

Selected and annotated by Alice Mitchell
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Hi there! Have you heard about “meta” books? No? Well, they’re books that are aware that they’re books. Sometimes the characters talk to you, the reader! Isn’t that neat? Actors like calling this “breaking the fourth wall.” And now it’s reached the world of picture books. If you’re interested in reading some books that literally speak to you, check these ones out. Stories here range from age 3 to 3rd grade.

Barnett, Mac. *Count the Monkeys*; illus. by Kevin Cornell. Disney Hyperion, 2013. 32p. 4-7 yrs. The monkeys scamper off into the woods with the appearance of 1 King Cobra who is scared off in turn by 2 mongooses. (Mongese? No, mongooses.) The monkeys might come back if you turn the page, but suddenly there are 3 crocodiles, which scare off those mongooses. With each prompt to turn the page, more fierce animals show up. Does this book even have monkeys in it?

Bromley, Nick. *Open Very Carefully: A Book with Bite*; illus. by Nicola O’Byrne. Nosy Crow/Candlewick, 2013. 4-6 yrs.

This story about the Ugly Duckling quickly goes awry when a spiky tail crosses the scene. But the owner of that spiky tail keeps hiding behind the illustrations, staring out with a yellow eye. You should turn the page very carefully...what is a crocodile doing in this book? Oh goodness, he’s eating all the letters! The duckling has some ideas for the viewer to help get rid of that nasty croc.

Byrne, Richard. *This Book Just Ate My Dog!*; written and illus. by Robert Byrne. Holt, 2014. 32p. 4-7 yrs.

As Bella takes her dog for a stroll across the page, suddenly he disappears into the crease of the book! When her friend Ben stops by and investigates, the book eats him, too! The book even eats the Dog Rescue car. Bella decides to investigate herself and manages to send a note for help from the book, asking the viewer to turn the book on its side and shake, and shake, and shake Bella, her dog, Ben, and everyone else out of the book.

Campbell, Scott. *Hug Machine*; written and illus. by Scott Campbell. Atheneum, 2014. 32p. 4-7 yrs.

This little boy is the Hug Machine! He is the best at hugging! Hugs calm people down and cheer them up, and no one can resist! He hugs big things, small things, soft things, hard things, anything he can get his arms on! Nothing is too spiky or too big for the Hug Machine! Nothing can escape his cheerful (pizza-fueled) grasp – not even the audience!

Gravett, Emily. *Again!*; written and illus. by Emily Gravett. Simon, 2013. 28p. 4-6 yrs.

Nothing should stand in the way of a dragon listening to its favorite bedtime story – not even Mom or Dad. The little dragon keeps saying “Again!” asking for his favorite story about a dragon searching the skies at night before grabbing a princess to make into a pie. With every re-reading, the story gets shorter, and the poor storyteller gets more exhausted. When his parent

accidentally dozes off and can't be woken with shouts of "AGAIN!" the little dragon throws a temper tantrum and breathes fire straight through the storybook!

Freedman, Deborah. *By Mouse & Frog*; written and illus. by Deborah Freedman. Viking, 2015. 40p. 5-8 yrs.

Mouse woke up eager to tell a story, illustrating everything, when suddenly Frog jumps in and hijacks Mouse's story! With Frog's "help," Mouse's story about setting the table for tea turns into a story about setting a table for tea and cake and a king and eleven-and-a-half kinds of melty ice cream. When Mouse halts Frog's story, Frog dejectedly erases the illustrations of ice cream and the king, and Mouse completes the story in partnership with Frog.

Klassen, Jon. *This is Not My Hat*; written and illus. by Jon Klassen. Candlewick, 2012. 40p. 4-9 yrs.

This hat does not belong to this little fish. He stole it. From that big fish over there, who probably won't notice it's missing. Or that the little fish stole it. The little fish tells the viewer all of this, running into dense weeds to hide as the big fish gets closer and closer to finding his hat...and the little fish wearing it.

Lehrhaupt, Adam. *Warning: Do Not Open This Book!*; illus. by Matthew Forsythe. Wiseman/Simon, 2013. 40p. 4-7 yrs.

This book is pretty dangerous – there are monkeys inside waiting to get out. You should just stay on that page; it's a good page. A safe page. Why did you turn the page? The monkeys are loose now! Look at the mess they're making, illustrating their own forest to lounge in. You really shouldn't turn the page any more. There might be something even more frightening there.

McDonnell, Patrick. *A Perfectly Messed-Up Story*; written and illus. by Patrick McDonnell. Little, 2014. 33p. 3-5 yrs.

Louie's story starts with him strolling along through the meadow, but he is soon interrupted when a blob lands on the page directly in Louie's way and he asks, "Who would eat a jelly sandwich while reading my book?" As Louie's story gets more and more messy, with food and crayon scribbles, he gets more and more frustrated. Despondent over the fact that no one will want to read his messy book, he gives up telling his story, until he realizes that he loves his story, mess and all.

Novak, B.J. *The Book with No Pictures*. Dial, 2014. 48p. 4-7 yrs.

What use is a book with no pictures? That sounds boring. Except... everything that the book says, you have to read. Even if you have to say "Blorp" or "Blurp" or even sing! This book is already ridiculous and there are still more pages! But you can't stop reading it! That's the rule.

Schwarz, Viviane. *There are No Cats in This Book*; written and illus. by Viviane Schwarz. Candlewick, 2010. 28p. 3-6 yrs.

Viewers are greeted by three very polite cats who are off to see the world. They just have one small problem – they have to get out of the book first. First they try to push their way out, then they try to jump their way out, but nothing works! They sit and wish *really* hard, and...poof! When the cats come back, they've brought you a surprise.

Scieszka, Jon. *Battle Bunny*; by Jon Scieszka and Mac Barnett, and Alex; illus. by Matthew Myers but mostly Alex. Simon, 2013. 32p. Gr. 1-3.

Alex received a book from his Gran Gran called *Birthday Bunny*, but that doesn't really suit Alex's style. He jazzes up the old, saccharine book with new dialogue and illustrations about Battle Bunny. Battle Bunny's birthday is the perfect time to enact his Evil Plan since he got "super birthday powers over all my enemies." Not Crow, nor Badger, or even the President can stop Bunny's evil scheme!

Stott, Ann. *What to Do When You're Sent to Your Room*; illus. by Stephen Gilpin. Candlewick, 2014. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Being sent to your room is usually a bad thing, but Ben sees it as an opportunity and offers advice to other kids, winking at readers as he walks into his bedroom. Start by writing an apology note, and make sure you're prepared with snacks. He then recommends starting on a birthday list – all this time is good for making tough decisions about what video games you want. He makes faces at his brother in the backyard, and practices his special-ops skills. But he can always count on his brother getting in trouble to earn him an early release.

Tullet, Hervé. *Mix It Up!*; written and illus. by Hervé Tullet. Handprint/Chronicle, 2014. 64p. 3-6 yrs.

Viewers have the magic touch in this book that invites youngsters to interact with the pages themselves. The audience has to tap the book, and rub colors into each other, and smudge paints together, with everything teaching kids about mixing colors together to make new colors. Once viewers know how to mix red, yellow, and blue together to make orange, purple, and green, they get to have some real fun, shaking the book, tilting it, and squishing the pages together to make the colors mix.

Underwood, Deborah. *Here Comes the Easter Cat*; illus. by Claudia Rueda. Dial, 2014. 80p. 5-7 yrs.

Cat is grumpy. Really, he's jealous. Easter is coming, and everyone loves the Easter Bunny! The narrator suggests that Cat become the Easter Cat... not to deliver hairballs to kids, but to deliver chocolate eggs! Chocolate bunnies would be nice, but don't bite their heads off! Cat comes up with idea after idea about how to become Easter Cat, until the Easter Bunny itself pays Cat a visit.

Underwood, Deborah. *Here Comes Santa Cat*; illus. by Claudia Rueda. Dial, 2014. 88p. 5-7 yrs.

Cat is at it again – now dressed like Santa! Cat has been naughty this year and, afraid that Santa wouldn't give him a present, needs to make sure that he still gets one, even if he gives it to himself. When the narrator questions whether Cat is really up to being Santa, Cat jumps to the challenge. He might not have flying reindeer, but jetpacks work...decently well. Then Cat tries being nice, but his efforts fall flat. Will Cat ever get a present?

Willems, Mo. *We Are in a Book!*; written and illus. by Mo Willems. Hyperion, 2010. 57p. Gr. K-1.

Gerald and Piggie are enjoying their day, when Gerald realizes that someone is watching them. Not just anyone... and it's not even a monster. They are being read by the reader! With a

cry of “A reader is *reading* us!” they realize that they are living in a book and start playing with the reader before asking to be read again.