooling

■ This is one of a series of four small board books that really do reflect the early lives of all our babies. Look out for ***Baby Noises***; ***Baby Plays*** and ***Baby Finds***, too.

THE BABY'S CATALOGUE

Allan Ahlberg, illustrated by Janet Ahlberg



A favourite to give as a present to new parents, this is a catalogue of six babies, and the people, objects and activities that make up their daily routine. There's no story, but the cosy, comic-book inspired pictures, grouped under such headings as Mums and Dads, Dinners, Bedtimes and even Accidents (nothing serious!), provide an absorbing source of familiar things to point at, discuss and laugh about. A simple idea, executed with peerless humour, warmth and quirky observation.

Kathryn Ross

BABY TOUCH PLAYBOOK

This large board book offers hours of fun to one- and two-year-olds. It's packed with bright pictures, intriguing textures, good words – and, yes, a bit of learning, too. Early concepts are introduced in a very relaxed way – I particularly love a page inviting children to feel the rainbow. The language will really help children to know the wonder of words as they move from the fast 'Brrrm! Brrrm!' of the car to the snail creeping 'Slowly, slowly, very slowly' through the garden. There are shapes to touch and explore, and introductions to rhymes and games, animals and more in this friendly, interactive book.

Wendy Cooling

BEAR IN A SQUARE Stella Blackstone

Bear in a Square teaches about shapes in a friendly, storybook way. Each double-page spread focuses on a different shape, with some of the more unusual ones included, such as hearts, zigzags and ovals. As Bear (who is rather dignified, yet charming) takes us through the story, the reader is asked to spot the shapes in each richly coloured scene. The book also acts as a counting exercise from one to ten, with one square to find, then two hearts, three circles and so on. It's ideal for children who know the basic shapes and are ready for something a bit more challenging.

Susan Reuben

■ This is one of a series of books about Bear, which are available in both paperback and board book format. Look out for *Bear About Town*; *Bear on a Bike*; *Bear at Home*; *Bear's Busy Family* and *Bear in Sunshine*.

THE BIG BOOK OF BEAUTIFUL BABIES
David Ellwand

Babies fill the pages of this book of black and white photographs, and they really do live up to the title. The good, rhyming text is based on simple opposites and teaches something about feelings and faces. Sometimes people are upset by the idea of a 'bad baby', but the photograph chosen to represent this reflects happiness – and mess – and the word is introduced with a very light touch.

Ideal for the very young – research has shown that babies are able to focus on black and white before they can focus on colours – this is a book to be enjoyed by babies and adults alike.

Wendy Cooling

Talk to Your Baby

It's never too soon to start talking to your new baby, as **Liz Attenborough** explains.

Talking and listening to babies from the moment they are born helps them develop good language and communication skills, which in turn enables them to listen and express themselves. It also helps them to learn and to develop good relationships.

Most brain development occurs from birth to the age of two, so babies and toddlers need stimulation as much as they need nourishing food. The best way to stimulate babies' brains is to talk to them, listen to them, sing to them, play with them and share books together.

People don't talk to their babies enough these days. Talk to Your Baby (www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk), the early language campaign of the National Literacy Trust, was established to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children aged 0–3. It was started in response to growing concerns from head teachers that too many children are starting school ill equipped in basic communication skills, and are therefore disadvantaged in the classroom. The ability to communicate forms the basis of learning, and is also vital for social and emotional development.

Babies love to communicate. They are born to be sociable, but they can't do that on their own. They need an adult to be sociable with them, to look at them and speak gently to them, touching them and responding to their sounds. Babies need to be able to gurgle and babble back – a dummy should be kept just for sleeping.

A language-rich home helps a child develop in many ways. Talking to babies helps them learn to listen, and gives them the chance to respond and be listened to. Over time, their coos, babbles and smiles will move on to first words and sentences, as they learn to control and use their tongue, soft palate, lips and voice. Interaction helps this natural process along.

Storytelling and reading books aloud are easy ways to have regular, valuable talking time. Storytelling introduces structure and language patterns that help form the building blocks for reading and writing skills. Reading aloud combines the benefits of talking, listening and storytelling within a single activity, and gets parents and carers talking regularly to young children.

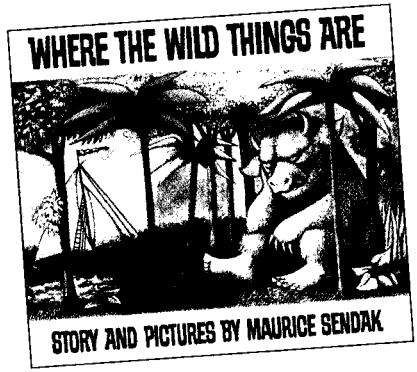
Singing, too, helps develop language skills, as it is often easier to string words together when they are part of a tune or a rhyme. Watching television with your baby occasionally is fine, as it gives you the opportunity to talk about it while watching. But the television should always be turned off if no one is watching, as it is a distraction to your baby and might get in the way of communication.

Communication is the basis of your relationship with each other, and will help the two of you form a close bond. Talk to your baby whenever you can – it really will make a difference. ●

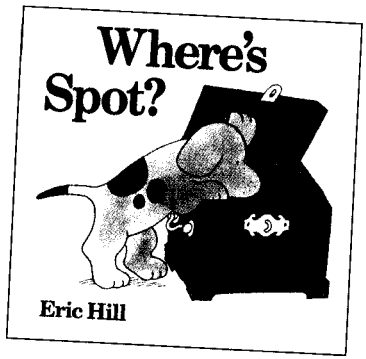
Sharing Books Right From the Start

When should I start sharing books with my baby? Start now! says **Wendy Cooling**.

It's never too early to share books; some even believe that reading aloud before birth helps the development of a calm personality and a sense of rhythm. Sharing books after birth is seldom a quiet activity, as babies will gurgle and join in with the reading well before they begin to talk, responding to the voice of the adult who loves them rather than to the content of the book.

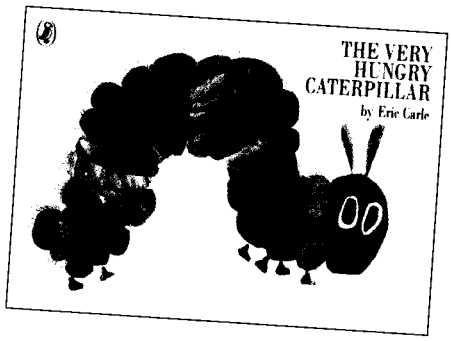


As language develops, children will ask questions, interrupt and become serious partners in the sharing. Rhythmic language, rhyme and onomatopoeic words that you can almost taste speak to babies, and help them develop an ear for language that will lead them into reading as they get older. Most importantly, this early sharing is safe – adults often wonder about the frightening nature of some stories, but this is cancelled out by the presence of the adult sharing the adventure, journey or danger with them.



Parents and carers are the first teachers and, as they encourage feeding, walking and talking, so they encourage reading – reading as shared pleasure, of course, not pressurising children to learn to read too soon. Some adults worry about reading aloud, and even feel a bit silly trying to do the different voices in a story. But children love the voices of those who love them and are not critical; they enjoy the shared time, the warmth, the sound of the words and the details of the pictures. The messages to the very young are that books are wonderful and reading together is fun; children receiving these messages will start school loving books and wanting to read.

The hardest thing is to find the book that will really speak to your child and become the start of his / her reading history. There are classic picture books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (*UFBG* 59); *Each Peach Pear Plum* (*UFBG* 25); *Where's Spot?* (*UFBG* 63); *Where the Wild Things Are* (*UFBG* 62) and *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (*UFBG* 189) that every child will enjoy. There are many more, of course: books that librarians, teachers and booksellers will be happy to introduce to you.



In my family, *The Elephant and the Bad Baby* (*UFBG* 96) remains a great favourite and I simply can't count the number of times I read it to a small niece. She's now grown up and has never forgotten it, and recently asked me to read it to her when she was quite ill and in need of a little pampering. Just as we revert to boiled eggs and soldiers of toast, we go back to the comforting books that were a solid part of childhood and, of course, then we introduce them to the next generation of children. The other favourite was *Witches*, a now out-of-print book, by Colin and Jacqui Hawkins – a wonderful but quite complicated book about witches with a text far too difficult for a very young child. My niece especially loved the pages about a witch's underwear, and I would read a very edited version of the text to her. Then she began to read for herself and all was discovered – how could I have done this to her? Once stories are familiar, we simply can't skip a word, as texts will be memorised and children will begin to join in and feel that they are reading themselves. Favourite books, even if not adult choices, do have to be read again and again, and we must grin and bear it! Remembering that witch's underwear reminds me that things don't change – today's very young children love to share *Pants* (*UFBG* 153) by Giles Andreae and Nick Sharratt with anyone who will read it. It's not a naughty book, but children think it is – read it together and have fun! ●

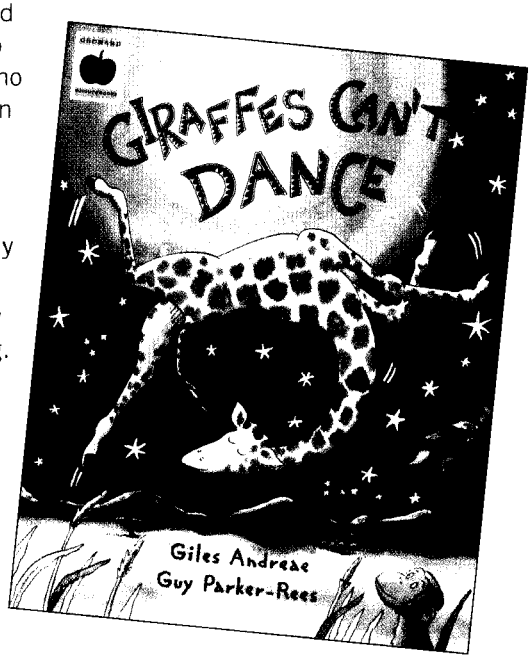
GIRAFFES CAN'T DANCE

Giles Andreae, illustrated by Guy Parker-Rees

I challenge you to read a child this book without dancing! I've read it to hundreds of children over the years and simply have to jig around at the front of the room – much to the amusement of my audience who are soon (of course) wanting to join in. The story:

'Gerald was a tall giraffe
Whose neck was long and slim,
But his knees were awfully bandy
And his legs were rather thin...'

could be a sad one but it certainly isn't: it's celebratory and affirming. Gerald is unhappy to find he can't dance, but he soon discovers his own very original style that amazes all the other animals.



This is not a didactic story, but it does touch on being different in a very positive way. It also makes children smile and shows that books are something to get excited about.

Wendy Cooling

GORGEOUS!

Caroline Castle, illustrated by Sam Childs

There are books that almost unwittingly provide the secret catchphrases that bind parents and children together, and this is one of them. Once Little Zeb had arrived, 'Tip top gorgeous' was heard frequently in our house. I defy any parent to resist the charm of this little zebra as he learns new words and tries them out (not always appropriately!) on the things that he meets during the course of a long day in the African bush. Sam Childs' illustrations are perfect, adding a comic subtext all of their own.

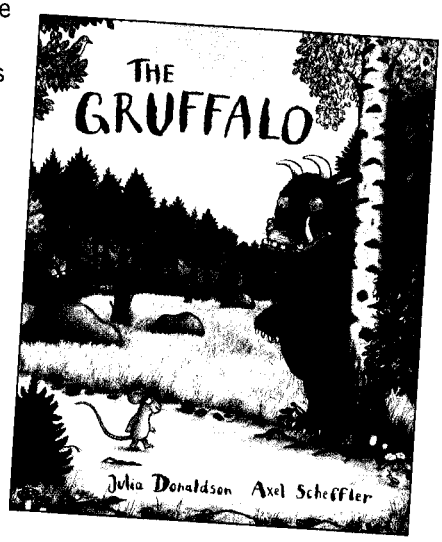
Laura Hutchings

■ Little Zeb returns in *Happy!*; *Little Zeb's Question*; *Funny!* and *Naughty!*

Everybody's Favourite...

THE GRUFFALO

Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler



A fox, an owl and a snake fancy a mouse for dinner, but the clever rodent scares off its predators by inventing a ferocious friend called a Gruffalo and describing it to them in lurid detail. Then the Gruffalo really does turn up in the deep dark wood, and the mouse's troubles begin in earnest...

This rhyming tale of the triumph of small over mighty features illustrations that are more comical than scary, despite the beast's 'terrible teeth in his terrible jaws'. The Gruffalo is a close relation of Maurice Sendak's Wild Things, and this wild thing is sure to become a modern classic, too.

Madelyn Travis

A quick-witted mouse invents a monstrous 'Gruffalo' to frighten off his hungry predators in the wood. But when the real Gruffalo turns up, with his 'terrible claws and terrible teeth in his terrible jaws', can he outwit him as well?

The Gruffalo is a distant cousin of Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (*UFBG* 62). He is a creature of vast size and comic-fierce physical characteristics, who wears an increasingly bemused expression as he becomes convinced of the tiny mouse's superior fright-power over the other animals.

A modern classic, this is a miraculously perfect picture book, where text and illustrations marry seamlessly in mood. Its gleeful rhyming text, which is a joy to read aloud, will soon have the entire family chanting by heart.

Patricia Elliott

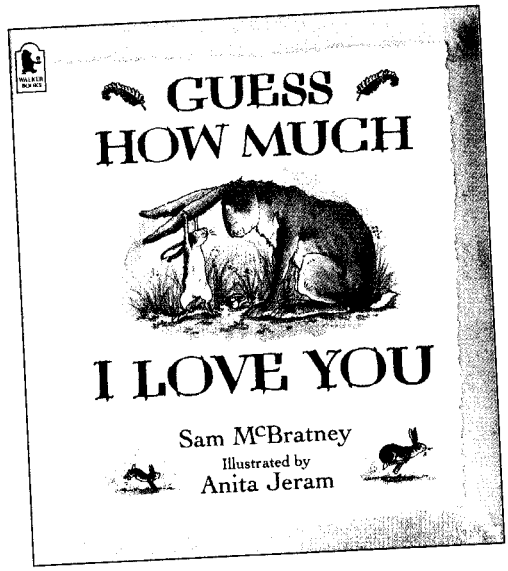
Everybody's Favourite...

GUESS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU

Sam McBratney, illustrated by Anita Jeram

Big Nutbrown Hare is the ultimate competitive dad. Little Nutbrown Hare is longing to explain just how much he loves Big Nutbrown Hare, but finds that his little arms, short legs and baby ideas are no match for Big Nutbrown Hare's grown-up ones. This results in an easily imitated pre-bedtime romp, which resolves into the security of Little Nutbrown Hare's soft bed of brown leaves and his absolute trust in the loving parent who settles nearby. The gentle illustrations are a lovely match for the story; the whole book is perfect for a calm, nurturing bedtime.

Antonia Honeywell



This book is the most heartfelt expression of love between an adult and child that could be imagined. Little Nutbrown Hare – and what a relief to have a hare, instead of another bunny – tries to tell Big Nutbrown Hare how much he loves him. 'This much!', stretching out his arms, or 'As high as I can hop!'. But Big Nutbrown Hare counters all with a greater love – he can hop higher, stretch further... When Little Hare is so tired that he starts pulling at his ears, Big Hare wisely lets him have the last word – he loves Big Hare right up to the moon. Gently, with perfect pace, Big Hare lays him down to sleep. And then whispers:

'I love you right up to the moon... and back'.

Guaranteed to have new parents sobbing.

Yzanne Mackay

HAIRY MACLARY FROM DONALDSON'S DAIRY

Lynley Dodd

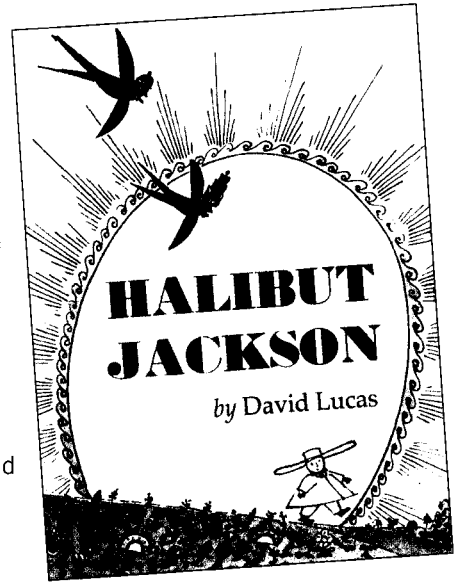
The first of a growing number of titles about Hairy Maclary and his doggy friends. Hairy Maclary takes a walk, and one after another the neighbourhood dogs join him. Their names are brilliant; my favourite is 'Schnitzel von Krumm with a very low tum', who I'm pleased to say now has his own books. The dogs pretend to be tough and up for anything – until they meet 'Scarface Claw, the toughest tom in town', and beat a hasty retreat. Dogs with character, words to almost taste and a satisfying conclusion give the **Hairy Maclary** books the well-deserved status of classics.

Wendy Cooling

■ Other titles include *Hairy Maclary and Zachary Quack*; *Hairy Maclary's Rumpus at the Vet*; *Where is Hairy Maclary?*; *Hairy Maclary's Bone*; *Hairy Maclary Scattercat*; *Hairy Maclary, Sit* and *Hairy Maclary's Caterwaul Caper*.

HALIBUT JACKSON David Lucas

This is a delightful tale about how even the most crippling shyness can be overcome. Halibut Jackson is so shy that, wherever he goes, he makes himself a suit that will allow him to blend, chameleon-like into the background. This works very well until an invitation to a party at the palace arrives, and his plan to attend without being noticed goes severely awry.



Halibut Jackson is set in an enticing fairy-tale world where invitations to the palace are delivered by a messenger on horseback, and the local library is full of leather chairs and winding staircases. The illustrations have a quirky, rather old-fashioned charm and are reminiscent of Ludwig Bemelmans' *Madeline* (*UFBG* 130).

Susan Reuben

Your Child's School Reading Book

Your child will be taught to read at school, and you can increase the pleasure in reading by buying or borrowing books to read together. But what about when your child brings their reading book home from school? What should you be doing with it? **Julia Eccleshare** offers some suggestions...

Long before most children start school, they will have been exposed to some kind of background to reading. The three Bookstart packs will at least have given them book ownership and, hopefully, their first opportunity to enjoy books by sharing them with adults. It is just the preparation they need. They need to hear stories read aloud, to join in with rhymes and poems and to see print around them. It is from this that they can begin to engage with the real purpose of reading; what it is for and how it can be enjoyed. From there, children can approach the first steps of reading with confidence that it will be worthwhile and enjoyable.

When they bring a book home from school, it is important that you share it with them rather than simply having them read it to you.

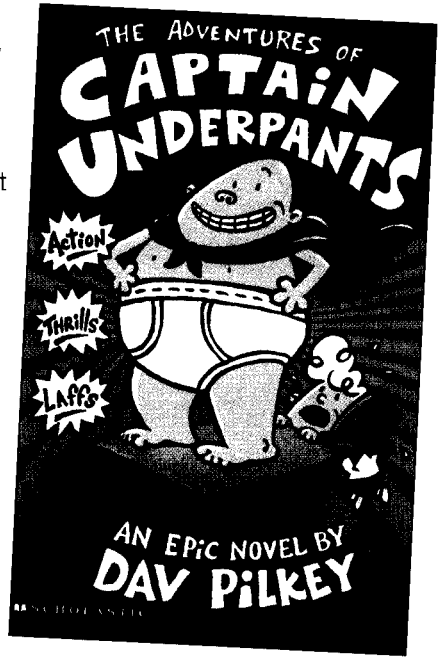
- Look at the meanings of words and sentences, making sure that not only are the words read, but also understood and put into context – this helps an inexperienced reader to begin to predict what might be going to happen in the book.
- Talk about the pictures. What they say will tell part of the story and help reinforce the meaning of the words. They also help the child predict what will happen next.
- Pick out words – maybe a name, or something simple like 'dog' or 'cat' that they have seen many times before – and talk about them. Find other words that sound or look the same and match them.
- Choose a group of favourite words (for instance active verbs or rhymes, or animal words or colours), or ones that sound or look the same, and turn them into a game that can be played without the need of the book itself.

Never lose sight of that fact that the main point of reading is to get pleasure. All work on individual reading development should be underpinned by an embedded enjoyment of stories. Reread as often as the child wants. Too often, reading is seen as a ladder to be climbed. Enjoyment and confidence is far more important: even when you know your child can read the story comfortably, allow them to revisit it.

In whatever way learning to read progresses, and it is often more in fits and starts than along a smooth curve, never give up reading aloud. Knowing the wider scope of what books can offer is the best possible spur to becoming an enthusiastic reader. ●

CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS series

Dav Pilkey



Overcoming his own learning disabilities and hyperactivity, author / illustrator Dav Pilkey started writing because there'd been nothing fun for him to read at school. But nowadays any boy who thinks there is nothing fun to read hasn't encountered the **Captain Underpants** books! Perfectly pitched for young boys, they are full of cartoon images, disgusting happenings, aliens, superheroes and really very silly humour. They are interactive (flip'o'rama!), have the longest titles (*Captain Underpants and the Perilous Plot of Professor Poopypants* or *Captain Underpants and the Invasion of the Incredibly Naughty Cafeteria Ladies from Outer Space – and the Subsequent Assault of the Equally Evil Lunchroom Zombie Nerds*) and are pretty much guaranteed to have any boy in fits of giggles and clamouring for the next title.

Leonie Flynn

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THE CAT MUMMY

Jacqueline Wilson

Frankly, I cried. Several times. This is an incredibly moving book about grief and love. It's about letting go but holding on, and moving on. Jacqueline Wilson understands what children worry about, and her books allow them to share their worries with a caring adult. Children need to know that bad things do happen and that when they do we hurt horribly, but friends and family help us through them. This book tackles the difficult questions that children have when a person or animal dies, and all in the cushioning context of a story with a powerful heart.

Nicola Morgan

C.I.A.: COWS IN ACTION Steve Cole

Pat Vine and his sister Little Bo Vine belong to a rare breed of super-intelligent cattle, the Emmsy-Squares. Clever they might be, but not as clever as someone else who lives on the farm: Angus McMoo – *Professor* Angus McMoo! He's a scientist, and so brainy that he's invented a time machine. But, before they can start exploring, a visitor arrives from the future – a ter-moo-nator, sent by the F.B.I. (the Fed-up Bull Institute) to destroy the professor! Luckily, they manage to knock the would-be assassin out, just before two more visitors arrive and invite our bovine trio to join the C.I.A. – Cows In Action – a crack team of time-travelling cow commandos, dedicated to saving the world!

With daft names, glorious puns, appalling jokes (cowpats feature, as you can imagine), fast dialogue and even faster adventure, this is a wonderfully groan-aloud / laugh-aloud treat, suitable for strong readers.

Leonie Flynn

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CLARICE BEAN series Lauren Child

With her usual mix of collage, colourful drawing and some wild typography, Lauren Child brings to life her greatest creation, the sublime Clarice Bean.

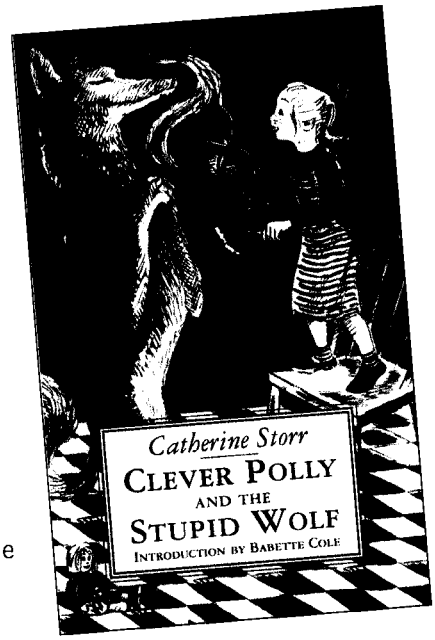
Her family is wonderfully peculiar (and yet somehow rather familiar); it includes Mandarin-learning Mum, Dad who hides in the office, brothers Minal Cricket (younger – whiny and annoying) and Kurt (older – dark and moody) and boy-mad sister Marcie, as well as Grandad (asleep) and cousins, uncle and more... And at the heart of all the chaos is Clarice, with one of the most distinctive and alive voices in picture books, and heaps of charm.

Daniel Hahn

■ Start with *Clarice Bean, That's Me*, which introduces the characters; further books include *What Planet Are You From, Clarice Bean?* and *My Uncle is a Hunkle, Says Clarice Bean*.

CLEVER POLLY AND THE STUPID WOLF

Catherine Storr



In these twelve linked stories, readers will recognise and delight in Storr's modern twists on favourite fairy tales in which brave, clever Polly outwits scheming Wolf again and again. Here, Wolf haunts a suburban street, intent upon eating Polly. But his slow wits are no match for hers. In vain, he turns to fairy tales for help, but Polly knows her fairy tales, too. Her knowledge and poor Wolf's inability to get anything right in the modern world invariably thwart him. Polly remains in control throughout – like the reader, her imagination, fairy-tale knowledge, and common sense means she remains one step ahead of Wolf all the way.

Elizabeth Hammill

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CLIFFHANGER

Jacqueline Wilson, illustrated by Nick Sharratt

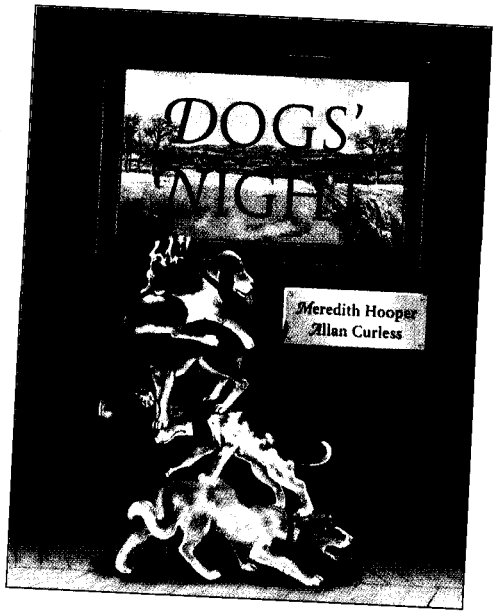
There's nothing that appeals less to Tim than the idea of going on an adventure holiday. His dad has booked one for him, but Tim is convinced he's going to hate it. And, sure enough, it isn't long before Tim and his team (the Tigers) are facing the most horrifying challenge of all: *abseiling!* Then canoeing, then an obstacle race... And Tim really, really *does not* like sports. He can't even catch. Then one day the Tigers have to do a Crazy Bucket race, and Tim has a brilliant idea...

An exciting, funny and reassuring book (and a Jacqueline Wilson title a boy would read!). Tim's adventures continue in *Buried Alive!*

Daniel Hahn

DOGS' NIGHT

Meredith Hooper, illustrated by Allan Curless



Get to know Meredith Hooper as both a great storyteller and a master of non-fiction picture books for young readers – a rare combination. Each year, the dogs from paintings in London's National Gallery leave their poses and run wild through the gallery for one night. Usually they return to their correct places – but this time they end up back in the wrong paintings! Confusion abounds amongst the humans! It takes another year for the dogs to return to their proper homes. Reproductions of actual paintings, with notes, combine with playful illustrations.
A perfect introduction to museum visits (and an ideal souvenir to return home to) – and great fun.

Jon Appleton

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THE ENORMOUS CROCODILE

Roald Dahl, illustrated by Quentin Blake

In this, the first collaboration between Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake, the eponymous crocodile fancies some nice, juicy children for lunch and has thought up secret plans and clever tricks to achieve his ends. Dahl's trademark diabolical ingenuity is very much at the fore as the crocodile tries to disguise himself so as to lure his prey – only to be foiled by other animals, one of whom ensures he will never be hungry again... The simple, repetitive structure of the book, the promise of potential bloodshed and the rough justice meted out in the shout-along ending make this a compelling, memorable read.

Steve Cole

ESIO TROT and THE TWITS

Roald Dahl, illustrated by Quentin Blake

Roald Dahl's wicked and non-conformist humour is legendary. In *Esio Trot*, typically, he is uninterested in obvious moral messages – old Mr Hoppy successfully woos the love of his life by pure deceit. Dahl's consummate storytelling speaks to readers of all ages and this is a perfect introduction for newly fluent readers, or a bedtime tale for not-quite-yet readers. In *The Twits*, Dahl is at his gleeful best in the portrayal of revolting, horrible Mr and Mrs Twit and their irredeemably nasty behaviour.

Children love these perfectly structured, subversive books, and they will return to them again and again, eagerly looking forward to his more difficult titles as their reading prowess develops.

Nicola Morgan

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FANTASTIC MR FOX

Roald Dahl, illustrated by Quentin Blake

Mr Fox is on the run. Three nasty farmers are hot on his tail after his repeated thefts of their choicest poultry. However, Mr Fox has many mouths to feed at home and is determined to beat the farmers at their own game. Clever animal that he is, he comes up with a truly fantastic and utterly hilarious plan to outsmart his enemies. Simple words and short chapters make this book a great introduction for first readers to Dahl's quirky humour. Blake's illustrations capture the grotesque farmers as well as the flair of Mr Fox.

Ariel Kahn