

The Pennsylvania Center for the Book presents A Baker's Dozen: The Best Children's Books for Family Literacy from the Year 2004

The Pennsylvania Center for the Book works with hundreds of children's books each year while preparing booklists, activities, and curriculum materials. Our Family Literacy Activities web site is designed to help parents and caregivers fill each child's world with books and a love of books. We consider these 13 titles—a Baker's Dozen—to be the very best picture books of 2004. They fulfill the goals of family literacy programs across the nation: to create lifelong readers and lovers of books and to start with the youngest audience—preschool children.

Anna's Book, written by Barbara Baker, pictures by Catharine O'Neill.
Dutton, 2004.

If you love a book as much as Anna does, you will want to hear it read time and time again. When Mommy returns to her chores after reading the book three times Anna finds a delightful way to continue enjoying the rereading experience. Watercolor washes capture the exuberance of sharing a new book with someone you love. The simple text and small size will make young lap sitters say "again?"

Construction Countdown, written by K. C. Olson, illustrated by David Gordon.
Holt, 2004.

Children will enjoy pointing to every colorful truck as they count down from "Ten mighty dump trucks." The name of each of the trucks is presented in large print and what it does is told in a rhyming couplet. The final double page spread provides a creative surprise when the construction site is revealed as "One gigantic sandbox with room to drive them all."

The Dog from Arf! Arf! To ZZZZZZ, by The Dog Artist Collection.
HarperCollins, 2004.

This smart alphabet book features cute canines acting out doggy behaviors that start with the 26 letters. It is dedicated to the "dog lovers of the world," but the interesting camera angles that capture the unique features of each breed will draw "awws" from even the most hard-hearted cat person. An especially fun feature is the use of upside down text on the R (Roll over and over and over) and U (Upside down) pages.

Guess Who, Baby Duck!, written by Amy Hest, illustrated by Jill Barton.
Candlewick, 2004.

This book showcases the special relationship between a grandfather duck and his granddaughter duckling. When Baby Duck is kept at home with a cold on a rainy day, Grandfather Duck shares a special book, a photograph album filled with Baby Duck memories. Illustrations in gentle colors with the faux photos on facing pages complement the enjoyment that lap reading brings to Baby Duck and her grandfather.

Inside Mouse, Outside Mouse, by Lindsay Barrett George.
Greenwillow, 2004.

Two colors of print (in shades complementary to their mice) help organize the parallel adventures of mice going to meet one another. The numerous visual details in the side-by-side illustrations will lend themselves to discussions on what is the same and what is different in the lives of the inside mouse and outside mouse. The changes in perspective and stimulating backgrounds of the paintings in this large-sized concept book will engage young readers, either as a group or as individual explorers.

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale, by Mo Willems.
Hyperion, 2004.

Too-young-to-talk Trixie is on a pleasant stroll to the neighborhood Laundromat with her daddy. While Trixie “helps” her father get the laundry in the washer her beloved stuffed rabbit accidentally joins the clothes for a sudsy ride. On the way home Trixie suddenly notices she is alone, panics, and tells daddy as best she can. Mom saves the day when the first thing she says upon their arrival home is: “Where’s Knuffle Bunny?” Willems’ placement of cartoon characters in a photographed city neighborhood is delightful.

Lemons Are Not Red, by Laura Vaccaro Seeger.
Roaring Brook, 2004.

This clever concept book features sturdy pages with cut out shapes that reveal what color objects are not “Lemons are not red” and are “Lemons are yellow. Apples are red.” Children will delight in the rich colors and brush stroke textures at each turn of the page. As the last two objects are a silvery moon and the black night, this book also doubles as a great choice for bedtime.

Polar Bear Night, written by Lauren Thompson, pictures by Stephen Savage.
Scholastic, 2004.

A polar bear cub awakens on a cold clear night for a quiet stroll outside her cave. All the arctic animals are asleep so she alone witnesses a star shower that lights up “everything the little bear loves.” And so she hurries home to her cozy cave and sleeping mother. The illustrations are made from linoleum cuts printed on mulberry bleached rice paper and the effect is a peaceful hush that perfectly captures the story and reminds adult readers of the native art of the arctic region.

Subway, written by Anastasia Suen, illustrated by Karen Katz.
Viking, 2004.

Repetition and rhythm emphasize the beat of an exciting ride on a city subway with a little girl and her mother. The illustrations feature people from many cultures dressed in vibrant patterns and cheerful colors. This book is a natural for open ended questions like “Where do you think the people are going?” and “Where have they been?”

Teeth, Tails & Tentacles: An Animal Counting Book, by Christopher Wormell.
Running, 2004.

Count from one rhinoceros horn up to 20 whale barnacle shells! This unique book celebrates (and enumerates) different parts and characteristics of animals, (e.g., 13 caterpillar segments, 8 octopus tentacles, 7 black ladybug spots). Vibrantly colored linoleum block prints provide close-up views of each featured animal, and invite fun in pointing and counting. There's more information on each featured creature at the back of the book.

Truck Duck, by Michael Rex.
Putnam, 2004.

When you mix animals and their favorite vehicles together you get this energetic book that cheerfully pairs powerful machines with drivers from the creature world. Each double-page spread features a rhyming pair: cab crab, boat goat, sheep jeep, in bright primary colors on sturdy pages sure to stand up to repeated rereading. Children's vocabularies will expand as the adult reader explains the humor and meaning in phrases such as rod cod and hog frog.

Where Is the Green Sheep?, written by Mem Fox, illustrated by Judy Horacek.
Harcourt, 2004.

Can YOU find the green sheep? Lots of sheep are easy to find in this silly, fun to read book, including the near sheep, the far sheep, the moon sheep and the star sheep! But where is the green sheep? Children will enjoy pondering that question while comparing and contrasting the whimsical, watercolor-illustrated sheep duos that festoon this lively book.

Wow! City!, by Robert Neubecker.
Hyperion, 2004.

Wow! City!'s oversized, energetic illustrations convey the thrill of a child's first trip to New York City. Each double page scene, drawn in riotous, lively carnival colors, highlights a specific aspect of the city, accompanied by an appropriate two word exclamatory phrase: "Wow! Lights!" "Wow! Museum!" "Wow! Bridge!" Wow! City! is an exciting read-aloud and a compelling lap-read, inviting children to further explore its detailed, bustling drawings of urban life.

Selection Criteria for Family Literacy Recommendations

1. Recent **outstanding trade books** whose text and illustrations are particularly suited to the interests and developmental characteristics of children between three and six years of age. Fiction and non-fiction as well as wordless books are considered.

Trade Books: Books designed for the general consumer and sold primarily through bookstores and to libraries ('trade' is in reference to the traditional trade markets these books are sold in). Though trade books were traditionally hard cover, in recent years more soft cover trade books have been common. Children's trade books are trade books designed primarily for children or for adults who read to children.

2. Books that are **accessible to adults enrolled in family literacy programs**, particularly those characterized by—

- **Text** that is easily approachable because of attributes such as these:
 - use of language that is primarily natural as opposed to literary,
 - use of repetitive words and phrases.

Natural as opposed to literary: Language that is similar to how we speak as opposed to how we write. Because of this it is easier to read and predict this kind of text. Examples—

- natural language: "I saw the truck."
- literary language: "Then came a truck."

- **Print** that is easy to read because of features such as these:
 - large lettering with ample space between letters and words,
 - few sentences per page without many sentences that break to the next page,
 - print that appears at about the same place on each page, and generally reads left to right and top to bottom.
- **Illustrations** that support and extend the text.

3. Books that are enjoyable for **reading aloud** and have **appeal to a wide range of families**.