

### **Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back**

BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN

*Gr. K-6 90 pages Harper, 1965*

Lafcadio decides he isn't satisfied being a lion—he must become a marksman and man-about-town and painter and world traveler and . . . He tries just about everything and anything in hope of finding happiness. If only he'd try being himself. A witty and thought-provoking book, Silverstein's first for children; He is most famous for his poetry, including the incomparable *Where the Sidewalk Ends*).

### **The Stories Julian Tells** (series)

BY ANN CAMERON

*K-5 72 pages Pantheon, 1981*

The author takes six short stories involving Julian and his brother and weaves them into a fabric that glows with the mischief, magic, and imagination of childhood. Though centered on commonplace subjects like desserts, gardens, loose teeth, and new neighbors, these stories of family life are written in an uncommon way that will both amuse and touch young listeners. Sequels: *Julian's Glorious Summer*; *Julian Secret Agent*; *More Stories Julian Tells*; and *The Stories Huey Tells*.

### **Chocolate Fever** BY ROBERT K. SMITH

*Gr. 1-5 94 pages Dell, 1978*

Henry Green doesn't just like chocolate—he's crazy about it. He even has chocolate sprinkles on his cereal and chocolate cake for breakfast. He thus is a prime candidate to come down with the world's first case of "chocolate fever." Funny, with a subtle message for moderation.

### **The Water Horse** BY DICK KING-SMITH

*K-2 120 pages Dell Yearling, 2001*

When eight-year-old Kirstie and her five-year-old brother Angus discover a purse-size

object washed up on the Scottish coast after a storm, they think it's some kind of egg and needs to be saved in the bathtub. Their guess is more than correct. With the head and neck that look somewhat like a horse's, the body of a turtle, and the tail of a crocodile, the creature is about the size of a newborn kitten. But it won't stay that size for long. What they have inadvertently hatched is the future Loch Ness monster.

Dick King-Smith, author of the popular *Babe: the Gallant Pig*, gives us not a monster story here but an affectionate look at what might have been if there really was a Loch Ness monster and if it had been raised by two affectionate children, a cooperative mom, a seafaring father, and a once grumpy but now knowledgeable grandfather.

### **James and the Giant Peach** BY ROALD DAHL

*K-6 120 pages Knopf, 1961*

Four-year-old James, newly orphaned, is sent to live with his abusive aunts and appears resigned to spending his life as their humble servant. Then a giant peach begins growing in the backyard. Waiting inside that peach is a collection of characters that will captivate your audience as they did James. Few books hold up over six grade levels as well as this one does, and few authors for children understand their world as well as Dahl did.



A list of several hundred other titles can be found in the Treasury of Read-Alouds in *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease (Penguin)

See also the author's Web site:  
[www.trelease-on-reading.com](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com)

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# CHAPTER BOOKS FOR KINDERGARTNERS

Bridging the gap  
between picture  
books and novels



COMPILED BY JIM TRELEASE

Author of the New York Times Bestseller  
*The Read-Aloud Handbook*

## **A few notes on reading longer books to smaller children with smaller attention spans**

Attention spans are built over many pages and many books requiring the child's focus in order to be understood. That's one of the many reasons children who are read to acquire reading skills so much more easily.

One way to build the child's attention span is to read aloud two to three picture books each day (or evening). Gradually increase the length of the books you read (build up to Bill Peet's 64-page books) until he or she is ready for chapter books. You'll know when that is by how long the child will sit for readings.

A three-year-old understands perfectly the spoken words, "Please pass me the butter" but would be hard-pressed to *read* those words. Listening comprehension remains years ahead of reading comprehension until about eighth grade. This allows a kindergartner, barely able to read, to understand not just the teacher but the words in novels — as long as the content, vocabulary, and dosage are not too heavy. This brochure contains some of my favorites, in order of complexity. Hearing richer words in longer sentences plants longer words and thoughts in a child's brain, which nurtures his own reading skills.

**CAUTION:** Always read the book or chapter ahead of time. Feel free to skip parts you think might be inappropriate or too complex for your child or class. Remember that once size does not fit all, that some books work with some children and not for another.

**AVAILABILITY OF THESE BOOKS:** Nowadays books stay in print only a few

years, *especially* juvenile titles. But even an out-of-print (OP) title can be easily and freely borrowed from your local library (or, upon request, your library can borrow it from *other* libraries). If you wish to own the book, inexpensive used-copies (including OP) can be found at Web sites like bookfinder.com or Amazon. New copies (but not out OP) can be purchased at your local bookstore.

**Two Times the Fun** BY BEVERLY CLEARY  
*PreK-K 92 pages Harper, 2005*

Beverly Cleary raised a set of twins, so she knows the breed well. Couple that with her witty insight to the workings of family life and you've got everything that makes this collection of four stories work so well. Jimmy and Janet are four-year-olds with two distinct approaches to things like dog biscuits, new boots, holes in the ground, and personal possessions. Originally separate picture books, these four tales work perfectly in the short novel category for preschool through kindergarten.

**Minnie and Sophie: All Around the Town**  
by Miriam Cohen; Thomas F. Yezerksi, ill.  
*Pre-K 68 pages Farrar, 2004*

In six anecdotal stories, we follow two sisters (ages five and seven) through their Brooklyn neighborhood during the Great Depression. These stories about an outing to the amusement park, clothes, treasure hunts, and games with playmates will strike universal cords with today's children while offering a gentle peek at the tamer and gentler world of the 1930s. Prequel: *Minnie and Sophie*.

**My Father's Dragon** (series)  
BY RUTH S. GANNETT  
*K-2 78 pages Knopf, 1948*

This is the little fantasy novel that has stood the test of time — surviving in print for a half

century. So it must be good! The three-volume series is bursting with hair-raising escapes and evil creatures. The tone is dramatic enough to be exciting for even mature preschoolers but not enough to frighten them. The narrator relates the tales as adventures that happened to his father when he was a boy. This is an excellent transition series for introducing children to longer stories with fewer pictures. The rest of the series, in order: *Elmer and the Dragon* and *The Dragons of Blueland*. All three tales are combined in a single volume for *My Father's Dragon: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Related dragon books for young readers: *The Best Pet of All* by David LaRochelle; and *The Book of Beasts* by E. Nesbit, abridged by Inga Moore.

**Dinosaurs Before Dark** (Magic Tree House series) BY MARY POPE OSBORNE  
*K-2 76 pages Random House, 1992*

In this first book of the popular time-travel series (with three- to four-page chapters), young Annie and Jack discover a treehouse that transports them back in time to the age of dinosaurs. The journey is filled with fantasy adventure while exploring scientific, cultural, or historic places and events.

**Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus** (series) BY BARBARA PARK  
*K-1 70 pages Random House, 1992*

Don't be put off by the title of this book, part of a wonderfully funny series (more than 40 books to date). Junie B. is Ramona, Little Lulu, and Lucy all rolled into one determined kindergartner. No one in children's publishing approaches Barbara Park when it comes to children's humor, and her 27 million sales with the *Junie* series is prove positive.