



# Pick of the Picture Books

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**Jill Bennett** and **Pat Triggs** make their selection from this year's publishing so far.

**Jill Bennett** and **Pat Triggs** make a personal selection from what's been published so far this year.

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Three alphabets - all very different.

## **Animal Alphabet**

Bert Kitchen, Patrick Hardy Books, 0 7444 0024 4, £6.50

Twenty-six letters, each adorned with an exquisitely painted animal or bird, plus an invitation to join in a name-guessing game. Little to engage the attention of the very young but much to delight older children and adults who appreciate beautiful design and high quality production.

## **A is for Angry**

Sandra Boynton, Methuen, 0 416 46850 0, £4.95

Sub-titled 'an animal and adjective alphabet' this is an inventively conceived and designed trip through the pages to find an 'outraged opossum' facing a 'playful pig', 'nosy newts' peering at 'merry mice', the inevitable iguana 'ill' from eating into its green upper case I, and so on. Sandra Boynton's distinctive cartoon style gives the animals a very funny range of expressions - look out for a Jazzy jaguar, a real cool cat in scarf and shades.

## **Lucy and Tom's a.b.c.**

Shirley Hughes, Gollancz, 0 575 03398 3, £3.95

Just when you thought there was nothing new that could possibly be done with an alphabet book - along comes Shirley Hughes with a book that breaks the mould and makes itself immediately indispensable. It's an alphabet all right (upper and lower case) but it is also an introduction to and reflection of life and living for the very young. As we follow Lucy and Tom from A to Z we find dogs, ducks, friends, Granny and Grandpa, light, oranges, ovens, rooms, voices, winter ...an inexhaustible source for sharing, looking, talking, learning and reading (there's lots of text). Fantastic value - the A spread alone is worth the money for what it has to show about words, reading, books, artists, painting. If you work with young children and can buy only one book this year, it must be this one.

## **Teddybears and the Cold Cure**

Susanna Gretz and Alison Sage, Benn, 0 510 00163 7, £4.50

William, one of Susanna Gretz's gang of characterful bears takes to his bed with a feverish cold and is looked after by the others. Bright lively pictures complement and extend a text for sharing and reading alone.

## **Fix-It**

David McPhail, Hutchinson, 0 09 156390 0, £3.95

More people as bears. Emma wants to watch breakfast TV but the set won't work and no-one can fix it, not even the fix-it man. All attempts to console Emma fail until, 'Finally her mother read her a book. "Read it again", said Emma.' By the time father has paid the repair man and found out what was wrong (lots to infer from the pictures) Emma is too busy to care - she's reading to her doll and the cat. An appealing 'message' for bibliophiles to pass on; good pictures, nice simple text for new readers.

### **Here Comes John**

0 241 11199 4,

### **Here Comes Theo**

0 241 11200 1,

Bob Graham, Hamish Hamilton, £3.95 each

Take a snail, a Scottie dog, a small girl and an even smaller boy, add a few well chosen words and the talents and sense of humour of Bob Graham and hey presto! - two delightful little books for all small children and other discerning readers. It is surely a stroke of genius to depict a snail above the words 'It's in a hurry./Look at it go!' and make it appear to be breaking the land speed record.

### **Forget-Me-Not**

Paul Rogers, ill. Celia Berridge, Kestrel, 0 7226 5870 2, £4.95

With some notable exceptions a rhyming text all too often spells disaster so far as picture books are concerned; not so here though: Paul Rogers' tale of a forgetful lion's trip to the seaside to visit his cousin and deliver a present reads well aloud. Each verse sets a puzzle - where has the hero left the various possessions he loses as the journey progresses? - the answer to which is to be found by careful study of Celia Berridge's detailed illustrations in pastel shades. The form of the book: four lines of verse and an accompanying vignette facing a full page picture, both being set within a single colour frame, remind me rather of some of the Ahlbergs' work but it is none the worse for all that.

### **Greedy Zebra**

Mwenye Hadithi, ill. Adrienne Kennaway, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 32892 4, £5.50

A zebra's insatiable appetite leads to his undoing in a Kenyan folk tale which provides an explanation for how the animals acquired their striking appearance; and striking is just what Adrienne Kennaway's paintings are. Her stylised and primitive interpretation of this story is heightened in its effect by her use of shape and form. A book with much to offer both artistically and as an example of mankind's attempts to account for why things are as they are.

### **The Fat Cat**

Jennifer Westwood, ill. Fiona French, Abelard, 0 200 72806 7, £5.95

The circular nature of this traditional Danish folk story of the cat who gobbles everything and everyone in sight before finally getting his just deserts, is heightened by the abundant use of circles in Fiona French's artistically geometric interpretation and the board game which embellishes the end papers. And everything really is in sight because we actually see the successive meals enclosed within the growing circle that is cat's body.

Initially I found myself wanting to recite the text of Jack Kent's version, so firmly is it imprinted on my mind, with the result that I almost missed the nice alternative touches - 'five fowls in a flock', 'seven damsels in a dance' that Jennifer Westwood uses in her telling, and which should help to establish it as a favourite alongside the Kent rendition.

### **The Shoemaker and the Elves**

Cynthia and William Birrer, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 166 4, £4.95

Wizardry with the needle is not the prerogative of the elves or the shoemaker and his wife, as is evidenced by the illustrations in this version of the ever popular story into which Cynthia Birrer works her own magic with a mixture of appliqué, machine embroidery and quilting. Both words and pictures are framed within braided borders which serve to draw the reader in and hold his or her attention in fascination and admiration for the illustrations, at the same time ensuring that the importance of the text is not overlooked. A truly remarkable and original work of art.

### **Where's the Bear?**

Pictures by Byron Barton, words by Charlotte Pomerantz, Julia MacRae,

0 86203 162 1, £4.95

It's the simplicity of Byron Barton's line and his use of large blocks of bold, bright colour which draw young children to his books, that and his ability to convey emotions on the faces of his characters within this seemingly simple form. He succeeds yet again here telling a story of how life's daily routine is interrupted by the discovery of a bear in the forest. Charlotte Pomerantz's minimal text comprising almost entirely the title sentence or the alternative 'There's the bear' is used to great effect through the form of dialogue and serves as an example of how such repetition can hold, rather than lose, the interest of beginner readers.

### **Morning, Rabbit, Morning**

Mary Caldwell, ill. Ann Schweninger, Hodder & Stoughton,

0 340 34807 0, £4.95

Minimal text is again effectively used in *Morning, Rabbit, Morning*. Here the key to success is the use of the imperative form: the reader directs rabbit's actions throughout the book but at the same time, the author's choice of rhythmic, rhyming words forces one to pay close attention to the form and nature of the language. Ann Schweninger's rabbit duly obeys in exuberant fashion as it frisks, whisks, jumps and thumps its way through the day.

### **Early Morning in the Barn**

Nancy Tafuri, Julia MacRae,

0 86203 152 4, £4.95

Three fluffy chicks greet the new day and their neighbours in a brief trip around the farmyard, the only text being the onomatopoeic accompaniment of animal noises. That special quality of early-morning sunlight reflects from each page of this glowing picturebook for the very young.

### **Old Macdonald Had a Farm**

Tracey Campbell Pearson, Bodley Head, 0 370 30601 5, £4.95

Judging by the exuberant nature of her pictures one gets the impression that the artist had great fun illustrating this favourite song to which she has added some verses of her own. And I certainly got enormous enjoyment from such scenes as the frantic dash of assorted animals (and humans) across the fields in pursuit of the mule. Of course, once the form and pattern of the song are known, the reading of this book is easy.

### **I Want to See the Moon**

Louis Baum, ill. Niki Daly, Bodley Head, 0 370 30971 5, £4.95

Two year-old(?) Toby wakes up and wants to see the moon. Dad changes a nappy, provides drinks, plays, reads and finally takes Toby into the garden to look at the moon. Lovely pictures in soft watercolours show a warm and loving relationship. I can already hear the chorus of objections about 'giving children ideas about getting up in the night'. Ignore them. Parents could learn from this one.

### **Badger's Parting Gifts**

Susan Varley, Andersen Press, 0 86264 062 8, £4.95

Susan Varley's first picture book and there are echoes of Shepard and Ardizzone in the delightful illustrations for a very good text. Old Badger dies, his young friends grieve but find solace in sharing their memories of him and what he taught them. A book full of feeling which treats a difficult subject with tact and restraint.

### **The Great Big Especially Beautiful Easter Egg**

James Stevenson, Gollancz, 0 575 03381 9, £4.95

Easter has gone and we don't make a big thing about the Easter Bunny as they do in the States where this book originated, but that's no reason for missing out on this wild and funny story of Grandpa recalling his quest for the egg of the title to give to Charlotte, the girl next door. James Stevenson's special brand of humour and his use of cartoon-type frames, speech bubbles and graphics should be better known here.

### **Rapscallion Jones**

James Marshall, Bodley Head, 0 370 31000 4, £4.95

Another American import with a sophisticated line in humour for older readers and listeners. Pressed for the rent, Rapsallion Jones, the fox, is forced to think about getting a job. He decides to become a writer. ('You call that a job!' - says his cigar-smoking bulldog landlady.) Great pictures.

### **Mighty Mountain and the Three Strong Women**

Irene Hedlund, English version by Judith Elkin, A & C Black, 0 7316 2398 5, £4.95

A long story with strong clear illustrations about how Kumiko, her mother and her grandmother show Mighty Mountain how to become the strongest wrestler in Japan. Nicely humorous and usefully anti-sexist.

### **The Headless Horseman Rides Tonight**

Jack Prelutsky, ill. Arnold Lobel, A & C Black, 0 7136 2383 7, £3.50

After Nightmares we have 'more poems to trouble your sleep'. The horror-hungry will find plenty to feed their appetites among the twelve nasties presented here, each accompanied by Arnold Lobel's shiverful black and white illustrations.

### **The Glorious Flight**

Alice and Martin Provenson, Hutchinson, 0 09 154300 2, £4.95

The Provensons in detailed, atmospheric pictures and simple text retell the story of the Bleriot family and the accident-filled eight years in which Papa Louis developed the plane in which he crossed the Channel in 1909. Marvellous project potential.

### **Anno's Flea Market**

Mitsumasa Anno, Bodley Head, 0 370 30591 4, £5.95

An antiquarian bonanza as Anno's latest wordless picture book shows a flea market packed with every imaginable artifact. Hours of poring, masses of information and some surprises for dedicated lookers.

### **The Wreck of the Zephyr**

Chris Van Allsburg, Andersen Press, 0 86264 0636, £5.50

Rich, mysterious and beautifully evocative paintings illustrate a dream-like fantasy of a boy who learns to fly his boat. The cloud-and shadow-filled pictures of the sailing boat gliding through the night sky are eerily compelling.

### **Sketches from Bleak House**

Mervyn Peake, Methuen, 0 416 45960 9, £8.95

Mervyn Peake's incomplete illustrations for Dickens' **Bleak House** with introduction and excerpts from the novel selected by Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen. Splendid material for stimulating response and discussion in those studying the text or reading for pleasure.

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