

*B*est-Selling Books for Infants and Children Ages 1–2

Children are never too young for you to read to them, and I strongly urge parents to start when their children are infants. This chapter gives you ideas for books to read to your children from birth through age 2. The majority are board books, sturdy little books that consist of about 14 to 28 thick cardboard pages with rounded corners. Sometimes picture books that sell well in hardcover and paperback editions are later published as board books (although the text is often condensed). However, most board books have been specifically designed for this format.

Rather than containing a story, board books are almost entirely concept oriented with topics such as the alphabet, animals, colors, numbers, opposites, shapes, and textures. In this chapter on books for the youngest of children, the majority (but not all) are board books specifically designed to be baby's first books.

Bedtime

Bedtime and books go together like milk and cookies. There is no better way for a parent, grandparent, or babysitter to get a child settled into bed than to pull out a favorite picture book. Then, instead of bedtime becoming something for children to dread and fight against, it becomes an enjoyable time when the caregiver and child can unwind and be close to each other. Often young children will drift off to sleep with happy characters and thoughts on their minds to dream about. As they get older, be prepared for them to negotiate for you to read "just one more book, pleeeeee!"

From *What Should I Read Aloud? A Guide to 200 Best-Selling Picture Books* by Nancy A. Anderson. © 2007 Nancy A. Anderson, Inc. Published by the International Reading Association.

***Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd. (1947). HarperCollins. 32 pages.** The all-time best-selling board book is *Goodnight Moon* (also available in regular hardcover and paperback). Generations of children have loved this book since it was first published in 1947. Illustrations depicting an old rotary telephone and the presence of a fireplace in the bedroom indicate a specific era, but the text is timeless. In lulling language, the author gives an account of a little bunny whose green bedroom grows increasingly darker as he goes through his nightly bedtime routine of saying goodnight to his room and all the familiar things visible. Looking for all the objects the bunny names is a fun way for children to interact with this book. Sharp eyes will even spot a copy of *Goodnight Moon* on the nightstand. Especially entertaining is the little mouse, climbing around the room as the clock indicates the increasing lateness of the hour. At the end, the little bunny succumbs to slumber, secure that all the beloved things inside his room (and visible through the window) will still be there when he awakens.

***The Going to Bed Book* by Sandra Boynton. (1995). Little Simon. 16 pages.** Author, artist, and musical composer Sandra Boynton—also known for her greeting cards—publishes extra-appealing board books with oddball humor that delight children and adults with their enchanting silliness. Her whimsical and hilarious style features zany animal characters, such as the elephant, moose, and pig in *The Going to Bed Book*. Children will see their own bedtime routines as fun when they see the animals prepare for bed by taking a bath (in one big tub), finding their pajamas, brushing their teeth, and finally rocking to sleep in the ark. The simple rhymes, goofy animals, and sweet lyrics in all of Boynton's books make for memorable reading experiences. Equally fun is her *Pajama Time!*

***The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, illustrated by Don Wood. (1984). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 32 pages.** In rhythmic and repetitive text, and with illustrations in beautiful shades of blue and lavender, children experience a bedroom scene, depicting a dark and rainy day through the window. A granny is sound asleep, snoring in her cozy little bed, and her grandson, who has been nodding in a nearby chair, joins her with his pillow (right on top of Granny). The dreaming boy is followed by a dozing dog, a snoozing cat, a slumbering mouse, and a flea—but the flea has no intention of sleeping. He hops on top of the stack to take a nip out of the mouse, which causes quite a commotion.

Children will enjoy tracking the flea's progress to the top of the stack by looking for the small black dot (encircled by a halo) in each of the illustrations.

***Good Night, Gorilla* by Peggy Rathmann. (1994). Putnam. 32 pages.** A weary—but fatherly—watchman walks by the gorilla cage, making his last nightly round at the zoo, unaware that the crafty creature has pickpocketed his keys and stealthily trails him, unlocking the cages of every animal the guard bids good night to. All animals quietly parade behind the oblivious guard as he traipses home to his nearby cottage. The animals are able to slip unnoticed into his bedroom, and the cheeky little gorilla even snuggles next to the sleepy wife as she turns out the lights. When all of the creatures reply to the wife's, "Good night, dear," they are exposed! After several readings, encourage children to make up a story about the unnamed mouse who appears in every illustration, first drifting up on a red balloon to the top of the gorilla cage to pick a banana, and then trailing the balloon behind him to, from, and then back again to the cottage bedroom for a nighttime snack.

***Time for Bed* by Mem Fox, illustrated by Jane Dyer. (1997). Red Wagon. 28 pages.** In this gentle bedtime lullaby, darkness is falling while various affectionate animal parents get their offspring ready for a cozy sleep. In rhymed couplets and repetitive text, the narrator bids good night to each animal family as the mothers endearingly cuddle with their little ones. In the final double-page spread (two facing pages in a book), a blond-headed toddler nods off to sleep as Mother hugs him closely.

Animals

If you look back at the five bedtime books, you will notice that all of them have animal characters, most of whom act like humans—either just speaking and thinking like humans, as in *Good Night, Gorilla*, or acting entirely humanlike, as the bunny does in *Goodnight Moon*. Research indicates that animal fantasy books are young children's favorite genre (Anderson, 2006b; Lawson, 1972; Peterson, 1971). Nearly one-third of the all-time best-selling children's books published in the United States are animal fantasy (Roback, Britton, & Hochman, 2001), and more than one-third of publishers' new titles are animal fantasy (Anderson & Eitelgeorge, in press). Therefore, it is not surprising that books about animals are abundant in this chapter and the ones that follow.

***Moo Baa La La La* by Sandra Boynton. (1982). Little Simon. 14 pages.** With what the publisher calls “serious silliness for all ages,” artist Sandra Boynton is better than ever with completely redrawn versions of her multimillion-selling board books, the most popular of which is *Moo Baa La La La*. Whimsical and hilarious animals entertain infants with their oddball antics while making the traditional animal sounds—all except for the three dancing pigs who sing “La La La.” If Boynton’s art looks familiar, chances are you have seen it on one of the more than 8,000 greeting cards she designed, or on the collections of children’s wallpaper, T-shirts, balloons, plush toys, stationery items, and mugs that are adorned with her artwork.

***Barnyard Dance!* by Sandra Boynton. (1993). Workman. 24 pages.** This joyful book features a bespectacled fiddle-playing cow and a pig twirling a sheep at a barnyard dance. The die-cut cover (cut-out hole) frames a picture of its zany characters. The farm animals dance a boisterous, knee-slapping square dance, which the fiddle-playing cow calls in cadence. Everyone will want to sing along as the animals do-si-do in the barnyard with a baa and a moo and a cock-a-doodle-doo as everybody promenades, two by two! I also recommend *Philadelphia Chickens* for another Boynton song and dance book—this one with musical notations as well as lyrics.

***Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Felicity Bond. (1956). HarperFestival. 32 pages.** The beloved author of *Goodnight Moon* created another all-time favorite with *Big Red Barn*, which tells about the cycle of a day in a barnyard, where a family of animals (and the old scarecrow) peacefully play and sleep in the grass and the hay. Horses, sheep, goats, geese, chickens, cows, and a pink piglet (who is learning to squeal) cavort around the big red barn in the great green field.

***Farm Animals* by Phoebe Dunn. (1984). Random House. 28 pages.** The cover illustration of an adorable pink piglet perched on a fence railing invites children to look inside this chunky little book. In lively full-color photographs, all the friendly animals on the farm—including ducks, chickens, pigs, sheep, and horses—are identified by name. Though the text is sparse, adults can provide the animal sounds and interesting information about the critters, making this a great book for lap reading.

***The Farm Book* by Jan Pfloug. (1968). Golden Books. 24 pages.** This is not a typical farm book with just the pictures, names, and noises of animals. It also shows the everyday activities of a farm family, including two children who jump in the hayloft and hug the woolly lambs while the farmer milks the cows and feeds the sheep and turkeys—and what a horde of turkeys it is!

***The Zoo Book* by Jan Pfloug. (1967). Golden Books. 24 pages.** An attractive baby zebra adorns the cover of this inviting book, which is a companion to Pfloug's *The Farm Book*. Teachers and parents can find great ideas on how to use this and other books with zoo themes for fun learning activities at a link from the Alphabet Soup site (<http://www.thekcrew.net/zoounit.html>).

***The Kitten Book* by Jan Pfloug. (1968). Golden Books. 24 pages.** All baby animals, but especially tiny and fuzzy kittens, are attractive to children, who can relate to the animals' diminutive size, playful nature, and helplessness. With easy-to-read text and attractive drawings, little ones can learn about the life of a kitten in this slim book. On a child's level, the author explains how kittens grow up. She provides interesting information, such as kittens will open their eyes for the first time at 2 weeks of age, and they are able to lap milk from a bowl at 6 weeks. Families who are planning to get a kitten will find this a valuable introduction. In addition, children who are born into families with an existing cat can enjoy seeing what their pet might have been like when it was a baby.

***Animal Babies* by Harry McNaught. (1977). Random House. 14 pages.** The cover of this thick board book depicts a mother red fox with her four contented little pups. Through colorful illustrations and easy-to-read text, children can learn to recognize and name 20 types of baby animals and their mothers—both domestic and wild—including a cygnet (swan), fawn (deer), foal (horse), joey (kangaroo), and kit (rabbit). Older children who have grown fond of this book might enjoy finding the names of other baby animals by searching the Utah Education Network (http://www.uen.org/utahlink/activities/view_activity.cgi?activity_id=4777).

***Baby's Animal Friends* by Phoebe Dunn. (1988). Random House. 28 pages.** Delightful full-color photographs capture the special bond between young children and baby animals. The cover photo of a towheaded toddler kissing a baby rabbit sets the tone for these authentic photos of baby animals, along with a few baby humans as well. If you want children to see what real animals look

like (as opposed to the cartoon-like drawings in many animal board books), have them view these photos of little animals, such as a sleeping fawn and a tiny lamb.

***Neighborhood Animals* by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Nadeem Zaidi. (2001). Baby Einstein. 16 pages.** With both colorful illustrations and real photographs, eight animals are introduced: dog, cat, bird, rabbit, mouse, ladybug, duck, and frog. Text under each illustration contains a discussion question and three facts about each animal.

***Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?* by Bill Martin Jr, illustrated by Eric Carle. (1991). Henry Holt. 32 pages.** The setting of this book is a zoo where an elephant, hippo, lion, and other animals are asked what they hear. Each answer leads to the animal on the next page, and the book culminates with a zookeeper and a group of multiracial children, each disguised as one of the animals in the book. The brief, rhythmic words are easy for children to memorize and recite as they look back at the pages. They will have fun saying the names of the animals—fluting flamingo, bellowing walrus, hissing boa constrictor, and more!

Love

One topic that needs little introduction is parents' love for their children. Three special board books allow little ones to experience security and comfort in unconditional parental adoration.

***Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney, illustrated by Anita Jeram. (1994). Candlewick. 20 pages.** A little hare tests his father's love by declaring his own: "Guess how much I love you?" Little Nutbrown Hare says he loves Big Nutbrown Hare as far as he can reach and as high as he can hop. However, Big Nutbrown Hare loves his son as far as *his* long arms can reach and as high as *his* strong legs can hop, which is much farther. Gentle competition ensues as each avows affection in ever more expansive terms. Finally, on the edge of sleep, the son says that he loves his father right up to the moon, which is very far, but as Father kisses his son goodnight, he replies that he loves him right up to the moon—and back. The watercolor illustrations, in soft earthy tones and delicate ink-line details, beautifully capture the loving relationship between parent and child.

***The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd. (1942). HarperFestival. 40 pages.** A little rabbit who wants to run away tells his mother how he will escape, but she tells him she will run after him because he is her little bunny. Thus begins the delightful banter, and no matter how many forms the little bunny takes—a fish in a trout stream, a rock on a high mountain, a crocus in a hidden garden, or a bird flying to a tree—his protective mother finds a way of retrieving him.

Following each of the pages in which the bunny tells of his next hiding place and the mother tells how she will find him is a colorful double-page spread, illustrating their imaginary game of hide-and-seek. The most touching illustration is the bunny with large graceful wings flying to the tree whose leaves have taken the shape of mother bunny with outstretched arms. The illustrations are very dreamlike, and they give young viewers a strong sense of security. This book will comfort a child who has tested the strength of his mother's love because the mother in the story always finds a way to draw her child back into her arms and loving care.

In the bunny's final attempt to hide from his mother, he fantasizes becoming a little boy and hiding in a house. The colorful spread that follows was the inspiration for another book that Brown and Hurd published several years later. Children will enjoy comparing this page to the "Goodnight room" page in *Goodnight Moon*. They will see the same little bunny clad in blue-and-white striped pajamas, blazing fireplace, picture of the cow jumping over the moon, round table with blue and yellow lamp, and even the little mouse hiding in a corner. Likewise, in the *Goodnight Moon* page, viewers will see a scene from *The Runaway Bunny* in a picture hanging on the nursery wall.

***I Love You as Much...* by Laura Krauss Melmed, illustrated by Henri Sorensen. (1993). HarperFestival. 22 pages.** This gentle picture book lullaby celebrates the love between mothers and children, starting with pairs (mothers and offspring) of various animals—horses, bears, camels, geese, sheep, mice, goats, and whales—in natural settings, and it ends with a young human mother and her newborn child. The poem is written in quatrains that break into couplets across each double-page spread, describing each mother's testament of love. Sorensen's watercolor illustrations extend to the edges of each page, which all have full backgrounds and panoramic views. Each mother animal's love poem to her baby appears in the corner of a page where it does not block the touching illustrations.

First Words

After an extensive review of research, the National Early Literacy Panel (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004) identified those characteristics of children from birth through age 5 that are most closely linked to later achievement in literacy, and oral language development was at the top of their list.

When children's caregivers read to them regularly, children's oral language develops more rapidly. Children are first able to listen to and understand words and phrases that they hear in conversations and in books. (This is called their listening vocabulary.) Later, children begin to speak these words, using them in appropriate context (called their speaking vocabulary). Eventually, children will match the spoken words to their written counterparts, and this is how children develop their reading vocabulary—the words they can recognize on sight. Numerous best-selling books are designed to develop young children's listening and speaking vocabularies. While children may outgrow the topics of these books, they will enjoy them anew when they learn how to read them independently or to read them to a younger sibling.

***My First Word Board Book* by Angela Wilkes. (1997). Disney Press. 32 pages.** In this miniature visual dictionary, children view double-page spreads that contain familiar categories such as animals, bathroom items, clothing, colored shapes, food, garage items, kitchen items, numbers, moving things, and toys. Each category contains about 15 labeled photographs, which serve to present simple word concepts. In addition, the groupings help young minds to categorize objects while connecting words to their associated images. A valuable feature of this book is that each item is labeled in lowercase (small) letters only, making it easier for emergent readers to recognize the words. (At least 90% of the letters young children encounter in print are lowercase, so it is the most desirable form to learn first.)

***Big Dog...Little Dog* by P.D. Eastman. (1973). Random House. 32 pages.** The bold, colorful drawings in this book emphasize the concept of *opposites* with humor. The book opens by explaining that Fred and Ted are two dogs who are best friends, but they are opposite in every way. For example, Fred is big but Ted is little, and Fred always has money but Ted is always broke. Unlike most concept books, this book contains episodes and action to maintain children's interest in the characters and their predicaments.

Babies by Gyo Fujikawa. (1977). Grosset & Dunlap. 14 pages. This charming first look at the sweet world of a variety of ethnically diverse babies is introduced with a cover illustration of a young boy cuddling his baby sister. Inside, infants and toddlers will learn that all babies like to be loved, hugged, and cuddled—the perfect things to do while you are reading this book. Their comparative descriptions, such as *big* and *little*, *naughty* and *nice*, *sleeping* and *waking*, and *crying* and *happy*, make this book a good introduction to the concept of opposites.

Oh My Oh My Oh Dinosaurs! by Sandra Boynton. (1993). Workman. 24 pages. The inimitable Sandra Boynton makes learning opposites fun with her sassy and energetic dinosaurs. Through activities such as singing, sunbathing, painting, dancing, and playing volleyball, a gang of personable dinosaurs demonstrates concepts such as *good* and *bad*, *happy* and *sad*, *early* and *later*, and *plump* and *lean*. A die-cut cover introduces the colorful, humorous characters.

Olivia's Opposites by Ian Falconer. (2002). Atheneum. 12 pages. Falconer's irrepressible Olivia, the rambunctious little piglet, demonstrates word pairs with a comic flair. In Falconer's signature black-and-red illustrations on a white background, Olivia acts out opposites such as *plain* and *fancy*, *loud* and *quiet*, *up* and *down*, and *long*—modeling her scarlet evening gown—and *short*—flaunting a red tutu. Though Olivia's energy seems endless (at least to her parents), the book aptly ends with the sleepy, pajama-clad Olivia and her *open* (yawning) and *closed* (finally!) mouth.

Mirror Me! by Julie Aigner-Clark, illustrated by Nadeem Zaidi. (2002). Baby Einstein. 12 pages. Parents can use this book to entertain infants and to help toddlers learn the names for parts of the face—such as *forehead*, *lips*, *ears*, *hair*, and *chin*—while looking at their own faces in the book's mirrors (thin reflective film on each spread). They will also have fun imitating faces made by the book's characters. This engaging little book offers many opportunities to interact with children.

Hand, Hand, Fingers, Thumb by Al Perkins, illustrated by Eric Gurney. (1969). Random House. 24 pages. A madcap band of dancing and prancing monkeys explain *hands*, *fingers*, and *thumb* while using their hands to beat on various drums. The strong rhythm of the text encourages children to chime in

during parts they remember. Do not be surprised if they tap on something to match the rhythm of “dum ditty, dum ditty, dum dum dum.”

Alphabet

In addition to oral language, the National Early Literacy Panel (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004) identified phonological/phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge as characteristics of young children that are most closely linked to later achievement in literacy.

Alphabet books, also called ABC books, are concept books that present the letters of the alphabet. Because these books are often children’s first introduction to the symbols that represent the English language, you should select them carefully. The best books present the letters in alphabetical order in both lowercase and uppercase forms.

Often, each double-page spread is devoted to one letter, and the pages contain a number of things whose labels begin with the featured letter. Encourage children to look carefully at the letter and say its name; then help them name all the things on the page, reinforcing that those words begin with the featured letter and sound. In this manner, children can learn the phonemes, or individual sounds of our language.

***Chicka Chicka ABC* by Bill Martin Jr and John Archambault, illustrated by Lois Ehlert. (1993). Little Simon. 14 pages.** This colorful board book is great for introducing the alphabet to infants. In this rollicking little chant, all the little letters of the alphabet race up the coconut tree in a humorous game of tag. It all starts when *a* tells *b* he will meet him at the top of the coconut tree. Then *d* dares *e*, *f*, and *g* to beat him to the top of the coconut tree. After all the letters make it to the top, then *chicka, chicka, boom, boom*, they all fall down! This board book was adapted from the full-size hardcover edition of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. Unlike most other adapted board books, the authors gave it a slightly different name so that people who are familiar with the original would not be disappointed that it was condensed to make it more appropriate for infants and toddlers, whose attention spans would not be maintained with the original 40-page version.

***The Alphabet Book* by P.D. Eastman. (1974). Random House. 24 pages.** With comical illustrations, Eastman presents the letters of the alphabet from

American ants, birds on bikes, and cow in car, through zebras with zithers. A unique feature is the alphabet that runs down the side of each page, highlighting the letter featured on that page. Show children how to run a finger down the page, reciting the alphabet, and when they get to the highlighted letter, they will be able to reinforce the letter name with the written symbol.

***Baby's ABC* by Anita Shevett and Steve Shevett. (1986). Random House. 28 pages.** This diminutive book contains 26 full-color photographs of babies and familiar objects in their world, making it very appropriate for a first alphabet book. Pages present objects of interest to toddlers, such as apples, crayons, ice cream, keys, lollipops, rattles, telephones, wagons, and zippers in an uncluttered manner on bright backgrounds. Each page contains the featured letter in both lower- and uppercase.

***A to Z* by Sandra Boynton. (1984). Little Simon. 10 pages.** Printed on thick board pages, this book presents a variety of humorous animal characters that introduce the letters of the alphabet. As in Boynton's other whimsical and hilarious books, animals such as aardvarks, beavers, cats, and zebras cavort around the pages to the delight of young viewers who are learning while being entertained.

Colors

Another popular topic for concept books is color, and authors and illustrators have imaginative ways to introduce the basic colors, including primary (red, yellow, and blue), secondary (orange, green, and purple), and tertiary (vermillion, marigold, chartreuse, aquamarine, violet, and magenta).

***Blue Hat, Green Hat* by Sandra Boynton. (1984). Little Simon. 14 pages.** Ridiculous and loveable animals introduce both the basic colors and familiar items of clothing. The elephant, bear, moose, and turkey appear in a variety of colorful, silly attire. The turkey has two fewer legs than the other characters, so he always ends up wearing the clothing in some strange manner (for example, a shirt around his tail feathers). The other animals are far from static, such as on the page where the elephant, bear, and moose are standing on their hands while wearing colored pants. To make learning the colors a little more challenging, each sequence has the colors in a different

order to ensure that children are really recognizing them and not just memorizing the order.

***Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr, illustrated by Eric Carle. (1996). Henry Holt. 32 pages.** This board book is a revised version of the classic 1983 hardcover edition (now out of print). Martin’s gentle rhythmic repetition, and Carle’s gorgeous, tissue-paper collage (a technique of cutting or tearing paper or fabric shapes that are assembled and glued on a surface) illustrations introduce children to a menagerie of colorful animals, who—on each double-page spread—nudge the reader onward to discover the next creature. The colorful illustrations of the brown bear, red bird, yellow duck, blue horse, green frog, purple cat, white dog, black sheep, and goldfish reinforce both color and animal concepts. This new edition has stronger colors and texture that delineate animal bodies more sharply. In addition, Carle slightly changed the positions and shapes of the animals from the original, resulting in a more energized look. Because the text is composed of only 32 different words, this makes a great first reader for children (also available in both hardcover and paperback editions).

***Good Night, Sweet Butterflies: A Color Dreamland* by Dawn Bentley, illustrated by Heather Cahoon. (2003). Little Simon. 24 pages.** Nine sparkly, three-dimensional butterflies (covered with glitter) flit through color-themed pages that offer a place for the little butterflies to sleep. Vibrantly colorful flowers, birds, and insects adorn each illustration. Thick pages make it easy to turn (and harder to tear). The final page reunites all the butterflies and colorful animals, and invites children to say goodnight to them all. The butterflies are securely mounted, but it is still possible for children to remove one, so young children should not be allowed to view this book independently to avoid a choking hazard.

Numbers

Children are at an advantage if they enter kindergarten knowing the counting numbers 1–10, and the following books will make learning these essential concepts fun.

***Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow. (1989). Clarion Books. 14 pages.** You may remember the catchy finger play from your

childhood: “Five little monkeys, jumping on the bed; one fell off and bumped his head.” Eileen Christelow retells this delightful old counting rhyme in a charming picture book with her amusing colored-pencil drawings of the rambunctious siblings. In this cumulative verse, children learn to count backward from 5 to 1 with the five silly monkeys who insist on bedtime mayhem, regardless of the doctor’s admonition after each in turn suffers the same injury. Finally, all the weary monkey children are asleep, albeit with bandaged heads, and Mother can go to bed. At the end, we discover where the children learned their bed-jumping skills. This also makes for good bedtime reading because it begins with the little monkeys’ nighttime routine of taking a bath, putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, and being tucked in. However, before you leave the room, you will want to stress, “No little monkey jumping on the bed!”

Olivia Counts by Ian Falconer. (2002). Atheneum. 12 pages. *Olivia Counts* is a companion book to *Olivia’s Opposites*, introduced in the section “First Words.” In *Olivia Counts*, youngsters can learn the counting numbers 1 through 10, while viewing the appealing piglet Olivia with various numbered objects. It begins with one ball and ends with Olivia pictured in 10 various familiar poses, such as trying on pantyhose, standing on her head, wearing flippers, listening to headphones, jumping rope, sunbathing, and doing handstands. My favorite page is *four aunts*, all of whom look like an older Olivia.

See and Spy Counting by Julie Aigner-Clark, illustrated by Nadeem Zaidi. (2001). Baby Einstein. 16 pages. Toddlers can sharpen their visual acuity while learning the numerals and counting numbers 1 through 5 by spotting objects and then counting how many of those items appear in the picture. Double-page spreads feature different animals in appropriate settings, such as a cow on a farm. Each spread contains five questions, and children are encouraged to see and count, for example, the number of barns (1) and the number of ears on the cow (2). For each page, the answers are always in numerical order, 1 through 5, making this an excellent first counting book.

Shapes

Similar to the counting numbers and colors, basic geometric shapes are concepts that children are required to demonstrate before they are ready to leave kindergarten. If children can learn them before they enter kindergarten,

they are at a great advantage. The following books will help them acquire these concepts.

See and Spy Shapes by Julie Aigner-Clark, illustrated by Nadeem Zaidi. (2001). *Baby Einstein*. 16 pages. Youngsters will love looking at the simple but brightly colored illustrations and listening to the rhyming text in this book. Start by pointing out each shape and saying its name: circle, square, triangle, rectangle, oval, star, and diamond. (Later, you can reinforce these concepts by pointing out the shapes of familiar objects at home, during play, or while riding in the car.) After children become familiar with the distinctive characteristics of the basic shapes, they will enjoy independently spotting them in the book's illustrations and then counting how many of each shape they can find. Each page features a different poem, animal, and shape, so numbers, colors, and animals are reinforced along with the basic shapes.

Puzzling Shapes: A Puzzle Book by Julie Aigner-Clark, illustrated by Nadeem Zaidi. (2002). *Baby Einstein*. 12 pages. This unique book is both a shape concept book and an interaction book (discussed in the last section of this chapter). Removable puzzle pieces made from colorful, heavy cardboard will both entertain children and help them develop their eye-hand coordination. Children can take out the puzzle pieces one at a time, while you discuss the shape, relative size, and color of each. After a few experiences with the book, children may enjoy taking out several pieces at one time and then determining where they belong in the book. On the last pages, the shapes are all the same color, so children can practice identifying them without the aid of color cues. However, the pieces are small enough for young children to put inside their mouths, so they should only view this book with supervision. In addition, the pieces are not easy to snap into place, so little ones may need your help to make them fit.

Other Concepts

Some books for infants and toddlers are primarily entertaining, but they also serve as a stimulus for discussion of interesting concepts, such as seasons of the year, daily activities, and community helpers. While they do not have full plots, these books do contain characters, setting, and events.

***I Am a Bunny* by Ole Risom, illustrated by Richard Scarry. (1963). Golden Books. 26 pages.** Nicholas, dressed in adorable red overalls and a yellow shirt, is a bunny who lives in a hollow tree and enjoys all the seasons of the year. In the spring, Nicholas likes to pick flowers and chase butterflies (who chase him back). In the summer, Nicholas lies in the sun and watches birds in the sky and frogs in the pond. In the fall, Nicholas enjoys watching the leaves fall and observing the animals prepare for winter. When winter arrives, Nicholas sees snow falling, and then he curls up snug in his bunny bed in the hollow tree to dream about the coming spring.

***Olivia* by Ian Falconer. (2000). Atheneum. 40 pages.** In the first of Falconer's books about Olivia, an irresistible piglet of boundless energy, children learn about a typical play day. However, the energetic Olivia is very talented; her sandcastle resembles a Manhattan skyscraper, and her wall scribbling resembles museum art. Olivia is also good at singing 40 very loud songs, and she is very good at wearing people out (including herself). In this day in the life of Olivia, we learn she likes the beach, dressing up, and dancing, but not taking naps. She envisions herself as a prima ballerina, and she is not beyond negotiating the number of books for her mother to read at bedtime. Falconer's spare text spotlights the illustrations that serve as visual punch lines. These highly amusing illustrations are charcoal portraits against a white background that are spotted with bright reds for the clothing or objects used by Olivia.

***The Fire Engine Book* by Diane Muldrow, illustrated by Tibor Gergely. (1950). Golden Books. 24 pages.** In this action-filled book, children can experience the exciting ride of old firefighting vehicles—the fire chief's car, the hose truck, and the hook-and-ladder truck with several firefighters hanging on alongside and one steering in the back. All the while the bells ring “clang, clang.” When the firefighters arrive at the antique store, they hook up the hoses to the fire hydrant, use their axes to get in, and rescue precious store items (including a puppy by jumping with it into the net), while giving the flames a good dousing. As one might expect for a book first published in 1950, the heroes are all males, but the old fire trucks with the pet Dalmatian riding in front make for a thrilling reading experience.

***Once Upon a Potty* by Alona Frankel. (1979). HarperFestival. 48 pages.** Potty training can be a long and stressful process for some parents and

children. A book that explains it on a child's level may make the transition from diapers to toilet a little easier. *Once Upon a Potty* comes in two versions: The boy version has a character named Joshua, and the girl version features Prudence. Both books open with a very round (and nude) child who shows his or her body parts, such as eyes for seeing and legs for walking. The child also explains he or she has a *pee-pee* for making *wee-wee* and a bottom for sitting (with a little hole for making *poo-poo*). Some readers may find the illustrations with the children bending over to show the hole in their bottoms to be overly gross, but the book does a good job of explaining the process of why and how children use a potty. However, many parents prefer that their children learn the anatomical names of their body parts rather than the baby talk used in this book. In addition, children today use potty chairs, but the book's potty is an 18th-century chamber pot, looking more like an oversized coffee mug! Nonetheless, the humor and cute illustrations will get children interested in the book and possibly the process of potty training as well.

Because that little hole in one's bottom does not actually *make* the poo-poo, you may wish to also share *Everyone Poops* by Taro Gomi, which charmingly explains the process of eating and eliminating waste through its humorous text and illustrations of both people (father and boy) and multiple animals—all of whom poop, of course.

Devotional

Several best-selling books were specially written for Christian parents to share with children who are ready for something more than bible stories. Best-selling books about other religions—even on the weekly lists—are rare. Therefore, I have included books about other religions in chapter 7, “Selecting Books to Supplement the Bestsellers.” Moreover, a search on Amazon.com or another large Internet bookstore can help you find additional books about your religion to share. This can be especially important for many parents because children are not likely to encounter these books in public schools, and yet knowledge of religions is important to understand the multicultural world in which we live.

***Poems and Prayers for the Very Young* selected and illustrated by Martha Alexander. (1973). Random House. 32 pages.** This short collection contains 39 poems with spiritual and inspirational themes—all understandable by young

children. A number are classic poems by well-known poets, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Father, We Thank Thee," Robert Browning's "Song," Christina Rossetti's "Who Has Seen the Wind," Robert Louis Stevenson's "Rain," Jane Taylor's "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," and William Blake's "Night." The collection also includes a few traditional poems with unknown authors, such as "Bedtime Prayer": "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray Thee Lord, Thy child to keep. Thy love guard me through the night, and wake me with the morning light." The anthologist also illustrated the book with simple but colorful pictures of young children in their daily activities.

***Blessings Every Day: 365 Simple Devotions for the Very Young* by Carla Barnhill, illustrated by Elena Kucharik. (2001). Tyndale. 384 pages.** This collection of devotions is a broad introduction to the bible and its many promises. The book features a scripture for each day of the year, followed by cheerful text that connects the verses with young children's experiences and daily issues. A short poem or prayer and colorful illustrations enhance each page. Though many parents use the daily reading as a bedtime devotional, I suggest sharing it right after children finish breakfast so they may ponder and apply the teaching throughout their day.

***God Made You Special* by Eric Metaxas. (2002). ZonderKidz. 18 pages.** Through rhymes, humor, and lovable veggies, little ones hear about how God makes everyone special. The characters explain that God made each of us different and unique, and he loves us very much. Bob the tomato is red and round, and he bounces because he has no feet; Madame Blueberry lives in a tree, and she is special because she is blue. The French Peas are special because they speak with a French accent. This book will help children understand that it is okay to be different and that being different makes them special. Other popular books by Eric Metaxas include *Even Fish Slappers Need a Second Chance* and *Jonah and the Pirates Who Usually Don't Do Anything*.

***Secrets of the Vine for Little Ones* by Bruce H. Wilkinson and Melody Carlson, illustrated by Alexi Natchev. (2002). Tommy Nelson. 14 pages.** In a gentle poem, Melody Carlson has distilled the essence of Bruce H. Wilkinson's best-selling adult book *Secrets of the Vine*, making it appropriate for young children. In this book, they will hear how God cares for them with tenderness and love. The content is based on Jesus's teachings that God is the vinedresser (caretaker); He is the vine, and Christians are His branches. Parents may wish to

use this book during devotional time to help children understand the application of Jesus’s teachings about “bearing fruit” in their lives.

***Prayers for Children* by Eloise Wilkin. (1952). Golden Books. 24 pages.**

This book is a short collection of traditional prayers, most with unknown authors. Eloise Wilkin, who did the artwork for many of the early Little Golden Books, touchingly illustrated it. Though some of the vocabulary may be difficult for very young children, the lilting language is sure to please them, and the reverent language will convey the essence of each prayer.

***The Prayer of Jabez for Little Ones* by Bruce H. Wilkinson and Melody Carlson, illustrated by Alexi Natchev. (2001). Tommy Nelson. 14 pages.** The text of this little board book is a child’s prayer, based on the well-known prayer of Jabez in I Chronicles 4:10 of the bible. The purpose of this book is to help children learn to pray and to understand that a loving and strong God listens and keeps them safe. The prayer asks that God would bless them, enlarge their territory (aspirations), protect them, and keep them from evil. It concludes with four questions for parents and children to discuss.

Interaction

Interaction books—also called participation books—are especially made for busy hands and curious minds. They contain lift-up flaps to look under for hidden objects, textured pages to feel, parts that move, scented pages, and sometimes a center pop-up as well. I have saved them for last in this chapter because most of these books would not last long in the hands of children under 2 years of age (especially the nicely scented pages, which might be tempting to teething youngsters). In addition, some of the detachable pieces could present a choking hazard. Interaction books are great for lap reading, but I suggest you set them out of sight when you are not around to guide younger children through the moveable parts on each page.

***Pat the Bunny* by Dorothy Kunhardt. (1940). Golden Books. 18 pages.** The all-time best-selling interaction book is *Pat the Bunny*. Dorothy Kunhardt’s interactive book for toddlers was the first of its kind when it was originally published in 1940. Children can participate with the characters Paul and Judy in seven activities. They can pat the bunny’s (fake) fur, lift a small cloth to play

peek-a-boo with Paul, smell the scented flower illustration, see a reflection in the shiny film, feel the sandpaper representing Daddy's scratchy face, and even look at a tiny seven-page bunny book within this book. Last, children are invited to poke their finger in the hole that represents Mummy's wedding ring. At the end, they are asked to wave bye-bye. Simple line drawings and pastel colors make this an easy book for even infants to focus on, and the double-folded cardboard pages (inside which the textured objects are attached) will withhold repeated use. This book is available in hardcover, paperback, and spiral-bound (plastic comb).

Parents who may have grown weary of reading *Pat the Bunny* to their children "just one more time, please" will get many laughs from the parody of it (for adults and intermediate-grade children), titled *Pat the Beastie: A Pull-and-Poke Book* by Henrik Drescher. In this book, two children play pranks on their patient pet Beastie (a green-haired, dragon-type critter), and they offer readers the chance to do the same. All the while, a toothy bird and dog utter warnings and reproaches to the children for more humane treatment of Beastie (who ends the abuse by gulping them down at the end)—a bit gross, but certainly comic relief for adults.

***Where's Spot?* by Eric Hill. (1980). Putnam. 22 pages.** Spot is a puppy who does not want to eat his dinner, so he hides in a basket. His mother searches throughout the house, and she finds eight other animals that are hiding there before finding Spot. Children participate in the search for Spot by lifting up flaps to reveal the concealed animals.

***Fuzzy Yellow Ducklings* by Matthew Van Fleet. (1995). Dial Books for Young Readers. 16 pages.** This book is unique because not only is it an interactive book but it is also a multiple concept book, demonstrating numbers, textures, colors, shapes, and animals. Fuzzy yellow ducklings, bumpy brown frogs, fuzzy gray koalas, woolly white sheep, and other types of creatures are concealed behind die-cut panels in which viewers are presented only with a labeled (and textured) shape, such as a circle, crescent, oval, or line. When you turn the page, the rest of the creature's body is revealed along with his friends (increasing by one for each shape). My favorite is a sticky pink line that turns out to be a frog's tongue tangled with eight others during their efforts to catch flies.

***The Wheels on the Bus* by Paul O. Zelinsky. (1990). Dutton. 16 pages.** Few children have never heard the traditional song “The Wheels on the Bus.” Paul O. Zelinsky masterfully illustrated this old song in an interactive book with moving parts: The wheels turn ‘round and ‘round, doors open and shut, and tabs pull wipers back and forth (swish, swish, swish). After a few readings, and with a little encouragement, children can pick out several subplots within the details of the illustrations—a boy with a boxful of adventurous kittens, a motorcyclist and her runaway puppy, and a young man with a guitar. The bus’s last stop is the library, where a folk singer is singing (you guessed it) “The Wheels on the Bus.” The back cover contains the musical notation to sing or play along.

***Open the Barn Door, Find a Cow* by Christopher Santoro. (1993). Random House. 22 pages.** In this colorful lift-the-flap book, youngsters find out what is in a barn, under a hen, in a sty, and more. They can literally open the barn door and take a tour around the barnyard to find out which animal makes the sounds in the text. After several readings, children may want to knock on the door before opening it, and then mimic the animated animal noises of the character underneath. (I especially like the goat who is chewing on a sock.)

***No Biting!* by Karen Katz. (2002). Grosset & Dunlap. 14 pages.** In this funny lift-the-flap book, the frustrated toddlers decide to hit and bite—playmates, Mommy, and even the family pet. However, when viewers lift the flaps, they will discover that the toddlers know a better way to act, and it is better to say “no” to hitting, biting, pushing, kicking, and spitting, and to say “yes” to fun things like playing a drum when they feel like hitting something.

***My First Jumbo Book of Colors* by James Diaz and Melanie Gerth. (2002). Cartwheel Books. 10 pages.** This color concept book is full of interactive parts that are designed to keep little fingers busy. In the brightly colored pictures, children can pull the blue train along the track, touch the soft yellow chick, and move the red crab through the water. Once children are introduced to the three primary colors, they can use wheels and flaps to pretend to mix paint and create new colors.

***Tails* by Matthew Van Fleet. (2003). Red Wagon. 20 pages.** With rhymed text, textured illustrations, lift-up flaps, fold-out pages, and scratch-and-sniff

spots, youngsters can learn animal names, shapes, colors, numbers, and—best of all—textures. A menagerie of playful animals sport all types of tails, such as bumpy (alligator), fuzzy (tiger), stinky (scratch-and-sniff skunk)—not to mention furry, spiny, and shiny tails. Pull-tabs will even make some of the tails swish or wag.