



# The Reading Chair

***I Know a Lot of Things*, by Ann Rand. Illus. by Paul Rand. 2009. San Francisco: Chronicle Books. 32 pp. ISBN 9780811866156. Ages 1 to 5.**

Originally published in 1956, this title recently made a well-deserved return. The illustrations by celebrated graphic artist Paul Rand use simple blocks of rich color to describe examples of things that children know.

Ann Rand artfully narrates, “I know such a lot of things. . . . I know how things are made. A house has glass and bricks and lots of sticks.” Some examples seem like quotes from the mind of a young child and come off with subtle humor: “A book needs pages and a cake takes ages to bake.” And others may teach children something new: “Even an ant could carry a load on his back big as a berry and a leaf be a ferry for a snail.”

As the pages are turned, the reader feels a sense of growing competence; yet the book ends on a humble note sure to echo with young children: “Oh, I know such a lot of things, but as I grow I know I’ll know much more.” With straightforward illustrations and a few lines of text, the Rands create a book of impressive emotional depth that captures both the confidence children gain as they begin to understand the world and the eagerness with which they strive to learn more.

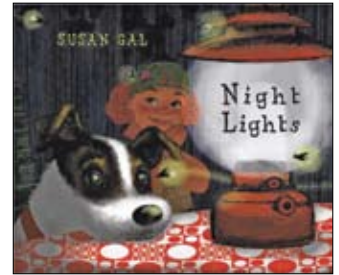
***Night Lights*, by Susan Gal. 2009. New York: Knopf. 28 pp. ISBN 9780375858628. Ages 1 to 5.**

Take a fresh look at darkness by thinking about the kinds of lights that shine during the evening routine of the family featured in this book. The single mom and young daughter arrive home by streetlight, greet their dog under the porch light, and barbecue over the firelight of the coals. They celebrate the pooch’s birthday by the light of the candles on its cake, enjoy the fireflies, and

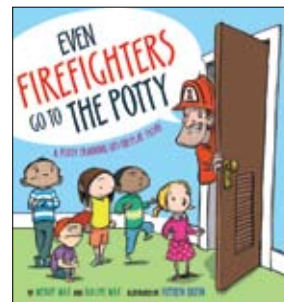


dash indoors as rain and lightning fill the sky. Bedtime comes, and they play games by flashlight, give kisses in the glow of the night-light, and fall asleep under the moonlight that streams in the window.

The simplicity of the story line—a birthday barbecue nestled into the evening routine of a mother and her child—and the near wordlessness (with only types of light identified) allows the reader to focus on the rich and glowing, charcoal and digital-collage illustrations. Gal’s pictures include comforting moments that readers may identify with, such as the girl reading *Harry the Dirty Dog* as she prepares for bed.



***Even Firefighters Go to the Potty*, by Wendy Wax and Naomi Wax. Illus. by Stephen Gilpin. 2008. New York: Simon & Schuster. 20 pp. ISBN 9781416927204. Ages 2 to 5.**



We chuckle every time we read this book. Upon turning each page, readers find a scene in the community in which a crucial team member has disappeared. “The fire alarm is ringing! The fire truck needs to go. But where did the firefighter who drives the truck go?” Open a flap, and you’ll see that he has excused himself to go to

the potty. “Even firefighters go to the potty!” The scenario repeats in the police station, where two children wait at the desk with a lost kitten but can’t find the policeman. It repeats on the ball field when the batter goes missing, at a construction site stalled by the foreman’s absence, and as patients await a checkup by the doctor.

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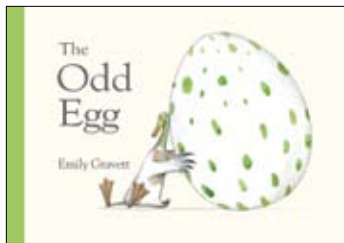
Chair illustration © Diane Greenseed.

This column appears in an online archive at [www.naeyc.org/yc/columns](http://www.naeyc.org/yc/columns).

There's humor in recognizing that even these important movers and shakers have to pause for the potty. But what puts the funny stuff over the top are Gilpin's depictions of the various visits to the bathroom, always clever, never in bad taste, and found behind the flap on each story spread. The baseball batter is poised at the urinal (with his back to us). The pilot reviews his flight map as he sits. The waiter whistles while he washes his hands. Nine of the ten potty-goers in the book are men, giving this book a clear gender bias, which may have been purposely designed, as more boys than girls tend to struggle with potty training.

***The Odd Egg*, by Emily Gravett. 2008. New York: Simon & Schuster. 28 pp. ISBN 9781416968726. Ages 2 to 5.**

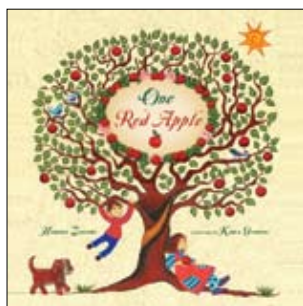
Readers love to root for the underdog, or in this case the "underduck." When all of the other birds have laid their eggs, Duck finds that he can't, and he adopts an egg instead. Taller than Duck himself and covered in green spots, the egg is a beauty in the eyes of its new parent. But from their perch atop eggs of their own, the other birds laugh skeptically and claim that Duck's egg will never hatch. One by one, each of their chicks arrive, revealed with progressively larger die-cut pages that illustrate the passage of time, like those in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.



As the birds care for their young and disregard Duck, he continues to wait (while knitting a scarf and booties for his baby), and the reader wonders how the good-hearted and patient Duck might win the day. Gravett's use of negative space (keeping large parts of the page blank) enhances the sense of anticipation in her illustrations. Then, "CREAK, CRACK," all of the slow-building suspense is resolved in an instant when an alligator emerges from Duck's supersized egg and snaps up all of the naysayers who thought it would never arrive. This surprise ending is outrageous, but believable, and it will please readers again and again.

***One Red Apple*, by Harriet Ziefert. Illus. by Karla Gudeon. 2009. Maplewood, NJ: Blue Apple Books. 32 pp. ISBN 9781934706671. Ages 2 to 6.**

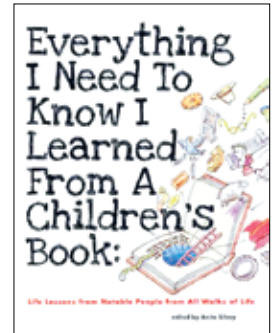
The book provides a lesson on science and the seasons as it details the life cycle of one red apple. First it's plucked from the tree, then driven to market, sold at a farm stand, and enjoyed by a young girl. She leaves the core for the birds, which help



scatter the seeds, one of which sprouts from the earth and grows into a tree that produces more red apples.

Gudeon's illustrations have a folksy quality. She paints a landscape of patchwork farmland, rolling hills, and red-painted wood barns. The thick paper pages and rich teals and purples Gudeon intersperses in the illustrations lend a vibrant and robust quality to her art. The book closes with a note of thanks: "Thank you, birds, wind, sun, and bees. Thank you, earth, for one red apple." This is a satisfying celebration of nature.

***Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book*, by Anita Silvey. 2009. New York: Roaring Brook Press. 234 pp. ISBN 9781596433953. Ages: Adult.**



This is a collection of notes from noteworthy figures—including artists, scientists, businesspeople, and even a Kennedy—about the children's books that made a big difference in their lives. In his note, Jay Leno quotes from and explains his identification with the book *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*: "The more people came, the faster Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne dug.' That line made sense to me. I was always a show-off. The more of an audience I had, the more I'd act up."

Leno is one of more than a hundred participants featured in the book, including Steve Forbes, Kirk Douglas, Judy Blume, Perri Klass, Deval Patrick, Maria Salvadore, Tiki Barber, and Angela Johnson. Each participant's message is accompanied by an excerpt or an illustration from their book of choice and a background essay by Anita Silvey about each book and its author. To learn how such inspiring minds were themselves inspired by children's books is a welcome window into the lives of those we're often curious about; but more important, it illuminates the particular ways in which children's books leave a lasting impression on readers and listeners.

Acclaimed writer Sherman Alexie (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*) writes about the first time he discovered a character of color in a children's book, in Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day*. He also reflects on discovering Native American poetry, including the work of Adrian Lewis. Alexie notes, "Ezra Jack Keats and Adrian Lewis wrote stories and poems that made me realize that people might want to listen to me, too." This collection will bring back memories of loving books during childhood and will boost any teacher's enthusiasm for introducing good books to children.

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