

The Reading Chair

New children's books too good to miss—and one forever favorite

The Rooster Struts

By Richard Scarry.
[1963] 2015. New York: Golden Books. 24 pp. Ages birth to 3.



This is a perfect example of a picture book as a piece of art—it delivers on so many levels. At its most basic, the book is about animals and how they move. But with the language Scarry chooses (“The duck waddles. The goose waggles.”), it is also a vehicle for promoting phonological awareness. The array of verbs used is fantastic (*crawl, shuffle, walk, wiggle, swing*, and lots more). Scarry juxtaposes large and small animals on many pages, introducing concepts of size, opposites, and perspective. Comparisons involving a parent and child, one teaching the other, make this a book about growing and being nurtured, too. Scarry’s attention to color and detail results in stunning images. Scarry created a timeless point-and-say book for the very young, which may hold even a 3-year-old’s attention as a browsing book.

The White Book

By Silvia Borando, Lorenzo Clerici, and Elisabetta Pica. 2015. Somerville, MA: Candlewick. 48 pp. Ages 3 to 6.



In this imaginative, wordless story, a boy with a paint roller produces murals on a wall, creating a delightful assortment of potential animal friends. However, they swim away, fly away, or turn out to be too wild to keep around. The scenes unfold rhythmically—first a white wall, then a coat of paint revealing a new animal

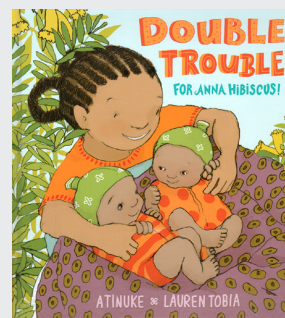
(and possible friendship), and then a turn of events that leaves the boy without a new playmate, returning readers to the white wall. The use of bold, simple colors in contrast to the white space helps build drama.

The boy’s emotional responses are expressive and varied, fitting each situation, whether it is disappointing, frightening, comic, or happy. This book is great for reading facial cues and for provoking discussion of social-emotional topics like being left out or making friends.

Don’t let the unsuccessful attempts dissuade you—the boy finally paints just the right animal for friendship: an eager dog.

Double Trouble for Anna Hibiscus

By Atinuke. Illus. by Lauren Tobia. 2015. San Diego: Kane Miller. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.



The Anna Hibiscus series highlights the happy and carefree life of a young girl growing up in Africa and travelling to Canada to see her mother’s family. This particular story revolves around the time when her twin brothers are born. Extended family is once again a presence. Anna Hibiscus is in for a shock when the entire family upends its routine to take care of the newborn “double trouble.” She’s dismayed when relatives are suddenly too busy to spend time with her. Eventually, they find ways to return to the everyday schedule, which is an important part of Anna’s day. When Anna Hibiscus has a moment to sit with her parents and brothers all together, they confirm that she’ll still get the love she needs, even if she’ll have to share.

The story reflects the childhood of author Atinuke, who was born in Nigeria and raised among extended family. Anna Hibiscus’s family is biracial, which can be an important point of connection for many readers who rarely see such families in children’s books. The text is well paced, and the illustrations are detailed and inviting. *Double Trouble* is an excellent addition to the series and a strong stand-alone title as well.

Forever Favorites

Each month we feature a classic book to reintroduce teachers to old favorites.

The Dead Bird

By Margaret Wise Brown. Illus. by Christian Robinson. [1938] 2016. New York: HarperCollins. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 8.



Reissued this year, this wonderful story, over 75 years old, is as relevant as ever. With new illustrations, larger pages, and diverse characters, the book is appealing in a new way. What remains the same is Wise Brown's wonderfully matter-of-fact way of dealing with death. She writes about death as a part of life—not something to be ignored or hushed, but something to be spoken about. When a group of children come across a dead bird in the park, they “felt with their fingers for the quick beat of the bird’s heart in its breast. But there was no heart beating.” The children prepare a special burial and funeral for

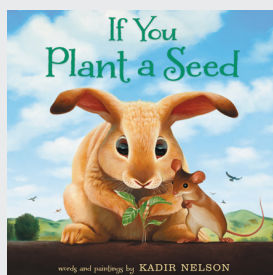
the bird, singing a song and laying a headstone. It’s a reassuring ritual that will help children feel a sense of purpose when they are faced with the death of an animal or person they know.

Robinson’s illustrations are rich with color, juxtaposing the abundance of life with the bird’s death, and lending hopefulness to the story. Wise Brown’s words capture the way life moves onward after death: “And every day, until they forgot, they went and sang to their little dead bird and put fresh flowers on his grave.” The book closes with a scene of the children playing in the park. An accessible book about death and about life.

Note: This book was written in 1938, long before the risks associated with handling dead animals was widely known. Educators and parents should caution children about not touching dead birds when they happen upon them, for health reasons. Because the likelihood that unsupervised children will stumble upon a dead bird is small and the strengths of the book, described above, are great, we decided to highlight the book despite this issue. Readers may find this book helpful when saying goodbye to household pets.

If You Plant a Seed

By Kadir Nelson. 2015. New York: Balzer + Bray. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.



Kadir Nelson’s new book starts out like a majestic planting and nature title—and it is. A rabbit and mouse plant seeds and watch them grow, accompanied by sparse but powerful text. After the vegetables come up, the story takes an interesting turn. A group of birds come by, and a fight for the vegetables breaks out between the birds and the rabbit and mouse. If you plant a “seed of selfishness,” Nelson warns, the result is a huge mess of animals, vegetables, and dirt. Thankfully, the animals have a change of heart. They eventually choose to plant seeds of kindness. The mouse and rabbit share the vegetables, and the birds scatter the seeds so more foods can grow.

The gorgeous oil-based illustrations are painterly—fine art with a childlike playfulness to them. Some spreads are wordless, inviting readers to get lost in the

mesmerizing visuals. Nelson is a renowned illustrator, having received awards for his books, which often focus on African American themes. This book, focusing on animals and nature, is a departure from those themes, but it still contains a powerful social message about taking care of those around us and investing in a better world.

About the authors

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 in Brooklyn, New York. She consults on book selections for The Book Vine, in McHenry, Illinois. Miriam’s new children’s book, *Stella Brings the Family*, was published by Chronicle Books in 2015.

The Reading Chair—reviews of children’s books that cover a diverse range of stories and characters—is available at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.

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