



# BfK Basics: Helping your child enjoy books and reading

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**Margaret Mallett** suggests ways to start a home library.

## Starting a Home Library for Small Children

A child's favourite stories, fact books and nursery rhyme books are the basis of what can become a home library.

**Margaret Mallett** explains why this is important and selects some 'must haves' for a small child's first collection.

Creating a collection of favourite books nurtures a sense of ownership, the feeling that here are some special books to be valued and enjoyed. It helps enormously to gather these together somewhere where they can be easily accessible. A shelf in the child's bedroom or play area - a shelf low enough to be accessible to a little person - would be a good location. Or you may prefer to find a large box and perhaps cover it in wrapping paper and write the child's name on the side.

The second Children's Laureate, Anne Fine, made the 'home library for every child' the cornerstone of her laureateship\*. She asked illustrators of children's books to design and donate bookplates to personalise a collection, downloadable free from [www.myhomelibrary.org](http://www.myhomelibrary.org). As Anne says, 'mothers can stick them in their babies' first picture books'.

## Selecting the books

Knowing our child's preoccupations, whether these are about lorries, animals or aeroplanes, helps us choose. Or we might want to respond to an experience, so David McKee's **Elmer and the Lost Teddy** may comfort if a favourite toy goes missing. Timeless classics for this age group, books which appeal to generation after generation, are likely to be well represented but there are also some exciting new writers and illustrators for this age group. Look out for books by Lauren Child, Mini Grey, Polly Dunbar and Oliver Jeffers. A first collection is likely to include: playful and novelty books; nursery rhyme collections; alphabet and concept books; picture books.

## Playful and novelty books

Many early books are transitional - part way between a toy and a book - and made of plastic, cloth or cardboard, all of which will stand up to vigorous treatment. Textured, lift-the-flap books and those using die-cuts and other creative techniques catch a child's attention and encourage interaction with both book and reader. The books in Fiona Watts' 'That's not my...' series, for example **That's Not My Puppy**, provide many different materials and textures for tactile satisfaction. Flaps to lift and pull chime with children's love of hide and seek - see for example Eric Hill's much loved classic **Where's Spot?**

## Nursery rhyme collections

The characters and events in these rhymes teach about the world and human behaviour. They introduce children to poetry and to the pleasures of language. Rhymes help the memory and lay some foundations for learning to read but the emphasis at this age should be on fun and pleasure. There are a number of fine collections, including Raymond Briggs' distinctive **The Puffin Mother Goose Treasury**, Mary Ann Hoberman's contemporary **The Orchard Book of Nursery Rhymes for Your Baby**

and Brita Granström's lively **Ring-a-ring O?Roses and Other Nursery Rhymes**.

### **Alphabet and concept books**

Not all early books are stories – concept books can be inspirational too. There are alphabet books like Robert Crowther's **The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Alphabet Book** which are little works of art. Number books and books featuring opposites, comparisons, shapes and colours fill bookshops. Choose those that do not just require object recognition but which intrigue and encourage comments and questions. Tana Hoban's little board book **Black and White** uses figure and ground to great effect. Manning and Granström's **Yuck!**, a delightful variation on an Aesop theme, nudges at the boundary between fact and fiction and teaches that different creatures eat different things. Then there are books that take us through a child's day, the sort of book brought to a high level of information and entertainment by author illustrators like Sarah Garland and Shirley Hughes. A recent book, Ken Wilson-Max's **Lenny Has Lunch**, has illustrations with a clear line and shows a dad and his little boy enjoying cooking together.

### **Picture books**

Children learn to 'read' images very early on and this is a tremendous advantage when they move on to written text. Creators of contemporary picture books often leave a teasing gap between the pictures and the words. This puts a young listener's imagination into top gear. Look for classics like **Dear Zoo** and **Owl Babies** or some of the constant stream of exciting new picture books. Oliver Jeffers' **How to Catch a Star** appeals to children's yearning for adventure while Emma Dodd's book **Me?** taps into the need for security and safety.

### **Sharing and using books with the very young**

Novelty books with their tags and flaps lead naturally to playful activity and nursery rhymes to singing and actions. Props sometimes add enjoyment – a soft toy owl can be held by a child listening to **Owl Babies** and I have used simple props for nursery rhymes – a little purse for Lucy Locket, a toy spider to act out Miss Muffet and a pail for Jack and Jill. As Anthony Browne, sixth Children's Laureate, said in his inaugural speech: 'Sharing picture books leads to amazing conversations.' Tiny children point to details we may have missed and make impressive visual connections. So simply reading the books and talking about them is the best way to nourish enjoyment and response.

### **Six 'must haves'**

It was difficult to choose just six! Remember that the early books that appeal to you are bound to be good choices: your enthusiasm for them will be infectious.

#### **Dear Zoo** by Rod Campbell

Children soon learn to make the noises of the animals as each unsuitable pet is revealed; later they appreciate the narrative. The board book format encourages them to turn the pages. This is a simple but extremely effective book which introduces concepts like size.

#### **The Orchard Book of Nursery Rhymes for Your Baby** by Mary Ann Hoberman, ill. Penny Dann

Large, themed and with generous spacing on each page, this fine collection with contemporary illustrations invites us to sing, chant and move to the 60 rhymes. The emotions and feelings of the animals and people are easily recognised. Just look at the pitiful expressions on the faces of the three little kittens, out in the snow without their mittens. And there's an intriguing picture of Miss Muffet – she seems to be turning into a spider! This book has a strong appeal to young imaginations and I guarantee it will lead to talk and laughter.

#### **Animal Gallery** by Brian Wildsmith

No first collection would be complete without one of Wildsmith's superb animal picture books and this is one of his best. There is a fine lion with a fierce expression and a group of elegant giraffes look out of the page. Children get a sense of the nature of each animal pictured in this imagination-stretching book.

## **Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever** by Richard Scarry

Children will enjoy this book over several years: its wonderfully detailed and annotated pictures follow the activities of Kenny and Kathy Bear in Busytown. Starting with a clear illustrated alphabet page, it then explores domestic settings, paints and toys and then enters the wider world of the farm, the dentist and the city.

## **Owl Babies** by Martin Waddell, ill. Patrick Benson

The story of the baby owls that wake up to find their mother gone taps into children's fears of abandonment but has a reassuring end. Children too young to understand the story like the pictures, partly because of the contrast between the dark night time wood and the creamy owlets. Babies from about six months respond to the end pages with the speckled owl feather pattern.

## **Goodnight Moon** by Margaret Wise Brown, ill. Clement Hurd

The pages of this board book edition of a classic bedtime story are easily turned by young children. Children are fascinated by the interplay between the pictures of a domestic world and the glimpses of the world outside with moon and stars.

**Margaret Mallett** is an independent writer and researcher in Primary English and team editor of the English Association's journal **English 4-11**.

\* 'Everyone's Home Library' by Anne Fine in **Books for Keeps** No.133, March 2002.

## **Books mentioned**

**Animal Gallery**, Brian Wildsmith, Oxford, 48pp, 978 0 19 272794 7, £6.99 pbk

**Black and White**, Tana Hoban, Greenwillow Books, 16pp, 978 0 06117 211 3, £3.99 board

**Dear Zoo**, Rod Campbell, Macmillan, 18pp, 978 0 230 74772 2, £5.99 board

**Elmer and the Lost Teddy**, David McKee, Andersen, 32pp, 978 1 84270 749 4, £5.99 pbk

**Goodnight Moon**, Margaret Wise Brown, ill. Clement Hurd, Macmillan, 20pp. 978 0 230 74860 6, £4.99 board

**How to Catch a Star**, Oliver Jeffers, HarperCollins, 32pp, 978 0 00 715034 2, £5.99 pbk

**Lenny Has Lunch**, Ken Wilson-Max, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 978 1 84507 979 6, £9.99 hbk

**Me?**, Emma Dodd, Templar, 24pp, 978 1 84011 963 3, £7.99 hbk

**The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Alphabet Book**, Robert Crowther, Walker, 12pp, 978 0 7445 7027 4, £7.99 pbk

**The Orchard Book of Nursery Rhymes for Your Baby**, Mary Ann Hoberman, ill. Penny Dann, Orchard, 96pp, 978 1 4083 0458 7, £12.99 hbk

**Owl Babies**, Martin Waddell, ill. Patrick Benson, Walker, 32pp, 978 0 7445 3167 1, £5.99 pbk

**The Puffin Mother Goose Treasury**, Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 160pp, 978 0 14 132966 6, £14.99 hbk

**Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever**, Richard Scarry, Golden Books, 72pp, 978 0 307 15510 8, £13.99 hbk

**Ring-a-ring O'Roses and Other Nursery Rhymes**, Brita Granström, Walker, 24pp, 978 1 4063 1683 4, £4.99 pbk

**That's Not My Puppy**, Fiona Watts and Rachel Wells, Usborne 'Touchy Feely Books', 10pp, 978 0 7460 3778 2, £5.00 board

**Where's Spot?**, Eric Hill, Warne, 24pp, 978 0 7232 6366 1, £4.99 board

**Yuck! What's for Supper?**, Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 978 1 84507 423 4, £5.99 pbk

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