

20 Best Books for Pre-readers (3-5 yrs)

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/best-pre-reader-books/>

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If you want to be in a market, you need to know what is on the market. In order to tackle any kind of project, you need to do your homework, meaning: find out what is out there, what is quality work, what is shoddy work, and what you can bring that no one has really done (or done that well) as yet.

Here are some of the best books for kids between the ages of 3 and 5 on the market today. The twenty-or-so best.

It's important to point out here that in terms of what a child will want to read or have read aloud, there is a lot of overlap. A child who grows up with a favorite board book will still want to take a peek in there when they're five, maybe even older. Children feel nostalgia too, it just happens more immediately.

For the storybook creator, we need to think of the age groups more distinctly.

First, know the buyer.

The ones paying for the books are still the parents, but the kids are now vocal and actually asking for certain books. That means you need to make the artwork appealing to both kids and their parents - not that you compromise your work, just that you keep both demographics in mind.

Most kids at this age group are over the book-eating phase, but they haven't yet learned to really take care of a book. For this reason, board books are still pretty popular for pre-readers. What is also starting to make surprising sales are ebooks, especially interactive ones, for the little buggers. Parents who are busy and need their child to be occupied with something for half an hour are now handing ebook readers to their child - rather than sitting them in front of the television.

Some ebooks have audio options so that the child can press a button and have the story read to them as they follow along. Some ebooks enable the child to touch the picture and alter how the drawing looks in some way. This gives the child a feeling of empowerment and it also exercises their finer motor skills.

Parents make it clear that dropping the ebook reader will break it, and in witnessing small children handle these gadgets, I've been amazed at how carefully and respectfully even a child of only three years will handle them.

OUT OF PRINT BOOKS

That said, I still prefer the tangibility and - well, the *relationship* you build with an actual book. It is a special thing to sit down with a book, cuddle-in together and read. Though you can swiftly obtain an ebook, the bulk of really great books are hard to find anywhere AT ALL - meaning you can count yourself lucky if you can still find them in print.

Many of my absolute favorites are listed on Amazon for \$100 and up because they are out of print... I don't mean the rare collector's first print classics either - no, I mean books that were published *maybe ten years ago*.

This is the thing I don't understand about publishing houses. After all the time and money allocated on obtaining the rights, designing and producing the product, making the deals, getting it into catalogues and libraries and shops - they actually let their books go out of print, some of them being mulched to make space for newer titles. This is insane, to actually create a product and then destroy it. It makes no sense to me as a business model and never will.

If you are interested in obtaining out of print and rare storybooks, visit [Old Children's Books](#). They stock thousands of books for kids that are hard to find.

FOREIGN BOOKS

There are some really fantastic books that are not on this list because they aren't available in English. If you want to know into what other languages a book has been translated, visit [World Cat](#). It's a worldwide library network.

Here are a couple of non-English books I wish everyone could have because they are SO GOOD.

Echt Super! by Ralf Butschkow. This book is in Dutch, German and Japanese. Butschkow is extremely prolific and you've probably seen his illustrations on various covers without realizing it. This particular book is written by him and is a fantastically clever way of conveying the idea of self-worth and bravery. This book is special too because boys love it even though it's about a girl.

Mia Liebt Grosse Sachen by Kathrin Schärer. This book is in German and Italian. This is a whimsical story about Mia the mouse who loves big things a lot. When she reads a book about how little plants put in the ground grow into big plants, she decides to bury all the things she really likes but wishes were big. It's wonderful. She learns how things really work and takes it upon herself to build something magnificent.

HERE'S MY LIST of BEST 20+ BOOKS for ages 3-5:

(No particular order, but I couldn't quite keep it to 20.)

1. [Two at the Zoo by Danna Smith and Valeria Petrone](#). This is a counting book, but it has an actual story about a boy who takes his grandpa to the zoo. The text also rhymes, so this book really has a lot going for it.

2. [Dogs Don't Do Ballet by Anna Kemp and Sara Ogilvie](#). This is cleverly written and illustrated with mixed media. It's extremely entertaining, and a book that kids talk about afterward for days. This is a favorite, often requested.

Sherlock Holmes isn't the only great character whose closest friend tells us about some grand adventure. The protagonist here is the dog, but the story is told by his owner, a little girl who sympathizes deeply with her dog's desire to put on the tutu and perform in a grand ballet production.

3. [Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae and Guy Parker-Rees](#). This is a sweet book, quite similar to Dogs Don't Do Ballet in that it is about expression through dance, and that no matter who you are you can do anything you set your mind to do.

4. [Madeline by Ludwig Bemelmans](#). This is a classic that will always be in print. It's short and sweet, brilliantly simple. The drawings are rather dark and at times muddy, but I think that's ok. Not everything in your library should look pristine.

5. [Curious George by Margret Rey and H. A. Rey](#). This is another great classic from France. Some of the stories are a little dated, but the basics are all there and still relevant. Kids love George because he is a kid and shows the natural curiosity in all of us.

6. [Charlie Hits It Big by Deborah Blumenthal and Denise Brunkus](#). This is a very modern coming of age tale for a guinea pig. It's just pure fun really, but does also show the deep-seeded importance of familial

love and coming back home.

7. [The Snail and the Whale by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler](#). I love The Gruffalo and Where's My Mum? - and honestly, those are the ones that kids love most. As an adult, I really love The Snail and the Whale. It's special, and probably the type of book a child won't fully appreciate until they have their own kids. All three are top-notch stories.

8. [Fancy Nancy and the Posh Puppy by Jane O'Connor and Robin Preiss Glasser](#). This duo has done insanely well in a short period of time. This is one of my favorites. If you didn't know, this has become an industry - much like Curious George and Dr. Seuss. That means many of the stories are ghost written and ghost illustrated.

What makes the voice of these books really resonate is the incredible attention to every single little detail in Glasser's illustrations. Fancy Nancy doesn't just wear a feather boa, she wears it with flair and we see every feather of it dance around her. The ruffles of her dress have attitude. We love this character because *the voice of the illustrations* tells us what the girl herself isn't yet able to express with words (despite her love of very fancy words). Her vocal POV is hilarious because we can easily imagine a precocious girl saying French words and wanting to be fancy and bemoaning that her parents are just not fancy at all. She jumps off the page and stays with us because the coupling of the written story with the illustrations is spot on.

9. [Findus and the Fox by Sven Nordqvist](#). Nordqvist is a brilliant illustrator who has created hugely popular characters. This has become an industry, but he has written a good number of these wonderful stories, including this one.

Definitely check out Nordqvist's work. He's also created some outstanding illustrated books for adults that will blow your mind.

In this particular story, Findus tries to scare a fox away from the chickens and learns something about wild foxes that is unexpected. In the end, the grumpy neighbor gets what's coming to him! It's a really fun story, and as all Nordqvist stories, unexpectedly tender and compassionate at just the right moment.

10. [Stuck by Oliver Jeffers](#). Oliver Jeffers is recognized as a major illustrator, highly prolific. This is one that he wrote. I had the pleasure of reading this book to a group of children at the library and it was a very happy hour spent, with the kids coming up to the book to point and make remarks, ask questions and giggle.

Everything you can imagine gets thrown up into this tree just to get the kite down. It's imaginative and artful.

11. [Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst and Ray Cruz](#).

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Classic. If you don't know this book, get it. Trivia: the sequel (*Alexander, Who's Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!)*) *Going to Move* by Judith Viorst) was ghost illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser (of Fancy Nancy fame).

This story is one that will get you laughing in an aching sort of way. It tears at the nostalgia strings in me, with a full respect for the structure of this writing - and for kids it just echoes exactly how they feel sometimes. Actually, we would all like to just go far away from our bad days sometimes.

12. [Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! by Mo Willems](#). Reading this book to a group of kids at the library, this wonderfully simple book inspired screams of delight from the kids as they called-out, "Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!" It's great fun.

13. [The House At Pooh Corner by A. A. Milne and Ernest H. Shepard](#). Classic, lovingly written and illustrated. A boy's imagination is revealed in these short stories so that we see what his favorite toys do and say during playtime. But in Winnie the Pooh the narrator is [the child's father](#), and he creates new stories about Pooh and friends based on the kinds of things he observes from his little boy. The voice is charming and sweet, full of love. That father's love filters through the narrative voice and affects our perception of the boy for whom these stories are told: Christopher Robin.

14. [The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats](#). This is a special book about the wonders of snow. It's visually sparse with cut paper images and feels like Art rather than illustrations. It's a lovely book with a plot that is extraordinarily strong. If you want to study plot in particular, and how to establish one with few words, study this book. It is perfect.

15. [Where The Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak](#). The illustrations are unlike any other. This is a solid piece that kids really enjoy. I love this book because of the unpretentious, slightly gritty sense of imagination, and the author's willingness to show the protagonist misbehaving. The monsters are especially whimsical.

16. [Extra Yarn by Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen](#). Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen are talents to follow. This is a whimsical book that combines their abilities beautifully. Not just everyone, but everything is knitted-up in warmth.

17. [The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson](#). Every child should know this story. It's a part of the culture, across every continent. Not knowing this story is like not knowing the story of Cinderella.

18. [So Much! by Trish Cooke and Helen Oxenbury](#). Written in black-American rhythm, this is one of my favorite books because you can play with the language and the illustrations are gorgeously dynamic

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without feeling cartoonish. The characters really come alive - they feel real because of the care Oxenbury takes into creating round characters. These aren't just pictures, they're Nana, Mama and Onkie - this is an excellent character study.

19. [The Dark by Lemony Snicket \(a.k.a. Daniel Handler\) and Jon Klassen](#). This book is brilliant. I love just everything about it. Klassen is at his most powerful with the black (see *This Hat Is Not Mine* for another sample). This Lemony Snicket is really clever and not so biting as some of his earlier works, so it is suitable for a younger crowd. As kids get a bit older, it's definitely time to introduce scarier stories, because they love it.

20. [Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina](#). This is a lovely old tale that not a lot of people know anymore. Those who do know the book hold it with warm regard. Worth sharing with your child.

21. [The Princess and the Pig by Jonathan Emmett and Poly Bernatene](#). This book makes me smile - and it plays with STORY, which appeals to the storyteller in me. Even though this is about a princess, boys love it too because the actual princess in the story is a PIG.

This very funny book pays homage to well known tales while spinning a very modern Mistaken Identity story.

22. [Plant A Kiss by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Peter H. Reynolds](#). Two great talents join forces to create this lovely book that plays with the old trope, "plant a kiss." This word play is sweet and philosophical without being preachy. [Full review here](#) (includes book video).

23. [The Princess Knight by Cornelia Funke and Kerstin Meyer](#). A classic Cornelia Funke story that every girl should know. It's about strength of spirit and courage. (Also a good story for boys who have a sister!)

24. [The Book With No Pictures by B.J. Novak](#). You may recognize his name as that of a comedic actor. It's him. This book was just released last month (September 2014), and I've no doubt this will be a best seller. I am infatuated with this project. *There really are no pictures at all* in this book and it does not hamper the enthusiasm for reading it one bit.

25. [Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish and Fritz Siebel](#). Just get the original. It has the strongest and freshest story. This is wonderful word-play, and for kids 3 to 5, the perfect time to introducing them to puns and word clarity if you are reading it to them. It's amazing to see their brains working over this stuff. For the beginning readers stage (ages 6-8), the kids can read it themselves - and often will.

26. [Mama Moo Goes Down A Slide by Jujja Wieslander](#). Mama Moo is a lovely, surprisingly whimsical

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character. I myself am not a fan of cows but I make a great exception here, just because she's that good. The drawings are brilliant and the stories are longer, more detailed - especially heavy in dialogue for a children's book, so they appeal to the child longer.

These are my favorites (at least, the ones that are in print and in English!) and the best books for pre-readers you can find. What do you think? Are there some favorites you have that aren't on this list? Share below and let me know.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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