2026 Picture Book

Gift Guide

literacious.com

Happy Holidays!

It's picture book gift guide time! I love this project and even though my entire living room is filled with stacks of picture books right now, it's a lot of fun to find the ones that speak to me and hopefully speak to you as well!

In this guide, you'll find 50 picture books that were published in 2026 that resonated with me whether they made me giggle, sigh, tear up, or just feel good. Are these the best 50 picture books of 2026? I don't know. I just know that of the 175+ titles that I read through, these were the ones I felt like I wanted to share the most with you. This year, titles will be grouped together in loose categories for a new way to search, but I encourage you to take a look at all the categories, you'll never know what you might discover!

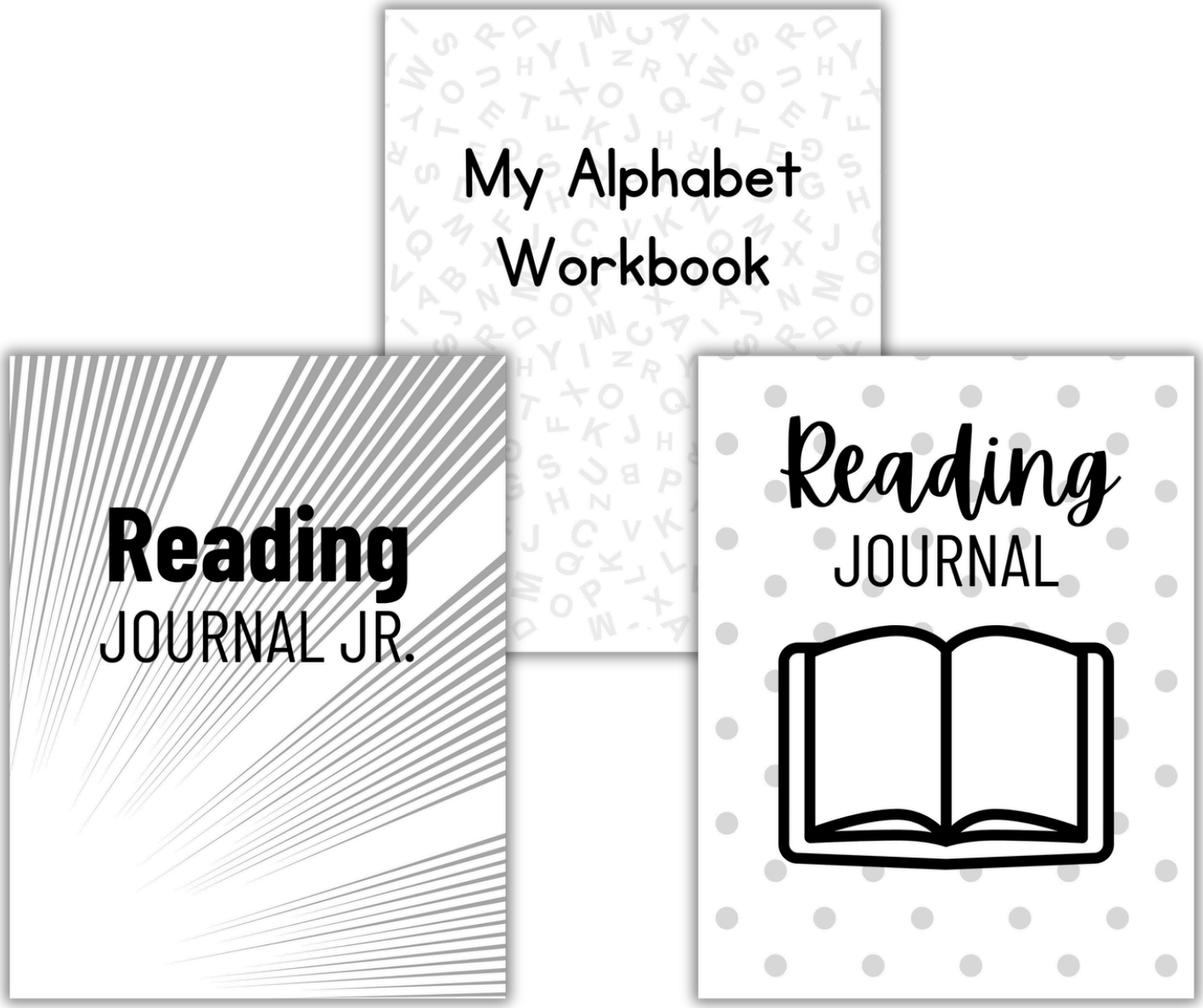
If you find a book that works for you and it's not on this list, that okay! There's a reader for every book and a book for every reader. I hope you find the one that best fits what you're looking for whether it's for you or another reader in your life this holiday season!

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday season,

Laura

This guide contains affiliate links, meaning I'll receive a small commission if you purchase through my links, at no extra cost. Please read the full disclosure for more information.

Looking for fun gifts for readers this holiday season?

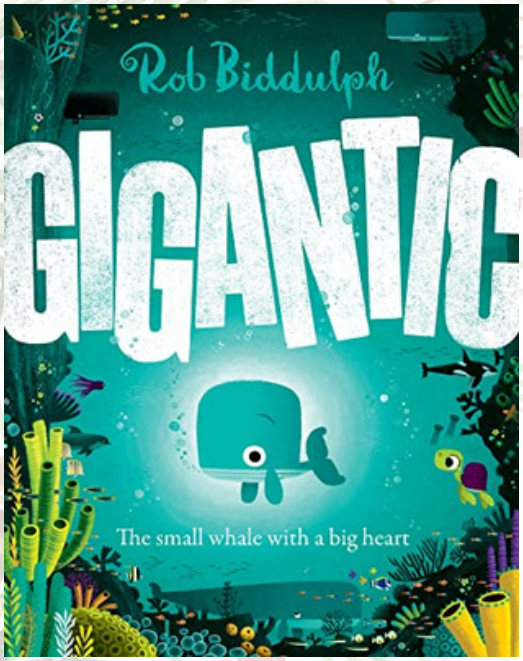


Check out the Literacious Etsy shop for holiday gifts for all ages!

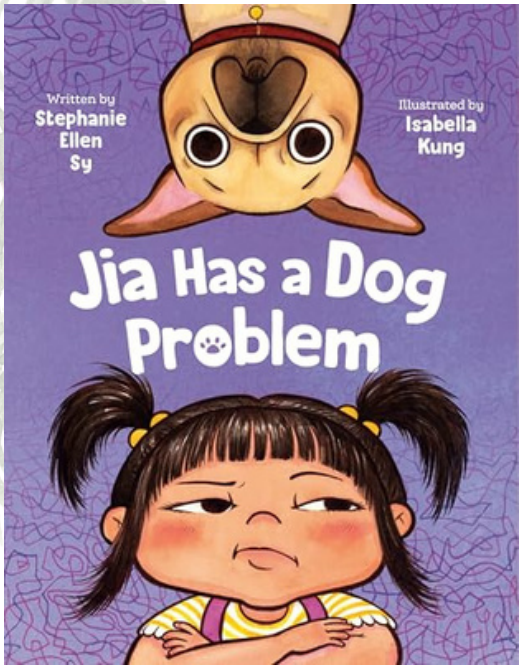
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Animals

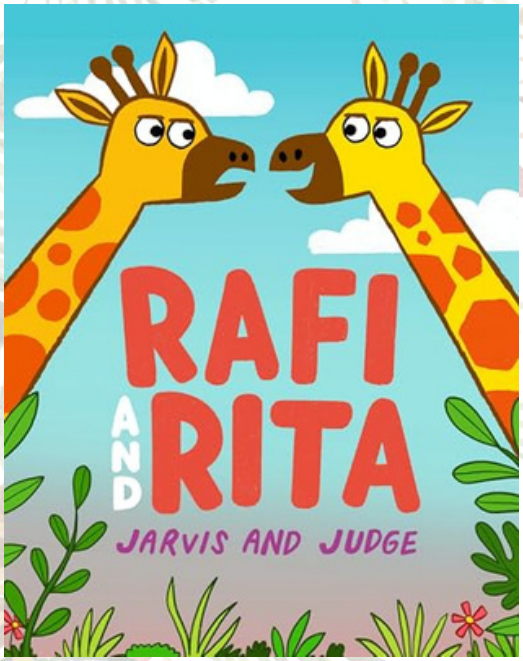


Gigantic: The Small Whale With a Big Heart
by Rob Biddulph
Meet Gigantic, the smallest blue whale in the Atlantic. Overshadowed by all the others in the pod, Gigantic is teased by the bigger whales and keeps to himself. But one day, when Gigantic's brother gets stuck on the sand, it's down to Gigantic and his smallest sea creature friends to save the day.



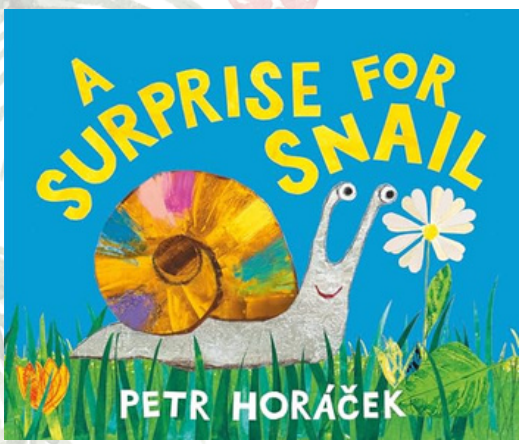
Jia Has a Dog Problem by Stephanie Ellen Sy
Jia runs from every dog—big, tiny, spotted, or shaggy. Charlie the French bulldog hides from every kid—behind couches, laundry, even grown-ups' legs. When something far scarier forces these two together, they discover a sweet surprise: a friend who understands.

Animals



Rafi and Rita by Jarvis

Rafi and Rita are twins. They do everything together. They like the same things, they finish each other's sentences, and they look exactly the same... except for their height. But who is the tallest twin, really?

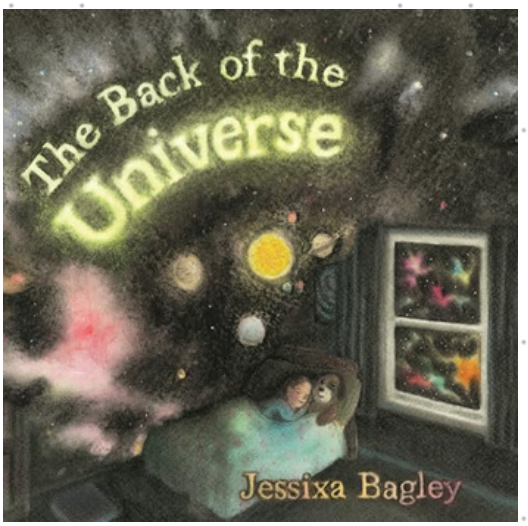


A Surprise for Snail by Peter Horáček

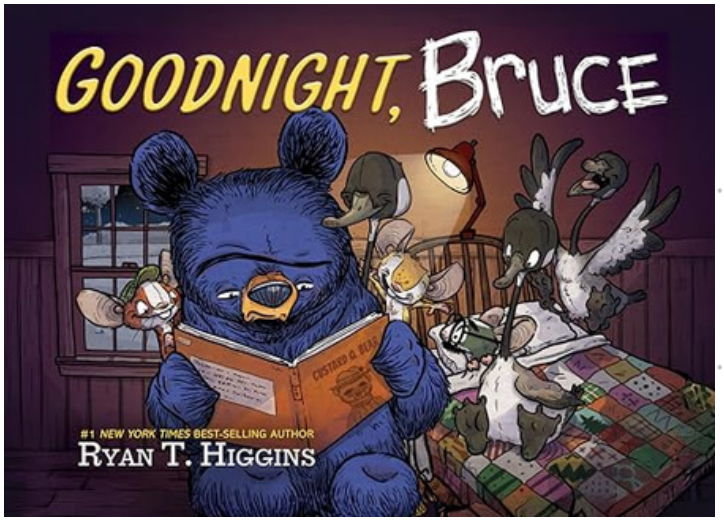
It's Snail's birthday, and he decides he wants to see the sun set by the sea, which is a long way away. Soon he meets Mouse, who's going in the same direction and offers to carry Snail on her back. Then Snail runs into Frog, who takes him hopping another part of the distance. Snail is so tired by then that he climbs up on a large rock to rest, sad that he may not make it to the sea in time. But when he opens his eyes again, there it is: a brilliant sunset, right in front of him!

Bedtime

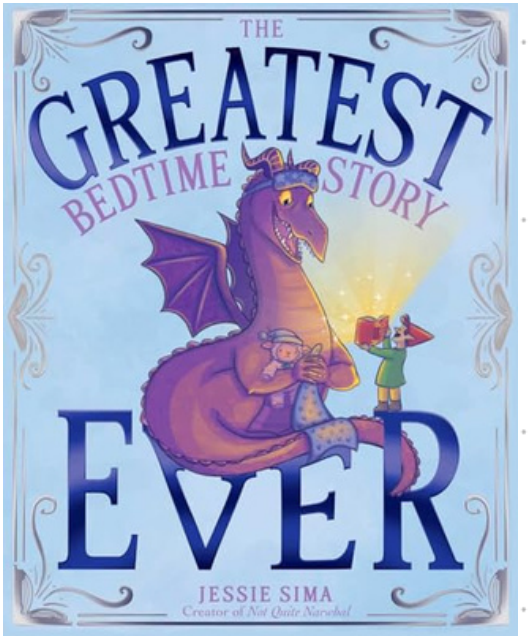
The Back of the Universe by Jessixa Bagley
Starting from that farthest corner, move toward distant glowing lights, which slowly resolve into our solar system, the lights of our cities, and finally the stars on a sleepy child's ceiling.



Goodnight, Bruce by Ryan T. Higgins
It's bedtime in Soggy Hollow. But Bruce's family of mice and geese would rather watch late-night monster movies than go to sleep. Will Bruce *ever* get them to sleep? What's a tired old bear to do?

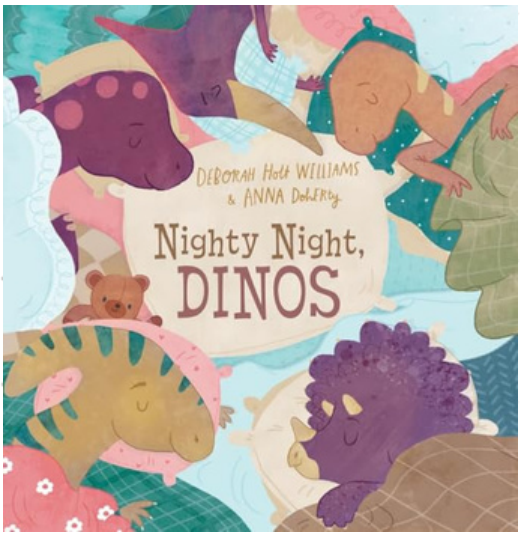


The Greatest Bedtime Story Ever by Jessie Sima
It all started when an elf, who happened to be a great writer, stumbled upon his greatest challenge—a sleep-deprived dragon! Nothing could get the dragon to fall asleep. Nothing except...THE GREATEST BEDTIME STORY EVER. So. Are you ready to hear it now?

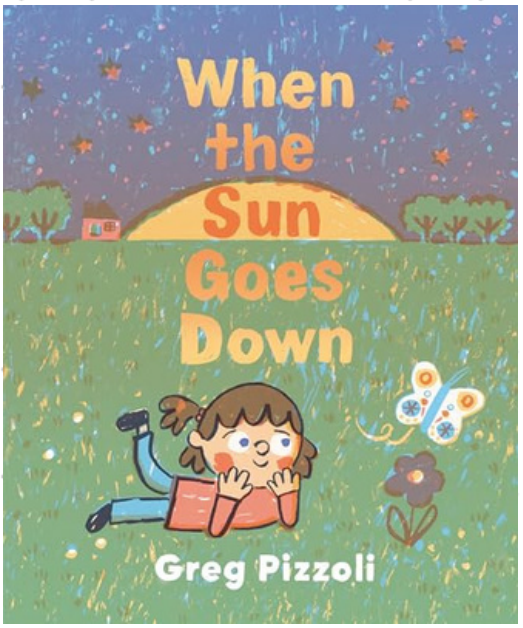


Bedtime

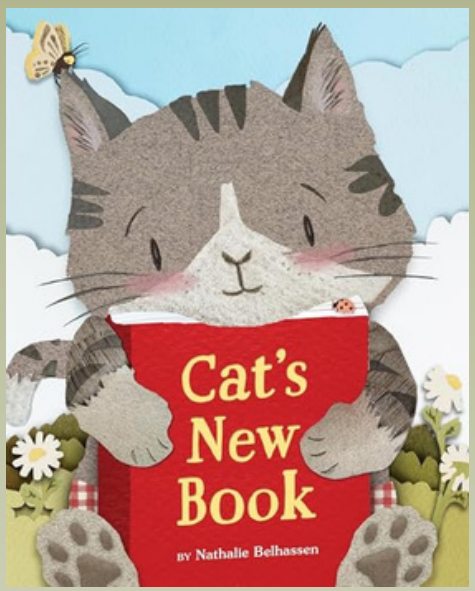
Nighty Night, Dinos by Deborah Holt Williams
Velociraptor snuggles under a cozy fern, Brontosaurus hugs his bear, and pretty soon, they all fall asleep until morning. But shh, don't wake them! They need sleep to stay healthy, big, and strong, and so does your little dinosaur.



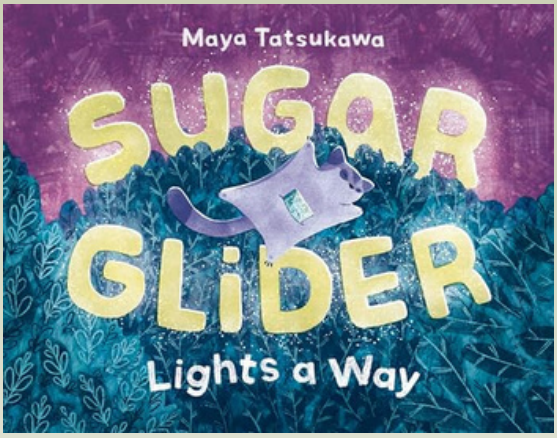
When the Sun Goes Down by Greg Pizzoli
The sun is going down and creatures outside and inside the house are ready for sleep. But where do they go? Come along as a young girl spends her evening learning just where butterflies and kittens go to get their rest. Through soothing and interactive dialogue, the creatures answer the question "where do you go when the sun goes down?" until the girl finally makes her way safe and sound to bed.



Books



Cat's New Book by by Nathalie Belhassen
Cat's brand new book has the cleanest cover and the smoothest pages. It even smells good! He can read it whenever he wants to because it's all his, and he plans to keep it looking new forever. But then Mole asks to read it. And then Frog. And then Turtle. After so much sharing, Cat's perfect new book is sandy and stained and...not so new anymore.



Sugar Glider Lights a Way by Maya Tatsukawa
Tonight, Moon is nowhere to be found! As Sugar Glider chases Moon through the trees and behind the clouds, it seems the forest is full of other bright things—just not the moonlight Sugar Glider loves... Will Sugar Glider find a way to read their book tonight?

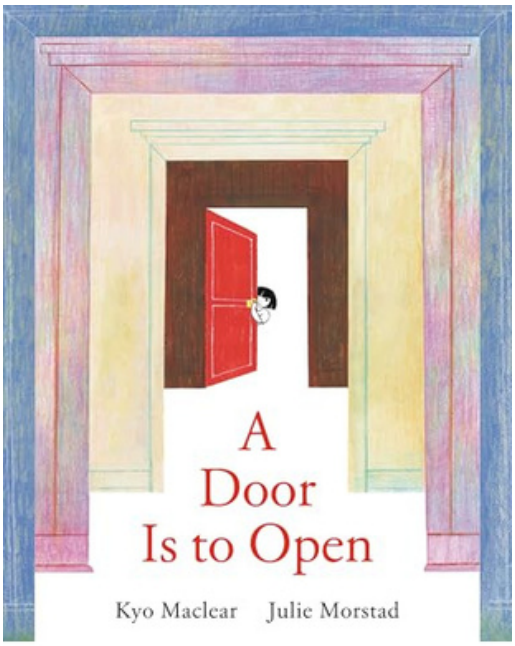


Where Do Stories Live? by Meenal Patel
When Avni receives a journal as a gift, she questions what is worth putting on its blank pages. Through observation, contemplation, and adventure as they walk to their aunt's house, Avni and her younger sister Isha discover the magic of storytelling hiding in butterfly wings, homemade meals, and shared laughter.

Doors

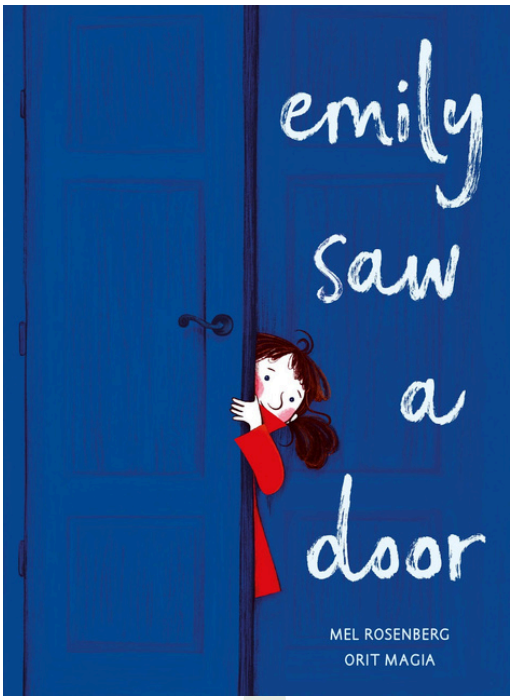
A Door Is to Open by Kyo Maclear

There are so many kinds of doors: swinging doors and sliding doors, screen doors for feeling the night air, revolving doors for going around and around. Doors that open into . . . anything you can imagine! A birthday party, a shipwreck on the salty sea floor, a fairy's tiny home, a slide into a room full of pillows! Or even the fantastical future ahead. Where will the doorway of this picture book lead? The only way to find out is to turn the page and go through . . .

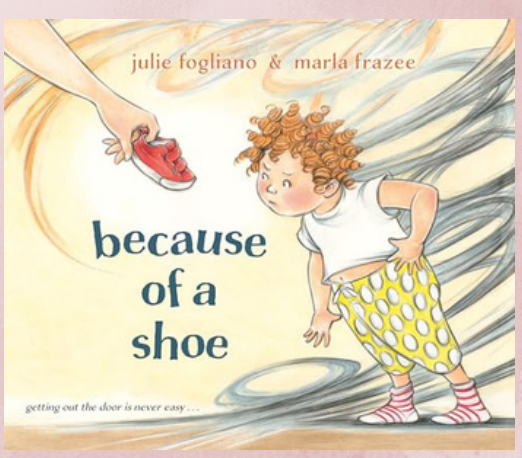


Emily Saw a Door by Mel Rosenberg

The first door is blue, and the voice behind the door tells Emily that she doesn't sound very bluish. The second door says it only opens for tigers, crocodiles, and snakes. But she is a girl named Emily - and the animals are hungry - and so she moves on. The third is only for people who speak very quietly, and the door can hear Emily. Finally, Emily comes to a place without a door. She gets out her chalk and draws one, then adds a doorknob, and goes right in. And when someone knocks on *her* door, she says, "The door is open!"



Family



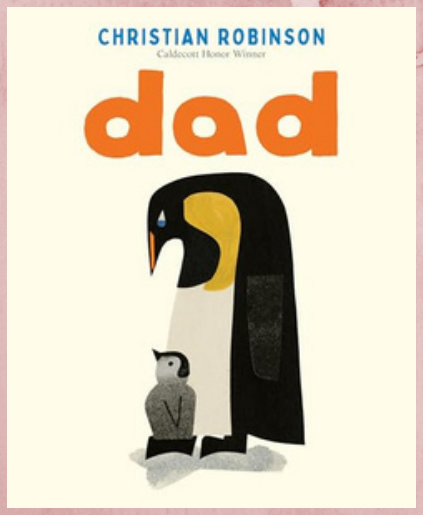
Because of a Shoe by Julie Fogliano

Even when it's time to put on our favorite shoes and leave the house, and even when that time turns into a tantrum where someone can't stop screaming, or flopping on the floor, or throwing a shoe across the room, and someone is making their maddest face and everyone else is waiting... Even then, nothing can come between the loving bond of a mother and their child.



The Big One by Dashka Slater

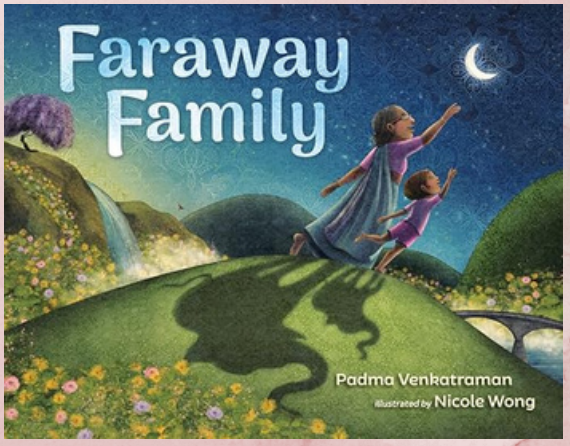
"Marina was the smallest of the town's children.
Nana was the oldest of the town's elders.
But even the old and the small have dreams."



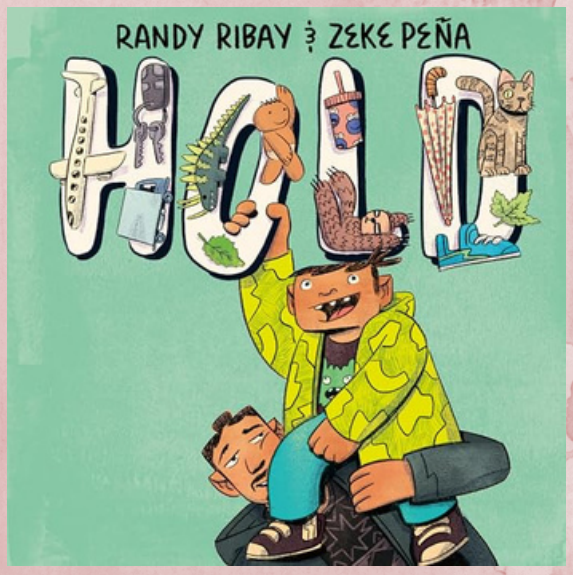
Dad by Christian Robinson

There are as many ways to be a dad as there are dads in the world. *Dad* is a big-hearted love letter to all of them, reflecting the range of relationships that dads, both animal and human, have with their little ones.

Family

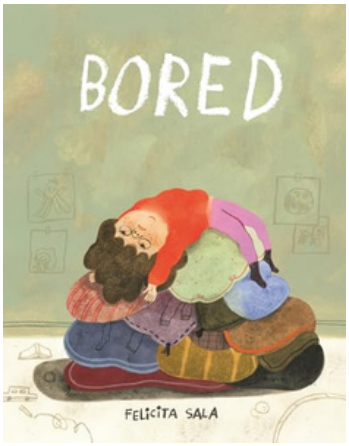


Faraway Family by Padma Venkatraman
It's a joyous occasion when you get to visit family in another country after a long time apart. But sometimes it takes a while to connect. When the power goes out at bedtime, a flashlight beam appears—it's her grandmother, who invites her into a lively game of shadow play. And soon the two of them are having a grand adventure, and the girl's faraway family starts feeling more like friends.



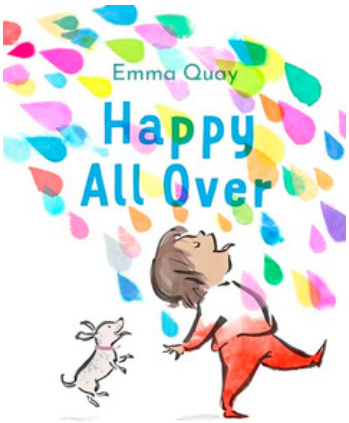
Hold by Randy Ribay
It's time to leave the house, but...where are the keys?? As Daddy rummages through the mess, he hands a water bottle to his toddler and says, "Hold, please." This accidental request turns into an adventure when the child wants to hold...EVERYTHING!

Feelings



Bored by Felicita Sala

Rita is bored. In her tragic and weakened state, her mind drifts to the beginning of a daydream. What if all the bored people in the world gathered together and got onto a bus? What if the boredom filled them up like balloons, with tiny heads and arms sticking out? What if they floated into the sky, bobbing along until they each spied something exciting?

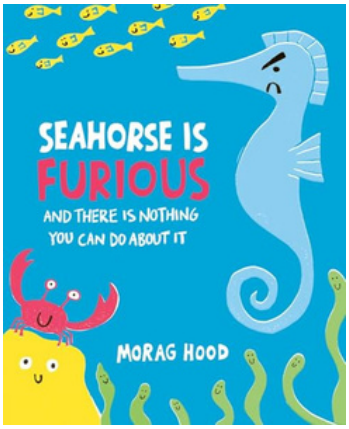


Happy All Over by Emma Quay

Whether it's planting a seed, dancing in the rain, blowing out birthday candles, or playing with a puppy, there are so many little things to smile about!

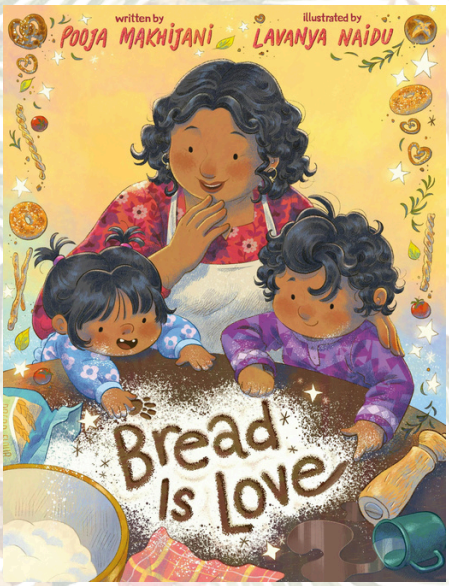
Seahorse Is Furious and There Is Nothing You Can Do About It

by Morag Hood



Seahorse is *furious*. It is a bad day. In a terrible week. In an awful ocean. And nothing in that whole entire, awful ocean is going to make him feel better. That's right: nothing. Not even his favorite things or his closest friend or the cuddliest bunny will help—unless... No, no he's furious. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Food



Bread is Love by Pooja Makhijani

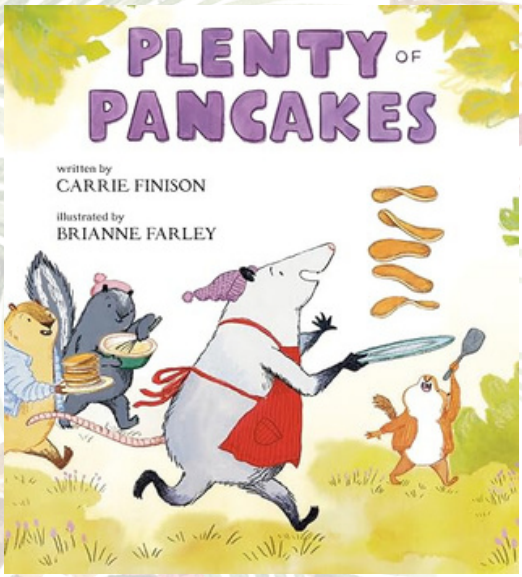
Bread is many things. Bread is simple. The dough can be made with just flour, salt, starter, and water. Bread is science. With the right ingredients, in the right amounts, the dough grows and changes. Bread can be unpredictable. Sometimes it rises, like a soft pillow. Sometimes it's flat and crunchy. But bread is always delicious, especially when it is made with love.



Pizzasaurus by Tammi Sauer

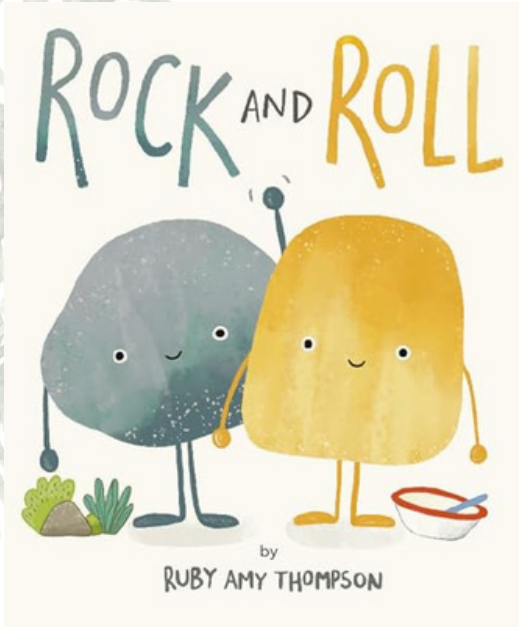
Meet Pizzasaurus, a dinosaur with a unique twist! While other dinosaurs are famous for their size, strength, or spikes, Pizzasaurus is known for his love of pizza. But what if Pizzasaurus's friends are feeling a bit left out? Luckily, pizza is perfect for sharing, and that makes Pizzasaurus a special dinosaur indeed.

Food



Plenty of Pancakes by Carrie Finison

Opossum Topsy is preparing a "Welcome Spring!" meal for her bear friend LouAnn, who has been asleep all winter long. She's brought milk, eggs, berries, and syrup, and soon she has five perfect pancakes, fresh from the pan. But when Topsy's back is turned—MUNCH! MUNCH! MUNCH!—she discovers someone has eaten all of the pancakes! No problem, she'll just make more, counting out five at a time. But then, it happens again! Who could the thief be?



Rock and Roll by Ruby Amy Thompson

Rock and Roll are the best of friends, but they are very different. Rock is strong, and Roll is soft. Rock hates attention, and Roll absolutely loves it. The two come from very different places--Rock was formed in a volcano, and Roll came out of an oven. But wait a minute . . . they both are team players, they are both able to handle pressure well, and they both LOVE to get dressed up. Could it be that maybe they are not so different after all?

Growing Up + Being Me

Good Morning, Morning! by Maya Myers

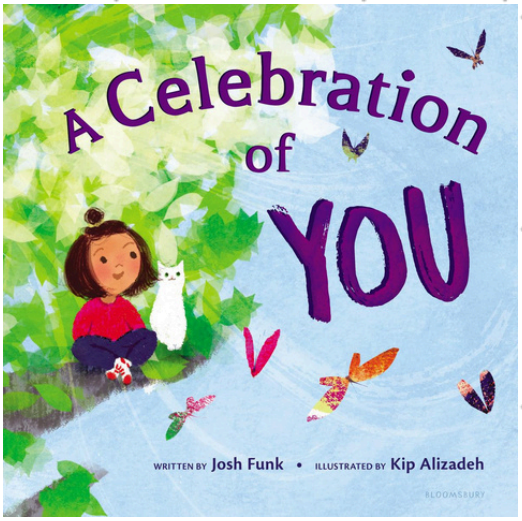
Just before daybreak, a child steps outside to plant warm feet on the cool ground. Though it's quiet, there's so much sensory magic to see and feel and hear: lacy slug trails on the porch; spiderwebs rippling in the grass; birdsong in the air; wet dew and spiky pine needles to walk through in the woods beyond the yard.



A Celebration of You by Josh Funk

Some days seem just plain ordinary. But if you look a bit more closely, can you find something to celebrate?

"The world all around stretches deep out of view
And yet a whole universe lives within you."



Growing Up ı Being Me

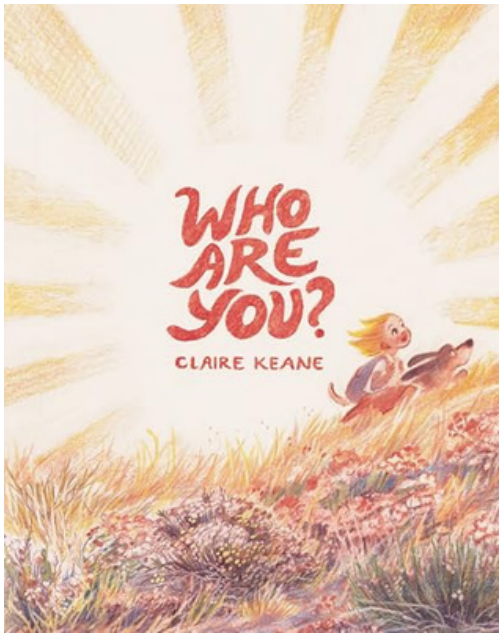
Loops by Jashar Awan



This big kid is wearing his first pair of big-kid shoes, the kind with laces! Even though they're a little on the roomy side—shoes to grow into, of course—he knows he can take care of them. Except they keep falling off!

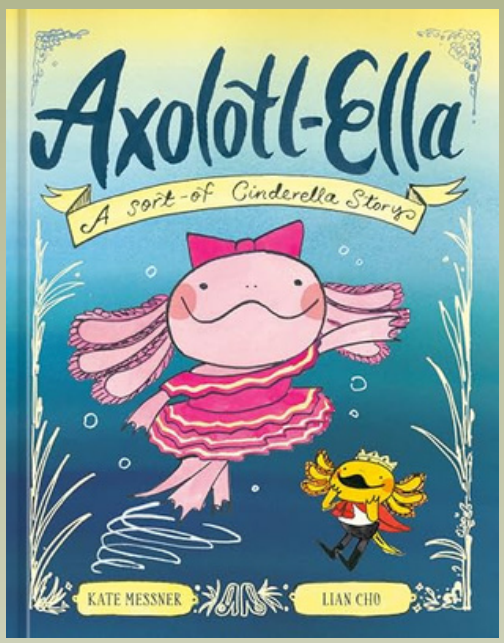
Not to worry, he'll just tie them up again, because he knows how to tie those loops! But wait a second, where did that darn shoe go?

Who Are You? by Claire Keane



With each step in nature, a young girl contemplates her place in the world. The question, "Who Are You?" becomes a mantra, asked by the wide sky above and the valley below. It echoes through her adventures as she encounters life's simple treasures—a fallen acorn, a graceful butterfly, the embrace of a towering tree. But everything isn't sunshine and butterflies.

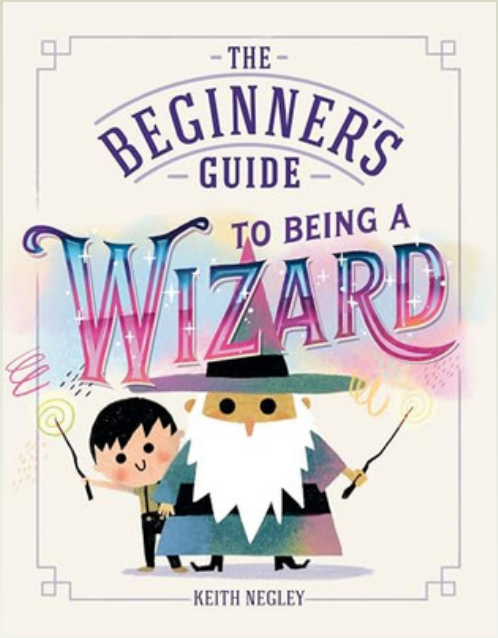
Imaginary Creatures



Axolotl-Ella: A Sort-of Cinderella Story

by Kate Messner

Axolotl-Ella is a quick and clever salamander with a daring, deliciously ambitious dream. All she needs to do to make her dream a reality is to meet the Prince at the King's Festival. So with a little bit of magic from the lake of the night, Ella makes her skin gleam and her gills glow--and conjures the perfect outfit for a fancy party! Can Axolotl-Ella find a way to make her dream come true, or will she be stuck at the murky lake with her annoying stepsisters forever?

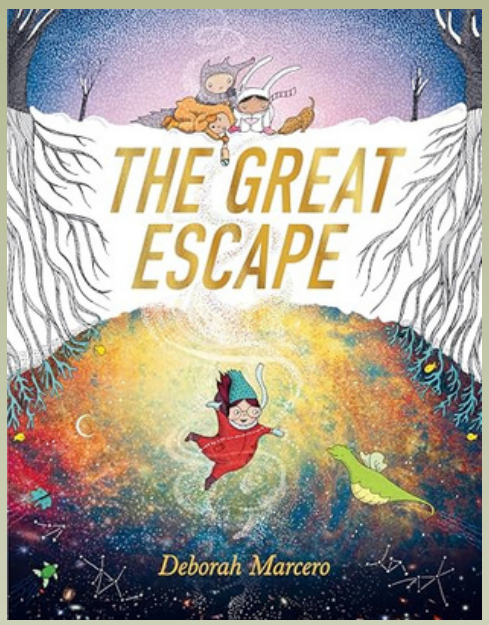


The Beginner's Guide to Being a Wizard

by Keith Negley

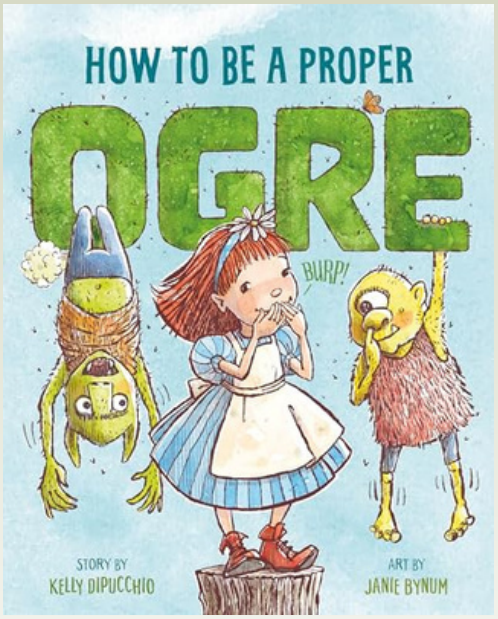
So you want to become a wizard? Excellent choice. Magic, like everything in life, takes practice and patience. It's important to know that you will make mistakes. For example, you might accidentally turn your friends into fish, or yourself into a turnip. This is all normal. Remember, magic is more about wondering than knowing. Also explosions.

Imaginary Creatures



The Great Escape by Deborah Marcero

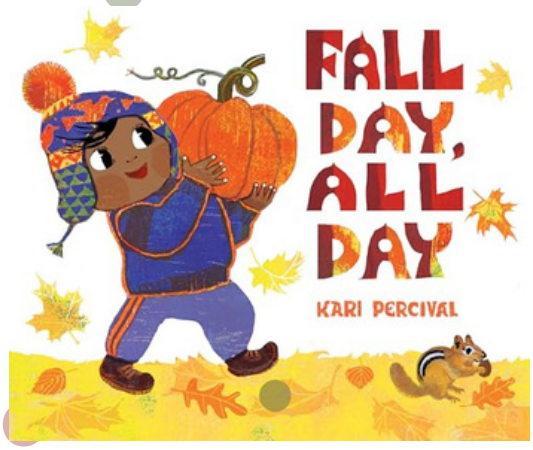
Evie believes in all things magic, but her always-pestering, always-following younger siblings make her life seem a little *less* magical sometimes. So Evie makes her escape to the snowy world outside, hoping for a bit of peace and solitude, only to discover her siblings trailing behind her, once again. Luckily, with the help of a wand and a few magic words, Evie turns a snowbank into a portal to an upside-down world full of stars, dolphins, and seahorses to ride.



How to Be a Proper Ogre by Kelly DiPucchio

Mary Beth doesn't quite fit in with her family of ogres. She's not green. She's not gross. She's not scary. But when Mary Beth has to stand up for herself and her family, she finds out she knows more than she thinks about how to be a proper ogre. This hilarious modern fable about belonging and finding one's voice is sure to entertain readers of all ages.

Nature



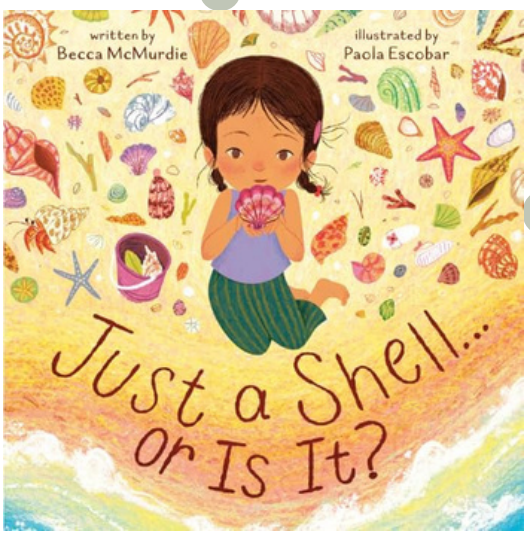
Fall Day, All Day by Kari Percival

As the leaves change colors and the air starts to crisp, the natural world begins to shift, and so do we. An encouraging appreciation for nature, play, and the simple beauty of a fall day.



Hello, Ocean! by Corinna Luyken

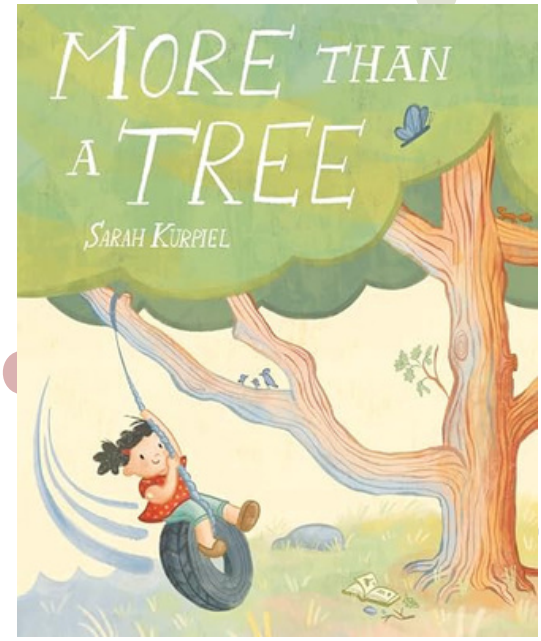
In this glowing portrait of beachtime joy, a girl greets the many things she encounters, celebrating them all. When she discovers a knotted pile of debris, she and her parents work to get it cleaned up, then go on with their busy, happy day at the shore.



Just a Shell... Or Is It? by Becca McMurdie

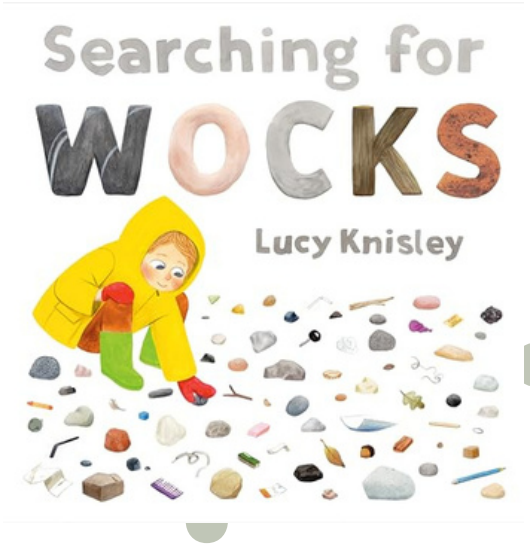
A seashell is just a seashell . . . or is it? To a clam, it's a door. To an octopus, it's a shield. To a young child, it's a treasure! A place to play or a home for critters, the beach can be so many things! And there are so many other exciting things to find hidden in sand dunes and between waves—all it takes is a little shift in perspective.

Nature



More Than a Tree by Sarah Kurpiel

The backyard tree has meant everything to the girl in this story. It has been a companion, a shelter, and a setting for all kinds of games. But now it's time to say goodbye, and to make room for a new backyard tree. And just as the old tree used to watch over the girl, she will now watch over the seedling as it grows.



Searching for Wocks by Lucy Knisley

On a walk to the playground and back, a child keeps their eyes open for special "wocks" for their collection. A bottlecap, a twig, and many stones make it into their pocket of treasures.

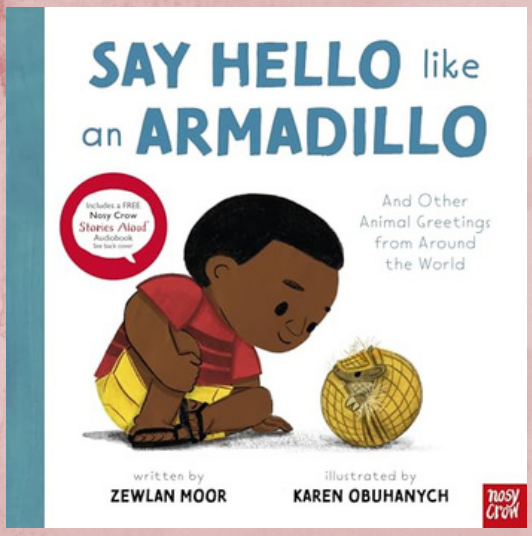
Nonfiction

Because of a Bee by Lola M. Schaefer



The interconnected networks between pollinators and plants can be quite complex, but this deceptively simple picture book showcases the spiraling circles of nature and the importance of even the tiniest creature in all our lives. Wander through the farm to learn how every fruit, vegetable, bug, and bird connect to each other before food arrives on your plate. A bee is just the beginning.

Say Hello Like an Armadillo by Zewlan Moor

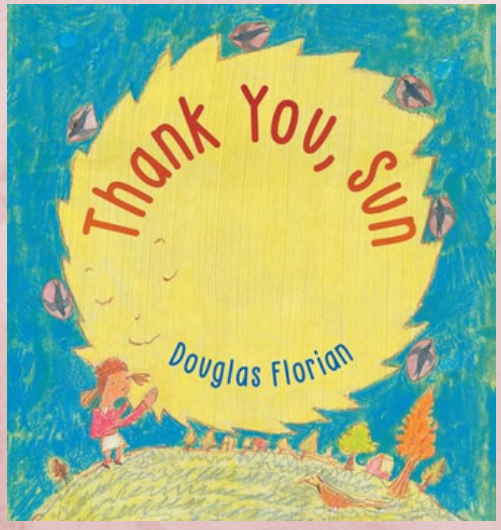


This playful story invites children to be open to all kinds of greetings as animals from around the world show off the unique ways they say "hello." From belugas' fin shakes and tongue clicks to fiddler crabs' waving claws to armadillos' unrolling to say "hi," these clever, creative animal greetings encourage young readers to experiment with different ways of greeting one another.

Nonfiction

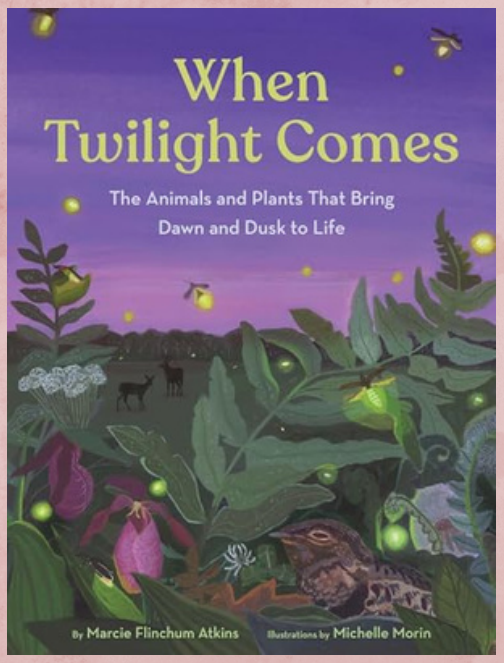
Thank You, Sun by Douglas Florian

From lofty mountains that *peak* our interest, to wind that lends a breeze, to soil that's truly *down to earth*, there are countless things to be thankful for on our planet. Filled with fun facts about nature and clever poems perfect for reading aloud, young readers can learn about the natural wonders of planet Earth and thank them for making the world go round!

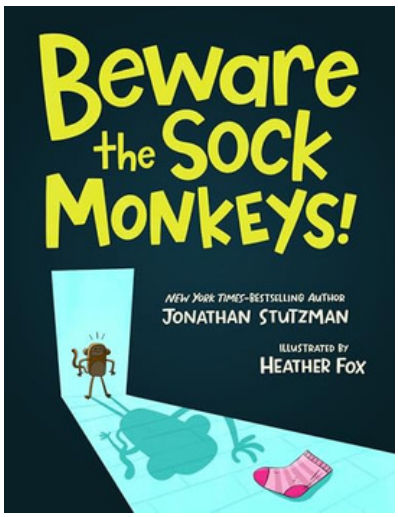


When Twlight Comes by Marcie Flichum Atkins

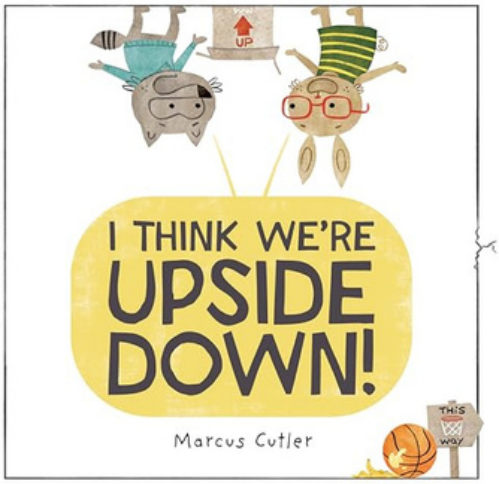
This engaging nonfiction picture book shows familiar animals and beautiful flowers—skunks, white-tailed deer, fireflies, morning glories, evening primroses, and more—in a whole new light, focusing on the behaviors, adaptations, and activities that define each as a crepuscular creature or plant.



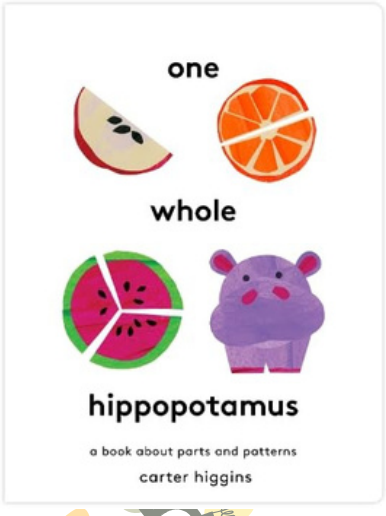
Silly



Beware the Sock Monkeys! by Jonathan Stutzman
It's time to go, but something's wrong. Each child is missing one sock. The kids know where they went. The Sock Monkeys took them! Dad isn't buying it. Like most fathers, he doesn't believe in silly, made-up stories. But the socks aren't under the bed, or in the toilet, or inside the dog's mouth. Wait . . . now Dad's sock is missing?! Beware the Sock Monkeys!

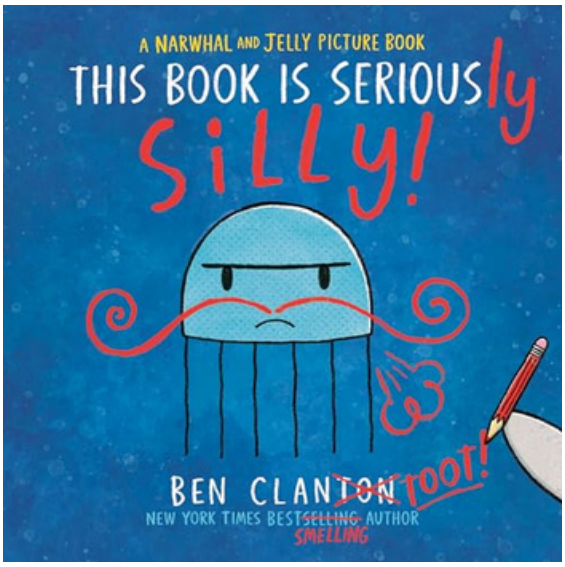


I Think We're Upside Down! by Marcus Cutler
Raccoon's new basketball just arrived. Time to shoot hoops with his friend Rabbit! But when the basketball falls UP instead of DOWN, they have to figure out how to make things right.



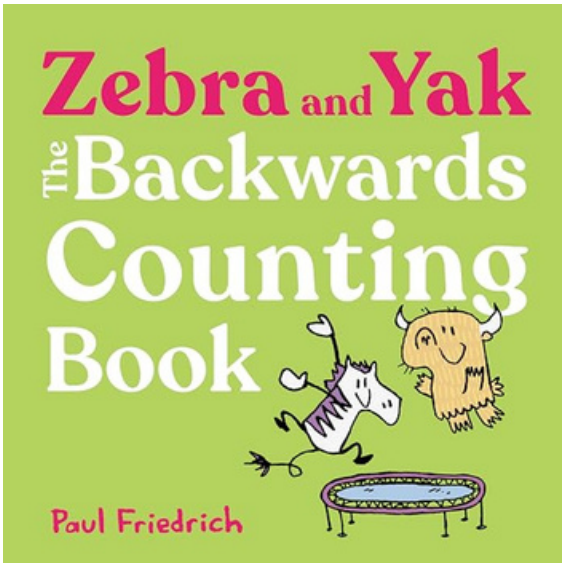
One Whole Hippopotamus by Carter Higgins
This deceptively simple concept book explores colors, shapes, patterns, and fractions. Its imaginative language, rich with rhythm and playfulness, begs to be read aloud, while its thought-provoking design tickles the brain and shows young readers that even the most familiar things can be seen in infinitely new ways.

Silly



This Book Is Seriously Silly! by Ben Clanton

Jelly has serious plans for this book and doesn't need any smiling, laughing, funny faces OR noises to derail it. And even if you *do* silly stuff Jelly will still be serious . . . even if he had a fuzzy pink mustache, or a name like "Jellysquish," or wore silly striped socks with silly faces that made silly sounds. Hey, don't let that give you any ideas!



Zebra and Yak: The Backwards Counting Book

by Paul Friedrich

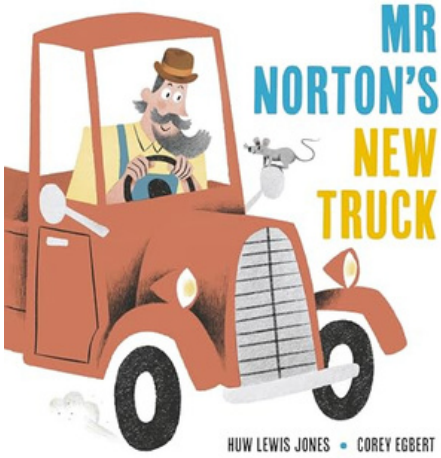
Counting books are supposed to go *one, two, three,* then a bunch of other numbers... But this one starts with *Twenty bottles of milk on the wall*. It's an odd—actually, an *even*—way to kick things off. Zebra and Yak aren't sure what to think. And from bottles of milk, to runaway cows, to UFOs on the loose, things just get stranger from there.

Transportation

Exca-Gator! by Brooke Hartman
Exca-Gator is so excited for a new day of building and constructing with all of his buds! He may be even a little *too* excited, when he overestimates his abilities and causes a big old construction site mess. Can Exca-Gator make things right with his friends *and* save the day?



Mr. Norton's New Truck by Huw Lewis Jones
One Monday morning, Horace Norton finds that a bear has accidentally broken his bicycle, and now he doesn't have a way to get to work. As the week progresses, Mr. Norton tries different vehicles for his journey with limited success: The bus is too busy, his roller skates slip too much, his scooter is too small, and his little red wagon is too wobbly! Luckily, Mr. Norton remembers that his grandfather's old truck is in the barn. What could possibly go wrong?



Printable 2026 Picture Book Gift Guide

Animals

- *Gigantic: The Small Whale With a Big Heart* by Rob Biddulph
- *Jia Has a Dog Problem* by Stephanie Ellen Sy
- *Rafi and Rita* by Jarvis
- *A Surprise for Snail* by Peter Horáček

Bedtime

- *The Back of the Universe* by Jessixa Bagley
- *Goodnight, Bruce* by Ryan T. Higgins
- *The Greatest Bedtime Story Ever* by Jessie Sima
- *Nighty Night, Dinos* by Deborah Holt Williams
- *When the Sun Goes Down* by Greg Pizzoli

Books

- *Cat's New Book* by by Nathalie Belhassen
- *Sugar Glider Lights a Way* by Maya Tatsukawa
- *Where Do Stories Live?* by Meenal Patel

Doors

- *A Door Is to Open* by Kyo Maclear
- *Emily Saw a Door* by Mel Rosenberg

Family

- *Because of a Shoe* by Julie Fogliano
- *The Big One* by Dashka Slater
- *Dad* by Christian Robinson
- *Faraway Family* by Padma Venkatraman
- *Hold* by Randy Ribay

Feelings

- *Bored* by Felicita Sala
- *Happy All Over* by Emma Quay
- *Seahorse Is Furious and There Is Nothing You Can Do About It* by Morag Hood

Food

- *Bread is Love* by Pooja Makhijani
- *Pizzasaurus* by Tammi Sauer
- *Plenty of Pancakes* by Carrie Finison
- *Rock and Roll* by Ruby Amy Thompson

Printable 2026 Picture Book Gift Guide

Growing Up

- *Good Morning, Morning!* by Maya Myers
- *A Celebration of You* by Josh Funk
- *Loops* by Jashar Awan
- *Who Are You?* by Claire Keane

Imaginary Creatures

- *Axolotl-Ella: A Sort-of Cinderella Story* by Kate Messner
- *The Beginner's Guide to Being a Wizard* by Keith Negley
- *The Great Escape* by Deborah Marcero
- *How to Be a Proper Ogre* by Kelly DiPucchio

Nature

- *Fall Day, All Day* by Kari Percival
- *Hello, Ocean!* by Corinna Luyken
- *Just a Shell... Or Is It?* by Becca McMurdie
- *More Than a Tree* by Sarah Kurpiel
- *Searching for Wocks* by Lucy Knisley

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