

# Some Good Books for Reading and Reading Aloud

## By Eric Bray

*Bilingual Japan*. Vol. 13 (1) 2004 (pp. 13-15)

Good books can really motivate kids to want to read. Naturally, people's ideas about what "good books" are will vary, but through this column I have been guided to some that we have enjoyed reading. To that end, a couple of years ago I wrote a short piece recommending the "Magic School Bus" series of books because my son had really liked having them read to him. At that point, Chris was at the end of his first grade of Japanese elementary school, and he was just starting to learn to read in English. Six and a half is a bit late to start, but he had gone to a Japanese nursery school that didn't really push kids into learning their hiragana, and he was much more interested in the action in the sandbox, so during the first year of elementary school he was pretty busy learning his hiragana and katakana. By the winter it seemed he was ready to start to learn to read in English. Since then we have gone through many series of books designed to help kids learn to read, and my idea here is to write about the books that we found most useful and fun to read in case any of you now finds yourselves in a similar situation. Also, later I want to include a brief list of books that he has enjoyed having read to him as we have continued with that too.

### **Books to help kids learn to read**

So there we were, Chris had done some letter and sound recognition workbooks and played around with some of the software that is out there to help kids learn how to read, The Learning Company, etc., but he still hadn't opened a book and tried to read it. Usually one starts with books that have relatively few, easy words on a page. There are a lot of series out there arranged in levels 1,2,3 to get your kid started. The easiest way is to go down to a bookstore and browse together through what is available. For some, that may not be convenient, and here in Japan ordering books from Amazon.co.jp might be a better option. The prices are considerably cheaper than the bookstores like Maruzen too.

We tried a variety of books considered Level 1, and the series I want to recommend is the "Start to Read" series published by the School Zone. The strong points are that 1) the language is quite easy and appropriate for true beginners, 2) there is a lot of repetition of newly introduced words, 3) each book focuses on particular sound letter patterns, 4) the illustrations are very engaging and creative, and don't follow a pattern from book to book. 5) the story content is often clever, whimsical, and in short, a bit fun to read.

There are 15 books in the Level 1 series. Three titles my son enjoyed a lot were, 1) "The Gum on the Drum", 2) "Jog, Frog, Jog", and 3) "The Good Bad Cat". Chris read each of these many times, which at this level is important.

### **The Gum on the Drum**

A School Zone Start to Read! Book - Level 1

ISBN – 0-88743-004-X

Price: 500 yen through Amazon.co.jp

Where to go from here?...On to Level 2 books. A couple of series that Chris liked were the "An I Can Read Books" which at Level 2 has around 50 titles. The books adapted from Arnold Lobel, but with his illustrations went over really well in our house, particularly the Frog and Toad books, first as books Chris liked to have these read to him, and later as books to read himself. Another good series is the "Puffin Easy to Read" books which also come in 3 levels. There are four adapted Winnie the Pooh books that are quite nice in Level 2.

### **Frog and Toad are Friends**

By Arnold Lobel

An I Can Read Book - Level 2

ISBN 1-55994-229-0

### **Pooh Goes Visiting**

Adapted by Stephen Krensky

Puffin Easy to Read – Level 2

At Level 3 you have more options. All the three series I have mentioned above have Level 3 books which you can try, but it is important to remember that these series are designed to supplement a standard school-based reading program. There is one series out there, the Oxford Reading Tree, that is a very complete reading program in itself. Last winter when Chris was finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> grade we started with the Level 6 and 7 Owls series, now we are doing Magpies 8, and I'm really impressed with this series. The first thing you notice is how each page recycles quite a bit of language from earlier levels. When it introduces new words, it always gives several more exposures to the word in that book. The stories are reasonably interesting, and there is magic key that takes the kids to some other place and time for an adventure, and then brings them back by the last page. The illustrations are pretty basic and not the strong feature of this series. If I had it all to do over again, I might start with this series and supplement it with the books mentioned above. You might find their website useful (<http://www.oup.co.uk/oxed/primary/ort/>). A set of 7 books will run about 4000 yen, which is not cheap, but at least they are now available through

Amazon.co.jp in Japan. That was not the case 2 years ago, when you had to go through the publisher. One hopes at this price that you will get a few readings out of each book. If they can be shared within or among families so much the better. (feel free to contact me Levels about 6,7,8)

Finally, there is a series out that Chris has been enjoying quite a bit this summer called "Ricky Ricotta's Mighty Robot". These are written with kids in mind by the same author as the very famous/notorious? "Captain Underpants" series, but with less edge and better spelling. Chris says, "Check it out"

**Ricky Ricotta's Might Robot vs.  
The Mutant Mosquitoes from Mercury**  
Dav Pilkey  
ISBN – 0-590-30722-3

### **Books to read aloud with Kids**

We established the routine of reading a story before bed from when Chris was around 2 years old. So, when he first started to read, I told him if he wanted me to read to him, he had to read to me first. He agreed to that, but when we started, I would usually alternate reading pages with him on the first time through. This helped ease him into the new routine. Anyway, I have continued to read to him after he reads to me, though I don't know how long that will last. It probably has a lot to do with whether I can find books that he wants to hear read to him. So if you have any good ideas for me, my email is below. I hope that one day soon Chris will be reading in English for fun on his own like he now is in Japanese. (By the way, a series in Japanese that really got Chris into reading in Japanese is "Kaiketsu Zorori). Here is a list of the books Chris has enjoyed hearing the most over the past years. I have split them into two groups. Books for young kids...maybe years 2 to 6 and then 5 to 9, of course, with some overlap.

#### ***Books for Younger Kids (2-6)***

**Good Dog, Carl** (great story – no words to get in the way of the plot)  
By Alexandra Day  
The Green Tiger Press  
ISBN: 0689817711

**Animals Should Definitely not Wear Clothing** (good fun, great illustrations)  
By Judi Barrett  
Aladdin Paperbacks  
ISBN 0-689-70807--6

**Dr. DeSoto** (fun story)

By William Steig

Scholastic Inc.

ISBN: 0-590-41462-3

**Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs** (great illustrations, clever tale)

By Judy Barrett

Scholastic Inc,

ISBN 0689707495

**Franklin's School Play** (one of a growing series that deals with kid's fears)

Paulette Bourgeois, Brenda Clark

Scholastic Books

ISBN 0-590-69331-X

**The Maggie B.** (cute story of sister and little brother on the high seas)

Irene Hass

Aladdin Paperbacks

ISBN 0-689-81507-7

*Books for Older Kids (5-9)*

**Rowan of Rin** (good adventure where boy discovers strengths)

By Emily Rodda

HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN 0-06-441019-6

**The Forgotten Door** (great story, boy from another planet deals with us strange earthlings)

Alexander Key

Scholastic Books

ISBN 0590431307

**Magic School Bus on the Ocean Floor** (one of the 9 original science oriented adventures written by Joanna Cole and illustrated by Bruce Degen which are far better than the staff written ones that came later)

Scholastic Books

ISBN 0-590-41431-3

**Stories to Solve: Folktales from around the world** (puzzles to solve, some better than others)

By George Shannon

Harper Collins Publishers

ISBN 0-380-73260-2

**Mightier than the Sword** (nice selection of world folk tales, fine illustrations, quality hardback)

By Jane Yolen

Harcourt Publishers

ISBN 0-15-216391-3

**The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig** (picture book – funny, good illustrations)

By Eugene Trivizas

Aladdin Library

ISBN 068981528X

**The Boy who Could Fly** (a bit of fun)

By Sally Gardner

Dolphin Paperbacks

ISBN 1-85881-839-7

**Captain Underpants # 3 The Invasion of the Incredibly Naughty Cafeteria Ladies from Outer Space (and the subsequent assault of the equally evil lunchroom zombie nerds)** (the kind of book your sister without kids gives your kid on his birthday to pay you back for your mistreatment of her as a child., toilet humor, nose humor, misspellings, very popular in the US – over 10 million copies sold, good for that last ditch effort to interest a kid that just refuses to read or listen to books in English. (series of 5 books)

By Dav Pilkey

Scholastic Books

ISBN 0-439-04996-2

Feel free to contact me at: [ehb23@yahoo.com](mailto:ehb23@yahoo.com)