



# The Reading Chair

Children's books are beautiful the second time around.

Whether they're reprints of the original titles or old favorites with a new twist, the stories and characters that stand up over time have a hard-earned place on our bookshelves. Here are a few beloved characters and titles, new and timeless at the same time.

## Paul Galdone Folktale Classics

***Three Little Kittens***, by Paul Galdone. (1986) 2011. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 32 pp. ISBN 9780547575759. Ages 2 to 6.

***The Three Bears***, by Paul Galdone. (1972) 2011. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 32 pp. ISBN 9780547370194. Ages 3 to 7.

***The Gingerbread Boy***, by Paul Galdone. (1975) 2011. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 40 pp. ISBN 9780547599403. Ages 3 to 7.



Paul Galdone, born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1907, originally published his version of these classic tales over 25 years ago. Now, the same text and illustrations are repackaged in a uniform and coordinated set of hardcovers (six in all, the next three to come in 2012), uniting these childhood library fundamentals. Galdone was a prolific writer and illustrator. While much of his writing was original, the number of retellings of story classics that Galdone published suggests his understanding of the importance and the appeal of folktales. They provide a shared cultural experience for children, spanning generations of readers.

Galdone's text is direct and age appropriate, not too flowery or verbose like some retellings. His writing provides good dramatic tension and nicely incorporates repetitive language set up by well-known plotlines. His colorful pen-and-paint illustrations are folksy and inviting. Both animals and people with exuberant expressions will draw in readers.

## The Moomins

***Moomin's Little Book of Numbers***, by Tove Jansson. 14 pp. ISBN 9780374350475. Ages birth to 2.

***Moomin's Little Book of Words***, by Tove Jansson. 14 pp. ISBN 9780374350482. Ages birth to 2.

***Moomin's Lift-the-Flap Hide and Seek***, by Tove Jansson. 24 pp. ISBN 9780374350512. Ages birth to 4.

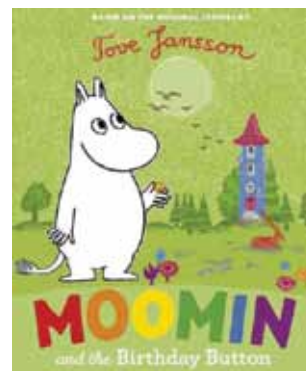
***Moomin and the Birthday Button***, by Tove Jansson. 32 pp. ISBN 9780374350505. Ages 2 to 6.

For the previous four books: First American ed. 2011. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers/Macmillan.

***Comet in Moominland***, by Tove Jansson. (1946) 2011. New York: Macmillan. 192 pp. ISBN 9780312608880. Ages 8 to adult.

Tove Jansson (1914–2001), writer and artist, began publishing the Moomin series in 1945 in Finland, bringing to war-torn Europe an “unusually happy family” whose members “give each other all the freedom they need” (*Comet in Moominland*, p. 175). Her books became runaway bestsellers, and were widely translated.

Today the books' characters maintain a beloved place in Finnish culture, inspiring their own museum and theme park. With names like Moomintroll, Snork Maiden, and Little My, it's hard not to take an interest in them. Regard-



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Chair illustration by Diane Greenseid.

This column is available online at [www.naeyc.org/yc/columns](http://www.naeyc.org/yc/columns).



less of which character the reader might identify with, all of them make good company. Described in the introduction to *Comet in Moominland*, Moomintroll is “as gullible as he is enthusiastic.” His mother, Moominmama, is “the center of the family, highly moral but broad-minded.” Little My is “the family’s small, disrespectful, yet extremely positive friend.”

Jansson’s imaginative and humorous original novels for grade-school children have just been reprinted. *Comet in Moominland*, the first in the reprinted series, is about Moomin adventures in the splendors of nature while they anticipate a comet’s arrival on Earth.

Jansson’s work has also just been adapted into books for younger readers. Their illustrations are bold and colorful, simpler than some of the sketches in the novels for older children. And yet, the Moomins and their friends remain true to character. *Moomin’s Little Book of Words* (board book) provides one word and a picture of that object on the left side of the page, and an illustration featuring Moomintroll interacting with the object on the right. In the *Moomin’s Little Book of Numbers* (board book), readers can count to 10, with one number presented per page, by observing various objects in Moomintroll’s life (“one moomin, two trees, three umbrellas, four clouds”).

In *Moomin’s Lift-the-Flap Hide and Seek* (hardcover), Moomintroll searches everywhere for his friend Little My. He finally finds her under his father’s hat. *Moomin and the Birthday Button* (hardcover) is about Moomintroll’s disappointment that his friends are too busy to pay any attention to him on his birthday. He doesn’t realize they are busy preparing something special for his party that evening. It’s easy to fall in love with all the Moomins in Moominvalley.

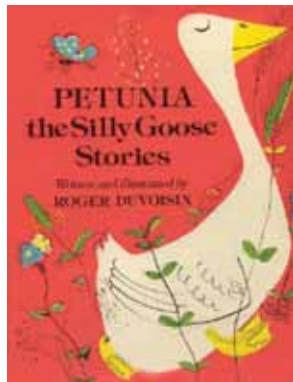
Thank goodness they are now available for all ages!

## Two More Classics

***Petunia*, by Roger Duvoisin. (1950) 2000. New York: Knopf. 32 pp. ISBN 9780394808659. Ages 3 to 8.**

Petunia is a silly goose who dreams of being something more. When she overhears Mr. Pumpkin say, “He who owns Books and loves them is wise,” she knows she must find a book. Petunia doesn’t know she is supposed to read the book, so she carries it instead. Being a book owner fills Petunia with an undeserved sense of intelligence. Before long, she is ordering around the other farm animals and dictating solutions to their problems, usually making their situations worse.

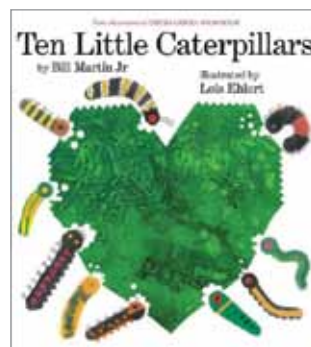
All children should meet Petunia, as children have since 1950 when the book first came out. And every adult needs to



meet Petunia too. Readers will identify with her yearning to be special. Yet they will also feel competent as they watch her obvious missteps with full awareness of what she is doing wrong. Her missteps also stir readers’ compassion for the suffering she inadvertently imposes on the other animals.

Finally, when Petunia creates one disaster too many and even injures herself in the process, she must face her failures with humility. In this moment of honesty, she makes a new discovery about books—that she can learn things by reading them. She finds the inspiration to become wiser so she can be a true asset to her friends.

Duvoisin does not have to teach and preach the value of humility and reading, because Petunia’s own transformation delivers the message so well. After reading *Petunia*, let open-ended questions about friendship and learning spur classroom discussion.



***Ten Little Caterpillars*, by Bill Martin Jr. Illus. by Lois Ehlert. (1967) 2011. La Jolla, CA: Beach Lane Books/Simon & Schuster. 32 pp. ISBN 9781442433854. Ages 2 to 6.**

First published over 40 years ago, Bill Martin Jr’s poem about 10 caterpillars is back in an updated form. The text successfully meets its

match in Lois Ehlert’s new illustrations. (Martin and Ehlert also collaborated on *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.)

Martin, who died in 2004, had an ear for language and rhyme. As Eric Carle describes in an introduction to *The Bill Martin Jr Big Book of Poetry*, Martin created the rhythm in his books first, and then he wrote the text to match it. Like his other books, this one has language rich with pattern and good pacing. It begins, “The first little caterpillar crawled into a bower. The second little caterpillar wriggled up a flower.” Other caterpillars find themselves on a leaf sailing across a garden pool, in a glass jar being brought into school, and in the face of a hungry wren. But the tenth caterpillar’s journey is the most satisfying, for it hangs in a chrysalis from an apple tree and becomes a butterfly.

In her most stunning artwork of recent memory, Ehlert’s bold and bright illustrations in watercolor collage grace the book’s large square pages and make the reader feel like he or she might even be able to step into the scene. While the text is simple, the illustrations provide the details of a science lesson, covering plants and insects (named in the illustrations) and caterpillar behavior (how it eats and protects itself). At the back of the book, readers will learn the names of all 10 caterpillar varieties, discover what they each eat, and see the butterfly or moth they become.