

LONGER STORIES

As children grow older, their understanding of the world also develops, allowing for understanding of longer more complex narratives.

A Bit Lost by Chris Houghton
Walker Books 9781406333831

This story of a baby owl which falls out of its nest might not be unique in its theme but the witty text and distinctive combination of colours in the artwork make this book highly unusual yet utterly child-friendly. Now also available in board book format.

Again! by Emily Gravett
Macmillan Children’s Books 9780330544030

A story about bedtime reading which will delight children and parents alike, as all will be able to relate to the routine of reading the same stories over and over again, with perilous consequences in this case. Emily Gravett is a master of using the book as a whole to tell her stories, and all her books are must-haves.

Bedtime for Monsters by Ed Vere
Puffin Books 9780141502397

Colourful, bold artwork and a witty text combine to create a great bedtime story about a hungry monster. A fair amount of peril and scariness in the text is counterbalanced by the different story told by the artwork, guaranteeing giggles and gasps aplenty. Look out for Banana and Mr Big by the same illustrator.

Biscuit Bear by Mini Grey
Red Fox 9780099451082

The wacky after-dark adventures of a biscuit bear are brought to life with panache thanks to the quirky and clever artwork. The detail in the illustrations and the playful use of typography make this a feast for the eyes for adults and children alike.

Box of Tricks by Katie Cleminson
Red Fox 9781862306271

This is the story of a little girl who is given a magical box of tricks as a special present and uses it to conjure up all that is needed for an unforgettable party. This is a stylish and fun ode to the power of imagination. Also look out for Otto the Book Bear.

The Dark by Lemony Snicket & Jon Klassen
Orchard Books 9781408330029

Laszlo is scared of the dark, and when his nightlight ceases to function, he must confront his fear. A dark yet wonderfully reassuring tale about a common childhood fear, this book is both simple and sophisticated and will appeal to children and adults alike.

Dog Loves Drawing by Louise Yates
Red Fox 9781862308657

When Dog receives a sketch book, he is confused at first by the blank pages but soon realises it is up to him to make up the story, and so he begins to draw. This is a delightful homage to drawing and making up one’s own stories. Look out also for Dog Loves Books and Dog Loves Counting.

Egg by Alex T. Smith
Hodder Children’s Books 9780340959862

A wonderfully quirky story of an egg which finds itself the centre of vixen Foxy Dubois’ breakfast plans, this will be enjoyed by adults and children alike who will both appreciate the fun retro artwork and wacky humour on different levels.

Good Little Wolf by Nadia Shireen
Jonathan Cape 9781780080017

This is a wonderful tale about a little wolf struggling with the expectations of being a storybook wolf and offers a marvellous twist at the end, with a gentle message that even the best behaved children are not always perfect.

Knuffle Bunny by Mo Willems
Walker Books 9781844280599

This visually stunning tale is the first of three picture books which follow little girl Trixie from toddlerdom to adulthood. In this first instalment, Trixie loses her favourite teddy and her dad’s inability to understand her distress prompts her to say her first words.

Lunchtime by Rebecca Cobb
Macmillan Children’s Books 9780230749535

The daily routine of eating lunch and children’s reluctance at interrupting their playtime to partake in it is tackled beautifully in this tale and enhanced by the lyrical artwork. It is wonderful tale about creativity and imaginative play.

Martha and the Bunny Brothers: I Heart School by Clara Vulliamy
HarperCollins Children’s Books 9780007419166

A vibrant, fun picture book about the excitement of starting school, but with the unusual emphasis on younger siblings’ feelings about staying behind at home. This gentle tale will help calm nerves as the life-changing event of starting school looms.

Puffin Peter by Petr Horáček
Walker Books 9781406337761

This is a wonderful story of friendship between two fun-loving puffins who end up separated after a great storm. The narrative is supported by beautifully evocative and strikingly colourful artwork. The several cases of mistaken identity while Peter looks for Paul will delight little readers.

Stuck by Oliver Jeffers
HarperCollins Children’s Books 9780007263899

All of Jeffers’ books are glorious but the silliness and wicked humour in this one makes it the most accessible for young children. When his kite gets stuck in a tree, Floyd starts throwing things at it to dislodge it. As the objects become increasingly ludicrous, the story becomes increasingly more hilarious.

RHYMING TALES

Children love listening to rhyming tales, which help them understand the rhythm of speech. It also makes the storytelling experience more fun and interactive.

Bottoms Up! by Jeanne Willis & Adam Stower
Puffin Books 9780141502137

A contagiously joyful book about subjects that forever delight little readers: pants and bottoms. This might be an energetic story but it makes for perfect bedtime reading. As much drollness is to be found in the illustrations as it is in the text. More hilarious titles are available by this duo.

The Great Snortle Hunt by Claire Freedman & Kate Hindley
Simon & Schuster Children’s Books 9780857072634

A pacy tale about a group of friends on the hunt for an elusive beast that lives in an isolated house. The sleek yet child-friendly artwork accompanies the fun rhythmic text which also offers a gentle reminder about not making assumptions about people.

The Pirate Cruncher by Jonny Duddle
Templar Publishing 9781848773769

With its atmospheric, detailed artwork and slightly ominous yet funny storyline, this is the perfect book for little pirate fans. The text is written in sea shanty style which enhances the overall ambience.

Rhino? What Rhino? by Caryl Hart & Sarah Horne
Hodder Children’s Books 9780340981405

A bored and lonely rhino sneaks out of the zoo to explore the world outside. He soon seeks shelter in a nearby farm with hilarious and chaotic consequences. Perfect rhyming and clever repetition teamed with vibrant and zany artwork make this an absolute hoot of a book.

What the Ladybird Heard by Julia Donaldson & Lydia Monks
Macmillan Children’s Books 9780230706507

When a couple of robbers are overheard plotting to steal a prize cow from the farm, the animals take it upon themselves, under the direction of the usually quiet ladybird, to foil their plan. With plenty of animal sounds for readers to join in, playful rhyming text and vibrant artwork, this is a wonderful read-aloud.

The Worst Princess by Anna Kemp & Sarah Ogilvie
Simon & Schuster Children’s Books 9781847388766

A hugely entertaining story with cheeky text and bright and witty artwork about a princess who defies all stereotypes of the fairy tale princess by choosing adventures with a dragon over life with a dull, patronising prince.

NOVELTY BOOKS

Novelty books, which have special built-in features (such as pop-ups, sounds, etc) enhance the enjoyment and interactivity of storytelling.

Goldilocks by Allan & Jessica Ahlberg
Walker Books 9781406330052 (3+)

A splendid novelty book which offers several variations of the traditional tale, some of which are rather eccentric and will delight young audiences. Beautifully illustrated, with lots of tabs to pull and flaps to lift as well as a mini pop-up book in the middle, this is a truly enchanting book for all.

New York in Pyjamarama by Michaël Leblond & Frédérique Bertrand
Phoenix Yard Books 9781907912122 (3+)

Readers follow a boy as he flies above New York at night in his dreams in this utterly original book which uses the old technique of Ombro-cinema to create movement on the pages, using a simple lined acetate sheet. The effect created will leave little readers speechless.

Noisy Body Book by Jessica Greenwell & Lee Wildish
Usborne 9781409535140 (3+)

Each book in this Noisy Book series includes a sound panel, with the sounds being an integral part of the storytelling. In this particular book, young children will undoubtedly find the body sounds particularly hilarious.

Opposites by Patrick George
Patrick George 9780956255891 (3+)
The impeccable design and clever use of acetate sheets teaches simple concepts of opposites in a novel and particularly effective way. The bold and simple illustrations are particularly eye-catching and attractive for young children but its clever concept will appeal to older children too. Look out for Colours, Numbers and Shapes too.

Playbook Farm by Corina Fletcher & Britta Teckentrup
Nosy Crow 9780857631244 (3+)

This inventive and unique concept offers endless storytelling and playing possibilities in the form of a very sturdy board pop-up book which unfolds to become a 3D playmat. Cardboard animals and tractor are included for added fun.

Press Here by Hervé Tullet
Chronicle Books 9780811879545 (2+)

A masterpiece of simplicity, bringing interactivity in picture books to a whole new dimension. Readers are made to believe they are controlling what is happening to the dots on the page, allowing young children to interact with the page in a way that has never been done before.

There Are Cats in This Book by Viviane Schwartz
Walker Books 9781406324990 (3+)

The cats in this book want to play and, by turning the pages of the book and lifting the flaps, little readers get to help them have fun. This is an ingenious book, inviting the reader to play an active part in the storytelling.

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it’s NEVER TOO EARLY TO START!

A selection of contemporary books for the under-fives

Compiled by Mélanie McGilloway for the Federation of Children’s Book Groups

Illustration from Books Always Everywhere
Written by Jane Blatt and illustrated by Sarah Massini
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it's NEVER TOO EARLY TO START!

As research has demonstrated over and over again, it is never too early to introduce children to books and reading, and in fact, the sooner, the better. With so many books for young children published these days however, it can be difficult to know where to begin. This booklist aims to offer some starting points and suggestions. There are many classic children's books for the under-fives which are already well loved and established and therefore this list particularly aims to highlight newer publications, both by established authors and illustrators as well as newcomers to the literature scene for young children. No list can be exhaustive, of course, but the selection here will hopefully be seen as diverse and appealing.

Where age recommendations have been added, they are for guidance only, though some books such as novelty books are not suitable for children under the age of 3 because of small parts.



NURSERY RHYMES

Every child's library should include a nursery rhymes anthology. They are essential to language acquisition as well as helping to develop an ear and love for rhyme and stories. There are many anthologies to fit all tastes, here are only a few examples.

Big Book of Nursery Rhymes by Kali Stileman
Doubleday 9780857530448

This anthology is particularly baby and toddler friendly with its bright and bold illustrations, which brings a fresh and contemporary look to the classic rhymes. The book also includes a whole section on songs and lullabies.

My Favourite Nursery Rhymes by Tony Ross
Andersen Press 9781842709733

Classic nursery rhymes are brought to life with fun and wit in this anthology which also includes an audio CD. The comic aspect of many of the illustrations will not be lost on young readers who will enjoy the illustrator's take on the rhymes.

The Puffin Mother Goose Treasury by Raymond Briggs
Puffin Books 9780141329666

Winner of the Greenaway Medal in 1966, this reissued anthology has lost none of its appeal, and is perfect for those who might be looking for a more traditional compilation of nursery rhymes. The retro artwork gives it ample charm. An abridged version is available in board book format.

FIRST EXPERIENCES

Babies' early enjoyment of books will be dictated by two factors in their development: they can focus better on high contrast colours, and they learn a lot through touch. Therefore book choice for very young children should concentrate on a variety of formats (cloth, touchy feely, bath, board) and bold illustrations. Very first experiences help babies get used to books as objects, as well as enjoying the closeness shared with the adult reader during storytelling.

Amazing Baby : Hide and Seek by Beth Harwood, Emma Dodd & Jonathan Lambert

Templar Publishing 9781904513278 (6m+) [board]

A game of hide and seek with a little bunny offers plenty of opportunities to lift flaps and feel textures. The Amazing Baby series as a whole is particularly well designed and pitched perfectly for different stages of babies' development.

Baby Touch First Focus Cot Book

Ladybird 9781409305163 (birth+) [cloth]

This is a lovely soft cloth book which is full of high contrast illustrations and unfolds concertina-style so it can be tied to the side of the baby's cot. A very good first experiences book.

Faces (Babies Very First Black and White Books) by Stella Baggott
Usborne 9781409535768 (birth+) [board]

Babies find faces fascinating and this small board book offers a selection of friendly faces for them to look at. As babies get older they can begin to identify facial features as illustrated on each page. Many more titles are available in this lovely series which also exists in bath book format.

The Noisy Book by Soledad Bravi
Gecko Press 9781877467523 (9m+) [board]

A chunky board book which presents a myriad of animals, objects and actions and the noises they make. This allows for great opportunities for interaction between adult reader and baby and is lots of fun.

Noodle Loves to Cuddle by Marion Billet
Nosy Crow 9780857630216 (9m+) [board]

A delightful touch and feel series centred around a little panda. Familiar objects and situations teamed with repetitive text and positive statements make this a real winner for this age-range. More titles are available in this series.

Splashy Whale by Jo Moon

Campbell Books 9780230748682 (3m+) [bath]

Part of the Bath Buddies series which has a sea life theme, this bath book comes with a sucker to stop it floating away in the bath. Bright colours and tactile patterns make this little book engaging for little readers.

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes by Mem Fox & Helen Oxenbury
Walker Books 9781406331264 (9m+) [board]

Babies all over the world are very different but one thing they usually have in common is ten little fingers and ten little toes. The gorgeous rhythmic text will delight the youngest of readers. The story promotes active interaction between adult and child, for a guaranteed fun storytime.

That's Not My Puppy by Fiona Watt & Rachel Wells
Usborne 9780746037782 (6m+) [board]

The winning combination of bold and bright pictures, simple rhyming text, and touch and feel elements have enabled this series to become an award-winning worldwide success, with over thirty titles to date.

LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD

COMPENDIUMS

Young children are primarily attracted to books that depict familiar situations and objects and compendiums are a great way to present familiar objects and learn about new ones, therefore also contributing to vocabulary acquisition.

Babies, Babies, Babies! by Catherine & Laurence Anholt
Orchard Books 9781408314357 (1+)

A brightly-coloured compendium of babyhood which teams beautiful artwork with an energetic rhyming text. A wonderful book to share, which offers plenty of stimulation for little ones.

Big Book of My World by Kali Stileman
Doubleday 9780857530424 (2+)

A wonderfully vibrant compendium of everything preschoolers love and will want to find out about. It will be a riveting volume for them, as well as a great learning tool, and will provide hours of entertainment.

INFORMATION BOOKS

Preschoolers are incredibly curious and thrive on acquiring new knowledge and therefore will relish being introduced to information books early on.

Apple by Nikki McClure
Abrams Appleseed 9781419703782 (2+)

Each double spread depicts a stage in the life of an apple by presenting a single word in block letters and an illustration using intricate paper-cuttings opposite. This book offers a wonderful opportunity to get children more connected with nature.

A First Book of Nature by Nicola Davies & Mark Hearld
Walker Books 9781406304916 (3+)

A splendid book which allows young children to discover small and beautiful details of nature all around them, and to follow the changes brought by each season. The simple but lyrical text is accompanied by beautifully atmospheric artwork. A book to treasure.

I Spy With My Little Eye ... by Edward Gibbs
Brubaker, Ford & Friends 9781848777149 (2+)

This interactive book uses striking artwork. Clever die-cut holes allow readers to play I Spy, as a hint of colour through the hole and simple fact helps them guess which animal might be on the next page.

Sometimes I Feel Sunny by Gillian Shields & Georgie Birkett
Picture Corgi 9780552565783 (2+)

Part of the My First Picture Book series, this narrative non-fiction book offers a simple rationalization of the different feelings toddlers might experience in language that they will understand.

What Will I Be? by Nicola Davies & Marc Boutavant
Walker Books 9781406328134 (2+)

Part of the Uncover and Discover series which explores different aspects of animal life, this wonderfully engaging title covers animal growth and the cycle of life. With flaps, a gentle repetitive narrative pattern and bright artwork, this series is pitched perfectly at toddlers.

GETTING INTO STORIES

As babies become toddlers their concentration span develops, allowing for longer but still simple narratives, often based on every day events, which they can relate to.

123 Little Donkey by Rindert Kromhout & Annemarie van Haeringen
Gecko Press 9781877579349

A simple story presenting familiar situations which also doubles as an early concept counting book, this book has lovely sturdy pages and bright and attractive artwork.

Apple Pie ABC by Alison Murray
Orchard Books 9781408308028

A stunningly illustrated introduction to the alphabet through the use of a traditional verse. The artwork and design are retro and elegant yet very child-friendly. Look out for One, Two, That's My Shoe as well.

Books Always Everywhere by Jane Blatt & Sarah Massini
Nosy Crow 9780857630902

A glorious celebration of books and book sharing, the artwork shows babies and toddlers enjoying books in all different situations and in all different ways, whether it is reading them or simply playing with them. It is delightfully positive and joyous.

Not Me! by Nicola Killen
Egmont Books 9781405248303

A charming story about a group of toddlers creating havoc in a house with none of them admitting to their involvement. A real sense of mischief is conveyed both in the artwork and the simple text. Gentle naughtiness oozes from the pages and will delight little readers.

Now I Am Big by Stephen Krensky & Sara Gillingham
Abrams Appleseed 9781419704161

A beautiful vintage looking book which celebrates the small achievements of toddlers as they grow into preschoolers. Full of positive statements, this little book will do wonders to empower little readers at a stage in their lives when they can lack confidence. Look out for I Can Do It Myself! by the same duo.

Penguin by Polly Dunbar
Walker Books 9781406312461

The story of Ben and his increasing frustration at the lack of interaction from his new stuffed toy penguin will delight young readers who will relate to his rollercoaster of emotions. The ending offers a gentle reminder that shouting is never the way to get what one wants. Also look out for the Tilly and Friends series by the same illustrator.

Pip and Posy: The Little Puddle by Axel Scheffler
Nosy Crow 9780857630049

A lovely series about two best friends which offers simple and charming stories that deal with many issues in toddlers' everyday lives. This particular title approaches the touchy subject of potty training with a comforting message that potty-training is a tricky business and that accidents can happen to anyone.

Small Bunny's Blue Blanket by Tatyana Feeney
Oxford University Press 9780192757937

This gentle and reassuring tale of a little rabbit whose mum washes his comfort blanket and as a result rids it of all its comforting smells will be much appreciated by toddlers who have experienced a similar situation. The artwork is simple and stylish and well pitched for the youngest of readers.