

23 Just For Fun Kids' Books

Tired of kids' books that are good for you? Grab something off this list of wacky, touching, zany, gross, and generally feel good books. Some are trashy (Gossip Girl), some are addictive (A Series of Unfortunate Events), and some are outright disgusting (Unmentionable). This list was compiled with the help of the NESCBWI yahoo group and a few good friends.

* book may be hard to find.

1. GOSSIP GIRL, (series), Cecily von Ziegesar

Inspiration for the tv series, Gossip Girl chronicles the lives of "the Manhattan elite" (and a few of their have-not counterparts). Everyone wears a lot of designer clothes and drinks a lot of expensive booze. Though anyone hoping for character depth or emotional truth should look elsewhere, readers who have always wished Danielle Steel and Judith Krantz would write about teenagers are in for a superficial, nasty, guilty pleasure. The book has the effect of gossip itself once you enter it's hard to extract yourself; teens will devour this whole. --PW ages 15 & up

2. TWILIGHT (series), Stephanie Meyer

Bella Swan's move to Forks, a small, perpetually rainy town in Washington, could have been the most boring move she ever made. But once she meets the mysterious and alluring Edward Cullen, Bella's life takes a thrilling and terrifying turn. Up until now, Edward has managed to keep his vampire identity a secret in the small community he lives in, but now nobody is safe, especially Bella, the person Edward holds most dear. Deeply romantic and extraordinarily suspenseful, Twilight captures the struggle between defying our instincts and satisfying our desires. This is a love story with bite.--Amazon ages 14 & up

3. A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS, (series), Lemony Snicket

Narrated by the exceedingly well-mannered Snicket, these witty mock-gothic novels feature the misadventures of 14-year-old Violet, 12-year-old Klaus and infant Sunny Baudelaire. From the

first, things look unfortunate indeed for the trio: a fire destroys their home, killing their parents along with it; the executor of their parents' estate, the obtuse Mr. Poe (with a son, Edgar), ignores whatever the children have to say; and their new guardian, Count Olaf, is determined to get his hands on the Baudelaire fortune. But by using their individual gifts the three enterprising children thwart the Count's plan for now. The author uses formal, Latinate language and intrusive commentary to hilarious effect, even for readers unfamiliar with the literary conventions he parodies. Exquisitely detailed drawings of Gothic gargoyles and mischievous eyes echo the contents of this elegantly designed hardcover.--PW ages 9 & up

4. HARRY POTTER, (series), J.K. Rowling

As the story opens, mysterious goings-on ruffle the self-satisfied suburban world of the Dursleys, culminating in a trio of strangers depositing the Dursleys' infant nephew Harry in a basket on their doorstep. After 11 years of disregard and neglect at the hands of his aunt, uncle and their swinish son Dudley, Harry suddenly receives a visit from a giant named Hagrid, who informs Harry that his mother and father were a witch and a wizard, and that he is to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry himself. Most surprising of all, Harry is a legend in the witch world for having survived an attack by the evil sorcerer Voldemort, who killed his parents and left Harry with a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Enchantment, suspense and danger galore follow Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione throughout the series. --PW ages 8-12.

5. THE STRANGE CASE OF ORIGAMI YODA, Tom Angleberger (pre-order, available April 1, 2010)

In this funny, uncannily wise portrait of the dynamics of a sixth-grade class and of the greatness that sometimes comes in unlikely packages, Dwight, a loser, talks to his classmates via an origami finger puppet of Yoda. If that weren't strange enough, the puppet is uncannily wise and prescient. Origami Yoda predicts the date of a pop quiz, guesses who stole the classroom Shakespeare bust, and saves a classmate from popularity-crushing embarrassment with some well-timed advice. Dwight's classmate Tommy wonders how Yoda can be so smart when Dwight

himself is so clueless. With contributions from his puzzled classmates, he assembles the case file that forms this novel.--Amazon ages 8-12

6. THE TRUE MEANING OF SMEKDAY, Adam Rex

When twelve-year-old Gratuity ("Tip") Tucci is assigned to write five pages on "The True Meaning of Smekday" for the National Time Capsule contest, she's not sure where to begin. When her mom started telling everyone about the messages aliens were sending through a mole on the back of her neck? Maybe on Christmas Eve, when huge, bizarre spaceships descended on the Earth and the aliens - called Boov - abducted her mother? Or when the Boov declared Earth a colony, renamed it "Smekland" (in honor of glorious Captain Smek), and forced all Americans to relocate to Florida via rocketpod? Gratuity's story is much, much bigger than the assignment. It involves her unlikely friendship with a renegade Boov mechanic named J.Lo.; a futile journey south to find Gratuity's mother at the Happy Mouse Kingdom; a cross-country road trip in a hovercar called Slushious; and an outrageous plan to save the Earth from yet another alien invasion. Fully illustrated with "photos," drawings, newspaper clippings, and comics sequences, this is a hilarious, perceptive, genre-bending novel by a remarkable new talent. --Amazon, ages 8-12

7. THE PROBLEM WITH THE PUDDLES, Kate Feiffer

A simple drive from the country to the city becomes an adventure for the Puddle family, which includes eight-year-old Baby; her older brother, Tom; and their two parents, who cannot agree on anything. The trip includes moments of catastrophe (noticing that they have inadvertently left their dogs, Big Sally and Little Sally, behind; realizing that their car has broken down and tipped over) and some happy reunions as well. The alternating human and canine narratives converge near the story's end. Capturing the story's somewhat daffy but entirely likable characters to perfection, Tusa's expressive drawings (seen as pre-publication sketches) add their own element of humor. The very occasional space where readers are encouraged to write in the book should not keep libraries from adding this amusing and original story to their collections. An offbeat but rewarding chapter book for reading alone or aloud.--Carolyn Phelan

for Booklist, ages 8-12

8. A BARREL OF LAUGHS, A VALE OF TEARS, Jules Feiffer

The story of Roger, a prince with such a sense of humor that the king's wizard sends him on a quest to sober him up a bit. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) the quest backfires: Roger enters the Forever Forest, traipses over the Dastardly Divide, and ventures downward into the Valley of Vengeance only to find himself on an entirely different quest than the one the wizard sent him on. Lucky for us, Feiffer's cartooning experience makes him an adventurous author, and he takes us on the ride of our lives, complete with timely asides, wizened wisecracks, silly drawings of characters walking in and out of the story, and more. A Barrel of Laughs, A Vale of Tears will give people of all ages (especially rowdy teenagers who sneak comic books to classes) a barrel of laughs and a wallop of wisdom! --Amazon, all ages

9. ONCE UPON A MARIGOLD, Jean Ferris

In a gratifying fantasy that contains elements of classic fairy tales, Ferris breathes new life into archetypal characters by adding unexpected and often humorous dimensions to their personalities. The protagonist, Christian, has been raised in the forest by a troll named Edric. As he nears manhood, Christian decides it is time to see the world-or at least the section across the river, where the lovely Princess Marigold resides. Having spent many hours gazing at Marigold through a telescope and corresponding with her by "p-mail" (letters sent by carrier pigeon), he has already felt the sting of Cupid's arrow by the time he lands a job in court. Marigold readily returns his affections, but unfortunately, she is about to become betrothed to Sir Magnus.

Meanwhile, Marigold's evil mother, Queen Olympia, is plotting to murder both Marigold and her kindly, doting father, King Swithbert. Readers swept into the lighthearted spirit of this novel will likely not be bothered by the predictability of outcomes. As in fairy tales of old, jabs are made at social values and norms, and concepts of nobility and ignobility are painted in very broad strokes. Nonetheless, heroes and heroines emerge as convincing, well-rounded characters embodying flaws as well as virtues. Their foibles-Edric's tendency to mix up adages, Christian's

stubborn streak and Marigold's penchant for "awful" jokes-make the good guys all the more endearing.--PW, ages 10-up.

10. MR. MYSTERIOUS & COMPANY, (& others), Sid Fleischman, illustrated by Eric Von Schmidt *

A magic show is in town! See Jane float through the air. Watch the head in the box move its lips and talk (that's Paul behind the whiskers). See tall, light-hearted Mr. Mysterious--Pa himself--make a cow lay an egg and a chicken give milk. Follow the adventures and high comedy of this family of magicians traveling in a show wagon through the Old West. The wonder workers are heading for California, where Pa intends to retire the show so that the kids can go to school. But the frontier has tricks of its own up its sleeve, and the magicians find themselves in hairbreadth escapes and nose-to-nose encounters with villains galore--including the notorious and short-tempered Badlands Kid.--Amazon, ages 10-14

11. A MOUSE CALLED WOLF, (& others), Dick King-Smith

Wolf is such a minuscule mouse that his mother decides to give him a big name. A slightly chewed piece of sheet music yields "Wolfgang Amadeus Mo"?hence W. A. Mouse or Wolf for short. The family mouse hole is just behind the leg of a grand piano played twice a day by an elderly woman. Wolf loves the music and, to the delight of Mrs. Honeybee and the bemusement of his mother, he becomes the first singing mouse. His special talent even enables him to summon help when Mrs. Honeybee falls and can't get up. The three central characters are nicely crafted in this sweet story. Budding young musicians will relate to Wolf's struggles to develop his talent and share it with his not-so-musical mother. Those who haven't discovered their talents will enjoy this small mouse as they have the other creatures King-Smith so lovingly creates. Goodell's black-and-white illustrations, done in an engaging style similar to the work of Garth Williams, have all the warmth of the text. An appealing beginning-chapter book for young readers ready for a bit of substance, and a surefire read-aloud. Jody McCoy, Lakehill Preparatory School, Dallas, TX for School Library Journal, ages 5-12

12. THE SQUIRE'S TALES, (series), Gerald Morris

A perfectly delicious, not entirely serious, reimagining of part of Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Sixteen-year-old Lady Lynet, younger sister of the beautiful, shallow Lyonesse, is tired of watching the Red Knight slaughter Lyonesse's suitors and stealthily rides to Camelot to ask King Arthur to send a knight to defeat Red. She's worried, though, because her father died opposing Arthur. She's aided by a dwarf she meets along the way, a polite, knowledgeable fellow, who helps her navigate the paths to Camelot, joining her and the kitchen knave Beaumains--or is Beaumains really someone else? As they travel, Lynet sees a lot of knights fighting, learns that appearances can be deceiving, and finds true love.--GraceAnne A. DeCandido for Booklist, ages 13 & up

13. THE GREAT TURKEY WALK, Kathleen Karr

"I've always been fond of birds, poultry in particular." From that first sentence, readers will gobble up Karr's (*Oh, Those Harper Girls!*) hilarious novel of a boy who resolves to walk 1000 turkeys from the Show-Me state to Denver, Colorado. Simon, who's 15 and newly graduated from the third grade, may not be too bright, but he figures he can make his fortune by buying Mr. Buffey's bronze turkeys for a quarter apiece and selling them in Denver for \$5 each. With his schoolteacher as an investor, Simon picks up a former drunk and a runaway slave to be his partners, and starts herding those turkeys 900 miles down the road. In their travels, they encounter a raging river and a swarm of locusts, each of which the turkeys conquer. But peskiest of all, they're tailed by Simon's no-good father, a circus strongman, who decides he wants in on the deal.--PW, ages 10 & up.

14. MR. CHICKEE'S FUNNY MONEY, (Flint Future Detectives series), Christopher Paul Curtis

A humorous and exciting tall tale about nine-year-old Steven, who loves helping his blind neighbor, Mr. Chickee, run his errands. When the elderly man tells Steven he is going on a long trip, he gives the boy a present and tells him to keep it secret. When Steven finally opens the surprise, he finds a quadrillion dollar bill. With the help of his younger friend, Russell, and Russell's drooling, giant dog, Zoopy, Steven manages to evade the smarmy and slightly inept

Agent Fondoo from the U.S. Treasury Department, who is desperately trying to get the bill back. Curtis piles the laughs on in this fast-paced mystery. The interactions between Steven and his dad, who uses every opportunity to educate his son (much to Steven's irritation); the dictionary whose copyright page constantly writes insults; and the boy's miraculous spying invention called the Snoopeeze 9000 all serve to give the novel a sense of whimsy and magical realism.--B. Allison Gray, John Jermain Library, Sag Harbor, NY for School Library Journal, ages 8-12

15. GYPSY RIZKA, Lloyd Alexander *

Tells the story of Rizka, a young Gypsy living alone in her wagon on the outskirts of Greater Dunitsa while awaiting the return of her father. Her irrepressible and quick-witted style of helping the townspeople exposes their ridiculous foibles as she tricks them with ruses that create hilarious situations yet turn out for the best. Rizka has her finger in everything: runaway lovers; floods; magical caves; and the dreaded Zipple, a relentless breeze that drives the citizens a little crazy. While she evokes either adoration or aggravation in the town, at the book's conclusion, when the Gypsies finally return but with news of her father's death, Rizka learns the real meaning of family and community. Fun in an imaginary land; an array of wonderfully exaggerated characters; events as a series of comic twists and turns; and humor that is farcical, satirical, tongue-in-cheek, and often derived from playing on words. But what is most quintessential Alexander is the creation of a strong heroine adept at triumphing by her wits.-- Connie Tyrrell Burns, Mahoney Middle School, South Portland, ME, for School Library Journal, ages 10-14

16. THE GIGGLER TREATMENT, Roddy Doyle

What, you might well ask, is the Giggler Treatment? Better yet, what precisely is a Giggler? You won't find out until chapter 6 of Roddy Doyle's *The Giggler Treatment*, but for those of you who can't wait, here's the answer: Gigglers are "baby-sized and furry. Their fur changes color as they move." Their main occupation in life is to look after children and to punish adults who are mean or unfair to them. And the Treatment? Four words: "Poo on the shoe." The Gigglers have always been there. Since the first dog did its first poo. Since the first caveman grunted at his first

cavechild. He stomped out of the cave, straight onto a huge lump of prehistoric poo.--Petra Williams for Amazon, ages 9 & up

17. SAFFY'S ANGEL, (Casson family series), Hilary McKay

A sparkling novel once about an eccentric, entirely engaging British family. The Casson parents, both artists--delightfully distracted Eve paints in her backyard shed and comically distant Bill spends weekdays painting in his London studio--named their children from a paint color chart: Caddy (for Cadmium), Indigo and Rose. All but Saffron, "so fierce and alone," who learns at the start of the story that she is actually the Italian-born daughter of Eve's twin sister, who died in a car crash when Saffy was three. Eve explains that Grandfather had been visiting Saffy and Saffy's mother in Siena at the time of the accident, and delivered the girl to the Cassons, who adopted her. Now elderly and catatonic after two heart attacks, beloved Grandfather sits in silence when he visits the family, as the children hover around him, endearingly sharing news of their lives. When Grandfather dies, "They felt as if they had lost a battle they might have won if only they had tried a bit harder."The man leaves something to each of the children: Caddy receives his crumbling cottage on a cliff in Wales; Indigo his aged Bentley (which Bill dismisses as an "absolute wreck"); Rose his remaining cash (£144). Attached to the will by a rusty pin is a note scrawled in a shaky hand, "For Saffron. Her angel in the garden. The stone angel." As McKay shapes an intriguing plot around Saffy's angel, the Cassons' capricious capers and understated, droll dialogue will keep readers chuckling.--PW, ages 8-12

18. FREDDY THE DETECTIVE, (Freddy the Pig series), Walter Brooks

Freddy, inspired by a book he had found in the barn (THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES), decides to become a detective. Mrs. Wiggins, the cow, becomes his partner (Freddy supplies the imagination, she provides the common sense!). Freddy will play many roles in the books which follow but that of detective is probably the one he will most often be required to fill. This book, incidentally, marks the first appearance of Simon the rat and his family as Freddy's chief antagonist(s)--Freddythepig.org, ages 5 & up

19. Mythic Misadventures, (Pandora series), Carolyn Hennesy

Pandora Atheneus Andromaeche Helena (“Pandy” for short) lives in Ancient Greece, surrounded by gods, goddesses, heroes, mythical monsters and magical beasts. She’s also a typical run-of-the-mill tween. She has crushes on boys, trouble at school, best friends, fierce enemies, a mother who doesn’t understand and a brother who makes her crazy. Typical and average, right? Wrong.--pandyinc.com, ages 8 & up

20. TO FIND A WONDER, Jennifer Carson

Mortimer is the best squire in Sir Emberly's troops, but his liege refuses to recommend him for promotion to knighthood. When Mortimer demands to prove his knight-worthiness, Sir Emberly charges him with an impossible task-finding a wonder in five days. With the help of his faithful mare, a scatterbrained wizard, a frog prince and a very special vegetable, Mortimer creates his own wonder-the first dragon to ever breathe fire! How much trouble could one fire-breathing creature cause anyway? Mortimer certainly discovers and learns along the way that being a knight is more than being talented with a sword.--Amazon, ages 8 & up

21. STARRING SALLY J. FREEDMAN AS HERSELF, Judy Blume *

It's 1947, and Sally J. Freedman is full of wild ideas. She's got her eye on handsome Peter Horstein, the Latin lover of her dreams . . . on old Mr. Zavodsky, who looks suspiciously like Hitler in disguise . . . and on her father, who Sally misses terribly. There are so many things to worry and wonder about--but what ever happens, Sally's school year will certainly be exciting--and unforgettable.--Amazon, ages 10-14

22. BUNNICULA, (series), Deborah Howe, James Howe, Illustrated by Alan Daniel

It all starts when Harold's human family, the Monroes, goes to see the movie Dracula, and young Toby accidentally sits on a baby rabbit wrapped in a bundle on his seat. How could the family help but take the rabbit home and name it Bunnicula? Chester, the literate, sensitive, and keenly observant family cat, soon decides there is something weird about this rabbit. Pointy fangs, the appearance of a cape, black-and-white coloring, nocturnal habits . . . it sure seemed like he was a

vampire bunny. When the family finds a white tomato in the kitchen, sucked dry and colorless, well ... Chester becomes distraught and fears for the safety of the family. "Today, vegetables. Tomorrow ... the world!" he warns Harold. But when Chester tries to make his fears known to the Monroes, he is completely misunderstood, and the results are truly hilarious. Is Bunnacula really a vampire bunny? We can't say. But any child who has ever let his or her imagination run a little wild will love Deborah and James Howe's funny, fast-paced "rabbit-tale of mystery."-- Amazon, ages 9 to 12

23. UNMENTIONABLE, (& others) Paul Jennings *

A collection of Paul Jennings' imaginative, twisty tales, packed with fun and ridiculousness. Tales include "The Ice Maiden", in which a boy finds himself frozen to a beautiful ice statue after daring to kiss her and the unforgettable "Little Squirt" in which a boy trains for a peeing contest--Amazon--ages 8-12