

By Anne Bogel of Modern Mrs Darcy

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From One Book-Lover to Another

Hello, dear book-lovers. I'm going to assume that if you're reading this guide, it's because you're a reader--and you have a young person in your life whom you'd very much like to see grow into a book-lover, too.

Books can be wonderful gifts--but only if they're the right books. Because we book-lovers know that all books are *not* created equal. There are books we consider friends, and books we (rightly) consider trash. There are books we want to read over and over again, and books that aren't worth reading even once. There are books we want to keep on our bookshelves forever, and books that simply take up space.

If we're giving books to our kids and nieces and nephews and nannied-fors and other young loved ones in our lives, we *have* to make sure we're giving them *good* books. Because they won't become readers if we give them bad ones.

Unfortunately, **giving good books isn't as easy as it sounds.** It's hard enough to find good books for ourselves, but if we can't remember what it's like to be 2--or 12--and what kids those ages like, finding a good book to gift them for Christmas can be a guessing game.

There's an expression I've heard my dad say a hundred times: "paper gains, paper losses." He likes to keep an eye on his investments, and as he watched their value rise and fall he likes to remind me (and himself, I suspect) that you haven't truly won or lost anything until you cash out.

This guide is called "Paper Gains" because you can't lose with the books listed here.

This guide will steer you towards good books for the young people on your gift list. It's full of books that they'll love reading--again and again. Books that will turn them into readers. (Hey, it's full of books you'll probably love, too!)

This list certainly isn't exhaustive--but it doesn't have to be. Because once a kid develops a taste for good books, they'll be able to find plenty more of them. The challenge is in learning to recognize what makes for a good book.

Help out a young reader by gifting them a good book this year. And here's wishing youand the young readers in your lives-a very happy holiday.

-Anne

A Note About the Age Guidelines Listed Here

I've included very approximate age guidelines with each title listed here. Please know that that's all they are: guidelines.

Young children differ greatly in both their reading skills and emotional maturity. Both factors are important to consider when putting a book in a child's hands.

If you're not sure whether or not your child or young friend is ready to read a certain book, try reading it yourself first, or reading it with them.

That being said, it's never too early to begin building a child's library. It's an investment that will surely pay off. There are no "paper losses" to be had from an investment in good books.

Books That Belong in Every Family's Library

Invest in the hardback versions of these, because you'll read them again and again...and again.

Goodnight Moon, Margaret Wise Brown.



This classic bedtime story walks the reader through a young child's bedtime ritual, as he says good night to everything around: "Goodnight room. Goodnight moon. Goodnight cow jumping over the moon. Goodnight light, and the red balloon..." Parents everywhere have this story memorized, for good reason. For the youngest child.

Where the Wild Things Are, Maurice Sendak.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

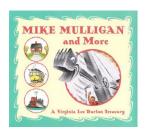
In this classic story, Max dons his wolf suit to make mischief--and ends up being sent to bed without supper. While stuck in his room, he sets out on an imaginative journey to the land of the Wild Things, where they make him King. He rules over the Wild Rumpus, but then returns home to his very own room, where his dinner is waiting for him--and it's still warm. Age 4 and up.

Frog and Toad Are Friends, Arnold Lobel.



The 4 Frog and Toad books provide charming tales of friendship--with a hefty dose of "silly" mixed in. The journey begins with <u>Frog and Toad Are Friends</u>, which includes the stories "Spring," "The Story," "A Lost Button," "The Letter," and my personal favorite, "A Swim." Wise enough for an adult to appreciate; simple enough for a child. Age 3 and up.

Mike Mulligan and More, Virginia Lee Burton.



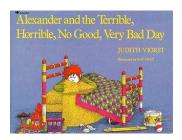
This volume collects the favorites <u>Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel</u>, <u>The Little House</u>, <u>Katy and the Big Snow</u>, and <u>Maybelle the Cable Car</u>. Burton's stories are thoughtfully told, appealing to all ages, and beautifully illustrated. Age 4 and up.

A Child's Garden of Verses, Robert Louis Stevenson.



It's hard to believe this collection was first printed in 1885. This collection includes classics such as "My Shadow" and "The Swing," and is complete with Tasha Tudor's wonderful illustrations. Age 4 and up.

<u>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, Judith Viorst.</u>



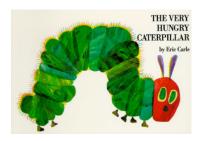
Alexander goes to sleep with gum in his mouth and wakes up with gum in his hair and when he gets out of bed he trips on his skateboard and it just gets worse from there. This so-badit's-good description of Alexander's horrible day helps kids understand that everybody has bad days...even in Australia. Age 4 and up.

The Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein.



A touching story of a young boy and his favorite tree. Over the years, the tree gives the boy what he wants--and as the boy gets older, he wants more and more from the tree, until the tree has nothing left to give. Well, almost nothing. Age 3 and up.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Eric Carle.



This whimsical story begins, "One Sunday morning the warm sun came up and--pop!--out of the egg came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar." This charming book is full of the repetitions kids love--and Carle's iconic collage illustrations of the hungry caterpillar and the beautiful butterfly be becomes. For the youngest child.

Series Kids Love (and Their Parents Do, Too)

Finding good books to read can be tough. When you get hooked on a series, you don't have to worry about finding great books; you can just enjoy *reading* them.

Anne of Green Gables, L.M. Montgomery.



Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert of Prince Edward Island, Canada decide to adopt an orphaned boy to help them on their farm. Their messenger mistakenly delivers a girl to instead--an 11-year-old feisty redhead named Anne Shirley. The 8-volume series follows Anne from her childhood at Green Gables until she is a mother herself; the later books are about her children's adventures more than they are about Anne. Age 7 for Green Gables; themes become more mature as the series progresses.

Emily of New Moon/Emily Climbs/Emily's Quest, L.M. Montgomery.



When Emily Starr's beloved father dies, she's sent to live with her distant relatives at New Moon, where she isn't loved and doesn't belong. But Emily slowly finds friends in Ilse, Teddy, and Perry, and begins to feel that maybe she can love New Moon after all. Emily of New Moon is a wonderful book for any budding writer (age 7 and up). Emily Climbs and Emily's Quest deal with more mature themes of love and marriage (age 9 and up).

The Little House Collection, Laura Ingalls Wilder.



These 9 books tell the story of Laura Ingalls' childhood and coming of age on the American frontier. Follow the Ingalls family as they move from the Big Woods of Wisconsin to the Kansas prairie, from a creekside dugout in Minnesota to the shores of Silver Lake, South Dakota. Destined to be read over and over again. (The audio cds by Cherry Jones are completely wonderful.) Age 6 and up.

The Shoe books. by Mary Noel Streatfield.



These charming books were discovered by a new generation of readers when Kathleen Kelly (played by Meg Ryan) recommended them to a Fox Books patron in Nora Ephron's 1998 movie <u>You've Got Mail</u>: "I'd start with <u>Ballet Shoes</u>, it's my favorite; although <u>Skating Shoes</u> is completely wonderful." There are 11 shoe books in all; a <u>10 book set</u> is available here. Age 7 and up.

The Betsy-Tacy books, Maud Hart Lovelace.



This series follows the the journey of Betsy Ray and her best friend, Tacy, from the time they are 5 years old. The first book, Betsy-Tacy, begins with the line, "It was difficult, later, to think of a time when Betsy and Tacy had not been friends." A sweet series that celebrates friendship and the wonders of childhood. 10 books in all. Age 5 and up.

The Boxcar Children, Gertrude Chandler Warren.



Warren was a first grade teacher who was frustrated that she couldn't find *good* books for her young students that were easy enough for them to read. She began writing The Boxcar Children books to fill the gap, and countless children have fallen in love with reading because of these stories of 4 orphans who make their home in an old railway car. (Stick to the first 17, written by Warren herself. Subsequent books written by different authors will bear the words "created by Gertrude C. Warren" on the cover.) Age 5 and up.

The Ramona Collection, Beverly Cleary.

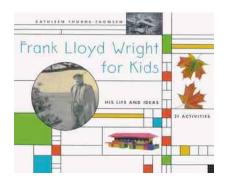


Ramona Quimby is a rambunctious, imaginative girl who is constantly getting herself into trouble. (The second book of the series is--for good reason--entitled Ramona the Pest.) Ramona's misadventures frequently embarrass her big sister Beezus and her friend Henry Huggins, but the characters remain convincing, warm, and loyal. (Ramona makes appearances in several of the Henry Huggins books. The audio recordings of these books--done by Neil Patrick Harris--are excellent. Stockard Channing does the audio for the Ramona books, and the audio versions aren't quite as lovable.) 8 books in all. Age 6 and up.

Books for Young Creatives

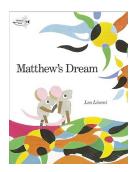
Well-chosen books encourage and inspire the young people in your life who dream of being writers, poets, architects, dancers, or who just love to get creative.

Frank Lloyd Wright for Kids: His Life and Ideas, Kathleen Thorne-Thomsen.



The first half of the book is about the man and his work, from his Wisconsin childhood to his mature years as an accomplished architect. Several of his masterpieces like the Robie House, Fallingwater, and Hollyhock are discussed in detail. The second half of the book contains 21 projects (including an edible graham-cracker-andicing model of Fallingwater). Perfect for budding architects. 7 and up.

Matthew's Dream, Leo Leonni.



Matthew lives with his poor mouse family in the corner of a dusty attic. His parents have high hopes for him, but he still doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up. After a school field trip to the art museum he realizes he wants to be an artist, and from that point on he sees his small world through an artist's eyes. Age 5 and up.

13 Artists Children Should Know, Angela Wenzel.



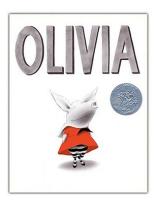
This book provides a wonderful introduction to great artists such as da Vinci, Monet, Cassatt, Van Gogh, Picasso, Chagall, and Warhol. Gorgeous illustrations of their most famous works are included, along with timelines and vignettes about each artist and information about their style of art. This beautiful book will help kids get familiar with art and comfortable with its vocabulary. Age 7 and up.

Cool City, Sean Kenney.



This book isn't a Lego instruction manual. Instead, its 32 pages are packed with wonderful photos of detailed city scenes Kenney constructed entirely from Legos. This is a book to return to again and again. Kenney is one of a handful of "certified Lego professionals" in the world, and all of his books are excellent. Age 4 and up.

Olivia, Ian Falconer.



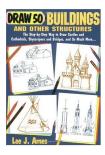
This is a story about a pig named Olivia: "She is good at lots of things. She is *very* good at wearing people out. She even wears herself out." She gets in trouble when she reproduces Jackson Pollock's Autumn Rhythm #30 on the walls at home. On rainy days she likes to go to the museum and look at her favorite painting--Degas's Ballet Rehearsal on the Set--for a long time. Olivia is a high energy kid (well, pig) with lots of spunk and a bit too much sass, and kids will enjoy this first installment. Age 2 and up.

The Hundred Dresses, Eleanor Estes.



Wanda Petronski is a Polish girl in a Connecticut school whose classmates make fun of her for wearing the same old dress every day. Wanda defends herself by saying she has a hundred dresses at home, but nobody believes her. When Wanda moves away, her classmates feel terrible--but it's too late to make things right, even though they now know the truth behind Wanda's claim. A poignant, beautiful book. Age 6 and up.

Draw 50 Building and Other Structures, Lee J. Ames.

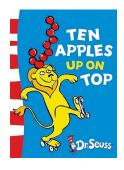


The Draw 50 series walks young artists step-by-step through the drawing process. Get this <u>Draw 50</u> book for the budding architect in your life. Tons of other titles are available to suit the interests of your young artist: they can learn to draw <u>flowers</u>, <u>trees</u>, <u>and plants</u>, <u>animals</u>, or even <u>magical creatures</u>. Age 9 and up.

Delightfully Silly Books

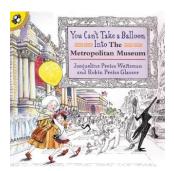
Kids love the unexpected (and slightly ridiculous) plots of the stories below. Adults will love them, too--because while these stories are *silly*, they're not stupid.

Ten Apples Up on Top, Theo LeSieg (Dr. Seuss).



This is the story of an apple-balancing contest between three rollerskating friends: a lion, a tiger, and a dog. They all compete to see who can get ten apples on their head first. This is a fun rhyming and counting book, in unforgettable Dr. Seuss style: "Seven apples up on top. I am so good they will not drop." Age 2 and up.

<u>You Can't Take a Balloon Into the Metropolitan Museum</u>, Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman.



A young girl and her grandmother go to visit the Met, but balloons aren't allowed inside. The girl's yellow balloon is tied to the railing outside, but it comes loose--and a hilarious adventure ensues. The outrageous story is told entirely in pictures done by Robin Glasser, who illustrates the <u>Fancy Nancy</u> books. Age 5 and up.

Mrs Piggle-Wiggle books, Betty MacDonald.



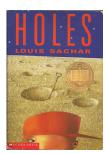
Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle lives in an upside-down house and smells like cookies. She has the longest hair you've ever seen and was once married to a pirate. Children love her because she understands them. Their parents love her because she knows how to cure any childhood ailment, and they flock to her for solutions like the Answer-Backer Cure, the Won't Pick Up Toys Cure, and the Never-Want-To-Go-To-Bedders Cure. (There are 5 Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle books.) Age 7 and up.

There's No Such Thing as a Dragon, Jack Kent.



Billy Bixbee awakes one morning to find a dragon sitting on his bed. It's a small dragon, about the size of a kitten. When Billy tells his mother what's happened, she says "there's no such thing as a dragon," and the dragon continues to grow bigger and bigger so that someone will take notice of him. Age 4 and up.

Holes, Louis Sachar.



Stanley Yelnats is a boy with a history of bad luck—all brought on by his "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather." Yelnats ends up at Camp Green Lake--a juvenile detention center, where there is no lake--and has to dig a giant hole every day in the hot sun. The boys soon discover there may be more to this hole-digging business than punishment. Age 8 and up.

Officer Buckle and Gloria, Peggy Rathmann.



This charming book is a modern classic and Caldecott winner. The children at Napville School are always falling asleep during Officer Buckle's safety talks, until Officer Buckle gets a buddy in the form of a police dog named Gloria. Age 4 and up.

Books to Fire Young Imaginations

Good fiction develops imagination and empathy, not to mention reading skills and appreciation for good literature. Your young reader will enter into new worlds through these wonderful works of fiction.

The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame.



This is the story four friends: river-loving Mole and Ratty, infuriating (but lovable) Toad, and wise Badger. This tale set in the English countryside celebrates friendship, loyalty and adventure. The friends drink tea, they fight battles, and they constantly try (and fail) to keep the ridiculous Mr. Toad out of trouble. Age 10 and up.

The Search for Delicious, Natalie Babbit.



From the author of <u>Tuck Everlasting</u>. Twelve-year-old Gaylen sets off to poll the kingdom about which food should stand for "delicious" in the new dictionary, but his simple quest soon reveals civil war is brewing. This is a sweet tale of a boy, his father-figure, a mermaid, and a dictionary, full of magic and mystery. Age 8 and up.

A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle.



L'Engle begins her groundbreaking science fiction/fantasy work with the famous opening line "It was a dark and stormy night," and plunges you headlong into the world of the Murray family, who must travel through time to save the universe. A Wrinkle in Time is the first-and most famous--of The Time Quintet. Age 7 and up.

My Father's Dragon, Ruth Stiles Gannett.



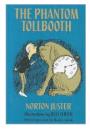
In this charming book, Elmer Elevator runs away with an alley cat to Wild Island to rescue a baby dragon, which he's able to do with the help of a pink Iollipop, a hairbow, and chewing gum. This is the first book in a trilogy; the whole set is collected in Three Tales of My Eather's Dragon. Plenty of action, but nothing scary--perfect for young readers (as young as 4 or 5).

The Hobbit/The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, J.R.R. Tolkien.



These stories of epic quest and good vs. evil are part myth, part fairy tale. These books are wonderful, touching, and timeless. In the words of C.S. Lewis: "Here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron. Here is a book that will break your heart." Age 7 and up (The Hobbit). Age 10 and up (LOTR).

The Phantom Tollbooth, Norton Juster.



10-year-old Milo comes home from school one day to find a tollbooth sitting in his bedroom. Since he doesn't have anything better to do, he pays the toll and drives through--and embarks on a strange journey into a fanciful world where he encounters all sorts of strange characters. The book's satire and word play will engage both kids and adults, albeit on different levels. Age 8 and up.

The Chronicles of Narnia, C. S. Lewis.



In this classic series, 4 british children discover that a wardrobe in their London home opens into a magical world called Narnia, where animals talk, magic is real, and the evil White Witch duels the fierce lion Aslan. The Narnia books are loved by young and old alike. Age 7 and up. Older C. S. Lewis fans should check out his Space Trilogy, which is better suited for older teens and adults.

Five Children and It, E. Nesbit.

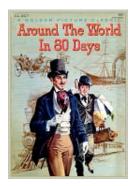


"It" is a Psammead--a sand fairy (and a cranky and irritable one at that) that must grant one wish a day to the children who found her. They soon learn to be careful what they wish for. J.K. Rowling has called E. Nesbit her favorite author and inspiration, and young Harry Potter fans may be interested in reading Nesbit for themselves. Age 9 and up.

Books for Young Adventurers

These tales of adventures big and small will delight any child who wants to see the world--or who just enjoys a good yarn.

Around the World in 80 Days, Jules Verne.



On October 1, 1872, a Londoner named Phileas Fogg gets into an argument at his club because of a newspaper article about a new Indian railway. The argument ends with him accepting a bet that he can circumnavigate the globe in 80 days, using any methods available. Fogg and his French valet Passepartout travel by train, car, boat, sled, and even elephant--but never by balloon (as they do in the movie version). An exciting, fast-moving story. Age 7 and up.

Harriet the Spy, Louise Fitzhugh.



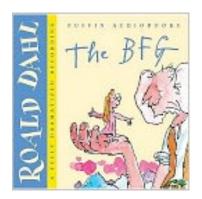
11-year-old Harriet Welsch is a spunky kid with an odd hobby: she's a spy. She writes down her observations, thoughts, and feelings about everyone she knows in her notebook. But then Harriet loses her notebook, and things don't go so well when her classmates read what she really thinks about them. Age 9 and up.

From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler, E. L. Konigsburg.



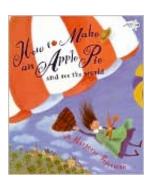
Claudia Kincaid is bored with her suburban life, so she convinces her little brother Jamie to run away with her to nearby New York City. She's carefully chosen a hideaway that is comfortable, beautiful, and elegant: the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Once they're set up in the museum, Claudia finds herself transfixed by a statue--and the mystery behind it. Age 8 and up.

The BFG, Roald Dahl.



One night when little Sophie can't sleep, she looks out her window and sees a giant blowing something (which turns out to be a good dream) into the window of a house down the street. The giant notices her, snatches her out of her room and takes her home with him to Giant Country. The giant turns out to be the world's *only* friendly giant, known as the BFG ("Big Friendly Giant). Sophie and the BFG become friends, and set out on an adventure together to convince the Queen of England to protect her fellow humans by capturing all the mean giants. Age 8 and up.

How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World, Marjorie Priceman.

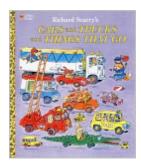


A young girl doesn't have the ingredients at home to make an apple pie, so she embarks on a whirlwind tour around the world to gather her (rather common) ingredients. She gets wheat from Italy, and sugar-cane from Jamaica. A fancy French hen delivers the needed egg, the milk comes from a British cow, and the cinnamon comes all the way from Sri Lanka! Age 5 and up.

Books for the Transportation-Obsessed

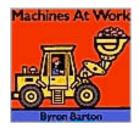
These titles are for any kid who's head-over-heels in love with trains, planes, or diggers. Invest in the hardback or board book version because your young friend will want to read about his favorite vehicles over and over again.

Cars and Trucks and Things That Go, Richard Scarry.



This delightful book just doesn't get old. Rich detail (and silly stories) fill every page. Do you want to ride in a carrot car? Will Officer Flossy catch that bad dog Dingo? Can you spot Goldbug on every page? This is a book to come back to again and again. Age 2 and up.

Machines at Work, Byron Barton.



Barton's simple, bold drawings show men (and women) spending their day on the construction site. This short book begins "Hey you guys, let's get to work!" and ends with "More work tomorrow." Enthralling for any child who love big machines (and that's a lot of kids). For the youngest child.

Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site, Sherri Duskey Rinker.



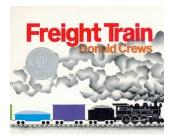
This whimsical book just came out in 2011, but it feels like a classic. One by one, Crane Truck, Cement Mixer, Dump Truck, Bulldozer, and Excavator wrap up their work on the construction site--and settle in with their loveys for bed. This book could be part of a sweet bedtime ritual for the youngest child. Age 1 and up.

Chugga Chugga Choo Choo, Kevin Lewis.



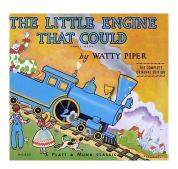
This tale of a little boy who plays with trains from sun-up to bedtime will delight young train-lovers. The story unfolds in cheerful rhymes that begin "Sun's up! Morning's here / Up and at 'em / Engineer." Destined to be a favorite. Age 1 and up.

Freight Train, Donald Crews.



This vividly illustrated book shows a brightly colored train *moving*--through tunnels, across trestles, by a city--until it's going, going, gone. Young train lovers will want to read this one over and over. Age 1 and up.

The Little Engine That Could, Watty Piper.

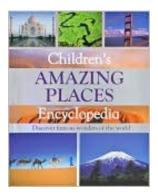


Parents will get nostalgic about this classic tale of the cheerful little blue engine that saves the day by delivering the milk and spinach and dolls and to the boys and girls on the other side of the mountain. "I think I can I think I can." This modern edition has ornate illustrations. Age 3 and up.

Books to Pour Over

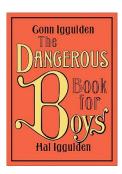
These books don't have to be read from beginning to end: they can be popped open at any time, to any page, to read (or re-read) and enjoy.

<u>Children's Amazing Places Encyclopedia</u>, Robert Hamilton.



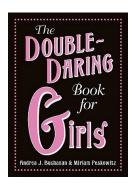
Chapters in this beautiful volume include Fantastic Features (the Matterhorn, the Dead Sea, the Grand Canyon), Exciting Events (twenty-four hour daylight, rivers of ice, hot geysers), Ancient Wonders (Stonehenge, the Colosseum, the Pyramids at Giza), and Spectacular Cities (Venice, Jerusalem, Sydney). The book also covers the various habitat of the world, people and places, astonishing structures, incredible technology. An eye-catching and awe-inspiring introduction for children. Age 6 and up.

<u>Dangerous Book for Boys</u>, Conn Iggulden and Hal Iggulden.



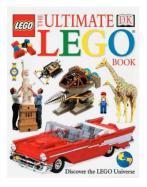
This book begins, "In this age of video games and cell phones, there must be a place for knots, tree houses, and stories of incredible courage." And here it is: this book covers famous battles and the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World; stories of the Wright Brothers and Robert the Bruce; how to wrap a package in brown paper and string, identify common trees, and discern the U.S. Naval flag codes. A great addition to every boy's bookshelf (though there's little in here that won't interest girls as well). Age 6 and up.

The Double-Daring Book for Girls, Andrea Buchanan and Miriam Peskowitz.



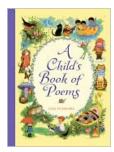
This follow-up to <u>The Daring Book for Girls</u> is better than the first installment. Of course notable women are covered, but the book shines for its unique and varied "how to" sections: like how to run away and join the circus, conduct a Japanese tea ceremony, or start a mother-daughter book club. Instructions for more prosaic activities like playing the harmonica, tossing horseshoes, and stargazing are also included. Age 8 and up.

The Ultimate Lego Book, Dorling Kindersley.



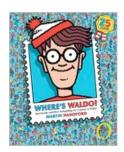
Young (and old) Lego lovers will spend hours and hours pouring over this book dedicated to all things Lego: their history, how they're made, the master builders, the LegoLand parks, and of course, the limitless building possibilities of Lego bricks. The city scenes--of Washington DC, San Francisco, New York City, and New Orleans at Mardi Gras--are favorites. Out of print, but easy to find used copies. Age 5 and up.

A Child's Book of Poems, Gyo Fujikawa.



This wonderful hardcover contains classics from William Blake, Robert Browning, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Kate Greenaway, William Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, and more. This beautifully illustrated book makes poetry accessible and fun for young people--and their parents. Age 3 and up.

Where's Waldo, Martin Handford.



Waldo and his iconic red-and-white stripes make their debut in this seek-and-find book. Find Waldo on every page, as well as a whole slew of crazy items on the checklists for each page found at the end of the book. The oversized pictures are rich in detail and humor--and might be just a little bit addictive. Age 5 and up.

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