



Ten Books Every Child Should Read

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Created Nov '20

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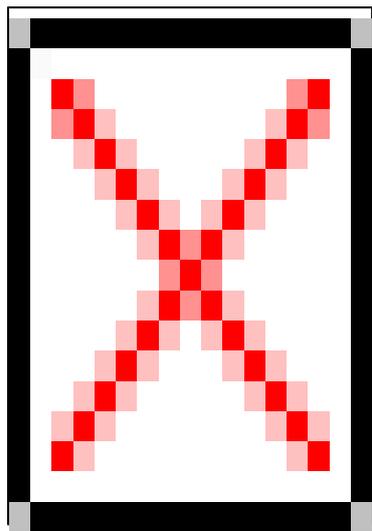
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Ten of the Best

Byline:

Selected by **James Mayhew**

As part of the celebrations for our 40th anniversary, we revised our long-running Ten of the Best feature and asked leading children's authors to choose the books they consider essential reading. Our thanks to **James Mayhew** for this selection.



There will always be children who find their way into reading through pictures. I was one of them! Long before I learned to read, I would sit in the school library and fall into the world in the illustrations. Comprehending the world around us, and allowing words to create images in our minds requires a finely tuned level of visual literacy, so I make no apology for focussing on books that children should read the pictures in. Many favourite books are out of print, so I've tried to feature books currently available. I also sought a mix of old favourites and exciting new discoveries.

The Story of Ferdinand

Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson, Faber and Faber, 978-0571335961, £6.99 pbk

'Once upon a time in Spain' - so begins this jewel of a book, with its tale of gentleness triumphant. A wonderful fable in which a tender, sweet-natured bull, who prefers sniffing flowers to fighting, refuses to be what everyone expects. I love that he stays true to himself, and so achieves real happiness. Powerful themes of pacifism and acceptance. Even in black and white, the exquisite line drawings dazzle and delight, and somehow capture the glare of an Andalusian landscape, as well as the expressions of Ferdinand. They are indelibly etched on my memory.

Where the Wild Things Are

Maurice Sendak, Red Fox, 978-0099408390, £6.99 pbk

Probably the most obvious book on my list, but still deserving all the acclaim. Sendak really sees through a child's eyes, both story and image. The expanding design of the pages and the wonderful freedom of childhood imagination, with the unforgettable, iconic, funny-scary *Wild Things*, is ultimately embraced in a tale of forgiveness: we never see the mother, but her unconditional love for Max is patiently waiting throughout, and provides the beautiful, perfect, ending.

Saturday

Oge Mora, Little Brown, 978-0316431279, £12.99 hbk

How do you turn things around when everything goes wrong? Instead of the usual middle class, suburban, white family, we have an ordinary, modern, hardworking, black mum, living in an apartment, and her little girl. Bold, beautiful illustrations give a jaunty air to this tale of a Saturday - the one day of the week they can be together - when one plan after another falls through, as is so often the case in real life. Important concepts about expectations and handling disappointment, are wrapped up in the luscious, collaged pictures. I fell in love with this book.

Oi! Get Off Our Train

John Burningham, Red Fox, 978-0099853404, £7.99 pbk

As topical today as ever, this eco-fable mingles dream-fantasy with reality in a thought provoking, yet simple way. Noah-like, a boy travels through the night on his toy train-set, and allows animals onto his train, one by one, when they reveal their assorted predicaments. The audaciously experimental illustrations, full of painterly atmosphere, are still something to wonder at and be inspired by.

Doctor De Soto

William Steig, Puffin, 978-0141374697, £6.99 pbk

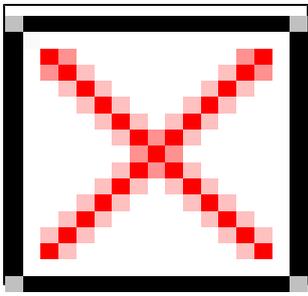
For a laugh, this book is a reliable tonic, with its charming, yet restrained and understated illustrations, a great companion to the sly humour of the words. When a fox with toothache begs for help from the diminutive Doctor De Soto, the kindly mouse-dentist takes pity. Will the wily fox outwit Doctor De Soto and his wife? Or will they win the day? I love that Mrs De Soto is absolutely an equal partner in the tale, which embraces humanity, kindness, deception, wit, moral consciousness, low animal cunning, and sweet revenge. Brilliant!

Beauty & The Beast

Max Eilenberg & Angela Barrett, O/P

Folk-lore, fairy tales, myths and legends, are such an important part of the cultural heritage of the world, and ALL children should read tales from many lands, preferably in illustrated editions. I'm choosing this single tale purely because of the extraordinary illustrations by Angela Barrett, surely one of our finest living book artists. The immersive atmosphere, detail, and emotion imbued in these lavish paintings are a thing of true wonderment. Intelligently retold, in both word and art, with enough mystery and magic to set the imagination racing.

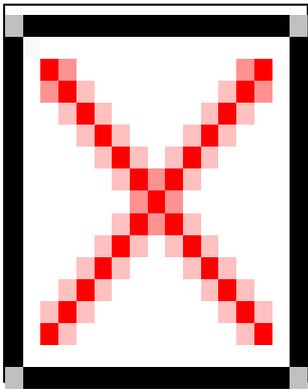
Julian Is a Mermaid



Jessica Love, Walker Books, 978-1406386424, £7.99 pbk

The spare text in this modern classic leaves just enough ambiguity for conversation and thoughtfulness, with spaces filled with gloriously free, confident drawing, and beautiful liquid painting. An uplifting tale of a boy, who is so struck by the beauty of women in mermaid costumes, that he decides he, too, wants to be a mermaid. It takes his Grandmother a while to realise that he should be free to express himself however he wants, and the book ends with acceptance, kindness and colour!

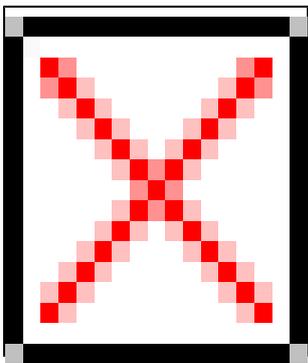
The Arrival



Shaun Tan, Hodder Children's Books, 978-0734415868, £10.99 pbk

Upheaval, separation, migration, loss and longing. The themes in this wordless masterpiece will fascinate and intrigue even the most fluent 'reader' of words, for deciphering and interpreting **The Arrival** becomes very much a personal reaction to the beautifully drawn sequences. Anxiety, trepidation, fear, as well as hope, empathy, beauty and humour, are captured to perfection in the strange shadowy creatures and brave new worlds. An astonishing, and moving, literary/art experience.

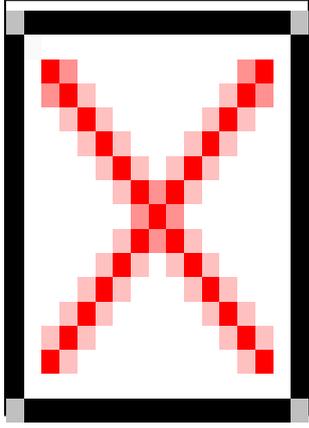
If All the World Were



Joseph Coelho & Allison Colpoys, Lincoln Children's Books, 978-1786036513, £6.99 pbk

This is a book that stopped me in my tracks when I first saw it. The exquisite, free, and colourful illustrations are full of emotion and expression. This lyrical poem of loss, and remembrance, is perfect for any child experiencing these, or needing to empathise with others who are. A really moving, tender book, with an uplifting message - that love lives on.

Moominland Midwinter



Tove Jansson, Sort of Books, 978-1908745668, £10.99 hbk

The race to get children reading longer books is often at the expense of illustrations. Yet a continued appreciation of art as a communicator is every bit as valuable as language. A good midway point is the Moomin series, books which becomes increasingly sophisticated, but are always full of fabulous drawings. Halfway through the series is my favourite, **Moominland Midwinter**, where Jansson's lonely, melancholic tale of Moomintroll, who unexpectedly awakes from hibernation, is matched with unforgettable, astonishingly atmospheric line drawings, full of haunting shadows and bewitched beauty, as Moomintroll yearns for Spring, but learns to respect Winter. A beautiful, magical, timeless book about resilience and independence.

James Mayhew is the creator of many acclaimed and much-loved books, including the **Katie** and **Ella Bella Ballerina** series, the **Gaspard the Fox** books, with Zeb Soanes, **Koshka's Tales**, **Miranda the Explorer** and **Boy**. He's also an ambassador of art, music and culture for children, travelling all over the world, as a speaker and educator.

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