

Themed Reviews

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Sizing Up Kids' Books

by Gwynne Spencer

If you went shoe shopping with your kids and none of the shoes had sizes on them, what would you do? That's how it is when you go book shopping. The publishers steadfastly refuse to put ONE age on a book, for fear it will scare off readers. The truth is, every book has an enormous age range, but each one can be honestly pegged to one particular age. Unfortunately, we'll never see that happen in our lifetime. So here is my foolproof way to tell what to buy at what age for your kids.

- * Birth to 6 months - Slobberproof books with bright colors, photos
- * 6 mo. to 1 yr. - Books that broaden their world with photos, drawings and concepts from a realistic point of view (no pigs in pants, please)
- * 1 yr. to 18months - Photographic dictionaries and word books to expand vocabulary
- * 18 months to 2 years - Goodnight Moon, Quick as a Cricket, stories with one sentence to a page. Poetry, Mother Goose and Dr. Seuss
- * 2 to 3 years - Stories with 32 pages, two or three sentences to a page, lots of pictures. Try to read ten of these a week
- * 3 to 4 years - Folktales like Three bears, Three Pigs, Three Billy Goats Gruff and stories of animals that behave like people (NOT fairy tales yet)
- * 4 to 5 years - Fairy tales (the old fashioned ones, not the movie version), stories of heroes, mythology and the great wide world
- * 5 to 6 years old - Beginning chapter books, books with enormous print (for little readers), predictable books like Green Eggs and Ham and Brown Bear for beginning readers. Read to them from chapter books like James and the Giant Peach, Ramona the Brave
- * 6 years old - Big print for little readers, predictable books with good pictures. Read them chapter books, one chapter a day from Oz to My Father's Dragon series (gentle stories without too much violence)
- * 7 years old - Silly joke books, silly stories like Amelia Bedelia and other easy readers, and the works of Roald Dahl and Dav Pilkey, Read them stories of talking animals like Charlotte's Web and more fairy tales
- * 8 years old - Skinny chapter books (32-64 pages, slightly smaller than the easy to reads that are 5"x 8") like Magic Tree House, Bailey School Kids, Junie B Jones for them to read on their own (after you've read them out loud to them) as well as funny read alouds like How to Eat Fried Worms and The Twits.
- * 9 years old - They love "junk" reading at this age: Garfield and Far Side and Calvin and Hobbes. Read "good" books to them to keep the octane level high: Prydain, Narnia, Ramona, Superfudge, Captain Underpants
- * 10 years old - Series are what they choose: Babysitters, Animorphs, Goosebumps (aargh), Betsy Tacy, Mrs. Piggie Wiggle, Prydain, Narnia, Xanth, Shiloh

* 11 years old - Books with 120+ pages, challenging titles that face the transitions of life fictionally-- Bridge to Terabithia, Where the Red Fern Grows, Watsons Go to Birmingham 1963. Still a passion for Garfield, other "comics". Try Tin Tin and Asterix as an alternative.

* 12 years old - Start a list of all the books they've read, authors, what they remember. When they hit 100, visit the bookstore. When they hit 1000 buy them a BIG gift certificate and turn them loose. You've done your job and created a lifelong reader. Now the problem is keeping them supplied with books.

If you like this brief outline and would like to know more about each age-and-stage in a forthcoming book, drop a line to me.

Gwynne Spencer is the author of "What's Cooking in Children's Literature" which connects kids' books with hundreds of snack recipes available from Linworth Publishing, (800/786-5017, www.linworthpublishing.com.) Gwynne can be reached at pengwynnes@aol.com or 3060 Seminole Rd, Woodbridge VA 22192

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