

I CAN READ!!

Kids who have just learned to read, about this time of the year in first grade, need lots of things to read to keep their enthusiasm high. The problem is that too many times, the books they choose are too hard, or too easy. Instead of frustrating or boring them, when you go to the library or the bookstore, look for the "I Can Read" series (HarperCollins) which includes Frog and Toad Are Friends, Frog and Toad Around the Year, Frog and Toad Together, all by Arnold Lobel.

The series is consistent in that the books are at second grade reading level, the text is in large print, the pictures support the text, and the lines break at logical places. (Most beginning readers assume that the end of the line is the end of the sentence).

A similar series by Jane Yolen stars Commander Toad, the galactic amphibian James Kirk whose exploits are chronicled in the irrepressibly silly (and therefore well beloved) Commander Toad and the Intergalactic Spy (PaperStar Book, \$4.95) which is sort of Leslie Nielsen meets Arnold Lobel in space, and the whomping good series titles including Commander Toad in Space, Commander Toad and the Planet of the Grapes, Commander Toad and the DisAsteroid, Commander Toad and the Space Pirates, and Commander Toad and the Big Black Hole. (each \$4.95,

illustrated by Bruce Degen of Magic Schoolbus fame). Every self-respecting first and second grader has a secret stash of knock knock jokes and chicken jokes, right there in a pocket. Commander Toad feeds on those fly-by-night jokes and flicks his pun-riddled tongue out in jest. The Commander Toad stories are goofy, filled with wretched puns, and a joy for kids and adults to read and reread.

The Frog and Toad books, by comparison, are filled with tender scenes, touching stories, and memorable characters who will tug at your literary heartstrings. Both series are terrific for kids beginning to read who don't want to read "baby books" any more and are not quite ready for chapter books. There are dozens and dozens of similar titles you'll find on the shelf of bookstore and library, once you zero in on these two classic sets.

One of my very favorite series is about the adventures of Fox: Fox on the Job, Fox at School, Fox and His Friends, Fox in Love, all by Edward Marshall, pictures by James Marshall (Puffin Easy to Read Series, \$3.50 each). This endearing set has also been packaged in a set of Fox in A Box (\$14, Penguin) which is a nifty way to get kids to read more than one book in the series! Fox is like John Travolta-meets-Reynard, a lovable charismatic and not-quite-sure-of-himself character. His misadventures in all the "high risk" situations most seven and eight year olds fear serve to make this series an enduring part of childhood reading too.

Keep those youngsters reading--not only does it improve their skills....it makes them dangerous! Kids who read don't watch as much TV, and don't become nearly as easy to fool. That's the kind of dangerous kids we WANT to see more of!

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