

Celebrate Spring with a Favorite Tale!

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Literature Is Back! The Best Books for Teaching Readers and Writers Across Genres
(Scholastic, 2007)

Which Came First, the Chicken or the Egg?

Picture Books for the Primary Grades

Aston, D. H. (2006). *An egg is quiet.* (S. Long, Illus.). San Francisco: Chronicle.
(Gr. K-2)

Whether you're looking for a book of interesting facts about eggs or a mentor text to teach the use of descriptive adjectives, this book is a must for your collection. Aston's flowing narrative is enhanced by Long's delicate watercolor illustrations. You might consider inviting students to use Aston's pattern to write their own text such as "A Flower is ..." or "A Dinosaur is..."

Bunting, E. (2007). *Hurry! Hurry!* (J. Mack, Illus.). Orlando: Harcourt.
(Preschool- Gr. 1)

The barnyard is buzzing with excitement when hen exclaims, "Hurry! Hurry!" Hen is followed to the barn by enthusiastic animals and their young to welcome the newest member of the farm family. Careful readers will notice that they can predict the next animal to join the fun by closely examining the illustrations where Mack has cleverly placed the animal in the background. Once you've enjoyed this book for pleasure, return to it to teach the use of an exclamation mark.

Friend, C. (2007). *The perfect nest.* (J. Manders, Illus.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.
(Gr. K-2)

Jack, the crafty farm cat, wants an omelet. Therefore, he builds the perfect nest to attract an egg-laying chicken. Much to Jack's surprise, he entices a Spanish-speaking chicken, a French-speaking duck, and a goose who hollers, "Great balls of fire!" Once they lay their eggs, Jack anticipates his tasty meals and chases the fowl away only to find himself the parent to three needy baby birds.

Harrington, J. N. (2007). *The chicken-chasing queen of Lamar County.* (S. Jackson, Illus.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Gr. K-2)

An African-American girl strives to be the best chicken chaser ever, but her favorite chicken, Miss Hen, continues to escape. Finally, she spots Miss Hen in an easy-to-catch spot, but decides to leave her there as she is tending to her young chicks.

Reynolds, A. (2005). *Chicks and salsa*. (P. Bogan, Illus.). New York: Bloomsbury. (Gr. K-2)

The chickens at Nuthatcher Farm are ready for a change in cuisine. Luckily, a wise food-network watching rooster shows them how to make chips and salsa. Next, the ducks give up fish and try guacamole, and the pigs join in the food frenzy savoring beans and chilis.

San Souci, R. D. (1989). *The talking eggs: A folktale from the American South*. (J. Pinkney, Illus.). New York: Dial. (Gr. 1-3)

Don't forget this "old favorite" tale of two sisters, spoiled and lazy Rose and her kind sister Blanche. When Blanche befriends an old witch-woman, she enters an amazing world and learns that the plainest of objects can hide surprising treasure.

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

Corey, S. (2003). *Players in pigtails*. (R. Gibbon, Illus.). New York: Scholastic. (Gr. 1-4)

In this spirited picture book, readers meet Katie Casey, a fictional character, based little-known verses from the song "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Katie walked, talked, and even dreamed baseball. Students will enjoy the lively mix of fact and fiction set during the short-lived time of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League of the 1940s. Pair this book with *Mighty Jackie: The Strike-Out Queen* (listed below) to begin a conversation or study about the history of women in sports.

Lester, H. (2006). *Batter up wombat*. (L. Munsinger, Illus.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Gr. K-2)

The last place Champs are ready to start a new season when they spot a stranger who introduces himself as a Wombat. The Champs misunderstand him and think his name is "Whambat." Thus, the fun begins as Wombat visualizes the baseball lingo literally and is wondering why there would be a pitcher (of water) on the mound or why he would run back home to Australia after he hits the ball. Share this book when exploring the strategy of making mental images. In addition, the wordplay in this book would be an ideal introduction to the Amelia Bedelia books.

Lupica, M. (2006). *Heat*. New York: Puffin. (Gr. 5-8)

In this fast-paced novel, Michael Arroyo, a talented young pitcher, is living his dream of leading his South Bronx All-Stars to the Little League World Series. Unfortunately, tragedy, rumor and prejudice threaten Michael's chances at achieving his dream. If readers enjoy this story, they might like to read Lupica's latest baseball novel entitled *The Big Field* (Philomel, 2008).

Moss, M. (2004). *Mighty Jackie: The strike-out queen*. (C. F. Payne, Illus.). New York: Simon & Schuster. (Gr. K-3)

At seventeen years of age, Jackie Mitchell stepped onto the plate to pitch in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees. Faced with jeers and snickers, this talented and determined young lady struck out both Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Sadly, as pointed out in the author's note, Jackie was then banned from big league baseball.

Norworth, J. (1993). *Take me out to the ballgame*. (A. Gillman, Illus.). New York: Simon & Schuster. (Preschool-Gr. 5)

Gather your students around to sing this ballpark favorite. For older readers, offer an invitation for them to try their hand at writing their own version about their preferred sport, hobby, or activity such as "Take Me Out to the Shopping Mall" or "Take Me Out to the Skate Park."

Robinson, S. (2006). *Safe at home*. New York: Scholastic. (Gr. 3-5)

Elijah Breeze, nicknamed "Jumper" by his father, seems to be facing an uphill battle. He has just lost his father and has moved from a quiet Connecticut suburb to the boisterous heart of Harlem. No friends, no room left in the summer basketball camp, and Marcus, who is clearly trouble, make the outlook even gloomier. Fortunately, his caring mother, compassionate grandmother, and wise baseball coach ease the transition and offer the opportunity to make good friends.

Strumm, J. (2007). *Satchel Paige: Striking out Jim Crow*. (R. Tommaso, Illus.). New York: Hyperion/Jump At the Sun. (Gr. 6-8)

Satchel Paige became a legend as he pitched his famous fastball wherever he was allowed to play baseball in the segregated South. In this graphic novel, the story about the talented and entertaining athlete is told from the point of view of a sharecropper who once played with Paige. The artwork and backdrop for the story depict the kinds of threats and abuses experienced by many African Americans early in the twentieth century. Overcoming that hostility, this popular sports hero and role model was eventually inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Interested readers will surely want to learn more about a man who had such an impact on the sport when it was a struggle for African American athletes to participate in sports.

Wiles, D. (2007). *The Aurora County all-stars*. Orlando: Harcourt. (Gr. 5-7)

Fans of Deborah Wiles' *Love, Ruby Lavender* (Harcourt, 2001) and *Each Little Bird That Sings* (Harcourt, 2005) will enjoy traveling back to rural Mississippi to meet twelve-year-old pitcher House Jackson. One of House's problems is Frances Shotz who not only broke his elbow, but is also in charge of the 200th anniversary pageant that is standing in the way of the team's annual Fourth of July game. This book would pair nicely with *Heat* to make text-to-text connections.

Celebrating Poetry Month

Grimes, N. (2008). *Oh, brother!* (M. Benny, Illus.). New York: Greenwillow. (Gr. K-5)

In twenty related poems, Grimes captures the struggles Xavier faces when his mother remarries and his stepbrother Chris moves in to his home. This unique look at a newly blended interracial family offers an opportunity to discuss how Xavier's character changes over time.

Larios, J. (2008). *Imaginary menagerie: A book of curious creatures.* (J. Paschkis, Illus.). San Diego: Harcourt. (Gr. 1-5)

Meet the firebird, a dragon, a phoenix, hobgoblins, and more in descriptive, rhythmic poems vibrantly illustrated by Julie Paschkis. Each legendary creature is briefly described at the end of this engaging book. While it is perfect to enjoy on its own, it would make an enticing invitation to writing, be it another poem or a story about one of these subjects. Don't miss Larios' imaginative *Yellow Elephant: A Bright Bestiary* (2006, Harcourt Children's Books).

Prelutsky, J. (Ed.). (1983). *The Random House book of poetry for children: A treasury of 572 poems for today's child.* (A. Lobel, Illus.). New York: Random House. (Gr. K-6)

Celebrate Poetry Month in April with a poem a day highlighting nature, the seasons, people, nonsense, and even more in this treasure. Actually, there's a poem a day for the entire year plus lots of extras if poetry is close to your heart. This is one of those must-haves for teachers in the primary and intermediate grades.

Schertle, A. (2008). *The Little Blue Truck.* (J. McElmurry, Illus.). San Diego: Harcourt. (Gr. K-1)

From the first "Beep!" to the last "Beep! Beep! Beep!" this rhythmic narrative poem takes young readers through the countryside as the friendly little blue truck greets a variety of animals along the way. When the gruff Dump truck bulldozes him aside, it looks like trouble. However, it's Dump who becomes mired in mud. Little Blue, along with one animal friend after another, come to the rescue. Children will love chiming in to choral read this book with you and will beg to hear it again and again.

Spinelli, E. (2007). *Polar bear, arctic hare: Poems of the frozen north.* (E. Fernandes, Illus.). Honesdale, PA: Wordsong. (Gr. 1-4)

Travel to the land of snow and ice meeting many of the animals, flowers, and insects that live there through inviting poetry. From large to small, polar bear to bumblebee, little snippets of life in a world far afield are shared. The book ends with a few facts about the subject of each poem. Enjoyable to read on its own, this book would be an excellent introduction to study of the Arctic in social studies.

Nifty Nonfiction

Blackwood, G. (2008). *The great race: The amazing round-the-world auto race of 1908*. New York: Amulet Books. (Gr. 4-8)

Car enthusiasts and history buffs will enjoy this informative and entertaining description of the personalities, the automobiles, and the hazards involved in trying to drive an automobile around the world in the early 1900s. The original photographs are fascinating.

Dowson, N. (2007). *Tracks of a panda*. (Y. Rong, Illus.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. (Gr. 2-4)

Readers watch a mother panda protect her young cub as she travels on a dangerous journey to find life-sustaining bamboo and a safe new home. Small inserts which accompany the story line give interesting facts about pandas and their environment. The delicate illustrations, done in the Chinese style with brush and ink, are a perfect complement to the text.

Hatkoff, I., Hatkoff, J., Hatkoff, C., & Uhlich, G. R. (2007). *Knut: How one little polar bear captivated the world*. (Zoo Berlin, photographs). New York: Scholastic. (Gr. K-3)

The stunning close-up photographs in this nonfiction narrative will grab your readers and keep them interested throughout the book. The authors share the story of little Knut who was born at the Berlin Zoo then lovingly cared for by a zookeeper named Thomas. The children will marvel at the amount of time and energy Thomas put into raising this young bear.

Just Good Reading for Intermediate and Upper Grade Readers

Looking at Life Through the Lens of Realistic Fiction

Beaty, A. (2008). *Cicada summer*. New York: Amulet Books. (Gr. 4-5)

Lily Mathis has a secret. She has also lost her brother and has not spoken since his death. She fills her days with school, Nancy Drew mysteries, helping at the town's small general store, and enjoying time with her all-too-quiet father. Life changes in several ways when a sly, devious newcomer arrives on the scene, and a real mystery needs to be solved.

Hest, A. (2007). *Remembering Mrs. Rossi*. (H. Mainoe, Illus.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. (Gr. 2-4)

Annie Rossi misses her mom. So do the students in Mrs. Rossi's sixth grade class. When she becomes ill and dies unexpectedly, both Annie and her father have to learn to be a family of two. A book of memories created by the class becomes a treasure that Annie reads again and again. Told with warmth and humor, readers watch these two rebuild their lives over the course of a year all the while, remembering Mrs. Rossi.

Korman, G. (2007). *Schooled*. New York: Hyperion. (Gr. 5-7)

Imagine the shock you would experience if you had been home schooled your entire life and then were suddenly dropped into the world of middle school. Life becomes quite a learning experience for Capricorn (Cap) Anderson after his hippie grandmother and guardian is hospitalized with a broken hip. Before long, he is voted class president, NOT the honor you would expect it to be. However, Cap is inherently clever and eventually fulfills his campaign promise: to get to know every one of the eleven hundred kids at Claverage Middle School during his term in office.

Spinelli, J. (1997). *The library card*. New York: Scholastic. (Gr. 3-5)

If you aren't convinced that there is magic in books, that the knowledge about a myriad of things can be right at the tips of your fingers, and that getting lost in books is truly wonderful, meet Mongoose and Weasel. Set on a road to the nearest juvenile detention center, Weasel has big plans for the summer including spray paint, shoplifting, disrespect, and plenty of sass. Mongoose is to be his partner in crime until he discovers a persistently reappearing library card and puts it to use. Brenda, Sonseray, and April find that books can change their lives as well. Together, their stories might invite writers to pen their own thoughts about how a book or books has impacted their lives.

Fantasy and Science Fiction: Exploring Imaginary Worlds

Clement-Davies, D. (1999). *Fire Bringer*. New York: Firebird/Penguin. (Gr. 6-9)

Good and evil clash vividly in the well-written tale about prophecies, courage, and renewed hope in the face of desolation. Rannoch, a fawn with the unmistakable oak leaf shaped patch on his forehead, is destined to quell the evil and find peace for the deer in his herd. He is gifted with good sense, strength, and the ability to understand all of the animals in the forests in which he and his band of friends travel. If your students enjoy this book, look for *The Sight* (2002, Penguin Group) and *Fell* (2007, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.).

Hale, B. (2008). *Snoring Beauty*. (H. Fine, Illus.). San Diego: Harcourt. (Gr. 2-6)

Students who are familiar with the traditional tale of *Sleeping Beauty* will find this fresh version filled to the brim with imagination. Funny and fun, readers meet King Gluteus, Queen Esophagus, and Princess Marge who is turned into dragon because of a bungled curse. Told by a personable frog whose favorite phrase is "Yada, yada, hippity-hop" and filled with vibrant illustrations, this is sure to become a class favorite. After enjoying this clever adaptation and reading other retellings of popular folktales, challenge writers in your classroom to retell a favorite with their own personal twists.

Peet, M. (2003). *Keeper*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. (Gr. 5-8)

Soccer enthusiasts and those who are merely interested spectators will find Paul Faustino's story absolutely fascinating. He traces his journey from living in a small, poverty-stricken South American town to winning the coveted World Cup. As a young boy when his classmates

gathered to play soccer after school, he tried to join in the game. With his long, skinny legs and lack of ability, he was more a liability than a benefit. So, he took to wandering the jungle around his village to fill his hours. It was there that he learned that he had a gift for soccer and where he refined necessary skills that lead him to a dream career. Readers will be fascinated when they learn more about his teacher, the Keeper. They will close the book wondering and almost wishing that Paul's story were true.

Riordon, R. (2007). *The Titan's curse*. New York: Hyperion. (Gr. 5-8)

Percy Jackson isn't exactly your average teen. He's a half-blood, born of a union between Neptune and his quite ordinary mother. In the third book in The Olympians series, Percy and his two good friends Annabeth and Thalia, must work together to thwart the Titan Lord, Kronos, and prevent the prophecy of the Titan's curse from coming true. Expect action, humor, and page-turning reading as you learn that many characters from Greek and Roman legends are NOT just a part of one's imagination.

Sleator, William. (2008). *Test*. New York: Amulet Books. (Gr. 6-9)

Someone is following Ann. The black motorcycle and red logo are difficult to miss. In fact that same logo appears other places, like on the bottom of the test sheets that she and her classmates practice endlessly in school. If you don't pass the mandated test, you really have no future and your teacher doesn't either. Set in a futuristic society where a greedy man controls an empire that could destroy family's lives, this book shows how Ann and her classmates boycott the test in their struggle to survive a mandated life in the polluted, traffic-impacted slums.