

## **It's Time to Fall Into a Good Book!**

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*Literature Is Back! The Best Books for Readers and Writers Across Genres*  
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### **Books Just for Fun!**

Each title in this trio of picture books will have your young readers in stitches and begging you to “read it again!”

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

Offill, J. (2007). *17 things I’m not allowed to do anymore*. (N. Carpenter, Illus.). New York: Swartz & Wade. (K-Gr. 2)

Meet a mischievous girl who decides to staple her brother’s hair to the pillow and glue his slippers to the floor. She continues her antics both at home and at school adding to her parents’ list of the 17 things she is no longer allowed to do. Nancy Carpenter’s artful blend of pen-and-ink drawings with digital images adds to the appeal of this amusing book.

Taylor, S. (2006). *When a monster is born*. (N. Sharratt, Illus.). New Millford, CT: Roaring Brook. (Preschool-Gr. 1)

You may have this book sitting on a shelf waiting for the perfect moment. I reached for it at the end of a long, hot September day. During the first reading, the children screeched with delight and disgust as the monster fell in love and got married. By the second reading, they had memorized the repetitive pattern and begged to hear it again. This circular story about a monster whose life always has “two possibilities” takes readers on a rollicking adventure only to end up back at the beginning. Pair this book with *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, HarperCollins, 1995) to discuss how writers design a circular story.

### **Books for Seasoned Readers in the Intermediate Grades and Middle School**

Mason, P. (2007). *Camel rider*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. (Gr. 5-8)

Told in alternating first-person voices, readers meet fun-loving Adam, a twelve-year-old Australian boy, and Walid, a young camel driver from Bangladesh. When war breaks out in Abudai, Adam escapes with neighbors because both of his parents are away from the Middle Eastern compound in which they live. Unwisely, Adam leaves the safety of his convoy, attempting to return home to rescue his dog. With no essential survival skills, he is quickly lost in the vast desert. There he eventually meets Walid, left for dead by his abusive masters. Despite language barriers and cultural differences, the boys join forces as they try to elude Walid's masters who have learned he is alive. Together they must try to survive the harsh desert environment and find their way back to civilization. Caught up in this fast-paced survival tale, readers also get a glimpse of life in the Middle East.

Pfeffer, S. B. (2006). *Life as we knew it*. San Diego: Harcourt. (Gr. 6-8)

In this science fiction title meet Miranda and her family and friends who experience an incredible calamity when a meteor collides with the moon, altering its orbit. Suddenly visions of the prom, ice skating lessons, and life with electricity are things of the past. Now the issues are fuel, food, family survival, and communication as rumors circulate about devastating earthquakes, tsunamis, and spreading disease. Related through journal entries, this survival story set in the not-so-distant future is a page-turner that ends with just a hint of hope.

Rinaldi, A. (2007). *The ever-after bird*. San Diego: Harcourt (Gr. 4-6).

CeCe McGill watches in shock as her father is shot by angry slave owners during an argument over escaped slaves. Because her father was often cruel and harsh with her, she simply cannot understand why he so kindly helped many fleeing slaves, and she finds it difficult to mourn him. The terms of the will place her under the guardianship of Uncle Alex, a kind but strict relative. She is invited to join him and his contrary assistant, Earline, on a trip to locate the elusive Ever-After Bird. Slaves believe that they will be set free if they are fortunate enough to see this bird, which is actually a rare scarlet ibis. As the threesome travel from plantation to plantation, Uncle Alex secretly helps the slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad. This is an engrossing book that depicts racial misunderstandings, abuse of slaves, and the courage of the abolitionists who worked for their freedom. CeCe learns more than she ever expected when she experiences the stark contrast between the luxurious plantation homes and the inhumane conditions under which the slaves must live. This knowledge sets the course for the rest of her life. *The Ever-After Bird* is an excellent title to integrate across the curriculum when studying issues surrounding slavery in social studies.

Smith, R. (2007). *Peak*. San Diego: Harcourt. (Gr. 6-8)

Fourteen-year-old Peak comes by his climbing abilities naturally. Both of his now-divorced parents were once mountain climbers. Because there are no mountains to climb in New York City where he lives, Peak hones his skills by scaling the city's skyscrapers. Caught and put on probation, the judge wants him to leave town. He is sent to the Himalayas to climb with his long-absent father, possibly to become the youngest person ever to ascend Mount Everest. In a plot

filled with interwoven lines of tension, readers learn that Peak may have a competitor, a Nepalese boy named Sun-jo. Suspense mounts as the climbing party is hounded by a hostile Chinese official and his troops. Then, a disturbing fact emerges when it becomes clear that his father is using Peak's probable success to raise money to finance his struggling climbing company. The vivid descriptions of life in the camps, the grueling, bitterly cold conditions, the disregard for the lives of the Sherpa guides, and the developing friendship between Peak and Sun-jo will keep readers turning one page after another until, all too quickly, they reach the end.

Zusak, M. (2006). *The book thief*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. (Gr. 7-8+)

This riveting historical fiction novel zeroes in on events during the Holocaust that revolve around nine-year-old Liesel Messenger and her family. With only the bare minimum to survive on from day to day, purchasing books is out of the question. So irresistible are they, however, that Liesel resorts to stealing them—just a few. Friendships, bombings, the tormenting of her best friend, and a Jewish relative hidden in the basement are all part of a tale set during a particularly grim period in history. The fact that this book is appropriately narrated by Death sets it apart from all others. This title is for the more mature readers in your classroom.

## **Books From Popular Series' That Will Leave Readers Wanting More**

How do we help students make educated book choices when they visit the school or public library? One simple, yet effective way to teach readers about authors is to introduce them to books in a series. Here are a few series books that are a perfect fit for beginning readers:

Arnold, T. (2007). *There was an old lady who swallowed a Fly Guy*. New York: Scholastic. (K-Gr. 2)

Before reading the fourth book in Tedd Arnold's humorous Fly Guy series, you may want to introduce your students to the original folk song by reading and singing Simms Taback's version *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Viking, 1997). The Fly Guy series is ideal for students who are ready for an easy chapter book because they have one or two sentences per page with repetitive phrases and elements. Try them with your reluctant readers, they are sure to enjoy them. The series includes: *Hi! Fly Guy* (2005), *Super Fly Guy* (2006), and *Shoo, Fly Guy* (2006).

Cronin, D. (2007). *Diary of a fly*. (H. Bliss, Illus.). New York: Joanna Cotler. (K- Gr. 2)

Doreen Cronin has given us a delightful set of mentor texts for students who want to learn how to write in a first-person diary format. Her latest addition to the other popular books *Diary of a Worm* (Harcourt, 2003) and *Diary of a Spider* (Harcourt, 2005) continues in fine tradition with her clever combination of facts and fun.

DiCamillo, K. (2007). *Mercy Watson: Princess in disguise*. (C. Van Dusen, Illus.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. (Gr. 1-3)

In Mercy's Halloween adventure, Mrs. Watson dresses Mercy as a princess complete with a pink dress and tiara. Mercy soon finds herself in a bit of trouble with the Lincoln sisters' cat. After you read this book, your students will be off to search out the other Mercy Watson adventures: *Mercy Watson to the Rescue* (2005), *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride* (2005), and *Mercy Watson Fights Crime* (2006).

Martin, Bill Jr. (2007). *Baby bear, baby bear, what do you see?* (E. Carle, Illus.). New York: Holt. (Preschool-Gr. 1)

The finale to a series that began 40 years ago with *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* highlights ten North American animals. Young readers are sure to join in as you read Martin's rhythmic language that is brought to life with Eric Carle's distinctive collages. Of course, you'll want to find time to read the other two books, *Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?* (1991) and *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* (2003).

### **Some Series for Older Readers Include:**

Funke, C. (2006). *Inkspell*. New York: Scholastic. (Gr. 5-8)

Readers who are still wondering what happens next after completing Funke's vividly written *Inkheart* (2003), will slip into this engrossing sequel with high expectations. They will be treated to magic, adventure, suspense, a little romance, and a good deal of problem solving on the parts of all of the characters. This story begins with Dustfinger, who is still desperate to return to the book world. He finds Orpheus, a crooked storyteller, to read him back into *Inkheart*. Yearning to see what lies beyond the pages of the book herself, Meggie joins Farrid who wants to be with Dustfinger. When Mo follows too, the story escalates. Now they must outwit villains old and new including the evil Basta and his followers in a medieval world quite unlike their own. It's up to the writer Fenolio to pen a new ending and save the day. The knotty question is just which ending is the right one as several people have ideas. Readers will enjoy meeting these well-crafted characters again in addition to some new faces as they engage in a battle between good and evil. Count on moments when you just don't know who will be vanquished and who will live on to appear again in the eagerly anticipated third book in this fantasy series. The brief literary quotes that begin each chapter along with the pen and ink drawings created by the author make books in this trilogy quite special.

Gantos, J. (2007). *I am not Joey Pigza*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Gr. 4-6)

The last thing that Joey needs in his life is the return of Carter, his no-good father, but sometimes one doesn't have a choice in things like that. Triumphant because of lotto winnings, Carter is back to reclaim his family and start a family business. As he begins family life anew, Carter even changes everyone's names. Soon, Joey/Freddy is enlisted to dress as a bee to help advertise for the Beehive Diner with predictably disastrous results. Having to adjust to numerous changes, including news of a baby on the way, gives this already hyperactive hero enough to keep his

mind whirling. He knows his life is not headed in the right direction and struggles with issues of forgiveness and personal identity. The fourth episode of this series is a high-energy story that mirrors Joey's frenetic inner world. Other titles include *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (1998), *Joey Pigza Loses Control* (2000), *What Would Joey Do?* (2002).

Kessler, L. (2007). *Emily Windsnap and the castle in the mist*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. (Gr. 4-6)

The latest offering in this upbeat fantasy series finds Emily in serious trouble with Neptune, King of the Sea. She has something he wants, and he has placed a curse on her that affects not only her ability to transform into a mermaid, but also the land-sea marriage between her mother and a merman. Tension mounts when creepy Mr. Beeston pursues her, trying to steal her treasure to use for his own ends. It is only when she meets Aaron and discovers Half Light Castle that she has the tools to undo the curse affecting her family and that of Aaron's too. Earlier titles in this series include *The Tail of Emily Windsnap* (2004) and *Emily Windsnap and the Monster from the Deep* (2007).

Pennypacker, S. (2007). *The talented Clementine*. New York: Hyperion. (Gr. 2-4)

You won't be able to keep a straight face as you and your students read this second installment in Clementine's life. A confident third grader, her optimism takes a dive when she learns that the third and fourth grades will be putting on a talent show. She has NO talent. She knows her fourth-grade friend, Margaret, who can do anything and always follows the rules, is going to shine. Clementine tries one thing after another, twirling a baton (disaster), acting (not so good), hopping on one foot (she just can't) and tap dancing (you won't believe it). You have to think like Clementine to figure out how to make sneakers into tap shoes (try bottle caps from the condo association's supply of beer), and you get the idea that Clementine is not your average third grader. She does make a difference in the talent show, however, but not quite the way she anticipates. If readers enjoy this title, try the first one, *Clementine* (2006). She's simply irresistible.

## **Adventures in Nonfiction**

Aston, D. H. (2007). *A seed is sleepy*. (S. Long, Illus.). San Francisco, CA: Chronicle. (Gr. 1-4)

As educators, we are fortunate to have authors like Dianna Hutts Aston to help us integrate lessons in science with examples of fine writing. This book is a masterful blend of fascinating facts and rich vocabulary written with engaging style and grace. You can share this picture book during science to learn more about seeds, and then return to it as a mentor text for a writing workshop mini-lesson on fluency. If you are looking for other winning titles on this topic consider Heidi Bee Roemer's interactive book about seeds and plants entitled *What Kinds of Seed Are These?* (Northword, 2006) and Eric Carle's classic *The Tiny Seed* (Alphabet Press, 1987).

Farrell, J. (2007). *Stargazer's alphabet: Night-sky wonders from A to Z*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. (Gr. 3-5)

Author John Farrell shares his fascination with the night sky in a book packed with visual appeal. Beautifully designed pages mix snippets of informative text with stunning photographs. Readers will return again and again to enjoy an introductory trip through the skies while highlighting relevant items from A to Z. Pair this book with *Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars: Space Poems and Paintings* by Douglas Florian (2007, Harcourt). This duo would be a wonderful combination to stimulate interest in an upcoming unit on astronomy or for readers who are similarly intrigued with asteroids, comets, constellations, and more.

Markle, S. (2006). *Little lost bat*. (A. Marks, Illus.). Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. (Gr. 1-4)

One of Maria's first graders' favorite units in science is the one entitled *October Animals* where students learn about owls, bats, and spiders. There are many appealing titles available about these interesting creatures and Markle's book is an informative addition. In this book students learn about the early life of a Mexican free-tailed bat and its struggle to survive. Some of our other "bat" favorites include *Amazing Bats* (Simon, 2005), *Zippering, Zapping, Zooming Bats* (Earle, 1995) and, of course, *Stellaluna* (Cannon, 1993).