



TOUCHSTONES:



A List of Distinguished Children's Books



TOUCHSTONES

Why do some books have a greater impact than others? Why are some remembered, and many others forgotten? An important part of the study of literature is the attempt to understand the difference between good books and mediocre ones, between good books and great ones. As pioneers in a relatively new branch of literary criticism, scholars of children's literature have been hampered by a lack of general agreement about which children's books most deserve study — about which ones are merely good and which ones are important enough to deserve special attention.

Some years ago, the Children's Literature Association, an organization of scholars, teachers, librarians, and parents interested in encouraging the serious study of children's literature, charged a committee of its members with the task of suggesting a list of such books — those children's books so significant that everyone interested in children's literature should know them. This pamphlet is the result of that committee's work.

After much discussion, the members of the committee concluded that it was neither possible nor desirable to name all the many excellent children's books in existence; nor would there be much point in providing yet another list of books children might like, or of books that might prove useful to teachers in primary classrooms. We decided, instead, to suggest a list of books so central to the traditions of children's literature that they might act as what the poet Matthew Arnold called "touchstones." While Arnold spoke of poetry, what he said applies also to other kinds of literature, and certainly to children's books: "there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent...than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry."

We believe that each of the books on this list has that sort of excellence; each may be applied as a touchstone to other children's books of the same kind. These books are all widely known and discussed among those concerned with children's literature, and in the committee's judgment, each of them has some particular significance; it is itself an important innovation or breakthrough, or else represents the work of an author or illustrator who made a substantial and unique contribution to children's literature over a number of years. Furthermore, each of these books deserves respect and attention in its own right; each is, indeed, a distinguished children's book, a book of enduring interest and significance — a touchstone.

There are many different kinds of children's literature. This list honors writers both of long novels and of short picture book texts, both inventive geniuses and careful collectors, both illustrators of great sophistication and cartoonists of deceptive simplicity. Despite the variety of their work,

however, all have made significant contributions to children's literature; and in order to suggest the equal importance of their contributions, they appear in the list uncategorized, in the alphabetical order of their last names.

The main purpose of this list is to encourage further study of these books, in the faith that better understanding of distinguished children's books will allow us to better understand children's literature in general, and thus, to help children to enjoy it more. But the list should also be a useful guide for those new to this literature: students in university courses, beginning teachers and librarians, children themselves. We hope these distinguished children's books will be read and enjoyed by people of all ages.

We also hope that our list will stimulate discussion, since the mere fact of its existence raises many important questions. Should such a list be attempted at all? If so, what books should it include, and why? Because we believe that discussion of such issues can only increase our understanding and enjoyment of children's books, we encourage you to consider our choices, and to let us know your opinions of them. If you wish to comment on our principles of selection, or on the inclusion or exclusion of any specific book, please write to:

Dr. Perry Nodelman
Editor, **Children's Literature Association Quarterly**
Department of English
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba
CANADA R3B 2E9



The following were at one time or another members of the ChLA committee that worked on this list:

Chair: Mary Ake, Librarian, Littleton, Colorado Public Schools

Jane Bingham, School of Education, Oakland University, Michigan

D.T. Hanks, English Department, Baylor University, Texas

Alethea Helbig, English Department, Eastern Michigan University

Elbert Hill, English Department, Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Peter Neumeyer, Department of English and Comparative Literature, San Diego State University, California

Perry Nodelman, Department of English, University of Winnipeg, Canada

Marcia Shafer, Ann Arbor Public Library, Michigan

Jon Stott, English Department, University of Alberta, Canada



The Touchstones

Aesop's Fables. (Numerous excellent selections and illustrated versions of individual tales are available.)

Aesop's Fables have been read to and by children for centuries; they are the precursors of most modern children's literature. Children still enjoy them, perhaps less for the sometimes doubtful wisdom of their morals than for the frequent comedy in the situations they describe. Just as important, the fables have sparked the interest of many fine illustrators, and are the basis for a distinguished body of art for children.

Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott.

Alcott's book is the prototype of American family stories, and one of the earliest children's novels to feature a spirited, complex female character. Jo March is unique: independent and interested in developing her full humanity, not just the limited femininity her sisters Meg and Amy aspire to. Sometimes called a "dreadful masterpiece" because of its sentimentality and contrivance, **Little Women** nevertheless conveys real emotions in a way that is still deeply satisfying.

The "Prydain" Series, by Lloyd Alexander.

A reworking of ancient Welsh materials into a thoroughly modern fantasy, the Prydain books judiciously combine the wonderful events and strong moral fervor of a legendary past with a contemporary breeziness of tone. The series chronicles young Taran's transformation from assistant pig keeper to high king, in a moving parable of maturity.

Fairy Tales, by Hans Christian Andersen. (Recommended: the translation by R.P. Keigwin, edited by Svend Larsen; numerous illustrated versions of individual tales are available.)

In retelling old folk tales, reworking old tales into new stories, and crafting original stories in the classic folk tale mold, Andersen worked with wit and verve; while his stories are often rich and complicated, they are still firmly rooted in the folk tradition. Some readers find his work overly sentimental; few doubt that he deserves his reputation as one of the finest writers of the literary fairy tale, a form he helped to originate.

Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain, by Edward Ardizzone.

This is the first of a number of books about Little Tim, a child who has the sort of exciting adventures usually reserved for superheroes. Tim is as industrious, good, and courageous as the great heroes of myth, even though he is only a small boy; no wonder he is beloved by young would-be heroes around the world. Ardizzone's distinct style combines watercolor with pen and ink drawings, the speech balloons of modern cartooning with an elegantly old-fashioned chiaroscuro.

Norwegian Folk Tales, as collected by Peter Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe. (Recommended: the edition translated by Pat Shaw Iversen and Carl Norman, with illustrations by Erik Werenskiold and Theodor Kittelson; many selections and illustrated versions of individual tales are available.)

These Norwegian tales are far removed from the sophisticated courtliness of Perrault's tales, and they are often earthier and funnier than the Grimms' tales. Asbjornsen and Moe collected some of the best-loved stories for very young children, including "The Three Billy Goats Gruff."

Johnny Crow's Garden, by L. Leslie Brooke.

A rich blend of linguistic flair and imaginative illustration, **Johnny Crow's Garden** is the result of nonsense Brooke first made up for his own children. There are wonderfully expressive faces, a meticulous attention to detail and continuity, and touches for adults too — references to books by "Confuseus" and "De Jabberwockibus" by "Ludovicus."

The Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

The children in this book of wishes fulfilled are not merely stereotyped or a foil for the plot, but fully developed characters. **The Secret Garden** stands out from the formula literature of its time particularly because of its unobtrusive but intricately patterned symbolism.

The Little House, by Virginia Lee Burton.

The swirling spirals that repeat in every picture in this book point out the continuity underlying the changes the text describes, as a city grows around a little house; but Burton's ingenuity makes each picture as much different in composition and atmosphere as it is the same as all the others in pattern. Burton was one of the first picture book artists to explore the narrative potential of a series of similarly composed pictures.

The Hey Diddle Diddle Picture Book, by Randolph Caldecott.

Here is Caldecott, one of the earliest and one of the greatest of children's illustrators, at his imaginative best. His always lively cartoons delightfully extend the simple rhymes he illustrates, and make what seems to be mere verbal nonsense into complicated and highly comical stories.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and **Through the Looking Glass**, by Lewis Carroll.

Carroll's writing and Tenniel's illustrations combine to create a time-honored fantasy. The unusual and often delightfully ill-mannered characters, the rich language and pithy conversations, and Alice's indignant responses to the topsy-turvy world she finds herself in appeal to the intellect as well as the emotions. These books have been enjoyed by generations of children and adults, and stimulated much rigorous literary criticism.

The Jack Tales, collected by Richard Chase.

Richard Chase carefully listened to Appalachian storytellers as they told their variants of British folk tales. His written versions of what he heard maintain natural rhythms and cadences, as well as the distinct vocabulary that makes these tales so special. They are eminently suited for reading aloud.

Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi.

The transformation of a puppet into a boy is handled believably and elegantly in this book. Collodi's wry wit and political commentary appeal to more sophisticated readers; his depiction of a child's search for a parent and a parent's search for a child has been deeply satisfying for generations of children. Numerous translations and adaptations attest to the continuing popularity of the mischievous Pinocchio.

The Golden Fleece, by Padraic Colum.

Every child should become acquainted with the myths of ancient Greece that underly our own culture. These retellings by a noted poet are faithful to the spirit of the great originals, and their simple, cadenced prose can be read aloud beautifully.

The Baby's Opera, by Walter Crane.

Crane adapted the styles of his time, in particular those of the pre-Raphaelites, to the purposes of narrative illustration. As well as representing Crane's characteristic style, **The Baby's Opera** is a tour-de-force of picture book art; Crane integrated every aspect of the book, including the typography and page layout, into a total composition.

The Norse Myths. (Recommended: **Norse Gods and Giants**, retold and illustrated by Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire.)

The often somber stories of the Norse gods and heroes are a vital part of our literary heritage. These unembroidered, euphonious versions are accompanied by striking illustrations that perfectly catch the spirit of the stories.

Rhymes and Verses, by Walter de la Mare.

The collected poems of an eminent English lyric poet, whose work exemplifies his philosophy that "only the rarest kind of best in anything is good enough for the young." Technically accomplished and musical, these poems range from delightful absurdities that sport with language, through perceptive descriptions of nature and humorous ones of animals, to the hauntingly mysterious and utterly mystical. De la Mare is the greatest poet of childhood.

Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle...and Other Modern Verse, compiled by Stephen Dunning, Edward Luders, and Hugh Smith.

A landmark in the history of children's poetry this tasteful collection of mostly modern, realistic poems for children and young people was the first of its kind. It has not only worn well itself, but also, paved the way for similar collections that speak to children about the things they encounter in the world about them in modern language and rhythms.

The "Moffat" books, by Eleanor Estes.

These homey novels describe the daily life and amusing adventures of the secure and happy Moffat family, once upon a time in America. For contemporary readers, part of the appeal of these books may be that they describe a time less complicated and confusing than our own; but Estes captures the feelings and perceptions of childhood in a way that transcends such differences of time and place.

Johnny Tremain, by Esther Forbes.

Historical fiction at its best brings a period to life; in **Johnny Tremain**, Forbes accomplishes just that. Her vivid depiction of Boston at the time of the War of Independence is richly detailed; and she portrays historical figures like Paul Revere and Sam Adams as believable human beings, so that their interactions with the young Johnny Tremain and with other characters Forbes has invented herself are thoroughly convincing.

Harriet the Spy, by Louise Fitzhugh.

A forerunner of the many realistic contemporary novels that describe the problems of young people, **Harriet the Spy** is both hilarious and involving. The laughter comes as Harriet records her wry perceptions of the people around her in a notebook; the unsettling implications of that laughter become apparent only later, as Harriet confronts the anger of her friends when they discover what she has written about them.

Millions of Cats, by Wanda Gag.

Still as popular now as it was when first published in 1928, **Millions of Cats** was one of the first important American picture books and the first distinctively American one. It continues to be widely read, because of both its memorably repetitive text and its charmingly folk-like illustrations. This book admirably represents Wanda Gag's substantial contribution to literature for young children.

The Wind in the Willows, by Kenneth Grahame.

Grahame's river bank is a pastoral paradise inhabited by creatures with the instincts of animals and the manners of Edwardian gentlemen. The book is a nostalgic Utopia that subtly explores and contrasts the virtues of security and the temptations of adventure. Mr. Toad, of Toad Hall, is one of the great loveable fools of world literature, on a par with Falstaff and Don Quixote.

A Apple Pie, by Kate Greenaway.

This version of a traditional alphabet rhyme, which tells how an apple pie is cut, fought over, and quartered by the children who encounter it, represents the work of an important illustrator of the Victorian period. Greenaway's pictures for this book are some of her most effective. In her characteristically placid and elegant style, they are handsomely designed and delicately colored.

Household Tales, compiled by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

The brothers Grimm were responsible for the world's greatest collection of folk tales — not just because they collected these tales, but also, because they turned them into literature. Their versions of the simple tales they collected are great works of narrative art; they reveal in print what a good oral storyteller must have sounded like. The collection contains every kind of story: magical adventures of innocent princes and princesses, comic tales of stupid peasants and clever thieves, allegories about saints and animals.

The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus, by Joel Chandler Harris, compiled by Richard Chase.

Harris' attempts to record the Black dialect of his time in print may now seem old-fashioned, even a little condescending; but his versions of stories from the Black oral tradition of the American South are un-failingly exuberant and vastly entertaining. The sly humor of these stories implies a devastatingly anarchic attitude toward those with power or authority, an attitude much relished by many who feel powerless, especially children.

The Iliad and The Odyssey, by Homer, as retold by Padraic Colum in **The Children's Homer**.

Colum's sparse, elegant versions of Homer's great epic make it possible for children to have access to one of the great stories that underlies contemporary culture.

Across Five Aprils, by Irene Hunt.

As citizens of southern Illinois, the Creightons find themselves caught in the middle of the struggle between north and south during the Civil War. This novel authentically reveals the effects of war through the eyes of a youngster; it shows how innocence confronts and deals with the sometimes ugly ways of the world.

English Fairy Tales, collected by Joseph Jacobs.

Some of the tales Jacobs collected, such as "The Three Little Pigs," still form the basic foundation of a young child's literary experience; some of the lesser known tales are satisfyingly gruesome depictions of dragons and other monsters. Jacobs admirably captured in print the rhythms of a variety of the dialects of the British Isles.

The Snowy Day, by Ezra Jack Keats.

A simple story of a small boy's experiences on a snowy day in the city is noteworthy for its author/illustrator's sophisticated use of a collage of bright colors and shapes to enrich a text of few words. That the pictures show the boy to be Black without the text remarking on his color was a startling innovation in 1962. **The Snowy Day** continues to be noteworthy for the vibrancy of its collages, and its place at the beginning of a distinguished series of picture books about the same child.

Just So Stories, the Mowgli stories from **The Jungle Book**, and "Rikki Tikki Tavi," by Rudyard Kipling.

Kipling's special place in children's literature is represented by this group of quite different stories. The "Just So" stories charmingly tell how various animals obtained their distinctive features in rich imagery and outrageously exaggerated phrasing. The adventures of Mowgli, the boy raised among animals, are set in an exciting world where rules are strict and punishment for wrongdoers is swift. The story of how the brave mongoose Rikki-Tikki-Tavi fights the terrifying cobra is high drama, full of emotion and tension.

The Blue Fairy Book, compiled by Andrew Lang.

The first of a series of similar books in all colors of the rainbow, this distinguished collection of folk tales from several cultures was prepared by an eminent scholar of folklore. It represents a first flowering of the conviction that children might have a special understanding and appreciation of stories from the world's vast oral traditions. The judicious selections Lang made for **The Blue Fairy Book** in 1889 still stand as a guide to the variety of different kinds of folk tales that bring joy to children.

The Story of Ferdinand, by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson.

Ferdinand, the bull who prefers sitting quietly and just smelling flowers to fighting, is admirably captured both in Leaf's sardonic text and in Lawson's cleverly detailed cartoons. The book is less a savage indictment of foolish aggressiveness than a biting send-up of it; Leaf and Lawson's descriptions of the various bullfighters make them seem like thoroughly silly people.

Book of Nonsense, by Edward Lear.

The best-known works of an early master of what has become an important kind of children's verse: nonsense. As well as making the limerick famous by composing hundreds of masterful ones, Lear wrote narrative poems that imaginatively describe nonsensical characters in nonsensical situations, in strong rhymes and rhythms. His witty, cartoon-like illustrations perfectly convey the characters and events described in his verse.

A Wrinkle in Time, by Madelein L'Engle.

This thoughtful book, the first in a trilogy about the Murray family, shares an important characteristic of much science fiction written for young people: it tends to be more concerned with moral questions than is much adult science fiction. The Murrays wrestle with the powers of good and evil, love and hate, as they try to rescue their father from a "tesseract" — a wrinkle in time.

The "Narnia" series, by C.S. Lewis.

Many first-time readers don't notice the extent to which Lewis' books about Narnia are Christian allegories; like Bunyan's **Pilgrim's Progress**, these books may be enjoyed for the magic of their fantasy as well as for the intricacy and moral weight of their message. The inventiveness of Lewis' Narnia shows how old ideas may give life to new fictions.

Swimmy, by Leo Lionni.

The bold pictures for this book accompany and enrich a simple parable about cooperation; the vivid swirls of colors evoke the complex textures of moving water, and the clever repeated use of the same block prints many times within each picture admirably supports the book's theme. Lionni shows how the techniques and styles of non-narrative contemporary art may be adapted to the task of narrative illustration.

The Princess and the Goblin and **The Princess and Curdie**, by George MacDonald.

These books represent the richly textured, poetic work of George MacDonald, one of the great English fantasists of the last century. The Princess and Curdie are well-drawn characters who struggle with important questions: what it means to be human, what it means to be good, what it means to love and be loved. Generations of children have delighted in the clear, deep atmosphere of these mystical works.

Make Way for Ducklings, by Robert McCloskey.

McCloskey's expressive cartoons provide a bird's eye view of Boston, as a pair of ducks try to find a suitable place to raise their new flock of ducklings. These pictures cleverly use the various textures of just one color, a warm brown, to judiciously combine gentle warmth and slapstick humor.

One at a Time, by David McCord.

The collected works of a man often acclaimed as today's best American poet writing for children. The winner of the first National Council of Teachers of English Award for poetry, McCord writes serious poetry, nonsense, and light verse that both meets children where they are and broadens their horizons.

The "Pooh" books, by A.A. Milne, illustrated by Ernest Shepherd.

These amusing, affectionately told stories were written for the author's son Christopher Robin about his own teddy bear and other stuffed animal friends, in the friendly confines of the 100 Aker Wood. Their warmth, lightheartedness, and gentle, kindly reflections on human nature have kept them popular year after year. The Shepherd line drawings deliciously capture Milne's mood.

The Story of King Arthur and His Knights, retold and illustrated by Howard Pyle.

Generations of children have been thrilled and chilled by the noble and ignoble actions of Arthur and his dashing knights, and Pyle's nineteenth century versions of these stories still remain the most exciting. Pyle's storytelling is strong, straightforward, and full of lively dialogue. His diction suits the period impeccably, and his illustrator's eye makes his descriptions especially apt and vivid.

The Arthur Rackham Fairy Book.

A representative sampling of the various styles of the great English illustrator, who worked in the early years of this century. Line drawings, pictures in color, and silhouette work illustrate skillfully retold folk tales of various cultures that every child should know. Rackham's knotted, complicated lines give even the most densely detailed of his pictures energy.

Swallows and Amazons, by Arthur Ransome.

The first of a series of books which excel at depicting the true seriousness of children's games. Ransome's thoroughly British children are sturdy, imaginative, and witty, and he captures the depths of their feelings as well as the fun of their adventures. Precise, rich details of sailing and of topography never interfere with the exciting plots of Ransome's well-wrought books.

Where the Wild Things Are, by Maurice Sendak.

A subtle compendium of the various ways in which pictures can be made to tell stories, **Where the Wild Things Are** makes impeccable use of picture dynamics, framing, color, and shape, in the depiction of its charmingly horrid Wild Things and the equally horrid and only slightly less charming boy Max. The story of how Max becomes king of the Wild Things has as much psychological relevance as it has imaginative inventiveness. It represents the always innovative work of a great children's writer, and perhaps, the greatest of all illustrators of children's books.

The Five Hundred Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins, by Dr. Seuss.

An early example of the zany delights of the prolific Dr. Seuss, author and illustrator of book after book of sublime nonsense. As Bartholomew tries his best to show his respect to King Didd, hat after hat appears on his head; neither the executioner, the magicians, nor the wise men can solve the mystery, which, mysteriously, finally solves itself. Seuss's exuberant illustrations perfectly match the rhythm and the spectacular diction of his unique verbal style.

Heidi, by Johanna Spyri.

Heidi is as fresh and real today as it was in 1880, when it was first published in German. Generations of readers have been charmed by Heidi's unassuming good nature, her enjoyment of fresh air and sunshine, and her ability to soften her harsh old grandfather. Spyri's evocative descriptions of Swiss village life offer today's children a nostalgic view of another time and place.

Treasure Island, by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Jim Hawkins gets the exciting adventures he at first only yearns for, as he leaves the boring life of an isolated seaside inn and goes off in search of buried treasure. Jim's first-hand experience of the dastardly scheming of pirates persuades him that the boring life of home is best, but involved readers of this highly involving book may not find it easy to agree with him. The high point of the book is Stevenson's masterly and richly ambiguous portrayal of Long John Silver, at once the most dangerous and the most loveable villain in children's fiction.

The Hobbit, by J. R. R. Tolkien.

The first of Tolkien's books about a unique other world, and the only one originally intended for children, **The Hobbit** describes how Bilbo Baggins rescues the dwarfs' treasure from the evil dragon, Smaug. Tolkien's meticulous attention to detail manifests itself in maps of the territories covered, in evocative descriptions of strange beings and strange places, and in convincing references to a lengthy and complicated history of which this story is only a small part. Bilbo's moral growth as he learns more of the world gives this book a richness rare in children's fiction.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain.

Tom is anarchic boyishness personified; but his often comical and always brilliantly described adventures now satisfy readers as much for their evocation of a time and place now past as for their still convincing exuberance and energy. Underlying the comedy is a consideration of the darker aspects of life, a consideration that moves into the foreground in this book's sequel, one of the classics of American fiction, **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**.

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White.

In this classic American fantasy, a clever, resourceful spider saves the life of a pig by spinning into her web words that convince gullible humans of the pig's excellence. Strong characterizations, important themes of friendship, death, and the continuity of life, and a humorous and often poetic style skillfully combine to make this one of the outstanding books of our century.

When We Were Very Young and Now We Are Six, by A.A. Milne, illustrated by Ernest Shepherd.

Also written for Milne's son Christopher Robin, these well-crafted, humorous verses have fetchingly varied rhythms and cadences, and show remarkable insight into a small child's world. Shepherd's delicate but energetic line drawings perfectly complement the tone of the poems.

Anne of Green Gables, by Lucy Maud Montgomery.

Ann Shirley, the irrepressible orphan whose growth into maturity is a series of comic disasters, has been loved by generations of children. Montgomery not only makes this angelic representation of a once-common ideal of girlhood surprisingly believable; she also describes the Prince Edward Island setting in a way that makes it seem suitably paradisaical. As in many important Canadian books for both children and adults, the landscapes in **Anne of Green Gables** are often just as interesting as the people.

Mother Goose. (Recommended: the scholarly **Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes**, edited with fascinating notes by Iona and Peter Opie; numerous selections are available.)

The rhymes we associate with Mother Goose are a compendium of sounds and rhythms — a delightful introduction to the pleasures of spoken and heard language, of the joys of patterned noise. Most are quite devoid of meaning; and that has allowed many fine illustrators to exercise much ingenuity in their clever attempts to depict them.

The Story of the Treasure Seekers, by E. Nesbit.

The young Bastables' attempts to solve the financial problems of their family are the usual Nesbit blend of high comedy and high adventure; and the conceit of young Oswald Bastable, who tells the story himself, is a delightful evocation of the egocentricity and ingenuousness of childhood. Nesbit's children occupy a world where what adults call fantasy is as much a possibility as what adults call reality; both are approached with an equally matter-of-fact attitude.

The Borrowers, by Mary Norton.

Skillfully using the technique of a story within a story, Mary Norton convincingly describes an entire new species of her own invention. The Borrowers are little people who live within the walls of houses, and survive by "borrowing" from the owners of those houses; Norton brilliantly tells of their imaginative uses of quite ordinary objects. Her understanding of the psychological as well as the physical dimensions of smallness gives this and Norton's later books about the Borrowers a surprising subtlety.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, by Robert C. O'Brien.

A combination of animal fantasy and science fiction, O'Brien's novel describes the adventures of some rats whose intelligence has been raised in an experiment by human scientists. The book is as clever as the idea it is built around, and admirably shows how the pleasures of science fiction can be integrated into literature for younger children.

Tom's Midnight Garden, by Philippa Pearce.

When the clock strikes thirteen in the middle of the night, Tom travels back in time to a Victorian garden, where he plays with a lively little girl named Hatty. This imaginative fantasy moves artfully to merge past and present, with some suspense and with remarkably credible characters. The focus, surprisingly, is less on the mystery of Tom and Hatty's meeting than on the various games they play, and on their complex attitudes toward each other. Some critics consider this book to be the fantasy masterpiece of modern children's literature.

The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault. (Recommended: the complete version translated by A.E. Johnson, with illustrations by W. Heath Robinson: numerous selections and illustrated versions of individual tales are available.)

At the end of the seventeenth century, Perrault published the first printed versions of many of the best-loved fairy tales: Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, Puss in Boots. His versions offer, not only the simple delights of the tales themselves, but also, a sophisticated French courtier's tongue-in-cheek attitude toward them. Other versions of these stories are simpler; few are as delightfully ironic.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Beatrix Potter.

Each of Beatrix Potter's small books of animal stories is a distinguished example of picture book art. In their subtle depictions of creatures who are more than animals and yet not quite civilized enough to be humans, Potter's restrained illustrations and texts display infinite understanding of the child's world. **Peter Rabbit** is the first and, perhaps, the best loved of a long series of tales that charm young and old alike.

The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood, by Howard Pyle.

Generations of children have learned of Robin Hood through Pyle's lively versions of the ancient tales about him. Packed with delightful pseudo-Medievalisms such as "What ho, ye varlet," Pyle's versions of these tales turn the merry men into the world's oldest and tallest group of schoolboys, and the adventures of Robin into boyish, high-spirited fun.

The Sword in the Stone, by T.H. White

A humorous depiction of the early years of King Arthur, in which the great leader-to-be is still an insignificant lad with much to learn about life. The novel combines slapstick with a deeply imagined consideration of what young Wart learns and how he learns it. It's to White's credit that this novel, the first in a series about Arthur's life written for an adult audience, should be so much enjoyed by children.

The "Little House" series, by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

There is something of interest for readers of all ages in Wilder's painstakingly detailed books about her childhood in the early years of the American midwest. These books are not only an honest depiction of real hazards faced courageously, of the value of hard work, and of the love and warmth of family life; they also have a subtle poetry that gives shape and deep meaning to these true-life reminiscences.

Some Other Noteworthy Authors and Illustrators

While working on this list, the members of the committee considered many other books, and had many heated arguments about them. There was substantial disagreement about the merit of some books, and as a result, those books don't appear on the final list; other books have been published so recently that, even though there was general agreement about their worth, some committee members hesitated to make a judgment about their enduring significance. In some cases, also, members of the committee agreed that a writer or illustrator had made a substantial contribution to children's literature, but could not settle on one particular book that might be considered a touchstone. Because we found our discussion of these matters so stimulating, and in order to encourage further consideration and discussion of excellence in children's literature, we offer a second list: the names of noteworthy writers and illustrators we did not include in our choices, but whose work other people interested in children's literature might wish to make a case for.

Joan Aiken	Meindert DeJong	Pat Hutchins
Natalie Babbitt	Tomi dePaola	Trina Schart Hyman
Frank L. Baum	Jean de Brunhoff	Tove Jansson
Lucy Boston	Peter Dickinson	Charles Keeping
Nancy Eckholm Burkert	Leo and Diane Dillon	E.L. Konigsburg
Marcia Brown	Paula Fox	Ursula LeGuin
Margaret Wise Brown	Leon Garfield	Arnold Lobel
Eleanor Cameron	Alan Garner	Gerald McDermott
Barbara Cooney	Virginia Hamilton	William Mayne
Susan Cooper	Erik Haugaard	Katherine Paterson
Helen Cresswell	Molly Hunter	Ellen Raskin

Ivan Southall
Peter Spier
Rosemary Sutcliff

William Steig
P.L. Travers
Chris Van Allsburg

Jill Paton Walsh
Barbara Willard

If you'd like to read more about distinguished children's books, the ones listed in this pamphlet are discussed in more detail in **Touchstones for Children's Literature**, a collection of critical essays published by the Children's Literature Association. That book and further copies of this pamphlet are available from:

ChLA Publications
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Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN
USA 47907



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