

# Children's books that will capture kids' imagination

BY SAMANTHA CRITCHELL  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Looking around their cluttered playrooms, parents might complain that their children have too many toys. It's rare, though, to hear the same thing about books. In fact, many adults would probably say kids can't have too many books.

Are books the perfect holiday gift for the children on your list?

They're probably something you'll feel good about giving, and the kids will feel good about receiving — especially some of the special books that seem a notch above those that children typically have access to at school or the library.



"Dog Train" (Workman) by Sandra Boynton gives extra punch to its punch with an accompanying CD featuring kid-friendly music by Blues Traveler, Hootie and the Blowfish, Spin Doctors, and a duet by film actress Kate Winslet and "Weird" Al Yankovic.

The book is essentially a songbook, with lyrics woven into illustrations featuring Boynton's familiar furry creatures. She's the author and artist behind board-book favorites "Pajama Time," "Barnyard Dance" and "Snuggle Puppy," among others.

"Dog Train" is a follow-up to "Philadelphia Chickens," a book-CD combination that had the look and sound of a big Broadway musical. The new effort is a lot more rock 'n' roll.

Boynton says she picked some of the contributing musical artists based on guidance from her then 19-year-old son Devin when

they took a cross-country trip. "He suggested Mark Lanegan for 'Sneakers,' and Mark was perfect," she says.

Does a rock book and CD make her a "cool mom"? "I think I'm getting there. Bringing my kids to see the Spin Doctors sure raises my position," Boynton says with a laugh.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Boynton introduces a new generation to Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, who sing "Boring Song."

"I'm enjoying the cross-pollination aspect of this. It's something parents and kids can like together," Boynton says.

Other potential gift books: "Winter's Tale" (Little Simon, \$26.95) by Robert Sabuda.

An elaborate pop-up book of winter scenes. The stark white paper works well as a metaphor for snow, especially when jazzed up with a little glitter. The final scene is an intricate landscape complete with a cozy house in the woods, scurrying animals, pine trees and bare birches — which look a bit like candy canes.

Another gift-worthy Sabuda pop-up book is "Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Dinosaurs" (Candlewick, \$26.99, ages 5 and up), which

he co-wrote and engineered with Matthew Reinhart.

"Christmas in New York" (Bulfinch Press, \$35) by Chuck Fischer. New York's famous holiday scenes make a house call in this bright and cheery pop-up book. It opens with the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall and ends at Times Square on New Year's Eve. It's not only pretty pictures here, though, as Fischer includes interesting tidbits and historical facts, including a list of tree lighting ceremonies and examples of store windows from the 1930s through the present.

"Can You See What I See? The Night Before Christmas" (Cartwheel/Scholastic, \$13.99) by Walter Wick.

This book is filled with hidden treasures that families can search for together. Clement C. Moore's "The Night Before Christmas" is the inspiration for photo compositions that are accompanied by lists of all the objects that make up the scene. Most are a list longer than "The 12 Days of Christmas."

"The Creative Company Presents The Adventures of Pinocchio" (Creative Editions, \$19.95) by Carlo Collodi and Roberto

Innocenti.

The story of the boy puppet, his desire to become real and his sometimes-mischievous ways is a familiar one, but in this book it's treated differently. It's more sophisticated and more subtle than the Walt Disney version. The language is nostalgic and its prose has a rhythm that's reminiscent of poetry.

"Cinderella: A Pop-Up Fairy Tale" (Little Simon, \$24.95) by Matthew Reinhart.

Cinderella's dream come true is even bigger and shinier with Reinhart's oversized silver coach and tall, proud white horses as accessories. He also figured out a way to make the cardboard characters — or, more likely, sturdy paper characters — spin, twirl and groove at the prince's ball.

"Treasury of Inspirational Stories for Children" (St. Martin's Press, \$12.95) by James Herriot.

"Moses the Kitten," "Bonny's Big Day" and "The Market Square Dog" are among the stories told by a country veterinarian in this collection, first published in the 1970s. The underlying theme of all the stories is a love of life and living creatures.

"Babar's World Tour" (Abrams, \$16.95) by Laurent de Brunhoff.

Beloved Babar, now a 75-year-old elephant, takes a world tour with his wife Celeste and their children in this newest book. They visit Germany, Russia, Spain, Thailand — for snorkeling, of course — and make it to France for a fashion show. Though the illustrations are simple, seemingly done with the eyes of children in mind, they still capture what's truly memorable about seeing an Anasazi cliff house in the American Southwest or Red Square in Moscow.

"The Art Book For Children" (Phaidon Press, \$19.95). This isn't a child's first art book, it's more like a second or third, delving deeper into works by



famous artists, including Leonardo da Vinci, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso and Jeff Koons. It explains that Katsushika Hokusai was obsessed with Japan's Mount Fuji and how Rembrandt van Rijn tried to "paint" feelings.

"One Red Dot" (Little Simon, \$19.95) by David Carter.

This pop-up book focuses on optics, graphics and careful paper engineering. There really isn't a story except to follow one red dot that finds its way onto orbs, puzzle boxes and "wobble-wobble widgets" on each eye-catching page. Youngsters might add some additional narration: "How did they do that?!"

"Mary Engelbreit's Mother Goose" (HarperCollins, \$19.99) by Mary Engelbreit.

Engelbreit's happy, homespun artistic style likely will be recognized by children, even if some of the rhymes are not. She includes 100 of Mother Goose's verses covering old favorites such as Little Bo-Peep and Old King Cole to the more obscure Lucy Locket and Terrence McDiddler.

"Almost Every-thing" (Roaring Brook Press, \$19.95) by Joelle Jolivet with text by Laura Jaffe and translated by Alexis Siegel.

Consider this a youngster's first reference book. It covers zulu huts and 17th-century French musketeers, and forklifts and Canadair water bombers. Words, though, are kept to a minimum in a glossary on the final pages; instead, the book "explains" the world and all it holds through detailed illustrations.

"Thomas the Tank Engine Story Collection" (Random House, \$29.95) by the Rev. W. Awdry.

Over the past 60 years, Thomas the Tank Engine has picked up legions of fans. The 14 stories in this book are from Awdry's classic Railway Series and feature original art of C. Reginald Dalby and John Kenney. The tales themselves are charming and the slightly British, slightly outdated tongue make them even more so.

"Galileo's Universe" (Creative Editions, \$17.95) by J. Patrick Lewis and illustrated by Tom Curry.

Galileo's significant scientific discoveries and "high-tech" inventions from four centuries ago are recalled in a series of poems and pop-up artwork. The pendulum that fascinated Galileo as a boy might do the same for a young reader today.

"Christmas in New York" is a pop-up book by Chuck Fischer.



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