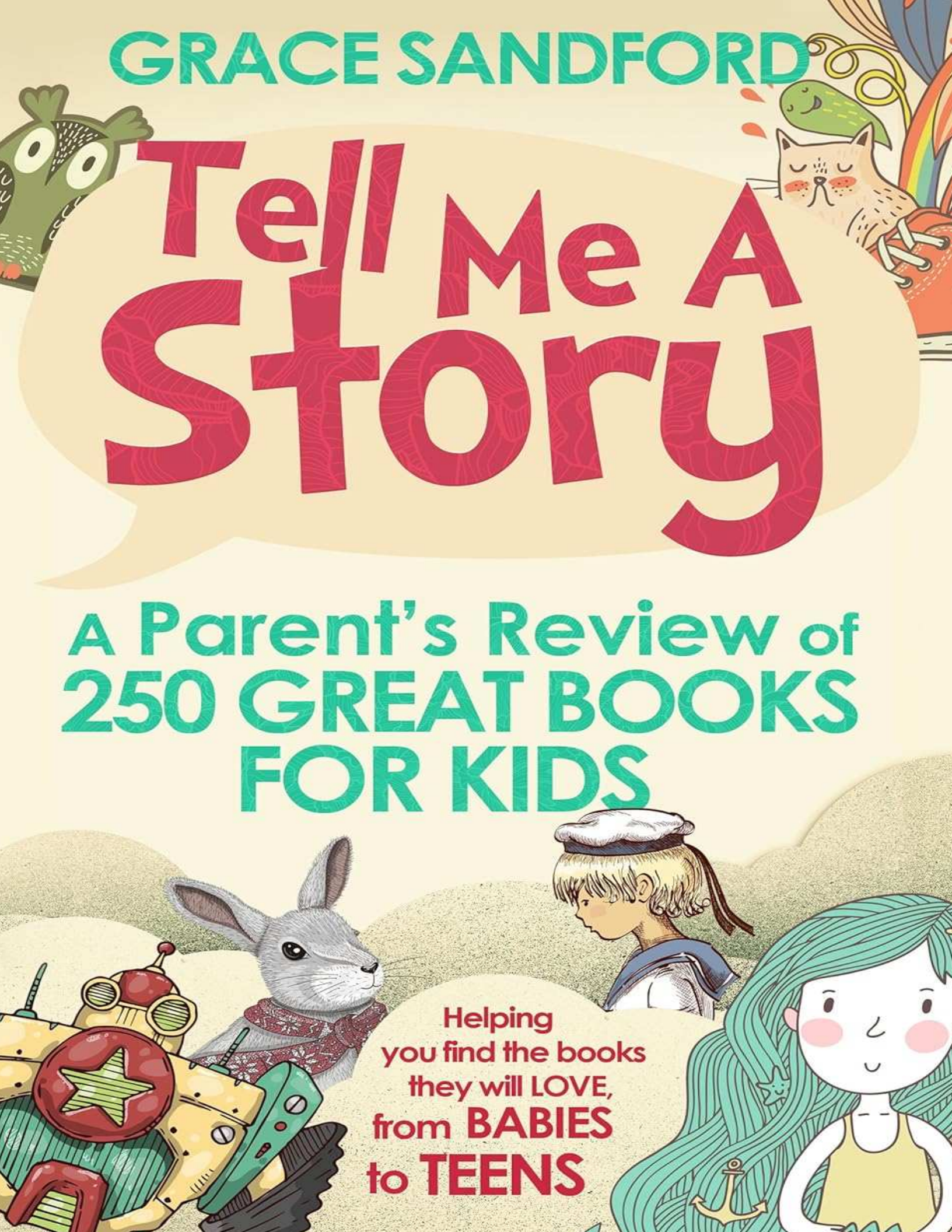


GRACE SANDFORD

Tell Me A Story

A Parent's Review of
250 GREAT BOOKS
FOR KIDS

Helping
you find the books
they will LOVE,
from BABIES
to TEENS

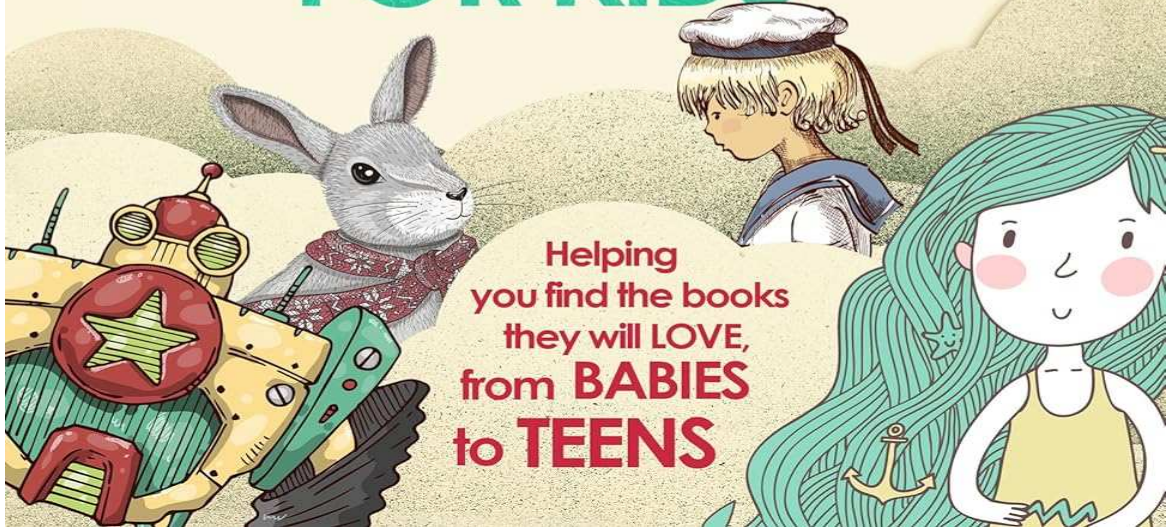


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www.teamsandford.com

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Introduction

First of all, I'd like to thank you for purchasing this book – a lot of love, sweat and tears have gone into its production and I hope that you'll enjoy it. And if you haven't yet purchased the book, here is some background information to give you an idea of why this review book might be for you.

Right off the bat let me tell you a bit about myself: I'm a mom, a godmother, an aunt and a friend to lots of people who have kids. I'm also a massively keen bookworm and have always loved books. Those are my main qualifications for writing this book. I'm not a professional book critic, or a literary expert, nor am I a child education specialist.

But, when I first became an aunt – before having my own kids – I realized right away that I wanted to share my love of books with my niece. I duly took myself off to the nearest bookstore and immediately panicked: there were just so many great looking books to choose from! I spent hours in the store and left with nothing, my brain addled by all the possible options – should I go for an old classic from my own childhood, or something contemporary that was geared more towards today's kids? Browsing an online bookstore was even worse: there were over 50,000 books listed just for kids under the age of two! Crazy!

Eventually, as I gained more and more friends with children over the years, more nieces and nephews and my own kids as well, I started to compile a list of old and new favorites that were sure winners with the kids I knew. That list formed the backbone of this book: along with extensive research using trusted resources and authorities (you'll find information about all the resources I used at the back of this book in the section marked References), endless discussions with friends and their kids who were older than mine, consulting numerous 'Top 100' type booklists, reading reviews, reading and re-reading the books themselves.

The result is *Tell Me a Story: 250 Great Books for Kids*, from birth right up to early teens. The basic criterion for each book is this: why is a child going

to love this book? I hope you'll agree that this should be the over-riding factor when deciding if the choices here are suitable for your kids.

Naturally, with a limit of just 250 books, there are bound to be titles that you will feel are missing from my list. As the saying goes "You can't please all of the people all of the time" – but what I have tried to do is offer up a broad a range of books so that there will be something for everyone.

To this end I have included classic picture books and classic literature as well as popular contemporary books, and even a bit of easy-read escapism makes its way onto my list: because, just like adults, every child is different. The aim has got to be to get our kids reading and, in my opinion, the best way to do this is by finding the books they will love rather than the books we think they ought to read!

This book is for anyone who wants to pass on their love of reading to the next generation – it's for parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, godparents and friends looking to choose a great gift for the children in their lives. It's for people who appreciate that instilling a love of reading at a young age is a real gift, and to give this gift all you need to do is find great books that will motivate your child to read more, and more and more!

A note about how to use this book

The book is divided into five sections for these different age groups: babies to age 2; 3 to 5-year-olds; 6 to 8-year-olds; 9 to 11 year-olds; and 12 into teens. I don't consider any one book as 'better' than the next – all the books here are great! But what I have done is loosely group the books in each section into categories, and within each category they are then listed alphabetically by title.

However, as each child develops and matures differently, and learns to read in his own time, some books will crossover from one age group to the next. I have tried to be clear in my review when a book might be better suited to the upper or lower end of the age group; and also to point out when a book might have a more challenging theme which needs to be considered.

With the vast number of great children's authors to choose from, I also made an executive decision to include each author only once in this book, and on the whole I have chosen what I believe is their stand-out book. Where possible, I mention other great books by the same author that you might want to consider and whether a particular author writes books for different age groups. My hope is that you will see these suggestions as a basis from which to explore each author fully and see what other great books they have written.

Finally, occasionally you'll see the phrases "we think" or "for us" – this "royal we" refers to me, my family and the other parents and friends who helped shape this book. For us reading is a collaborative experience: we all love reading and sharing the same books. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for sharing my passion!

A note about the awards mentioned in this book

Where relevant, I have mentioned when a book has received a particular literary award. However, please note that some books have won lots of awards, and in order to spare you information overload I have only focused on the main awards that are recognized internationally. Any omission is entirely my fault and I apologize now! Below are the awards I have mentioned, plus a brief description of what they are awarded for.

Caldecott Medal - awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children. Also a number of runner-up books are awarded the Caldecott Honor.

Dromkeen Medal - awarded annually by the Courtney Oldmeadow Children's Literature Foundation for those who have advanced children's literature in Australia.

Geisel Award - awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author and illustrator of the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year.

Greenaway Medal - awarded annually by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in the United Kingdom for an outstanding book in terms of illustration for children and young people.

J.M. Barrie Award - the Action for Children's Arts charity organization in the United Kingdom presents the J.M. Barrie Award annually to a children's arts practitioner or organization whose work will stand the test of time.

Man Booker Prize - aims to promote the finest in fiction by rewarding the best novel of the year written by a citizen of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland.

Margaret A. Edwards Award - administered by the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association, and sponsored by School Library Journal magazine, to honor an author, as well as a specific body of his or her work, for significant and lasting contribution to young adult literature.

Michael L. Printz Award - administered by the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association, this award annually honors the best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit, each year.

Newbery Medal - awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. Also a number of runner-up books are awarded the Newbery Honor.

Pulitzer Prize for Fiction - awarded for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life.

Pura Belpré Award - co-sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, and REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, the Pura Belpré Award is presented annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth.

And finally ...

As I have mentioned, this book is divided into five age groups, and in each group there are fifty titles. I chose this amount as I believe fifty is a manageable number of books to contemplate, and I'm confident that most people will find at least five titles in each section that they like. However, for further reference I also highly recommend the following books:

100 Best Books for Children offers a smaller selection of books but they are selected and reviewed in greater depth by the leading children's book critic Anita Silvey.

1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up is compiled by Julia Eccleshare, the children's books critic at *The Guardian* newspaper in the United Kingdom, and includes many European titles that you might not have heard of.

The New York Times Parent's Guide to the Best Books for Children is a gigantic reference tome; with over 1700 titles it is quite overwhelming, but it does have a very impressive cross-referencing section so that you can really drill down to find books that match your kid's interests/ age etc.

Great Books for Babies to 2-Year-Olds

Helping our children to learn to read is one of the greatest gifts we can give them and according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, it's never too early to start reading to your child: newborn infants will benefit from hearing the sound of your voice as this helps develop listening skills and starts him on the journey to language acquisition. There is also evidence that even fetuses still in the womb recognize their parents voices, so – as long as you don't feel too silly reading to your bump – why not prepare your read-out-loud skills before birth with one of the great books listed here?

In fact, for us, a book's "read-out-loud"-ability was one of the main criteria in choosing great books for under two-year-olds: it is essential that the books you read to them at this stage are ones that you'll both enjoy. For those new parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents who maybe don't have much experience in reading to kids, finding a book that is well-written naturally encourages you to be enthusiastic in its reading (very important when you have to read it for the fifth time in a row!) and is more likely to encourage a child to continue exploring the book on his own. Books that feature strong rhyming texts tend to dominate this age group for that very reason: by having a strong rhythm and rhyme, the text is easier both to read and to understand.

The second most important criteria at this early stage are the pictures. Words and images that combine to "tell the story", will always be winners as they allow your child to interact with you beyond the story, as you point out objects, colors and more. Interactive books that include flaps, holes, textures, tabs and pop-ups are also vital additions at this stage: by keeping books fun to play with, you will naturally inspire curiosity.

So, below is our list of the top fifty books for under-tuos. As with all the sections in this review book, we have chosen a range of books from childhood classics to contemporary works; books that have stood the test of time and books that promise to be great favorites in years to come. We have

specified a number of books that are best suited to tiny babies under 6 months, but most of the books listed are suitable from around 6 months and no doubt many of these books will be revisited over time well beyond the age of two. For example, we suggest introducing the enduringly popular Dr. Seuss books right away, knowing that they will likely be a staple of your child's library right through to middle school!

The main factor for choosing books for under-tuos is to tap into their exploration of their universe: books that “speak” to them of the things they do and the things they're interested in - like choo-choo trains or ladybugs, playing peek-a-boo and getting ready for bed – these are the books that will get them started on the wonderful journey that is reading!

Books for very, very early readers – babies under 6 months

FUZZY BEE AND FRIENDS

by Roger Priddy, 2003

“A cloth book that kids can enthusiastically touch and chew, with simple, two-sentence rhymes that sound appealing to babies. My kids loved the crinkly front cover!”

- Amy Broadmoore, Delightful Children's Books

Author/ illustrator Roger Priddy has been at the forefront of children's educational books, first working with publishing giants Usborne before branching off on his own to create Priddy Books. And, whilst our reviews of great books for kids aims to focus, mainly, on children's fiction rather than on purely learning books, many of the books made for the youngest of our children necessarily combine both areas. And this is what we love most about Priddy's book *Fuzzy Bee and Friends*.

Made specifically for babies and pre-toddlers, this is a cloth book – all the pages are made of fabric – making it easy to handle for babies as young as 3 months. Unlike other cloth books which often simply present a series of bold images, perhaps with one word per page, *Fuzzy Bee and Friends* has a fun rhyming text that parents can read to babies, offering up the critical bonding opportunity of storytelling from a very young age.

Priddy also goes the extra mile, for as your baby explores a brightly illustrated insect world through its textured pages, snippets of useful information contained within the rhyme reinforce the texture. For example on the dragonfly page the rhyme goes, “Don't be fooled by a scary name, this dragonfly is really tame”, and its wings are made of a gossamer light, soft material which confirms that the dragonfly is far from a scary thing at all.

And if bugs don't take your fancy, then there are a number of these great Priddy cloth books exploring other animal kingdoms including, *Squishy Turtle and Friends*, *Fluffy Chick and Friends* and *Snowy Bear and Friends*.

LOOK, LOOK!

by Peter Linenthal, 1998

“This board book responds to the findings that very young children react best to high contrast black and white illustrations.”- Children's Literature

Black-and-white picture books for very young babies have become all the rage in parenting circles in the past few decades, and this one from Peter Linenthal is one of the best.

Child development researchers are largely in agreement that whilst a baby's sense of sight develops slowly from birth, the right kind of stimulus can be a helpful tool in his/her understanding of their new surroundings. We now know that at birth a baby can really only see objects 8-12 inches away and as their sight develops they begin to enjoy looking at highly contrasted images, particularly those rendered in just black and white.

This is where books such as *Look, Look!* come into their own. Amongst the first of its kind, this board book comprises a series of black-and-white illustrations depicting simple objects and animals in Linenthal's bold and curvaceous style, along with a small amount of text on each page in a limited range of bright colors.

Clearly, this isn't the stuff of bedtime stories! But as a very early introduction to the joy of books *Look, Look!* can't be beat. As such, it comes as no surprise that Linenthal's range of black-and-white books are part of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a fantastic scheme that ensures that one book each month reaches the homes of children from birth to 5 years old in over 1600 communities across the United States.

PEEK-A-WHO?

by Nina Laden, 2000

“The exuberant illustrations in this guessing-game board book will enchant infants and toddlers.”

– Lisa Falk, School Library Journal © 2000

Books aimed at the very, very young should be all about having fun, and *Peek-A-Who?* by Nina Laden is just the ticket, drawing on the familiar game that can often hold a baby’s attention for ages. Ideal for babies as young as 6 months - in fact from the minute your baby gets the concept of the peek-a-boo game - this book will please almost as much as the game.

The combination of brightly colored, highly contrasted images and die-cut holes that keep you guessing until you reveal the hidden object are simply irresistible. Babies also love exploring the tactile sensation of putting their hands through the holes and, of course, the page that contains a mirror (“Peek-a...YOU!”) is the best bit of all!

Laden wrote and illustrated her first book when she was just 5 years old, and her sense of fun and understanding of the world through a child’s eyes continues to dominate her best books. We really like Laden’s work and her follow-up book, *Ready, Set, Go!*, is also worth mentioning here. Based on a similar concept and with the same bold imagery, this time the die-cut holes reveal witty illustrations that go with the surprising words that all rhyme with “go”, for example, “Ready, set... BLOW” reveals a girl blowing bubbles.

THIS LITTLE BABY

by Sandra Lousada, 2002

“There is some evidence that babies can recognize voices and faces within weeks of birth.”

- Howard Reinstein, Babycenter.com

Babies love seeing other babies, and there are several good picture books featuring photographic images of babies, but if you can get this one – generally only available in the United Kingdom – then it'll be worth the effort, because we think it's the best!

Created by the noted portrait photographer Sandra Lousada – whose work in the 1960s snapping celebrities and other notable people was featured in glossy magazines such as *Vogue*, *Queen* and *Tatler* – *This Little Baby* cleverly puts together a simple yet expressive rhyming text with adorable and expressive black-and-white photographs of babies. But that's not the best bit... the best bit is the end, where the rhyme goes "And this little baby is the one I love best!" and instead of a photograph, there's a mirror for babies to see themselves in. Brilliant!

We were given this book second-hand when our daughter was about 5 months old. She went wild for it! And even now, aged 2, she comes back to it, chiming in with the rhyme and screaming her name out when she sees herself in the mirror. It's really a lot of fun, beautifully executed and – importantly, if your child loves it as much as ours – hardwearing!

Textures, flaps and holes: interactive books for under twos

COUNTING KISSES

by Karen Katz, 2001

“With buoyant cartoons rendered in a bouquet of vibrant pastel tones, Katz creates a book as irresistible as a baby's smile.”

– Publishers Weekly

Since the publication of her first children's book in 1997, Karen Katz has been nothing short of prolific, turning out over fifty books that she has written, co-authored or illustrated. Many of her books are specifically aimed at the under-twos and it's clear that her success is due to a very natural talent for knowing what babies and young toddlers enjoy, both visually and conceptually.

She is, perhaps, best known for a series of lift-the-flap type books, which offer variations of the peek-a-boo game revealing different hidden things: the most popular of these books is *Where is Baby's Belly Button?* with bold illustrations cleverly hiding different parts of baby's body. Thoughtfully presented with both boy and girl babies and of multiethnic origins, this is a book that any parent and baby can easily relate to.

However, our favorite Katz book is not one of her typical lift-the-flap ones. Instead *Counting Kisses* has a very simple concept – a fussy baby needs many, many kisses from all her family members to help her get to sleep. Starting with “ten little kisses on teeny tiny toes” and ending with one last kiss on her “sleepy, dreamy head”, the book not only introduces counting and identifying parts of the body but, most importantly, the comforting message of all-encompassing love from her family.

We also love Katz's wonderful book *Over the Moon*, which relates the story of a couple adopting a young baby, based on the author's own experience of adopting her daughter from Guatemala. Written in simple language in the style of a classic fairytale, it's a beautiful way to explain the journey of adoption to young children.

DEAR ZOO

by Rod Campbell, 1982

“Simple, stylish and highly interactive, the patterned text invites constant re-reading.”

– Booktrust

For many children, *Dear Zoo* will be their first foray in to the wonderful world of lift-the-flap books. For therein lies the specific brilliance of the book: the endless satisfaction that a young child gets from revealing what's behind the flap simply cannot be underestimated and the author, Rod Campbell, certainly knew this when he created it over 25 years ago!

The story recounts a youngster's search for a suitable pet: he/she writes to the zoo and they send different animals – each more problematic than the last – the lion is too fierce, the giraffe is too tall and so on. Will our protagonist ever find the perfect pet?

But what draws children into this book is not just wondering if the pet will ever be suitable, but also the fact that they have to open the flap of each animal container, box or crate to see what the zoo has delivered. For parents, it's a great opportunity to practice creative animal sounds as you help your child open the flap. You'll never forget the moment your child first starts mimicking the “hiss” of the snake and the “roar” of the lion! It will be both adorably cute and one of those many precious moments when you realize your child is learning and growing.

There are now several different versions of *Dear Zoo* in many different languages, pop-up versions, touch-and-feel versions, and even an app