

Babies Need Books!

I think the most horrifying thing I ever saw was a daycare center where the infants were propped up in carseats in front of the TV so the caregivers wouldn't have to amuse them. The idea of six month olds being able to be amused by TV is laughable, but the dereliction of adult responsibility is not. Many people don't really understand that babies learn language in the first 17 months of their lives, and if they miss it then, they pretty much miss it forever. Babies need to be read to every single day from the moment they are born (and maybe even before!). "What sort of books could you possibly read to a baby?" you might ask. Lucky for the babies there are HUNDREDS of great books out there, and they all are just as enjoyable for the babies as the adults who read them aloud over and over. The venerable Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a new edition (HarperCollins, \$19.95) in a handsome dark blue jacket with a fascinating afterword by Leonard Marcus which tells the story of Margaret Wise Brown, her hundreds of published stories, her fierce advocacy of reading for little ones, and the birth and sustained publication of this classic bedtime story. If you don't read Goodnight Moon to a baby every day, then you need to read it every night. It is the quintessential "winding down the day" book with the little bunny saying Goodnight to everything in the Great Green Room, and the patiently rocking little old lady whispering "hush" and waiting for the bunny to finally go to sleep. Included in this edition are also pictures of Margaret Wise Brown, Clement Hurd, and Ursula Nordstrom who editorial vision steadfastly insured the survival of books for the tiniest of children in the face of harsh critics and disbelievers.

Goodnight Moon and its companion story, The Runaway Bunny are available as board books now (Harper Festival, \$6.95 each), which makes them slobberproof and virtually indestructible. Board books offer heavy cardboard pages that are easily turned by tiny inexperienced fingers, lamination on the full-color artwork to ensure the survival of the book beyond one or two readings, and bright memorable four-color illustrations.

If you peruse the Board Book shelf of bookstores, you'll also find two of my own favorites, Color Farm and Color Zoo, both by Lois Ehlert (Harper Festival, \$6.95 each) which not only have fascinating die cuts in each page which ingeniously combine to form outlines of different animals from the farm and zoo, but also teach shapes kinesthetically as well as visually. These two books will involve even the youngest child in books over and over and over, drawing the little book lover back to the written page with delight and

fascination; what better way could an adult provide to make reading fashionable and compelling?

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