



The Reading Chair

***I'm a Dingle-Dangle Scarecrow.* Illus. by Annie Kubler. 2003. Auburn, ME: Child's Play. ISBN 9780859536264. 10 pp. Ages birth to 3.**

Infants and toddlers will love this simple rhyme inviting them to play scarecrow by jumping up and down and shaking their hands and feet. The board book's text, excerpted from a classic English song not widely known in the United States, can be sung or spoken. It begins, "I'm a dingle-dangle scarecrow, / With a floppy-floppy hat. / I can shake my hands like this, / And I can shake my feet like that!" (To learn the melody, you can refer to the musical score on the back cover or look up one of several versions on YouTube.)



Kubler's irresistible illustrations feature multicultural roly-poly babies donning a variety of hats, including a purple nightcap with stars on it, a hoodie with rabbit ears, a Sunday-best hat, a court jester hat, and for the scarecrow, a farmer's hat worn by a baby in a checkered shirt and overalls. With only five double-page spreads, the book is short, but its pages are oversized compared to most board books, giving the illustrations added appeal.

***Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site,* by Sherri Duskey Rinker. Illus. by Tom Lichtenheld. 2011. San Francisco: Chronicle. ISBN 9780811877824. 32 pp. Ages 2 to 7.**

Rinker's debut book adds breadth to the category of sleepy-time books by tapping into the tastes of a particular audience: children with trucks on their minds. This book

gives a rhyming rundown of the workday, with a bedtime routine of five personality-filled trucks (Crane Truck, Dump Truck, Cement Mixer, Bulldozer, and Excavator).

"Spinning, churning all day long, / Cement Mixer sings his whirly song. / Now (*yawn!*) he's weary / and so dizzy, / From the fun that keeps him busy. / With one last spin, he pours the load. / He's ready now to leave the road. / He takes a bath, gets shiny-bright, / Pulls up his chute, turns off his light. / He cuts his engine, slows his drum, / And dreams sweet dreams of twirly fun. / *Shh . . . goodnight, Cement Mixer, goodnight.*"

Lichtenheld's illustrations bring the trucks' personalities to life. Crane Truck's stabilizer arms are hard at work during the day, but they clutch a teddy bear as the truck falls asleep. Cement Mixer's mouth (front grille) shows him singing at work and yawning as the day comes to a close. Excavator looks serene as he snuggles on the dirt heap. Very different in style from Lichtenheld's more simplistic illustrations in *Duck! Rabbit!*, the wax-oil pastel artwork in this book captures depth and texture. Rich orange and blue skies and highlighting from the moon's glow make the illustrations pop.



Rinker's inspiration for the book came from her son's interest in incorporating trucks into his bedtime routine and her own interest in converting his enthusiasm into thoughts of sleep.

***Seven Little Mice Go to School,* by Haruo Yamashita. Illus. by Kazuo Iwamura. [1981] 2011. New York: North-South. ISBN 9780735840126. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 6.**

Thirty years since its publication in Japan, this new English translation of *Seven Little Mice* is a success (a 1999 French edition, *Le train des souris*, is also available). The

Isabel Baker, MAT, MLS, is president of The Book Vine for Children, a national company dedicated to getting good books into the hands of preschool children and their teachers. Isabel has worked as a children's librarian and is currently a presenter on early literacy and book selection.

Miriam Baker Schiffer, MFA, is a writer.

Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

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book opens with the mice. “They are septuplets, which is like twins only there are seven,” Yamashita writes. (He could not have guessed in 1981 that multiple births would be so relatable to children today, a convenient coincidence.) No matter how nicely their mother prepares them for their first day of school, with new hats fashioned from bottle caps and book bags made from cocoon silk, they have trouble getting to sleep the night before. They worry



about bullies. They worry about the long walk through the forest during which they may bump into a snake or get cold. And how will their mother corral them all in the morning?

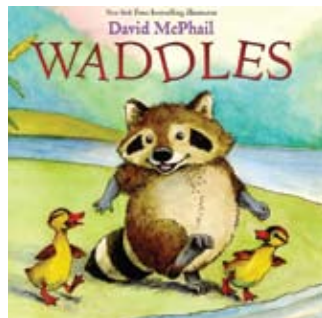
While the mice are slumbering, using humor and imagination, their mother unrolls two large balls of yarn to form parallel train tracks running through the forest. When it’s time to set

out for school, she acts as a train conductor and calls her children to climb aboard by lining up single file behind her on the tracks. What child could resist that? Soon, their train of eight grows to include many neighbors too. And when the humongous locomotive bumps into a large snake—the encounter happens in a dramatic fashion in a dark tunnel on a double gatefold spread—the snake slithers away in fear.

With lively and detailed illustrations, this original story oozes charm without being saccharine. It’s one of the best books in recent memory about going off to school.

Waddles, by David McPhail. 2011. New York: Abrams. ISBN 9780810984158. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.

Waddles enjoys a lovely raccoon life, finding meals in trash cans in the park and watching the seasons change. It only gets better when he befriends a duck named Emily. They swim together, and Emily offers to share her supply of bugs. Waddles declines; he prefers half-eaten sandwiches from the trash.



Waddles keeps Emily’s eggs warm with his fluffy coat, and he even protects them from a hungry fox. When the ducklings hatch, Waddles becomes a wonderful uncle-like figure. With these new friends in his life, he’s happier than ever. But when Emily and her brood depart for the winter, Waddles feels hopelessly lonely. Winter is not the same as it was before Emily came into his life. Thankfully,

it’s not long before he spots the first sign of spring, followed shortly by a reunion with his friends.

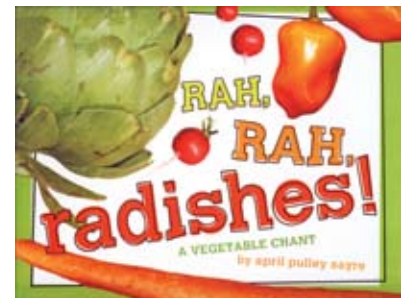
In this story of friendship, McPhail combines facts of the natural world with a heavy dose of fiction, and the balance works nicely. He paces the story—and adds a layer of science at the same time—by announcing each season as it arrives. The pen, ink, and watercolor illustrations are warm and full of expressive detail.

Waddles is a character readers root for. His tenderness is endearing, his loneliness stirs empathy, and when he fights the fox with conviction, his loyalty to Emily and her eggs is inspiring.

Rah, Rah, Radishes! A Vegetable Chant, by April Pulley Sayre. 2011. La Jolla, CA: Beach Lane Books/ Simon & Schuster. ISBN 9781442421417. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 8.

Sayre has drawn inspiration from the bounty of her local farmers’ market in creating this chant that celebrates healthy eating: “Rah, rah, radishes! / Red and white. / Carrots are calling. / Take a bite! / Oh boy, bok choy! / Brussels sprout. / Broccoli. Cauliflower. / Shout it out!”

Photographs of abundant, fresh-picked produce are mouthwatering, the variety mesmerizing, and Sayre’s language a treat on every page: “Eggplant’s extraordinary. / Pumpkin’s art. / Don’t eat zucchini? / Time to start!” The



rhyme never feels forced. Ear-pleasing alliteration abounds, and readers might just start moving to the rhythm of the text. Children will likely encounter vegetables they’ve never heard of, in forms they’ve never seen (the green heads of the brussels sprout plant are still on the stalk). Invite them all into the classroom as soup or crudités.

Rah, Rah, Radishes! supports multiculturalism (bok choy and peppers in varieties of cayenne, poblano, habanero, and serrano) and mathematics (sorting and grouping of related varieties). The book also fosters a connection with the source of our food by ending with an appreciative nod: “Thank you, farmers. / Thank you, bees. / Sun and seasons, leaf and stalk. / Know them. Grow them! / Veggies rock!” “A Few More Bites,” the section at the end of the book, offers more information about vegetables, whether tomatoes are a fruit, and putting color on your dinner plate.

Sayre has published over 55 books, but this is the first in which she has created the illustrations. The sequel *Go, Go, Grapes! A Fruit Chant* is coming out in 2012.

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