

WORLD's list of 50 great 20th-Century books for Children, 2006

A year ago WORLD published a list of the top 40 books of the 20th century (with the help of readers, the list later grew to 100). This year WORLD takes a look at the world of children's literature by publishing a Nifty 50 list of children's fiction written since 1900. Picture books come first on our list, in alphabetical order by author, followed by juvenile fiction.

*In composing the list I consulted with other moms and with my husband, who has 22 years of bedtime stories under his belt, but since we're the parents of four boys I have to acknowledge that the list is tilted toward boy favorites. (Parents with daughters are welcome to send suggestions for list expansion.) Some books that are written for children seem to appeal more to adults than their intended audience. A favorite like Ouida Sebestyn's *Words by Heart*, a story of a black family in Oklahoma after the Civil War, deals beautifully with the difference between knowing Scripture and applying it, but it didn't appeal to a focus group of boys.*

*We limited the list to one book by each author, and sometimes that was hard. We chose *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss, but *Yertle the Turtle* is also terrific. We chose *Chicken Soup with Rice* by Maurice Sendak, but *Pierre: A Cautionary Tale* (about the boy who learned to care) was a close second. Same goes for William Steig, whose great *Yellow and Pink* barely beat out *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*.*

*One final note: Since the list focuses on books written in the past 100 years, some classics such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, *An Old Fashioned Girl*, and *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* are not on it. Since the list is limited to fiction, some excellent nonfiction titles (for example, books by D'Aulaire, Gail Gibbons, and David Macaulay) aren't on it.*

Please send letters to the editor commending specific choices or castigating us for omissions. But for now, let's dive in.

By Susan Olasky

PICTURE BOOKS

Brown, Margaret Wise

Runaway Bunny

The persistent bunny mother acts as does God in Psalm 139. Kids will like comparing the illustrations to those in Goodnight Moon.

Butterworth, Nick and Inkpen, Mick

The Lost Sheep

One of a series of four books based on parables from the Bible. A joyous combination of text and illustration.

Crews, Donald

Freight Train

A wonderful read-aloud story about a train. The writing displays great train rhythms that kids love.

de Paola, Tomie

The Knight and the Dragon

An inexperienced knight and dragon make preparations for their first battle.

Freeman, Don

Bearymore

A circus bear has to learn a new trick or be out of a job.

Goscinnny and Uderzo

Asterix the Gaul

First in the series about a Gaulish village's comedic fight against Roman tyranny.

Hall, Donald

Ox-cart Man

In the fall a farmer takes his crop to market. He sells everything, even the ox that pulled his cart, and walks home with seeds, tools, and presents to begin the process all over again.

Hunt, Angela Elwell

The Tale of Three Trees

Three young trees' dreams of future greatness are fulfilled in surprising ways.

Johnson, Crockett

Harold and the Purple Crayon

A boy creates his world with his trusty purple crayon, saving himself with a stroke of his imagination from many catastrophes.

Kraus, Robert

I, Mouse

Robert Kraus is better known for Leo the Late Bloomer, but we enjoy this little mouse's attitude. He likes cheese. Is that a crime?

Krauss, Ruth

The Carrot Seed

Charming drawings by Crockett Johnson illustrate this simple story of a seed that grows into an enormous carrot.

Leaf, Munro

The Story of Ferdinand

Ferdinand would rather smell the flowers than fight in a ring, but on the day the bullfighters come to find the toughest bull, placid Ferdinand has just been stung by a bee.

Nash, Ogden

Custard the Dragon

While Belinda, Ink, and Blink brag about their bravery in this story-poem, it falls to Custard, a "realio trulio cowardly dragon," to defeat the pirate.

Peet, Bill

Cowardly Clyde

A cowardly war horse overcomes his fear to save himself and Sir Galavant from the ogre.

Plath, Sylvia

The Bed Book

For kids tired of their "nice little, tucked in tight little, turn-out the light little beds," here's a whirlwind poem about more exciting places to lay their heads.

Polacco, Patricia

Just Plain Fancy

The Amish dress plain to please God. But what happens when two little Amish children find they have hatched a colorful peacock alongside their chicken?

Rayner, Mary

Mr. and Mrs. Pig's Evening Out

Garth Pig and his siblings outwit a wolf disguised as a babysitter.

Rylant, Cynthia

The Relatives Came

A story of family love beautifully illustrated by Stephen Gammell, with lots of great detail, like the Granny sucking her thumb while she sleeps.

Scarry, Richard

Cars and Trucks and Things That Go

This book is full of cool vehicles. Children like looking for Goldbug, who is hiding on every page.

Sendak, Maurice

Chicken Soup with Rice

Everyone knows *Where the Wild Things Are*, but our favorite Sendak book is a little volume with a poem for each month: "In January it's so nice, while slipping on the sliding ice, to sip hot chicken soup with rice. Sipping once, sipping twice, sipping chicken soup with rice."

Seuss, Dr.

Horton Hatches the Egg

Maizie the lazy bird would rather play than waste her time sitting on an egg, so it falls to elephant Horton to do her job.

Shulevitz, Uri

Oh What a noise!

Another fun read-aloud full of city noises that build to a crescendo.

Stieg, William

Yellow and Pink

Two marionettes ponder how they came to be. A clever argument for creation.

Tripp, Wallace

Granfa' Grig Had a Pig

A collection of Mother Goose rhymes brought to life with sly humor by Wallace Tripp.

JUVENILE FICTION

Atwater, Richard

Mr. Popper's Penguins

Mr. Popper is a housepainter who dreams of high adventure in the Arctic. Some of those dreams come true with the arrival of a strange package containing the first of many penguins.

Bond, Michael

Paddington Bear

A small bear from Peru finds a home and causes lots of mischief in London.

Dahl, Roald

The BFG

An orphan girl kidnapped by a giant finds he is the friendly exception among large and truly filthy creatures.

DeVries, Anne

Journey Through the Night

A four-volume series about the Dutch resistance from a Christian perspective. For older kids. Out of print and hard to find.

Dygaard, Thomas J.

Halfback Tough!

A young thug has his life turned around by football.

Hergé

Tintin in America

Funny cartoon-style adventures starring the Belgian boy journalist Tintin and his dog Snowy.

Herriot, James

All Creatures Great & Small

Humorous and warm-hearted tales of a country veterinarian in Yorkshire.

Jacques, Brian

Redwall

An abbey full of mice fights against a vicious rat and his vermin horde. First of a series.

Kjelgaard, Jim

Wild Trek

Kjelgaard wrote a series of dog books that are favorites among children who like animal stories. Here, a trapper and his dog set out to rescue a scientist and bush pilot trapped in a virgin wilderness.

Lewis, C.S.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

The classic Christian allegory about four children who find themselves in a parallel kingdom ruled over by the lion Aslan. First in the must-read Narnia series.

Lindgren, Astrid

Pippi Longstocking

Wacky stories of irrepressible Pippi who lives by herself while her sea-captain father is out at sea.

MacDonald, Betty

Mrs. Piggle Wiggle

An old woman knows just the right sort of "medicine" to cure the bad habits of little boys and girls.

Montgomery, Lucy Maud

Anne of Green Gables

The first in a delightful series about the orphan who comes to live with an elderly couple on Prince Edward Island.

North, Sterling

Rascal

The gentle story of a boy and his raccoon.

O'Dell, Scott

Island of the Blue Dolphins

Scott O'Dell's keen eye for detail and historical accuracy made him one of the best writers of historical adventures for young people. In this volume a young Indian girl is stranded on an island.

Paterson, Katherine

The Great Gilly Hopkins

This is a fine novel about a tough little girl in foster care and the kind, Christian foster mom who gets through to her. Caution: Gilly's language is profane in spots.

Pinkwater, Daniel

Fat men from Space

The spacemen in this book look amazingly like Pinkwater: overweight, wearing plaid sports coats and horn-rimmed glasses, and scarfing down burgers.

Prins, Piet

Wambu

A young aborigine escapes from headhunters and finds his way to civilization. Along the way he meets up with Dutch missionaries.

Rawls, Wilson

Where the Red Fern Grows

A story of a boy and his dogs, and their summer together in the Arkansas Ozarks.

Taylor, Mildred

Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry

The story of a black family in Depression-era Mississippi, with an emphasis on the role played by the church in the family's life. *

Taylor, Sydney

All-of-A-Kind Family

Delightful tales of an observant Jewish family in New York City in the early 1900s.

Tolkien, J.R.R.

The Hobbit

Another must-read: Bilbo Baggins, set in his ways, surprises even himself by going on an adventure with dwarves to combat a dragon. Older children move on from here to the superb Lord of the Rings trilogy, but (with occasional skipping where the action slows down) the three books also make excellent bedtime reading extended over many weeks.

Voigt, Cynthia

Homecoming

First in a fine series about the Tillermans and their friends in a small town on the Chesapeake Bay.

White, E.B.

Charlotte's Web

The famous story of Wilbur the pig and how his life is saved by Charlotte, a spider who is both a good friend and a good writer.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls

Little House on the Prairie

Both boys and girls like these stories of pioneer living.

Yates, Elizabeth

Amos Fortune, Free man

Amos, an African prince, was captured and sold into slavery in the United States. He works to buy his freedom powered by his Christian faith.