

THE BEST PICTURE BOOKS 2021

1. **Avocado Asks** by Momoko Abe. Avocado feels great about life until someone in the grocery store asks. . . “is this a fruit or a vegetable?” Cue the identity crisis!
2. **Over in the Woodland** by Nicole Abreu and Shau Abreu, illustrated by Susanna Covelli. This mythological spin on the classic nursery rhyme “Over in the Meadow” is a really fun read aloud, plus my girls LOVED finding the baby griffin hidden on each page.
3. **The Boy and the Sea** by Camille Andros, illustrated by Amy June Bates. If you can’t visit the beach this summer, this stunning picture book will make you feel like you’re there, as a little boy visits the sea throughout his life.
4. **Can Bears Ski?** by Raymond Antrobus, illustrated by Polly Dunbar. Little Bear is very tuned into his world – he can feel the floor shake and his bed rumble. But he also feels like he might be missing something. When Dad Bear takes him to see an audiologist so he can get hearing aids, he realizes the world can be LOUD.
5. **Bunnies on the Bus** by Phillip Ardagh, illustrated by Ben Mantle. This rollicking rhyming book is a total read-aloud delight.
6. **What’s the Matter, Marlo?** by Andrew Arnold. When a friend discovers Marlo in the yard, he’s excited to play. But Marlo is furious for some reason. It turns out that fury might be masking some deep sorrow.
7. **I’ll Be the Water** by Alec Aspinwall, illustrated by Nicole Wong. This one, about the love between a grandfather and grandchild, is a total tear-jerker. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.
8. **Girl Versus Squirrel** by Hayley Barrett, illustrated Renée Andriani. When a little girl sets out three bird feeders in the backyard, she’s dismayed when a squirrel starts eating from one of the feeders. She keeps making it more and more inaccessible, but the squirrel is determined!
9. **What Miss Mitchell Saw** by Hayley Barrett, illustrated by Dianan Sudyka. This terrific picture book biography follows Maria Mitchell from her childhood watching the stars at night until the day she discovered a comet no one had ever seen before and how she became America’s first professional female astronomer.
10. **Where is My Balloon?** by Ariel Bernstein, illustrated by Scott Magoon. Owl has a balloon and Monkey has a sock. Everyone is happy. Until Owl asks Monkey to hold his balloon for a moment and while Owl is gone. . . the balloon pops!
11. **If You Come to Earth** by Sophie Blackall. I love everything Sophie Blackall does and this book is no exception.
12. **Where’s My Turtle** by Barbara Bottner, illustrated by Brooke Boynton Hughes. Archer has lost his turtle! His mom is convinced it must be around somewhere, probably in Archer’s untidy bedroom. My girls LOVED finding the turtle hiding on each page while Archer looks for his missing pet.
13. **Mr. Complain Takes the Train** by Wade Bradford, illustrated by Stephan Britt. You won’t be surprised to hear that Mr. Complain . . . likes to complain. As he takes a train ride to his vacation destination, everything is a bit too loud

- or too sad or too bumpy. But as the train nears the destination, Mr. Complain says something he's never said before. "Wahooooo!"
14. **Rocket Says Look Up! by Nathan Bryon, illustrated by Dapo Adeola.** Rocket can't wait for the celestial display in the night sky and puts out signs inviting her community to join her. But most of all, she wants her brother to come watch too.
 15. **Another Book about Bears by Laura Bunting, illustrated by Philip Bunting.** Look, there are just TOO MANY books about bears. The bears just want a break from having to be the star of so many stories. Couldn't another animal take their place?
 16. **Me and Mama by Cozbi A. Cabrera.** A rainy day might seem like no fun, but with a loving mother, a gloomy drizzly day can be full of loving adventures at home between a mother and a daughter.
 17. **Ten Ways to Hear Snow by Cathy Camper, illustrated by Kenard Pak.** On a snowy day, a little girl sets out to visit her grandmother and notices all the different sounds that snow can make.
 18. **Bodega Cat by Louie Chin.** Chip is a bodega cat and he is one busy cat, keeping everything afloat. Well, it's possible that the Matos family does a bit of the work keeping the bustling bodega running all day long and it's ALSO possible that Chip may *occasionally* sneak a nap on top of the snacks, but everyone knows who really runs the show here.
 19. **Let's Get Sleepy! by Tony Cliff.** A family of cats is on the lookout for a little mouse named Sleepy. But no matter where they go, they can't seem to spot him! Your little readers will probably be sharper-eyed though and able to locate this tricky mouse on each spread.
 20. **The Yawns Are Coming by Christopher Eliopoulos.** Two friends are anxiously awaiting all the fun they have planned for their sleepover. There CERTAINLY won't be time for actual sleeping. But then, long before the night is over, the yawns attack. And they can't be fought off forever.
 21. **If I Were a Dog by Joanna Cotler.** If you were a dog, you might be shy or you might be snuggly or you might be energetic. But just like you are now, you'd be very very loved.
 22. **Waiting Together by Danielle Dufayet.** This charming picture book is for every child who has ever had to wait MUCH longer than they wanted for cookies to be done, for rain to stop, for a friend to play.
 23. **I Got You a Present! by Mike Erskine-Kellie.** Your birthday is here and of course your friend Duck wanted to get you the best present ever. But . . . it was not easy finding the best present ever.
 24. **The Barnabas Project by Terry Fan, illustrated by Devin Fan.** Barnabas lives in a lab below ground where perfect pets are created. But Barnabas isn't perfect and one day his little home is stamped with the word "FAIL." Instead of waiting around to be discarded, he and his other imperfect friends escape.
 25. **Swashby and the Sea by Beth Ferry, illustrated Juana Martinez-Neal.** Swasby is a grumpy old man who is NOT enthusiastic about his new young neighbor. He keeps leaving notes in the sand for her (mostly of the "go away" type) but the sea takes matters into its own hands and changes those notes into welcoming ones.

26. **Don't Hug Doug** by Carrie Finison, illustrated by Daniel Wiseman. Doug does NOT like hugs. He's fine with a high five or a wave, but please don't try to hug him. This is a lighthearted and delightful book about personal space and body autonomy.
27. **Dozens of Doughnuts** by Carrie Finison, illustrated by Brainne Farley. LouAnn is making doughnuts and she can't wait to enjoy them! Of course, when a friend knocks on the door, she's happy to share. Just as the two sit down to gobble them up. . . another knock. Will LouAnn get ANY doughnuts?
28. **Keeping the City Going** by Brian Floca. You probably know Brian Floca from his Caldecott win a few years ago – this newest book shows the people and vehicles that kept a busy city going during the pandemic.
29. **Noodlebear** by Mark Gravas. Bear skipped hibernating and instead spent the winter eating noodles and watching noodle eating contests on television. And when he runs out of noodles, he decides it's time to head to the big city and try one of those contests for himself.
30. **Sun Flower Lion** by Kevin Henkes. It's hard not to love a Kevin Henkes book and this one, with spare colors and tiny brief chapters (each one is about 2-3 pages) is such a fun early picture book.
31. **Stegothsaurus** by Bridget Heos, illustrated by T.L. McBeth. Stegothsaurus loves words. His brothers prefer succinct dialogue, so Stegothsaurus is thrilled when he finds a new dinosaur friend—an *allothsaurus*—who is equally verbose. But things take an unexpected turn when it's mealtime and Stegothsaurus discovers what his new friend enjoys eating.
32. **Eyes That Kiss in the Corners** by Joanna Ho, illustrated by Dung Ho. This is a STUNNING picture book and one where you'd be hard pressed to decide whether you love the text or the illustrations better. It follows a young girl who notices that the shape of her eyes is different than some of her peers and realizes that her eyes are like her mother's and her grandmother's. If I was forced to choose a single best picture book of 2021, it'd probably be this one.
33. **Dirt Cheap** by Mark Hoffmann. Birdie is very anxious to earn some money so she can buy a new soccer ball. But. . . what could she do to earn that money? It turns out that dirt is a gold mine!
34. **A New Kind of Wild** by Zara Gonzalez Hoang. Ren loves living with his grandmother where the outdoors provide an endless imaginative playground. But when he moves to the city, he discovers – thanks to his new friend Ava – that the city can also feel magical and wild!
35. **Butterflies Belong Here** by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Meilo So. This is a fantastic story about how butterflies are struggling and how a young girl, trying to find her own place to belong in a new country, helps make a home for butterflies in her new community.
36. **Grace and Box** by Kim Howard, illustrated by Megan Lotter. Have you ever had a child love the box more than the gift inside? Then your child will love this book that explores all the ways a child can use a box.
37. **What's That Noise?** by Naomi Howarth. Magnus is a seal who awakened by a really loud noise. All his friends are anxious to help but none of them can identify what that sound might be. Until Walrus points out it might be Magnus' rumbling tummy.

38. **This Is MY Room!: (No Tigers Allowed)** by Jennifer Richard Jacobson, illustrated Alexandria Neonakis. Jojo is excited about finally having her own room. But . . . what is she going to do about the wild animals that keep sneaking into her room? Her surprising solution to the persistent tiger visitor is a delight!
39. **Even the Smallest Will Grow** by Lita Judge. Everything tiny grows bigger, from a seed to a little baby. It's a sweet, peaceful book that's a perfect baby gift or bedtime story.
40. **Roar!** by Katerina Kerouli. My girls are all obsessed with this lift-the-flap books exploring the sounds different animals make.
41. **More-igami** by Dory Kleber, illustrated by G. Brian Karas. When a little boy learns about origami at school, he desperately wants to get better at it. But his family quickly tires of EVERYTHING in the house getting folded. Until he finds an outlet for his new passion at a local restaurant with an understanding owner.
42. **The Elephants Come Home** by Tom Komsic, illustrated by Hadley Hooper. This incredible true story about a couple who helped protect a group of elephants is absolutely stunning.
43. **Digging for Words** by Angela Burke Kunkel, illustrated by Paola Escobar. This true story about a man who finds books that are being discarded and then creates a free library for others in his community to enjoy is beautifully illustrated and wonderfully told.
44. **A Day So Gray** by Marie Lamba, illustrated by Alea Marley. Do you only see the grayness of a gloomy day or are you able to spot the bright surprises just waiting to be discovered even on a winter day? This book is beautiful and a wonderful way to talk about seeking out the good.
45. **My Tree** by Hope Lim. When a little boy moves from Korea, he finds comfort in the beautiful tree in his backyard which provides endless entertainment.
46. **Mayhem at the Museum** by Luciano Lozano. When a young girl visits the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art with her class, it's not quiet and still like you might imagine, as the world-famous paintings and sculptures come to life in delightful ways.
47. **Ronan the Librarian** by Tara Luebbe and Becky Cattie, illustrated by Victoria Maderna. Ronan is a mighty barbarian and is always bringing home incredible finds from his raids to trade with his community. But when he brings home a book, he can't find a single person who wants it.
48. **The Camping Trip** by Jennifer K. Mann. Told in comic-style panels, this is the story of Ernestine's first camping trip with her aunt and cousin. She's excited but it's also all a little new and scary!
49. **Ella and the Penguin Stick Together** by Megan Maynor, illustrated by Rosalinde Bonnet. Ella is thrilled when she gets glow-in-the-dark stickers and can't wait to share them with her best friend Penguin. But glow-in-the-dark requires. . . dark. And neither of them are very excited about the dark.
50. **We Wait for the Sun** by Katie McCabe, illustrated by Raissa Figueroa. Based on a true story, this follows a little girl and her grandmother who quietly go out in the night to pick blackberries and watch the sun rise.
51. **Firefighters' Handbook** by Megan McCarthy. If you have a child who loves firefighters, this is a really delightful book about what it takes to become a firefighter.

52. **When the Babies Came to Stay** by Christine McDonnell, illustrated by Jeanette Bradley. If my four-year-old was choosing HER best picture book of 2021, this would likely be her choice. Four infants arrive on a small island with notes asking that they be taken care of. The librarian brings them into her home and together, they create a new family.
53. **Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away** by Meg Medina, illustrated by Sonia Sanchez. This picture book perfectly captures the emotions when a beloved friend has to move away.
54. **Oh Look a Cake!** by J.C. McKee. If you love the dark humor of Jon Klassen's books, you'll enjoy this one too. We've been reading this delicious picture book nonstop!
55. **Sweet Pea Summer** by Hazel Mitchell. When a little girl's mother is sick, her dad takes her to spend the summer with her grandparents. She struggles with her worries about her mother until her grandfather recruits her to help him in his beautiful backyard garden.
56. **Two for Me, One For You** by Jörg Mühle. Bear is delighted to find three delicious mushrooms and brings them back so her friend Weasel can fry them up. But which of them should get two and which of them should get one? Both of them have compelling reasons why they should be the one to get the bigger portion.
57. **Such a Library!** by Jill Ross Nader, illustrated by Esther Van Den Berg. You know that Yiddish story about the man who feels his house is too small and cramped and the advice he gets is to bring a bunch of animals in? This is a spin on that story where a little boy goes to the library to find some quiet and can't stop hearing the turning of pages, the tapping of keys, and other noisy sounds!
58. **Itzhak: A Boy Who Loved the Violin** by Tracy Newman, illustrated by Abigail Halpin. I love a good picture book biography and this one, about one of the most famous violinists of all time, is terrific and inspiring.
59. **Our Favorite Day** by Joowon Oh. Told with beautiful cut-paper illustrations, this is the story of Papa who follows the same routine every day. Except for Thursday, because it's a very special day. The day when his beloved granddaughter comes to visit.
60. **Maud and Grand-Maud** by Sara O'Leary, illustrated by Kenard Pak. A little girl loves going to spend the night with her grandmother and imagines the day when she'll have her own grandchildren come to visit.
61. **A Little Space for Me** by Jennifer Gray Olson. Some people need a little space. And some people need a lot of space. This whimsical story of how a little girl finds space in her busy household is a perfect way to introduce the idea of personal space and quiet to a child.
62. **The Clothesline** by Orbie, illustrated by Karen Li. A little boy loves going to the store to buy candy and when he heads down, his favorite thing is to give the clothesline a good tug and hear the funny sounds it makes. Except one day, he gets stuck on the clothesline and it looks like he'll never be able to get down!
63. **Hike** by Pete Oswald. I LOVE this nearly wordless book of a small child and dad getting up early in the morning to spend the day hiking together. There are endless beautiful details to look at and the parent-child relationship is so tender.

64. **Mucky Truck** by Ammi-Joan Paquette, illustrated by Elisa Ferro. If you have a child who loves Little Blue Truck, this is a perfect other picture book to try!
65. **Bee-Bim Bop!** by Linda Sue Park, illustrated by Ho Baek Lee. Is there anything better than a dinner when your favorite dish is being made? I love this charming story about a favorite Korean meal.
66. **How to Catch a Clover Thief** by Elise Parsley. Roy is DELIGHTED that his patch of clover is growing. But every time he turns around, the clover disappears! Is it possible that his gopher neighbor is the one stealing it? And if so, how can he catch that clover thief?
67. **No Ordinary Jacket** by Sue-Ellen Pashley, illustrated by Thea Baker. If you've ever had a beloved blanket or item of clothing that got worn out, you'll love this sweet book about how a well-loved jacket gets a second life.
68. **Peace** by Baptiste Paul and Miranda Paul, illustrated by Estelí Meza. There are so many ways – big and small – to bring peace to the world, even if you're a little child. This beautiful book quietly describes some of them.
69. **Rectangle Time** by Pamela Paul, illustrated by Becky Cameron. A family cat LOVES rectangle time, when the boy and the dad pull out a large rectangle (i.e. a book). But as the boy grows older, the rectangles keep getting smaller. And quieter. Do they still need the cat during Rectangle Time?
70. **Mr. Brown's Bad Day** by Lou Peacock, illustrated by Alison Friend. Mr. Brown is an important tiger with an important job at an important office. And his important briefcase never leaves his side. Until one day, during his lunch break, when that very important briefcase is accidentally taken. And it is VITAL that Mr. Brown gets that briefcase back because it contains the most important things of all.
71. **Cougar Crossing: How Hollywood's Celebrity Cougar Helped Build a Bridge for City Wildlife** by Meeg Pincus, illustrated by Alexander Vidal. I'd never heard this true story about a cougar that lived in Los Angeles, successfully crossed 16 lanes of busy freeway traffic, and became famous throughout the city but I was utterly fascinated by it!
72. **The Boy Who Loved Everyone** by Jane Porter. When a little boy goes to school, he tells everyone – from the lunch lady to the guinea pigs – that he loves them. But when he tells his mother that no one said it back to him, she explains that we all show love in different ways and points out some sweet examples.
73. **Three Squeezes** by Jason Pratt, illustrated by Chris Sheban. I'll tell you what, get your Kleenex out for this touching story of a dad who, from the day his baby comes home from the hospital, uses three gentle squeezes to communicate his love and support.
74. **The Old Truck** by Jerome Pumphrey, illustrated by Jarrett Pumphrey. On a small family farm, a little pickup works right alongside the family until it becomes too old and finds a resting spot where it quietly rusts away. But years later, the young daughter is grown-up and takes on the task of restoring the faithful old truck.
75. **One Fox** by Kate Read. Calling a counting book a thriller might seem like a stretch. . . until you read this one. It truly is!
76. **On Account of the Gum** by Adam Rex. When a young girl gets gum stuck in her hair, everyone has an idea of how to get it out, most of them more wacky

and improbable than the one before until the gum is the least of the problems with her hair!

77. **Unstoppable** by Adam Rex, illustrated by Laura Park. My children all laughed their faces off as we read this book on repeat about a bunch of animals wishing for different abilities.
78. **Sky Color** by Peter H. Reynolds. Marisol loves painting and can't wait to help with the mural for the school library. Her assignment is the sky but there's no blue paint. How is supposed to paint a beautiful sky without any blue?
79. **Try It! How Frieda Caplan Changed the Way We Eat** by Mara Rockliff, illustrated by Giselle Potter. You probably know bananas and apples. But do you know kiwi? How about purple asparagus? And how did those things even get on the grocery store shelf? This fun book explores how one woman brought more variety to our dinner plates!
80. **Mootilda's Bad Mood** by Coren Rosen Schwartz and Kirsti Call, illustrated by Claudia Ranucci. It's a bad day at the farm for Mootilda who has woken up in a very bad mooood! Filled with hilarious puns, this picture book makes a terrific read aloud (emphasis on the LOUD).
81. **I'm a Hare, So There!** by Julie Rowan-Zoch. When a hare in the desert is called a rabbit, he's quick to point out the differences between himself and a rabbit. Which leads to a snappy discussion of other animals that look similar but aren't the same!
82. **Share Some Kindness, Bring Some Light** by Apryl Scott. All the animals in the forest are afraid of Bear, despite Coco's attempts to show them how kind and fun Bear really is. But when Bear helps out a small deer stuck in a snowstorm, it might be just what the animals needed to convince them that Bear truly is a good friend to have.
83. **Jules v. the Ocean** by Jessie Sima. Jules is set on making the most incredible sandcastle there ever was. But the ocean? Well, it's not playing nice.
84. **The Ramble Shamble Children** by Christina Soontornvat, illustrated Lauren Castillo. A family of children love their rundown home until they read a book that features a proper house and they wonder. . .should we make our house more proper?
85. **Simon at the Art Museum** by Christina Soontornvat, illustrated by Christine Daveneir. Simon is delighted to be spending the day at the art museum with his parents. Except their idea of visiting the art museum involves a lot more looking at art and a lot less sliding around on slippery marble floors.
86. **Khalil and Mr. Hagerty and the Backyard Treasures** by Tricia Springstubb, illustrated by Elaheh Taherian. Khalil lives in a noisy apartment with his family and his favorite escape is going out to the yard to look for buried treasure. His downstairs neighbor, Mr. Hagerty, also spends a lot of time outside, taking care of his garden, and despite their differences, the two become good friends.
87. **Bunny Built** by Michael Slack. Bunny is anxious for some carrots, but he can't find any! Until he grows the most enormous carrot ever and now has to decide how to use it wisely.
88. **The Runaway No-Wheeler** by Peter Stein, illustrated by Bob Staake. This boisterous picture book follows a truck through one mishap after another.

89. **Don't Feed the Coos!** by Jonathan Stutzman, illustrated by Heather Fox. The Coos (i.e. pigeons) LOOK darling but if you feed them? You'll never get rid of them!
90. **Snail Crossing** by Cory R. Taber. When a delicious cabbage appears on the other side of the road, Snail will do whatever it takes to get there. Until stopping to help some small friends derails him and it looks like his cabbage dreams might be gone for good.
91. **The Black and White Factory** by Eric Telchin, illustrated by Diego Funck. Are you ready for a tour of the Black and White Factory? No colors – not ANY – allowed. But wait. . . . something is malfunctioning. Is that color in the Black and White Factory?
92. **Free** by Sam Usher. When a little boy finds a sick bird, he and his grandpa take care of it and then set it free. But it keeps coming back, eventually leading the two humans to an incredible bird symphony.
93. **Scarlet's Tale** by Audrey Vernick. When Scarlet is born, her parents are delighted by their beautiful new baby. And a bit surprised to discover that she has a long fluffy fox tail.
94. **Marjory Saves the Everglades** by Sandra Neil Wallace, illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon. Having recently visited the Everglades for the first time, I was fascinated by this non-fiction picture book about how they almost disappeared forever. And how one woman spent her life trying to save them.
95. **Hello Jimmy!** by Anna Walker. Jack loves going to his dad's house. They have the best time together! But is his dad lonely when Jack isn't there? Then Jimmy, a chatty parrot, arrives at suddenly Jack wonders if it was better when his dad was a bit lonely.
96. **That's Not Bunny!** by Fiona Watt. Hawk keeps flying down to catch his prey but every time he comes up with a vegetable instead of the bunny he really wants for dinner.
97. **Awesomely Emma** by Amy Webb, illustrated by Merrilee Liddiard. This book clearly and beautifully shows how all of us are different (in the case of this book, Emma is a little girl in a wheelchair with limb differences).
98. **Saturdays are for Stella** by Candy Wellins, illustrated by Charlie Eve Ryan. George's favorite day of the week is Saturday because it's the day he spends with his beloved Grandma Stella, having adventures in the city and at home. And then, one day, Stella is gone and Saturdays are full of heartache for George. Until a new member of the family arrives that might help ease his aching heart.
99. **Sheepish (Wolf Under Cover)** by Helen Yoon. A wolf cleverly dresses up as a wolf, determined to snag himself a mutton dinner. But what happens as he gets to know the sheep?
100. **Harry and the Guinea Pig** by Gene Zion, illustrated Margaret Bloy Graham. Harry is not delighted when the neighbor's guinea pig comes over because no one seems interested in HIM anymore! But then a day at show and tell gives Harry a chance to see that his family still loves him .