

**Selected and annotated by Erica Eis**  
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Tired of damsels in distress and heroic braggadocios? Consider the following international anthologies and picture books featuring characters of other familiar species. No unicorns or dragons here—it's the ordinary animals who become the heroes of the day.

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**Asbjørnsen, Peter Christen.** *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*; illus. by Marcia Brown. Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1957. 3-6 yrs.

Asbjørnsen's simple text and Brown's expressive illustrations create a ready-to-tell tale for storytimes and read-alouds. Moments of italicized and capitalized text offer subtle suggestions for storytellers on how create tension and characterization throughout the tale, which paired with the brightly colored illustrations make this picture book an excellent choice for the beginning storyteller inexperienced at telling to toddler and preschool audiences.

**Adler, Naomi.** *The Dial Book of Animal Tales from Around the World*; illus. by Amanda Hall. Dial, 1996. Gr. 4-6.

Adler's text combines with Hall's illustrations to create a collection of nine folktales that are ready-to-tell to younger audiences with minimal adaptation. The book itself can be used during storytimes and as a read-aloud, because its colloquial tone and well-placed illustrations clearly reflect the folktale being presented. As an added bonus, Adler's "About the Stories" endnote reveals her sources to be fellow storytellers from the cultures represented, granting this anthology a sense of authority that makes it an excellent addition to any library or personal collection.

**Aesop.** *Aesop's Fables*; illus. by Jerry Pinkney. Sea Star, 2000. 5-8 yrs.

While not all of *Aesop's Fables* feature animals, several of them do, and Pinkney's illustrations bring each one of them to life. The text is simple but literary and the tales short, making this edition an excellent choice for transitional readers and read-alouds. Not all of the tales have illustrations, causing some to be more appropriate for read-alouds and others to be more useful for storytellers not tied to using a book during their telling.

**Bruchac, Joseph.** *How Chipmunk Got His Stripes: A Tale of Bragging and Teasing*; written by Joseph Bruchac and James Bruchac, illus. by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey. Dial, 2001. 4-7 yrs.

Bear boasts that he can stop the sun from rising and mischievous Brown Squirrel challenges him to prove it, resulting in an embarrassed Bear. Bear loses his temper at Brown Squirrel's subsequent teasing, lashing out in a fit that leaves Brown Squirrel a Chipmunk in the end. Young audiences will relate to both Bear and Chipmunk and be drawn in by Aruego and Dewey's illustrations of the animal characters, while Bruchac's straightforward narrative makes this picture book a good selection for storytime and read-alouds.

**Climo, Shirley.** *Monkey Business: Stories from Around the World*; illus. by Erik Brooks. Holt, 2005. Gr. 3-6.

Filled with several anecdotal asides, quotations, and illustrations, this comprehensive anthology of monkey tales from around the world serves most effectively as a research guide for the monkey enthusiast rather than a collection of ready-to-tell tales for the novice storyteller. With some work, however, storytellers may adapt these tales for younger live audiences while also making use of the supplementary material that Climo provides.

**DeSpain, Pleasant.** *Eleven Nature Tales: A Multicultural Journey*; illus. by Joe Shlichta. August House, 1996. [Age range n/a].

Pronunciation guides, vocabulary definitions, and storytelling suggestions from DeSpain (provided in the “Notes”) make this anthology of eleven ready-to-tell tales perfect for beginning storytellers. The sparse illustrations, brevity of the tales, and relatively simple language also create an opportunity for younger audiences to practice paying attention and for teachers and parents to practice their storytelling skills.

**Downard, Barry.** *The Little Red Hen*; written and illus. by Barry Downard. Simon, 2004. 3-6 yrs.

Fantastical and funny photographic illustrations pair with repeated phrases and vocabulary enrichment words like “wheat,” “miller,” and “dough” to make this adaptation of the well-known “Little Red Hen” tale a great selection for preschool and lower elementary storytimes and read-alouds. Fans of the *I Spy* series in particular may be intrigued by the illustrations, and audiences of all ages will appreciate the message of industry over laziness offered by the story (and that the lazy ones don’t get their desserts!).

**Grimm, Jakob Ludwig Karl.** *The Fox and the Cat: Kevin Crossley-Holland’s Animal Tales from Grimm*; illus. by Susan Varley. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1985. Gr. 3-5.

Crossley-Holland’s formal tone results in a text that reflects the Brothers Grimm source material, but also may not hold the attention of younger audiences on their own. Despite the occasionally dry text, Varley’s pleasant illustrations provide comforting stop points in the text for transitional readers and read-alouds, making this adapted-Grimm anthology a worthwhile alternative to Grimms’ original text.

**Hamilton, Virginia.** *When Birds Could Talk and Bats Could Sing: The Adventures of Bruh Sparrow, Sis Wren, and Their Friends*; illus. by Barry Moser. Blue Sky/Scholastic, 1996. Gr. 3-5.

Adapted from Martha Young’s collection of antebellum African American folktales, Hamilton’s conversational text paired with Moser’s illustrations create an anthology that reflects both African American southern culture and the animal characters’ personalities. Eight of the nine tales feature feathered characters, making this anthology an excellent alternative to the more common Brer Rabbit, Uncle Remus, and Lapin tales from the American South.

**Han, Suzanne Crowder.** *The Rabbit’s Escape*; illus. by Yumi Heo. Holt, 1995. 5-8 yrs.

Naïve Rabbit travels with Turtle to the bottom of the sea, where he must use his wit to escape a dangerous situation. This dual language picture book features both English and Korean texts accompanied by whimsical illustrations. Han’s introductory “Author’s Note” and residency in Korea authenticate her adaptation, making it an excellent addition to library collections and a great resource for storytellers.

**Ho, Minfong.** *Brother Rabbit: A Cambodian Tale*; illus. by Jennifer Hewitson. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1997. 5-8 yrs.

Brother Rabbit creates and solves many problems for himself in this Cambodian tale, in which the morally ambiguous hero triumphs over others in ways that some audience members may find unfair. Hewitson's illustrations reflect and illuminate the narrative, but their detail and lack of contrast could make them difficult to see from a distance. Ho's introductory "A Note About This Story" provides cultural context for the tale, but does not offer a specific source citation.

**Mora, Pat.** *The Race of Toad and Deer*; illus. by Domi. Greenwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 2001. 5-8 yrs.

Audiences of all ages will enjoy this adapted Guatemalan tale of camaraderie and perseverance. Mora seamlessly integrates Spanish vocabulary and Latin American culture into the predominantly English text, an effort well supported by Domi's vibrant watercolors. Although similar to "The Tortoise and the Hare," this tale focuses less on individual success and more on collective effort, creating an unexpected tone and message compared to what is normally presented by Western folktales.

**Reneaux, J.J.** *How the Animals Saved the People: Animal Tales from the South*; illus. by James Ransome. HarperCollins, 2001. Gr. 3-6.

Reneaux's collection of eight animal tales from the American South highlights the diversity within the storytelling heritage of the region. Written in dialect, the book has an informal tone that creates a sense of place and time and effectively captures American Southern culture. Reneaux provides a glossary and bibliography for storytellers unfamiliar with certain vernacular or backgrounds used in specific tales.

**Rosen, Michael.** *How the Animals Got Their Colors: Animal Myths from Around the World*; illus. by John Clementson. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992. 5-8 yrs.

Nine shorter tales written in everyday language make this anthology ready-to-tell and a good choice for preschool and lower elementary audiences. Clementson's bright, collage-like illustrations scream for this book to be used during craft storytimes, and could easily serve as inspiration for middle and high-school art and English classes. Rosen's "About These Stories" is an insufficient bibliography, lacking text and storyteller citations, and may require storytellers to do further research on individual tales.

**Ross, Gayle.** *How Turtle's Back Was Cracked: A Traditional Cherokee Tale*; illus. by Murv Jacob. Dial, 1995. 5-8 yrs.

Turtle finds himself in trouble when he boasts about his triumph over Wolf, angering Wolf's relatives. Neither Ross's text nor Jacob's illustrations take priority in this tale, which creates a sense of balance that will appeal to transitional readers and make the picture book a good selection for bedtimes and/or read-alouds. Ross's introductory "Author's Note" and closing "The Cherokee Nation" establish the tale's authenticity and provide historical context.

**Steptoe, John.** *The Story of Jumping Mouse*; written and illus. by John Steptoe. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1984. Gr. K-3.

Mouse decides to journey to "the far-off land," helping other animals he encounters along the way. Contemporary kids may find the black and white art a surprise, but they'll also realize that

the richly detailed scenes in this Caldecott Honor–winning title repay examination. Though there is unfortunately no source note for the tale, the story itself is a well-written and touching one, ready for adaptation from storytellers eager to provide a lesser-known and non-damsel tale of generosity and selflessness.

**Stevens, Janet.** *Coyote Steals the Blanket: A Ute Tale*; written and illus. by Janet Stevens. Holiday House, 1993. 4-8 yrs.

Strong-willed and arrogant Coyote refuses to listen to the advice of others. By ignoring Hummingbird's warning and stealing a blanket, he set in motion a series of trials and misfortunes for himself and all the animals he encounters along the way. The linear narrative, expressive illustrations, and excellent characterization of Coyote will capture the attention of younger audiences, although they may be surprised by the tale's morally ambiguous ending.

**Ward, Helen.** *The King of the Birds*; written and illus. by Helen Ward. Millbrook, 1997. 5-9 yrs. Birds from around the world gather to select their king in this adaptation of a traditional tale found in many cultures. Ward's colorful and realistic illustrations complement her minimal but expressive text to create a picture book that's perfect for younger audiences, while the tale's message of brains over brawn and beauty will appeal to audiences of all ages.

**Yeoman, John.** *The Singing Tortoise and Other Animal Folktales*; illus. by Quentin Blake. Tambourine, 1993. Gr. 4-6.

This anthology presents eleven animal tales that can easily be adapted for audiences of all ages, especially considering that some of the tales don't shy away from less-than-happy endings. Blake's illustrations provide stopping points in the text that make the book a good selection for transitional readers, but may not be large or frequent enough to keep the attention of younger readers during read-alouds. Yeoman's sparse and unprofessional citations offer little explanation of the tales' backgrounds and aren't up to current standards, making this anthology a better selection for independent reading and research than for use during public storytimes or storytelling events.