

Special Advertising Section



just kidding

books for children and young adults

by Meakin Armstrong

Adventure stories and visits to other worlds intrigue the young—even while they're tethered to classroom desks. Books are arguably the best entrée into those exotic places, but which book is the best one to give? Bookstore visits can be dizzying experiences: immediately, you're confronted with a plethora of volumes, all of them covered with effusive blurbs and snake oil promises. Independent booksellers can cut through the hype. They make personal recommendations to their customers everyday, each one tailored to a particular child.

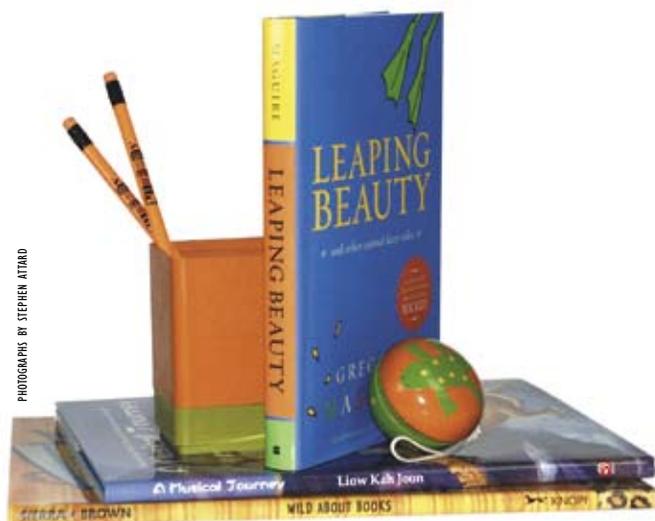
The **Book Sense Children's Picks** list—a companion to the adult edition—is a compendium of those booksellers' finds and insights. Highlights from the latest list follows, with a selection of books for children from teens to toddlers.

LIVING OUT FANTASIES

Newbery Honor and National Book Award-winning author Ursula K. Le Guin's **Gifts** (Harcourt) takes place in the Uplands, a barren land settled by families who possess various powers passed through their bloodlines. While some of these so-called gifts could be considered good, others are terrifying, like the ability to inflict blindness. Kim Fox of Schuler Books & Music in Grand Rapids, MI, calls Le Guin's latest "an intelligent teen fantasy" whose characters "find the courage to throw off their families' expectations and envision a world of light and grace."

Thirteen-year-old Zazoo writes poetry and swims in the canal alongside her house. She was born in Vietnam, but has lived in the French countryside since she was two. Life's pleasant calm is interrupted when a young stranger asks her questions about the local pharmacist she can't answer. Zazoo's investigations lead her to a deeper understanding of both World War II France and the Vietnam conflict. **Zazoo** by Richard Mosher (Graphia/Houghton Mifflin) "is a gem of a story," says Sue Carita of The Toadstool Bookshop in Milford, NH. It's about "the wonders of nature, wartime memories, and regrets."

Sometimes travel isn't strictly voluntary. In **Monsoon Summer** by Mitali Perkins (Delacorte Press), fifteen-year-old Jasmine "Jazz" Gardner secretly loves her best friend, Steve. The



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trouble starts when Jazz's mother returns to India, the country where she was born, in order to help build a clinic. Jazz has to leave California comforts and crush-worthy Steve far behind. Nicole White of Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena, CA, calls "Monsoon," "accessible to teens, with a positive portrayal of young women."

ANIMAL TALES

The younger the reader, the more animal-oriented our highlights become. A good example is **Hachiko Waits**, by Lesléa Newman and illustrated by Machiyo Kodaira (Henry Holt). "Hachiko" is based on the true story of an Akita puppy who each morning accompanied his master to a Tokyo train station, and then returned to walk with him home. But one day, Hachiko's owner died while still at work. Hopeful he would someday see his master again, Hachiko diligently waited at the station for the remainder of his life. Dana Harper of Brystone Children's Books in Fort Worth, TX, calls this book "a beautiful tribute" to Hachiko who "embodies all the best qualities of a dog."

Gregory Maguire, who reimagined "The Wizard of Oz" in his book (and later, the hit Broadway musical) "Wicked," continues his irreverence for the classics with **Leaping Beauty and Other Animal Fairy Tales** (HarperCollins). Illustrated by Chris L. Demarest, these fractured fairy tales include Cinder-Elephant who also goes to the ball (but with glass pie plates on her feet, instead of slippers) and a cobra named Rumplesnakeskin. Carl Wichman of Varsity Mart in Fargo, ND, says, "Each tale is fun to compare with your memory of the original."

Laura Ziock of Altamont Books in Livermore, CA, asks, "What do you suppose happened to the Lilliputians whom Gulliver brought to England?" T. H. White, author of "The Once and Future King," answers the question in **Mistress Masham's Repose** (The New York Review Children's Collection). This rediscovered classic about "an orphaned heiress with evil guardians," who discovers a tribe of Lilliputians living on her tumbledown estate, is "marvelous," Ziock says.

A Musical Journey: From the Great Wall of China to the Water Towns of Jiangnan, by Liow Kah Joon (SilkRoad Networks) is a whirlwind travelogue of China's twelve major cultural regions. Included are smatterings of history and facts, drawings of costumed children—and a CD of original compositions, in the style of traditional music. Intended for those who

seek to know more about China, "A Musical Journey" is recommended by Leigh Ann Johnson of Seattle's University Book Store because it guides "readers through China in an artistic, informative, and fun way."

IMAGINATIONS RUN WILD

Children who resolutely read aloud to their pets will love **Wild About Books** by Judy Sierra, illustrated by Marc Brown (Alfred A. Knopf). A wayward librarian ends up at the local zoo, and "by reading aloud from the good Dr. Seuss . . . quickly attracted a mink and a moose." Betty Bennett of Bennett Books in Wyckoff, NJ, says, "The animals discover the joy of books and, in their own unique ways, become avid readers. The fanciful illustrations make this a book you will want to read again and again."

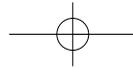
Little is known about Aesop, the fabulist who lived more than 2,500 years ago, but his tightly written tales of talking animals with varying vices and vanities succinctly demonstrates the foibles of modern life. Carol Moyer of Quail Ridge Books & Music in Raleigh, NC, calls the illustrations to the adaptation **Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop's Fables**, retold and illustrated by Helen Ward (Chronicle Books), "elegant and sophisticated." She also notes that its "oversize format makes it great for sharing with a large group."

Barbara Cooney, author and illustrator of the well-loved "Chanticleer and the Fox," also illustrated **When the Sky Is Like Lace** by Elinor Lander Horwitz (Viking). Kelly Justice of The Fountain Bookstore in Richmond, VA, says the reissue of this poetic ode to "bimulous" nights "is cause for celebration. I love the Lewis Carroll-like prose, and the lavender, cornflower blue, and ochre softness of the silly illustrations that gives this absolutely delightful gem a glow, reminding me of lantern light."

WARM AND FUZZY

Dogs, fish, and even a dragon dominate the selection for toddlers and preschoolers. **Dog Blue** by Polly Dunbar (Candlewick Press) is "a charming story," says Wendi Gratz of Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Cincinnati, OH, of a boy who desperately wants a blue dog, only to get a black-and-white one. After a moment of doubt and disappointment, the boy comes to love his variegated canine.

The Best Pet of All by David LaRochelle, illustrated by Hanako Wakiyama (Dutton Children's Books), has a retro-fifties flavor to its illustrations, befitting the tale of a boy



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and his beatnik dragon who likes to “roast hot dogs in the living room.” Susie Fruncillo of Lake Country Booksellers in White Bear Lake, MN, says the book has “terrific illustrations that match its sweet and funny story.”

Razor-sharp, digitally produced renderings make **Ten Little Fish**, by Audrey Wood and illustrated by Bruce Wood (The Blue Sky Press/Scholastic), “the counting book for the twenty-first century,” says Erin Shuster of Schuler Books & Music in Lansing, MI. She adds, “Any fan of ‘Finding Nemo’ will be thrilled with this fun adventure.”

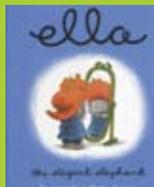
Goodnight Goodnight Sleepyhead, by Ruth Krauss and illustrated by Jane Dyer (HarperCollins), may be the perfect bedtime story—children are asked to say goodnight to their toys, and even to their bedroom walls and floors. “It’s a beautiful, newly illustrated edition of an old favorite,”



says Lois Proctor of The Bookseller in Ardmore, OK. “Warm fuzzies reach out from the pages as you work your way to sleepy time. A true delight!”

For more information on the Book Sense Children’s Picks list, consult your local independent bookseller or visit www.BookSense.com.

PUBLISHERS’ PICKS



Ella is an elephant on an island of elephants, who’s nervous about her first day of school. She wears her grandmother’s lucky hat, but that only brings her scorn. Classmates taunt Ella and tease her—until the pachyderm (and her wide-brimmed hat) save the day. Fashionably illustrated, **Ella the Elegant Elephant** by Carmela and Steven D’Amico (Arthur A. Levine Books) is an ideal read for the sartorially distinctive child.



A whodunit, **Detective LaRue: Letters from the Investigation**, by Mark Teague (Scholastic Press) follows Ike LaRue, a dog accused of kidnapping a pair of cats. Told in a series of letters by the canine to his owner, the plot gets increasingly shaggy-dogged as Ike solves the crime while also evading the long arm of the law.

Everything is pink on Priscilla’s planet. Her toys and bike are rosy-tinted, as are her shoes and clothes, and morning porridge. Priscilla journeys through pink swamps, past pink meadows, in search of other colors until she finds a multihued butterfly. **Priscilla and the Pink Planet** by Nathaniel Hobbie, illustrated by Jocelyn Hobbie (Little, Brown and Company) is perfect for those girls with persistently pink preferences.

In **Saving Francesca**, by Melina Marchetta (Alfred A. Knopf), sixteen-year-old Francesca transfers to St. Sebastian’s, a former boy’s school where she is one of only thirty other girls. What could have been a paradise for Francesca alternates between “living in a fishbowl” and feeling like she doesn’t exist. Adding to the strain, her mother suffers from acute depression. Richly drawn, Francesca finds her way, despite insurmountable odds.

