

Early Literacy Book Collection

A gentle reading journey — from first shared pages to first solo stories

A free resource from Why Play Learning

A little note before you begin

There are no ages here on purpose. Children find their reading feet at their own pace — some race through one stage, some love to linger, and both are exactly right. Dip in wherever your child is happy, mix the levels freely, and let a book they adore be read a hundred times. That isn't going backwards; that's how reading is built.

How to use this list

- **No ages, on purpose.** Follow your child, not a birthday. Some race ahead, some love to linger — both are perfectly right.
- **The levels are signposts, not tests.** Mix them freely and dip in wherever your child is happy.
- **Re-reading a favourite is brilliant.** It's never backwards — it's exactly how confident reading is built.
- **Let your child choose.** A book they love does far more than a "right level" one they don't.
- **Try the library first.** Borrow, enjoy, and buy the ones that become firm favourites.
- **Keep reading aloud.** Even once they can read alone, sharing a story stays wonderful at every stage.

Just Beginning · sharing and joining in

Board books, flaps and textures. Your child points, joins in the words, and “reads” from memory.

Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell **Guessing-game** · Lift each flap to guess the animal — every page is a little surprise.

Peepo! by Janet & Allan Ahlberg **Spot-and-find** · Peek through the holes at a busy day and spot what’s coming.

That’s Not My... Usborne series **Touchy-feely** · Bumpy, fluffy and shiny bits to stroke while the words gently repeat.

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr & Eric Carle **Sing-along** · A colour-and-animal chant children “read” from memory in no time.

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes by Mem Fox · **Cosy** Sing-song and gentle, made for cuddling up.

First Words · spotting and sounding out

A few words per page, lots of repetition, strong rhythm. First words start to be recognised.

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet & Allan Ahlberg **Spot-and-find** · Find the hidden character on every page — part story, part treasure hunt.

Hairy Maclary from Donaldson’s Dairy by Lynley Dodd **Sing-along** · A bouncy roll-call of dogs that trips off the tongue.

Oi Frog! by Kes Gray & Jim Field **Giggly** · Silly rhyming rules about who sits where — giggles guaranteed.

Elmer by David McKee **Heart-warming** · A patchwork elephant discovers that being different is the best thing of all.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle **Hands-on** · Munch through the week and the holes in the pages.

Finding My Flow· simple sentences, growing confidence

Short, predictable sentences and familiar patterns. Your child reads more of the page themselves.

Winnie the Witch by Valerie Thomas & Korky Paul **Spooky-fun** · Chaotic spells and one very put-upon black cat.

Meg and Mog by Helen Nicoll & Jan Pieńkowski **Spooky-fun** · Bold, bright and gloriously daft magic mishaps.

Zog by Julia Donaldson **Adventurous** · An accident-prone dragon and a lovely twist about what he really wants to be.

Aliens Love Underpants by Claire Freedman & Ben Cort **Giggly** · Exactly as ridiculous as it sounds — children roar.

Mr Men & Little Miss by Roger Hargreaves **Collectable** · One big character trait per book — easy to follow and fun to collect.

Reading On My Own· first solo stories

Longer text and early chapters. Your child reads independently, or takes turns with you.

Biff, Chip and Kipper / Songbirds Phonics Oxford Reading Tree

Confidence-building · Decodable stories that match phonics learning, so early wins come thick and fast.

Claude by Alex T. Smith **Adventurous** · A little dog in a beret with big adventures — short chapters, lots of pictures.

Horrid Henry Early Readers by Francesca Simon **Cheeky** · Funny and satisfyingly naughty.

The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark by Jill Tomlinson **Gentle** · A lovely first “proper” story, equally good together or alone.

Winnie the Witch Early Readers Oxford **Familiar** · Old friends in a slightly longer format.

Sharing Together — read aloud

Long before children read alone, they fall in love with stories in your lap. Reading aloud builds vocabulary, sparks imagination, and — best of all — gives you both a cosy moment that has nothing to do with "levels." These are richer tales for a grown-up or older sibling to read, at any stage. Keep sharing them long after your child can read alone; a story loved together is never outgrown.

Sharing Together

Richer stories beyond what your child can yet read alone — perfect for a grown-up or older sibling to read aloud, at any stage.

The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson · **Thrilling** · A clever little mouse outwits the whole wood — the rhythm begs to be chanted along to.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen · **Interactive** · Squelch, splash and stumble through it with actions the whole room joins in.

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak · **Adventurous** · A bedroom becomes a wild ocean — and safely home again.

The Tiger Who Came to Tea by Judith Kerr · **Surprising** · An unexpected, slightly thrilling visitor who eats absolutely everything.

Room on the Broom by Julia Donaldson · **Adventurous** · A growing gang, a dragon, and a wonderfully satisfying rescue.

Stick Man by Julia Donaldson — **Adventurous** · a little stick's eventful journey home; bouncy rhyme made to be read aloud.

The Snail and the Whale by Julia Donaldson — **Wondrous** · a tiny snail sees the whole wide world; sweeping and lovely.

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell — **Reassuring** · three worried owlets wait for their mummy; gentle comfort at bedtime.

Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney — **Tender** · a "love you more" contest between two hares; pure warmth.

Handa's Surprise by Eileen Browne — **Guessing-game** · a basket of fruit and a string of cheeky animals; children shout out what's coming.

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae — **Uplifting** · a lanky giraffe finds his own music; a lovely "you can" message.

Dogger by Shirley Hughes — **Heart-tugging** · a lost toy and a big-hearted sister; every family knows this feeling.

Peace at Last by Jill Murphy — **Interactive** · poor Mr Bear can't get to sleep; join in with every snore and tick-tock.

Lost and Found by Oliver Jeffers — **Heart-warming** · a boy and a lost penguin and a long row to the South Pole.

Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell — **Rousing** · a hardworking duck, a lazy farmer and a wonderfully satisfying ending.

The Colour Monster by Anna Llenas — **Feelings** · a muddled monster sorts his emotions into colours; brilliant for talking about feelings.

Not Now, Bernard by David McKee — **Darkly funny** · a boy, an ignored warning and a monster; short, sharp and a joy to read aloud.