



# 100 Great Children's Picture Books

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is a wonder full book. Here is Martin Salisbury's choice of a hundred picture books published in the last hundred years or so. And it's sumptuous: a chronological gallery of the work of an international array of some of the most exciting picture book artists from across the world. Each book is displayed in a double page spread which contains photographed pages from the published book and Salisbury's introduction to the book and its illustrator. This gives us a little biography, some indication of the artistic, design and reprographic techniques involved, and the contribution of the title to the art of the picture book, alongside a wealth of enthralling images. Perhaps this collection might be considered as a companion to his earlier [Children's Picturebooks: the Art of Visual Storytelling](#) [4], providing a rich visual commentary or parallel story to the analytical work of that title.

But, in his introduction, he claims to have given way entirely to 'the wow factor', a 'luxuriously subjective approach' to deciding what to include. He admits, too, that he is defying the modern critical consensus that a picture book is uniquely a union of text and picture, and concentrating primarily on the pictorial aspect: 'good art and design'.

The result is breathtaking and eye-opening in scope, including many books that have never found an English language publisher, but which Salisbury sees as contributing to the picture book as an art form, exemplifying its highest achievements, or pushing at its boundaries. These include works from post-Revolutionary Russia, which brought avant-garde art to children's books, and titles from present day publishing houses in Portugal, Belgium and Italy that encourage work that continues to experiment and extend the possibilities of the form.

Through the intervening years, Salisbury introduces us to a wealth of titles, familiar and unfamiliar. Sometimes even a book we might regard as familiar, like Ardizzone's **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain**, appears very different in its original edition than in more modern reprints. And if Salisbury's preference for first editions satisfies the book collector's taste in a growing market where some of the rarer books can fetch big prices at auction, then it also alerts us to the way in which the technical possibilities of reproduction in each era both constrain and inspire the imagination and graphic inventiveness of the illustrator.

Salisbury includes many British titles from 1950s and 1960s, partly, he admits, from nostalgia, but mainly because he sees it as a defining period in the development of the modern picture book. Those of us who have lived that long will be gratified to find some old favourites but possibly be disappointed to find that Salisbury has not made the same choices

that we might have: either of the books to represent his favoured illustrators or which illustrators to include.

Of British illustrators, you might be surprised not to find McKee, Browne, Briggs or even Blake (though he is given honourable mention). The geographical coverage leans towards Europe and Japan, with some US representation, and you may look in vain for an Australian (not even Shaun Tan). But, after all, this is a personal selection and, if there is any such disappointment, it is more than made up for by the revelation of illustrators we have not met before and the pleasure of such an expert and enthusiastic guide.

The book itself, written by the leader of the UK's first Master's programme in children's book illustration, is an example of how the appreciation of the picture book as a cultural artefact has grown in the last twenty years, with museums dedicated to important figures, and a century of great works for students to study and learn from. Another message to be taken from the book is how provincial we continue to be in the UK in our attitude to work from non-English speaking countries. So many of these books have never found a British publisher, as if our own, admittedly rich, heritage, has blinded us to what else is out there. Perhaps this is beginning to change and, if you want to get an idea of the variety and quality of work from other countries that we rarely get to see, look out for the travelling exhibition of international picture books from the 2014 [IBBY Honour List](#) [5]. 50 countries are represented in this exhibition which is hosted by [International Centre for the Picture Book in Society](#) [6]. Whatever you do, buy this book, it's a bargain.

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