opening extract from

1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up

edited by

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Preface

By Quentin Blake

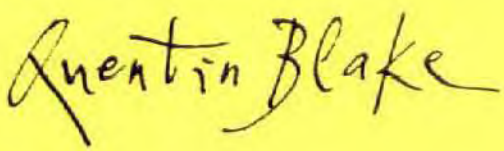
As it happens, it's almost exactly fifty years ago that I embarked for the first time on producing a set of illustrations for a children's book. I think I can remember pretty well what my thoughts were then: I wanted to take drawing beyond the world of jokes in which I had started professional life and into that other world where you could embrace narrative and organize the sequence and placing of drawings through pages from the front cover to the back. The fact that I had been trained as a teacher (of English) meant that even then I could begin to see some parallels between the way that a good lesson might work and a book might involve to stimulate a young person by its words and its pictures.

I don't suppose that I ever thought (just to stick to the illustration aspect for the moment) that my job was simply to draw the people and things mentioned in the text; but even so I had to get used, over time, to the realization that when you were at work on a set of illustrations, or a whole picture book, there were quite a number of activities going on in your head—in parallel, as it were—at the same time. They included identifying with the characters, and conceiving what they looked like and their expressions and gestures: from the infant mewling and puking in its nurse's arms through to the lean and slippered commedia dell'arte pantaloon. And then also taking in assorted crocodiles, dogs, mice, monkeys, goats, elephants and insects. Then there's identifying with the reader to envisage his or her reactions to certain promptings disposed in the pictures: Does she really look sad? Where are those cockatoos? And of course: How many pictures? Of which moments (the author's best moments may not be your best moments)? Where do they fall in the text? When does the page turn? What is the appropriate implement to draw with (there are lots to choose from)? If there's colour, what part does it have to play and how does it contribute to the atmosphere of the book? And so on and so forth.

At the same time, simply from having to write a few short texts of my own, I became aware that the authors of children's books had a similar gamut of professional concerns—of imaginative creation, of moral discrimination, of voice, drama, structure, rhythm, pace—and often more complicated than any I was likely to encounter. So that by the time I was appointed the first Children's Laureate in 1999, I was

determined that this was one of the aspects of children's literature that I wanted to place emphasis on. In consequence, in my short speech of acceptance I said, referring to the authors present on that occasion, "I believe . . . people like us take writing children's books seriously, because we take writing seriously, in the same way those of us who draw take drawing seriously." I went on to add ". . . these books, at their best, are primers in the development of the emotional, the moral, the imaginative life. And they can be a celebration of what it is like to be a human being. That is why they are important."

I seem to remember that on some other occasion I made the observation that for me getting involved in children's books was like going through a gate into an enchanted grove—which was perhaps a rather exaggeratedly poetical way of saying that I was having a nice time; but also, of course, more than that. I might also have said that for the reader it was like going through a gate into a rich and varied landscape. It is indeed a landscape so varied that one can be at a loss about which of many paths to take. That is what I find so valuable about this book. It's a guidebook, full of maps and hints and local information and suggestions about where to go next. And its huge virtue in my eyes is that it doesn't restrict itself to the well-trodden paths. Its remit relates to quality and interest; there are books from many countries and earlier times. Clarice Bean from England is on the same page as the dog with the yellow heart from Germany; Thursday's child from Australia faces Opal and her dog Winn-Dixie from Florida, USA. If you don't know the Little Engine That Could she comes puffing in here, and you can say Goodnight Moon with Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd. And you won't miss Ernest and Celestine in the beautiful drawings of Gabrielle Vincent. Every now and then a golden age of children's books is announced, but there are glitterings of gold all through their history, and Julia Eccleshare's book sifts out a thousand and one for us.



London, United Kingdom

Introduction

By Julia Eccleshare

There is little that is more influential than the stories we read in childhood. From their meaning and their language come a welter of emotional experiences—and the words with which to express them—that cannot easily be reached in any other way. Stories are places of enchantment, mystery, surprise, dread, and—above all—consolation, and nowhere can they be found in richer abundance than in children's books. Delving into *1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up*, readers will find all of the above in the most memorable stories written for children across the world.

Yet this fascinating collection offers more than just a reminder of the enduring pleasure that is to be found in children's books. Grouped into broad age bands to provide simple guidance as to who the books are primarily for, it is an invaluable guide for any adult who wants to give an informed answer to the conundrum children so often pose—"What shall I read next?" From wordless picture books to novels that are as happily read by adults as they are by children, there is something here for all kinds of readers. International in its scope and wide-ranging in its choices, it will remind adults of the books they loved as children as well as introducing them to some of the best contemporary authors and illustrators writing today.

The books selected for this volume offer a history of the perception of childhood in different countries and at different times in history. They show how sometimes childhood is idolized, sometimes it is demonized, and how stories chart the social changes that affect children so profoundly. This is achieved through a chronological layout that shapes the book into an intriguing study of how expectations and opportunities for children have changed over time and how stories function as education, entertainment, or just plain escapism.

The shifting nature of children's literature as an art form is another feature that is easy to trace through the pages of this book. The entries, which have been illustrated wherever possible with their first edition covers in their original language, show how dramatically children's books have changed both in what they are saying and in how they attract their readers. Some changes are quite obvious; images that have long been abandoned on the grounds of political incorrectness reveal much about the prevailing attitudes of an era. However, there are other changes in the illustration of children's books that are subtler but also

Key to symbols in the book

Author

Illustrator

informative. The muted, dreamy colors used in picture books in the pre-digital age have gradually been replaced by bright colors and hard-edged lines that compete with the other visual references surrounding children. Some changes in book illustration have sprung from technical innovation, but others come from the recognition that while picture books were once the only visual stimulus for the young, they are now just one among many.

Among the selection are personal favorites chosen by some of the world's best-known contemporary writers. Philip Pullman celebrates the subversive nature of Geoffrey Willans's *Down with Skool!*, relishing Ronald Searle's illustrations in particular. Margaret Atwood remembers the classic tale of Canadian girlhood, *Anne of Green Gables*; Eric Carle loves *Der Struwwelpeter* while realizing, even as a boy, that the cruelty is exaggerated and not to be taken literally; and Judy Blume cherishes Ludwig Bemelman's *Madeline*, who can easily be seen as an inspiration for some of Blume's own characters. *Sans Famille* inspired Marie-Aude Murail when she was young and Gustavo Martín Garzo enjoyed *El Capitan Tormenta*. As might be expected the strongest influence on these children's writers generally came from their own culture but, while some have logical connections, others are unexpected. Whichever, all the choices offer insight into the connection between the reader as a child and the writer they eventually became.

Any grouping of children's books inevitably raises as many questions as it answers. What are books for children? Simply, they are stories that children enjoy and typically they have a child or a childlike character, often an animal, at their heart. Loosely, that definition works up to a certain age, but there are also adult books that children read and children's books that adults enjoy reading. Perhaps a better definition comes from the poet and Children's Laureate Michael Rosen: "I think of children's books as not so much for children, but as the filling that goes between the child world and the adult world. One way or another, all children's books have to negotiate that space."

This is a useful definition, particularly as it acknowledges that the precise borders of those worlds may slip and be redrawn as notions of what is suitable for children shift. Content thought too explicit in one decade may be regarded as completely acceptable decades later, thus leading to books written for adults being reclassified for teenagers. Or,

more alarmingly, some children's fiction, despite the freedoms is has enjoyed, can become restricted or censored in a different time or place. Rosen's definition also partly explains why children's books remain so popular among adults: the "filling" between the two worlds is a place that adults enjoy revisiting for many reasons, not least because it presents a way of stepping back into a seemingly unchanging aspect of childhood.

Putting together an international selection such as this one underlines both the particularity and the universality of children's books. It shows the way in which children's books are eternal and how they emerge from the society in which they are conceived; they reflect the actual world that children inhabit but also act as a vehicle to show how different childhood might be. Children's books carry the twin ambitions of providing entertainment while also offering educational or cultural improvement. The balance between these two sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting intentions, varies according to the prevailing attitudes to children, but their existence seems to be universal. Some stories can cross cultures and time periods and be easily understood by all. This has been demonstrated across the centuries by the oral tradition and over the last decade by J. K. Rowling's phenomenally successful Harry Potter series. Children's stories can be great ambassadors; the cross-cultural bonds that develop as a result of children from around the world knowing variations of the same stories provides an invaluable shared experience for children whose lives, in reality, would share nothing.

Learning to enjoy reading in childhood paves the way for adult reading. While the impetus to "get children reading" often begins within education, it can soon develop into a lifetime pleasure. Children, when happily introduced to the words and pictures created for them especially in the early stages of being read to, embrace them eagerly. The route into these diverse story worlds is usually character led. Children's imaginations make it seemingly easy for them to identify with animals, dolls, teddies, trains, cars, and so on. Children's books have a directness and honesty that adults often find alarming, but that children adore. To be frightened within the safety of a story can be a delicious experience. There is nowhere better than in fiction for children to take the risks that may be denied them in real life and to live out other lives and experiences.

In children's literature, examples of children managing to live in an adult world without adults on hand to help are ubiquitous. Indeed,

getting rid of the adults and striking out on one's own is a near prerequisite of all great children's books so that children can take on adult roles, sometimes successfully, sometimes not (and often adults come to the rescue just in time).

While adult fiction is often concerned with form and structure, children's books are identified as "the home of the story." Because children love surprise and excitement, they demand from fiction a narrative that offers both in an engaging and wholly engrossing way. Even before the rise of other leisure media, many of the most successful children's books have been driven by adventure.

Selecting the 1001 entries that make up this book was the greatest pleasure. Foraying into the past to revisit national and international classics is a lesson in history and cultural change as much as it is a journey of literary discovery. Snapshots of attitudes to children, expectations of them, and messages thought suitable for them are all held within the pages of these stories. This volume also reminds us of the stories through which children may have formed their first and often most important views of another country or way of life.

On revisiting, many of these turn out to be even better than remembered. It is often the illustrations, absorbed in early childhood, that will rekindle the strongest and warmest memories. Stories and the images that accompany them have a rare capacity for taking even the oldest reader straight back into the essence of their own childhood. Much of the pleasure of choosing these books, however, has been to bring them to the attention of a new generation of readers. Alongside enduring classics, there has also been the enjoyment of highlighting some of the most successful, contemporary illustration and writing taking place throughout the world. Where once upon a time children's books took their time to travel, publishing is now almost instantly global.

For the contributors, too, there has been a delight (possibly even childish delight) in championing old and new personal favorites. They have relished the opportunity to revisit old friends and to praise their many qualities. The result is a unique guide to some of the greatest and most imaginative journeys into fantasy, mystery, adventure, history, real life, and more. Whether told in words or pictures or both, these books are the perfect introduction to the imagination of childhood and the storytelling that fuels it.

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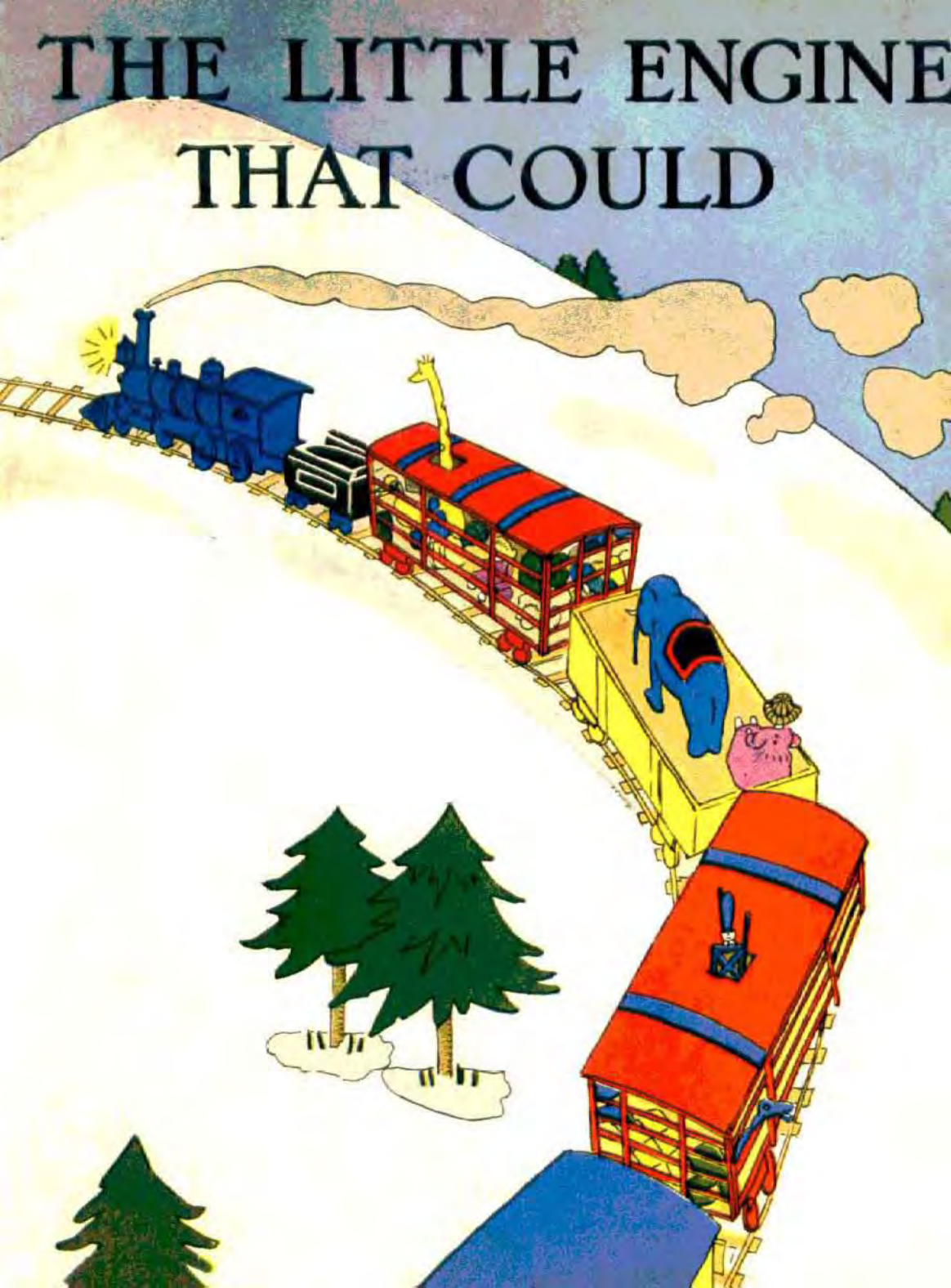
Rosie's Walk, written and illustrated by Pat Hutchins.

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD



The Little Engine That Could 1930

Watty Piper Lois Lenski

Nationality | Pseudonym used by the publisher (Watty Piper); American, born 1893 (illustrator)
Publisher | Platt and Munk, USA
Theme | Classics, Favorite characters

A trainload of toys and presents, destined for the children's Christmas trees over the steep mountain, is stranded when the locomotive breaks down. A clown, the leader of the toys, asks several locomotive engines for help but is rebuffed by all, including the pompous passenger engine who is too snobbish for the task, the powerful freight engine who is otherwise engaged, and the elderly engine without stamina. Finally, the clown asks the little blue engine who lives in the railway yard. At first, the little blue engine is not sure she is up to the task, but she whistles and puffs her catchy mantra up the hill: "I-think-I-can, I-think-I-can." Ultimately, she rounds the summit to pull the train triumphantly down the other side, puffing out jubilantly, "I-thought-I-could! I-thought-I-could!"

The Little Engine That Could is a version of a Sunday-school story called "Thinking One Can" (1906). Mary C. Jacobs (1877–1970) rewrote it as *The Pony Engine*, published 1910. Other versions appeared, but the one attributed to "Watty Piper" by its publishers came to be the accepted text. The Little Engine is an exemplar of the American credo that hard work will succeed. "Remember the little engine that could!" is the kind of injunction that all moral educators issue from time to time. Young children enjoy the catchy refrains and the anthropomorphic engines, whose characters predate even the British Thomas the Tank Engine. Interestingly, the Little Engine may be the only anthropomorphic locomotive that is female. **VN**

Pat the Bunny 1940

Dorothy Kunhardt

Nationality | American, born 1901
Publisher | Golden Books, USA
Theme | Animal stories, Favorite characters, Classics, Family

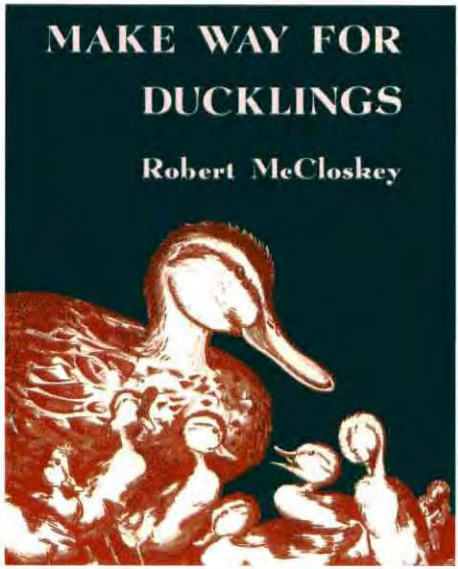
One of the very first "touch and feel" books, *Pat the Bunny* is often chosen as a baby's first book. It remains a staple present at baby showers and a stalwart of family nursery bookshelves everywhere, with more than seven million copies in print. There are many reasons that this book has become and remained a classic for nearly seventy years.

In the late 1930s, Dorothy Kunhardt, an established children's author, was trying to find ways to build interactivity into a book she was creating for her infant daughter Edith. The end result proved to be a huge leap forward in books for the very young—the addition of simple "touch and feel" and "scratch and sniff" elements.

You would be hard pressed to find a child today who does not have some memory of this classic title, from stroking the bunny's soft fur, to looking in the mirror, to feeling Daddy's scratchy beard, to playing peek-a-boo, or to trying on Mommy's ring.

As an extra bonus, and something Kunhardt had not foreseen, it was discovered that the book also gave the opportunity for parents of visually impaired children to use books that offered tactile learning instead of purely visual learning.

Several decades later, Edith Kunhardt, Dorothy's daughter for whom the book was written, responded to the enduring success of the original book by writing her own. She published *Pat the Cat* in 1984, *Pat the Puppy* in 1991, and *Pat the Pony* in 1997. **KD**



Make Way for Ducklings 1941

Robert McCloskey

Nationality | American, born 1915
Publisher | Viking Press, USA
Award | Caldecott Medal
Theme | Animal stories, Classics, Family

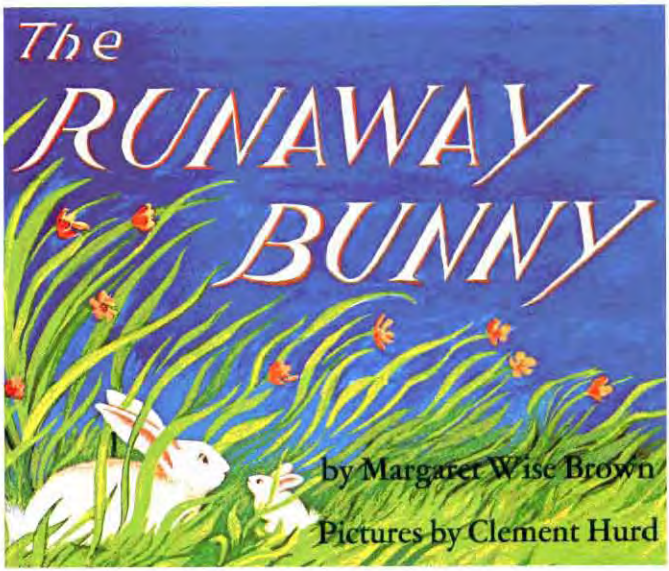
Make Way for Ducklings was Robert McCloskey's second picture book. It brought him immediate acclaim and assured him, and the delightful duck family he created, a permanent place in the hearts of the people of Boston in the United States.

Mr. and Mrs. Mallard come to Boston looking for a place to raise a family, away from the danger of turtles and foxes. They investigate the pond in the Public Garden, see the famous Swan Boats, narrowly escape being run over by boys on bicycles, nest on an island near the St. Charles Bridge, and eventually make their home in the Public Garden.

The ducks never look or act other than as real birds, but they have engaging personalities: persnickety Mrs. Mallard and proud and responsible Mr. Mallard, who, once the ducklings start growing, is happy to go off alone exploring. The bouncy ducklings—Jack, Kack, Lack, Mack, Nack, Ouack, Pack, and Quack—are as noisy and unruly as their names suggest.

Boston and its inhabitants are the other heroes of McCloskey's bold and detailed charcoal drawings. Nearly every double-page spread lovingly depicts a landmark of the city. At the end, the redoubtable Mrs. Mallard leads all her ducklings through the heart of Boston and its traffic to a rendezvous with their father, their way cleared by the Boston Police Department.

In 1987, Mrs. Mallard and her ducklings were immortalized in bronze statues in the Boston Public Garden, where children can meet them today, still on their unstoppable way to the pond. **CB**



The Runaway Bunny 1942

Margaret Wise Brown Clement Hurd

Nationality | American, born 1910 (author); American, born 1908 (illustrator)
Publisher | Harper and Row, USA
Theme | Animal stories, Family

The Runaway Bunny has never been out of print since it was first published and it remains a classic read today. For many families this companion to *Goodnight Moon* has become essential bedtime reading.

The Runaway Bunny was published first, and if you look closely at the illustrations in *Goodnight Moon* you will find that a copy of *The Runaway Bunny* appears in the book. Little bunny is determined to run away from his mother in order to have an adventure of his own. Readers love the way that mother bunny listens to her son and then alway finds a way to be there for him whatever he decides to do.

As the little bunny suggests becoming a fish, or a bird, or a rock, among other things, mother bunny counters each idea: "I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you," or "I will be a tree that you come home to," so that she can always watch over her little bunny. Eventually, of course, the little bunny concedes defeat, "'Shucks,' said the bunny. 'I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny.'" "Have a carrot," the mother bunny says to her little one, and brings the book to a comforting close. Parents should prepare for not only nightly readings of this title, but also to hear the words "again, please" at the end of every reading. Very young children never tire of this bedtime tale and always enjoy the charming illustrations, too.

Margaret Wise Brown's other classic tales include *Goodnight Moon* (1947), *My World* (1949), and *Little Fur Family* (1946). **KD**

The Three Railway Engines 1945

Reverend W. Awdry William Middleton

Nationality | English, born 1911 (author); English, birth date unknown (illustrator)
Publisher | Edmund Ward, UK
Theme | Favorite characters, Classics

When his three-year-old son Christopher was ill, the Reverend Wilbert Awdry made up a story to soothe him. It was about three railway engines on a scenic railway on Sodor, a fictional island in the Irish Sea.

The engines were anthropomorphized and given easily identifiable characters: Gordon the big, self-important engine, Henry the green engine who got scared, and Edward the blue engine who had adventures. Christopher Awdry loved the story and pestered his father to tell it to him again and again. It might have remained a private family tale had Awdry's wife not recognized its potential and persuaded her husband to send his ideas to a publisher. The result was *The Three Railway Engines*, a collection of four stories about Edward, Gordon, and Henry. It was not guaranteed to be a success—being published at the end of World War II, when paper prices were high and books consequently expensive—yet it caught the public's imagination and sold more than 22,000 copies.

William Middleton illustrated *The Three Railway Engines*, but Awdry was not pleased with his work and the publishers commissioned Reginald Payne to illustrate his next title, *Thomas the Tank Engine*. He was followed by C. Reginald Dalby. (Many years and many books later, he was replaced by John T. Kenney.) Dalby closely observed the E2 Class 0-6-0T locomotives built for the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway between 1913 and 1916 before illustrating his first book, *James the Red Engine*. He also made changes to later editions of *The Three Railway Engines*. **VN**

C. Reginald Dalby's later endpapers for *The Three Railway Engines*.

Thomas the Tank Engine 1946

Reverend W. Awdry Reginald Payne

Nationality | English, born 1911 (author); English, birth date unknown (illustrator)
Publisher | Edmund Ward, UK
Theme | Favorite characters, Classics

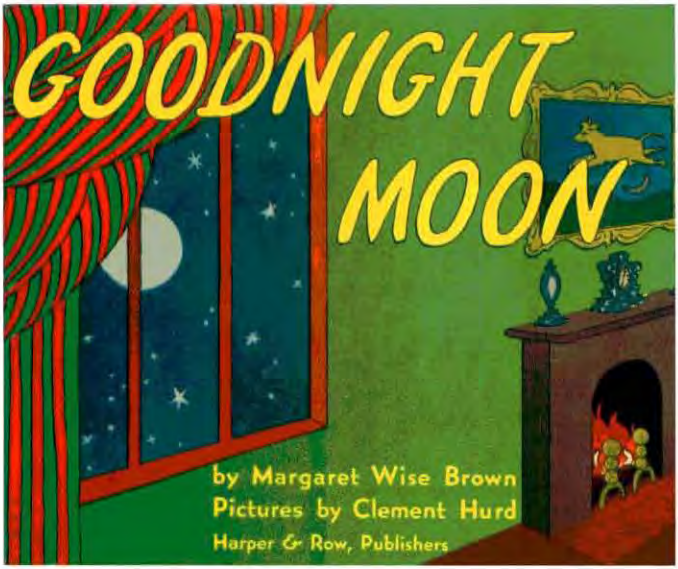
The character of Thomas the Tank Engine was born when Reverend Awdry carved a wooden tank engine for his son. Reputedly, it was young Christopher, not his father, who chose the name of Thomas.

Thomas the Tank Engine was a collection of four stories: "Thomas and Gordon," "Thomas's Trains," "Thomas and the Trucks," and "Thomas and the Breakdown Train." Throughout them all, the blue-painted Thomas, with his distinctive cheeky smile, had adventures and riled the Fat Controller, who owned the railway, but always ended up doing the right thing, becoming a Really Useful Engine.

Most people believe this to be the first book in the series, but it actually came second, after *The Three Railway Engines*. The series, which has been adapted for television and the stage, remains a firm favorite, with railway buffs, children, and adults, for such characters as the coaches Annie and Clarabel, Bertie the Bus, and the argumentative Toby the Tram Engine.

The illustrations for this book are often erroneously attributed to C. Reginald Dalby, but they were actually the work of Reginald Payne. It was Payne who created the much-loved iconic images we know today, which Dalby then used as the basis for his works (from the third book onward). Payne's life remains frustratingly shadowy, despite the best attempts of researchers.

Reverend Wilbert Awdry wrote twenty-six books. Since the reverend's death in 1997, Christopher Awdry has continued his father's work, writing more adventures for Thomas and his friends. **LH**



Goodnight Moon 1947

Margaret Wise Brown Clement Hurd

Nationality | American, born 1910 (author); American, born 1908 (illustrator)
Publisher | Harper and Row, USA
Theme | Animal stories, Family, Rhyming stories

Goodnight Moon is a much-loved bedtime picture book. Margaret Wise Brown's story has stood the test of time. It was published in the late 1940s, and has since earned its rightful place in the canon of classic American children's literature.

Illustrated with a simple color scheme, the book's soothing, rhyming poem is set in a familiar, family house where a bunny rabbit wearing blue-and-white striped pajamas is saying good night to everything he can possibly see in his room.

The entire story takes place in just this one room, but such are the skills of both author and illustrator that the words and pictures, along with careful details, reveal some very subtle touches. For example, the lighting in the room grows slowly darker as each page is turned, and the moon can be seen rising throughout the duration of the story, gradually appearing and expanding in the left-hand window.

In addition to the little rabbit, other characters include a small cat and mouse, who provide ample visual narratives along the way. They also add other possible stories to this heartwarming and cozy book.

Parents will be all too familiar with the little bunny's continual attempts to postpone the time he has to go to sleep, and much fun can be had when looking in detail at all the other characters in the pictures.

This is an ideal first book for any child, with its strong rhymes and reassuring drawings. Parents should make sure they have an interesting explanation ready for the inevitable question, "What is mush?" **NH**

"In the great green room there was a telephone...."


BUNNY