

Book Links: March 2000 (v.9 no.4)

Read-Aloud Science Books

by Terrence E. Young and Coleen Salley

Children enjoy science—both emergent and sophisticated readers often choose science and nature as their favorite genre of literature. The picture books for the youngest readers (and nonreaders) provide a wonderful opportunity for shared learning experiences. Children naturally enjoy listening to and discussing stories. Reading a beautifully illustrated and accurate science book to children opens up a world of wonder to them. Having children listen and respond to science stories and science poems appears to be one of the most beneficial means of extending and developing their scientific literacy.

Many early-childhood and elementary teachers are uncomfortable teaching science. They often feel a sense of insecurity about science content as well as process. They know that science instruction should be something other than teaching the textbook or setting up an experiment. Reading aloud science trade books complements science teaching and can be used to help students make a direct connection to science. When used in the classroom, science read-aloud books can increase science vocabulary, lower the abstract nature of science principles and explanations presented in textbooks, and enrich the students' science experiences.

Not only are science trade books a great source of information and enjoyment, but, often, the colorful illustrations or stunning photographs are a story in themselves. Numerous trade books provide nuances beyond textbook information. Students who discover such interesting facts will have more questions and read more. Good science read-aloud books might even inspire a child to become a scientist!

In selecting books it is important to remember that not all children are able to separate fact from fiction. Therefore the primary emphasis is to select books that present the most accurate information and science concepts.

SCIENCE READ-ALOUDS

Albee, Sarah. *Very First Things to Know about Monkeys*

1999. 32p. Workman, \$8.95 (0-7611-1134-4)

Preschool–Gr. 2. Fifteen interesting facts about monkeys and an abundance of colorful illustrations make this title very appealing. Questions and suggested activities add to the interest. Additional titles in the Very First Things to Know series tell about ants, bears, and frogs.

Barner, Bob. *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!*

1999. 26p. Chronicle, \$12.95 (0-8118-2238-9)

Preschool–Gr. 1. This delightful, colorful book is for the very youngest. Although the bright, happy pictures are comical, each bug displays its true characteristics, such as "Friendly daddy longlegs that never bite," and "Grasshoppers hop, hop, hopping out of sight." A "Bug-O-Meter" at the end of the book allows comparisons on four points among the eight bugs described.

Cowley, Joy. *Red-Eyed Tree Frog*. Illus. with photos by Nic Bishop

1999. 32p. Scholastic, \$16.95 (0-590-87175-7)

Preschool–Gr. 2. The color photographs in this book are so extraordinary that they appeal to all ages, but the text lends itself best to use with younger children. Notes at the end give more information about this tiny, nocturnal creature that lives in the rain forests of Central America.

Dunphy, Madeleine. *Here Is the African Savanna*. Illus. by Tom Leonard

1999. 32p. Hyperion, \$14.99 (0-7868-0162-X)

Preschool–Gr. 2. The art is extraordinary in this series—colorful, realistic, and detailed. Each title is a simple cumulative narrative that shows the interdependence of plants and animals—in the case of this book, on the savanna. The texts are great for early childhood. Other subjects in the series include the coral reef, wetlands, rain forest, arctic winter, and Southwest desert.

Dylan, Bob. *Man Gave Names to All the Animals*. Illus. by Scott Menchin

1999. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-202005-5)

Preschool–Gr. 1. Bold, humorous pictures illustrate the humorous lyrics to a song written and recorded by Dylan 20 years ago. Such lines as “He saw an animal leavin’ a muddy trail. . . . He wasn’t too small and he wasn’t too big. Ah, think I’ll call it a pig” will have children singing and laughing. The variations in print size and the arrangement of the lines on the page add to the fun of sharing this book.

Earle, Sylvia. *Hello, Fish! Visiting the Coral Reef*. Illus. with photos by Wolcott Henry

1999. 32p. National Geographic Society, \$15.95 (0-7922-7103-3)

K–Gr. 5. The color photographs are so fabulous, so exotic, so stunning that this book should be designated “all ages” just for the visuals alone. The text is poetic and, indeed, is arranged in a lyrical style on the page: “Spotted stingray—graceful, / gentle creatures, / rays glide through the sea like giant butterflies.”

Fleming, Denise. *Time to Sleep*

1997. 32p. Holt, \$15.95 (0-8050-3762-4)

Preschool–Gr. 1. Fleming’s colorful, imaginative rag art always adds so much appeal to her text. In this nature story, she gently introduces the phenomenon of hibernation to young listeners. Each creature reminds another that winter is coming. Bear warns snail, who tells skunk, who informs turtle, all the way to ladybug, who awakens bear to tell him to go to sleep!

Fraser, Mary Ann. *Where Are the Night Animals?*

1999. 29p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-06-027717-3)

Preschool–Gr. 2. Beautiful, realistic art captures the comings and goings of these nocturnal creatures—the coyote, skunk, raccoon, possum, owl, etc. The afterword explains where these nocturnal animals go during the day, in this title in the Let’s Read and Find Out Science series.

Gibbons, Gail. *Bats*

1999. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (0-8234-1457-4)

K–Gr. 3. This colorful book does a good job of dispelling some of the fears and superstitions about bats and demonstrates that bats are friends to humankind and deserving of protection. Gibbons writes in a pleasant, lucid style that reads easily.

Gibbons, Gail. *Pigs*

1999. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (0-8234-1441-8)

Preschool–Gr. 2. This simplified view of a favorite animal of younger children may present as much information as most of us ever want to know about pigs. The information includes such interesting facts as scientists' beliefs that pigs are the smartest of all farm animals.

Glaser, Linda. *Spectacular Spiders*. Illus. by Gay Holland

1998. 32p. Millbrook, \$16.95 (0-7613-0353-7); paper, \$7.95 (0-7613-0386-3)

Preschool–Gr. 2. Beautiful art and rhythmic narrative make this a good introduction to arachnids for young readers. The notes (facts) at the end give quite a bit of detail about spiders, and their characteristics and environments.

Goldin, Augusta R. *Ducks Don't Get Wet*. Illus. by Helen K. Davie

1999. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-06-027881-1); paper, \$4.95 (0-06-445187-9)

Preschool–Gr. 2. The author proves the truth of the title with a simple experiment. The clear text in this Let's Read and Find Out Science title is enhanced by attractive art.

Goldsmith, Howard. *Hungry Little Hare*. Illus. by Denny Bond

1998. 30p. McGraw-Hill, \$14.95 (0-07-024799-4)

Preschool–Gr. 1. This oversize book with animals camouflaged against the forest underbrush provides children with a hidden picture game as it introduces creatures that survive their predators by hiding in the open. A final page that quizzes readers about these creatures' distinguishing characteristics also has the appeal of a game.

Gove, Doris. *My Mother Talks to Trees*. Illus. by Marilyn Mallory

1999. 29p. Peachtree, \$15.95 (1-56145-166-5)

K–Gr. 3. In this most imaginative book about trees, the mother cites specific characteristics of 11 trees in a neighborhood as she greets each. In spite of herself, the daughter's curiosity overcomes her embarrassment about her mother's idiosyncrasy. Notes at the end offer additional factual information on the varieties of trees. Colorful art and a map on the endpages add to the pleasure.

***The Hare and the Tortoise: A Fable from Aesop*. Retold and illus. by Helen Ward**

1999. 40p. Millbrook, \$15.95 (0-7613-0988-8)

Preschool–up. As in her previous book *The King of the Birds*, Ward's art is photographic in its realism and her rendition of a familiar tale is clever and winning. The endnotes provide interesting bits of information, including the fact that male hares can reach speeds of up to 43 miles per hour.

Horenstein, Henry. *A Is for . . .? A Photographer's Alphabet of Animals*

1999. 36p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-201582-5)

Preschool–Gr. 1. Each black-and-white photograph hints at the identity of the animal pictured by showing a small part of its anatomy. The 26 animals are pictured in full at the end of the book.

Jenkins, Martin. *The Emperor's Egg*

1999. 29p. Candlewick, \$16.99 (0-7636-0557-3)

Preschool–Gr. 2. Big, bold paintings and an amusing conversational style of writing tell young readers about the emperor penguin, a bird that goes to the coldest, windiest place on earth to lay its eggs. The oddest feature of these birds is the father's care and hatching of the egg. Judy Sierra's picture book of poems *Antarctic Antics* (Harcourt, 1998) would be fun to read in conjunction with this title.

Kajikawa, Kimiko. *Sweet Dreams: How Animals Sleep*

1999. 32p. Holt, \$15.95 (0-8050-5890-7)

Preschool–Gr. 1. Beguiling color photos capture animals in repose. A simple rhythmic text makes this a soothing read-aloud at home or in a class of the youngest: "Hippos pile in a great big heap. Flamingos stand on one leg to sleep." Notes at the end give a little more information about each animal's sleeping habits.

Lesser, Carolyn. *Spots: Counting Creatures from Sky to Sea*. Illus. by Laura Regan

1999. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-200666-4)

Preschool–Gr. 1. More than just a number book, this is also a science book that introduces the concept of biomes. These communities of living organisms defined by a specific environment—such as the creatures of the deciduous forest, tundra, and savanna—are vividly described in imaginative, descriptive adjectives: "Staring, rippling, jetting spots . . . five reef squids." The vibrant, colorful illustrations move dramatically across double-page spreads. Notes, titled "More to Explore," provide additional information about each of the 10 biomes depicted.

Loewer, Peter. *The Moonflower*. Illus. by Jean Loewer

1997. 32p. Peachtree, \$15.95 (1-56145-138-X)

Gr. 1–5. "When the sun has set in the west . . ." the creatures of the night begin to stir. Beautiful illustrations accompany a narrative written against a background of leaves—a simple leaf design in the body of the text, and a more elaborate one for sidebars. A glossary of scientific words and directions for planting a moonflower vine conclude the book.

London, Jonathan. *Baby Whale's Journey*. Illus. by Jon Van Zyle

1999. 40p. Chronicle, \$14.95 (0-8118-2496-9)

Preschool–Gr. 3. This author and illustrator duo seem to be getting better and better in their collaboration. London's love and respect for nature is reflected in his flowing, poetic text, and Van Zyle's art is a spectacular complement to it. The large trim size makes this a good choice for reading aloud to a group. Excellent notes about the sperm whale and its characteristics, as well as suggestions for sharing the book, follow the text.

Markle, Sandra. *Down, Down, Down in the Ocean*. Illus. by Bob Marstall

1999. 32p. Walker, \$15.95 (0-8027-8654-5)

K–Gr. 3. Four sections of the book, dealing with the ocean surface, the twilight zone, the ocean bottom, and the ocean floor, divide the text naturally into segments perfect for reading aloud, either individually, as each topic is considered, or together for an overview of ocean life. The text is nicely paced and packed with interesting facts, and the art is colorful and lively against the dark background. A glossary at the end of the book provides further information.

Pfeffer, Wendy. *Sounds All around Us*. Illus. by Holly Keller

1999. 32p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-06-027711-4)

Preschool–Gr. 2. This easy narrative explains how sounds are made and the many purposes sounds serve. Various activities, from simple to more involved, are suggested at the end of the book.

Rockwell, Anne F. *Bumblebee, Bumblebee, Do You Know Me? A Garden Guessing Game*

1999. 24p. HarperCollins, \$14.95 (0-06-027330-5)

Preschool–Gr. 1. This “garden guessing game” is great to introduce the very young to the more popular garden flowers, the ones they will see around them, and the more common garden insects.

Rounds, Glen. *Beaver*

1999. 32p. Holiday, \$15.95 (0-8234-1440-X)

Preschool–Gr. 2. Simple, understated drawings and text make this a good, straightforward introduction to the beaver. In an afterword, Rounds dispels some of the myths about the beaver, such as “working like beavers.” In reality, beavers do little work and take plenty of time for napping and eating.

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *A Pinky Is a Baby Mouse and Other Baby Animal Names*. Illus. by Diane deGroat

1997. 32p. Hyperion, \$14.95 (0-7868-0240-5)

K–Gr. 3. Deceptively simple at first glance, on closer examination this book reveals a great deal of information. Rhymed text identifies names of infant animals, while including facts about their environment, such as “Baby porcupines are kittens chewing buds and bark” and “Baby emus are chicks running on the plain.” All are realistically pictured in soft-toned illustrations. At the end of the book, 100 animals, including fish, birds, and insects, are listed, each with the appropriate infant name of that species.

Schuch, Steve. *A Symphony of Whales*

1999. 32p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-201670-8)

Gr. 1–5. This is an intriguing story based on an event in 1984, when nearly 3,000 beluga whales were entrapped by ice in the straits of Siberia across from Alaska. Through the combined efforts of the villagers of the Chukchi Peninsula and a Russian icebreaker, the whales were saved. Since whales are known for responding to music as well as singing to themselves, classical music was used to effect the rescue. The icebreaker broke a passageway in the ice and the whales followed the amplified music out to open sea. The deep colors of the oil paintings further the mood of a dark, cold, wintry setting.

Schwartz, David M. *If You Hopped like a Frog*. Illus. by James Warhola

1999. 29p. Scholastic, \$15.95 (0-590-09857-8)

Gr. 3–6. Ratio, proportion, and comparative anatomy are introduced in a most entertaining way. This colorful and amusing book appeals to even students who are not budding mathematicians with questions such as, “How many hamburgers would you eat if you ate like a shrew?”

Sill, Catherine. *About Reptiles: A Guide for Children*. Illus. by John Sill

1999. 40p. Peachtree, \$14.95 (1-56145-183-5)

Preschool–Gr. 2. The 15 beautiful, full-color paintings in this book are photographic in detail. One simple line of text per page cites the common characteristics reptiles share, such as dry and scaly skins, hibernation, and hatching from eggs. Other characteristics among species of reptiles include having short legs or no legs. An afterword gives further details about each reptile pictured. This couple has collaborated on other handsome books, about birds and mammals.

Strauss, Stephen. *How Big Is Big?* Illus. by The Fernades Four

1999. 32p. Millbrook, \$21.40 (0-7613-1664-7)

Gr. 2–6. This introduction to opposites, size perception, and the relativity of measurements makes these abstract concepts fun and fathomable through the use of poems, factual sidebars, and colorful, zany art.

Swineburne, Stephen. *Safe, Warm, and Snug*. Illus. by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey

1999. 40p. Harcourt, \$16 (0-15-201734-8)

Preschool–Gr. 1. Colorful, comical watercolors and brief, rhymed text describe how a variety of animals protect their unhatched eggs and their newborns from predators. Notes about such unusual species as the cichlid fish, kangaroo, cockroach, killdeer, sloth, emperor penguin, Surinam toad, African rock python, sea horse, tumblebug, and bat are included at the end of the text.

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