

The BOOK BUZZ: Children's Books and Thinking



Isabel Baker and Miriam Baily

CHILDREN, BOOKS, AND THINKING—what a terrific trio! Some books guide the young child toward learning concepts such as colors, shapes, numbers, animals, or letters. Other books tell stories in which a character uses their mind to succeed. Sometimes this character is a trickster who tries to outthink everyone, but in the end a clever hero or heroine outsmarts even the wiliest foe.

The books chosen here include concept books to exercise the mind and books about characters who find solutions to everyday problems. These are books that encourage children to think and show how being clever can help anyone succeed.



Turtle's Race with Beaver: A Traditional Seneca Story. As told by Joseph Bruchac & James Bruchac. Illustrated by Jose Aruego & Ariane Dewey. 2004. New York: Dial. Ages 4–8.

After her hibernation is over, Turtle finds her pond has been claimed by a beaver who refuses to share. Challenged to a race, Turtle knows she cannot swim faster than Beaver. She must think of a clever way to win. In a twist on “The Tortoise and the Hare,” Turtle outsmarts Beaver and Beaver learns to share.

Rumpelstiltskin's Daughter. Written and illustrated by Diane Stanley. 2002. New York: HarperTrophy. Reprint ed. Ages 5 and up.

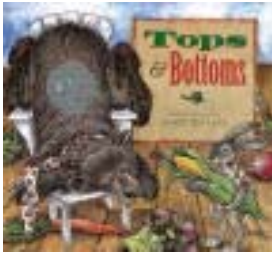
We know the story of Rumpelstiltskin and the miller's daughter. Here we have that traditional story with a new twist in the next generation. The miller's daughter marries not the greedy king but Rumpelstiltskin. Years later their daughter is in the same fix as her mother once was. Not one to call on her father for help, the daughter lays some canny plans of her own and sets things right in the kingdom.



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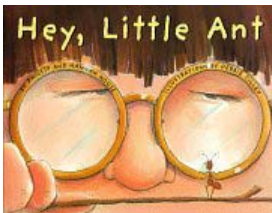
Miriam Baily, M.A., works for the Book Vine for Children and was previously a teacher.

Puzzle illustration ©
Melanie Hope Greenberg.



Tops and Bottoms. Adapted and illustrated by Janet Stevens. 1995. San Diego: Harcourt Brace. Ages 4–8.

Lazy Bear has lots of land; smart Hare has a hungry family. Mr. and Mrs. Hare cook up a plan. If Bear will donate the land, Hare will do all the work, and they can split the crops. Bear even gets to choose the half he wants—tops or bottoms. When Bear wakes at the end of the growing season, he finds that Hare has tricked him.



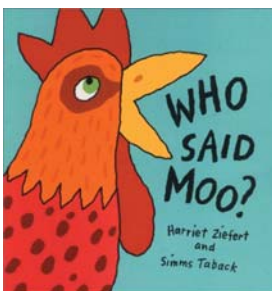
Hey, Little Ant. By Phillip & Hannah Hoose. Illustrated by Debbie Tilley. 1998. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle. Ages 4–8.

What would you do if the ant you were about to step on looked up and started talking? Would you stop and listen? That's just what happens as the ant uses logic to present his case to the boy. Should the ant get squished, or should he go free? Originally a song by this father-daughter team, the conversation between boy and ant makes us think about our actions.



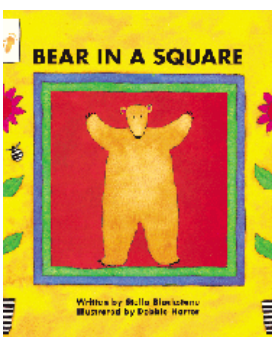
Five Creatures. By Emily Jenkins. Illustrated by Tomek Bogacki. 2001. New York: Frances Foster. Ages 3–8.

“Five creatures live in our house. Three humans, and two cats.” That is just the beginning of various ways to sort the family members according to their traits. The lighthearted comparisons lead the reader along the path to deductive reasoning. What characteristics make creatures the same, and what makes them different?



Who Said Moo? By Harriet Ziefert. Illustrated by Simms Taback. 2002. Brooklyn, NY: Handprint. Ages infant–4.

Every morning Red Rooster went to the top of the barn and crowed, “Cock-a-doodle do!” One morning someone answered, “Moo!” Red Rooster must find out which farm animal said moo. Infants can begin to develop their thinking and predicting skills as they help Red Rooster answer his question, “Who said moo? Was it you?” in this colorful lift-the-flap book.



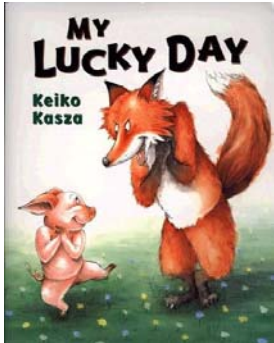
Bear in a Square. By Stella Blackstone. Illustrated by Debbie Harter. 2000. Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books. Ages infant–4.

With a big friendly bear as a guide, find the shapes hidden on every page. Children can recognize and then count squares, circles, triangles, zigzags, and stars. Vibrant artwork and rhyming text draw children into thinking about each shape individually, the shapes that appear within other shapes, and the idea that it takes many shapes to make a picture.



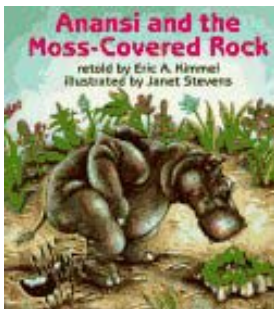
Clever Beatrice: An Upper Peninsula Conte. By Margaret Willey. Illustrated by Heather Solomon. 2001. New York: Atheneum. Ages 4–8.

Beatrice and her mother are very poor and about to run out of food. There are only two ways to get money where they live: cut down trees with the lumberjacks or make a bet with the rich giant who likes to gamble on his strength. The giant agrees to contests with Beatrice, a wisp of a girl, but he hasn't counted on how clever she is—brains beat brawn every time.



My Lucky Day. Written and illustrated by Keiko Kasza. 2003. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. Ages 4–8.

When a delicious-looking piglet “accidentally” knocks on Mr. Fox’s door, the fox can hardly believe his good luck. Dinner has just shown up on his doorstep. It must be his lucky day! But before Mr. Fox can warm the roasting pan, the piglet has manipulated Mr. Fox into giving him a fabulously tasty meal, a bath and massage, and freedom. In this funny trickster tale with a surprise ending, readers realize that luck had nothing to do with piglet’s outsmarting Mr. Fox.



Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock. As told by Eric A. Kimmel. Illustrated by Janet Stevens. 1988. New York: Holiday House. Ages 3–7.

Anansi the spider finds a strange moss-covered rock in the forest. When he discovers that the rock has magical powers, he devises a plan to use its magic to trick other forest creatures. Soon he has tricked Lion, Elephant, Zebra, and all his friends, and Anansi has taken their food. Little Bush Deer knows what has been happening, and he thinks of a way to trick Anansi and return affairs to their rightful state.

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