



## Children's Book Publishing

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THIS ARTICLE WILL COVER ALL BOOKS exclusive of textbooks and paperback books published for children from pre-school through junior high school. It is based on data secured from existing literature and research in the field, forty returns from a questionnaire sent to children's book editors and/or persons responsible for the juvenile list in publishing houses, interviews with selected editors and other authorities on the subject, and personal study and research.

The history of children's book publishing is an important segment of the social history of this country since each generation reveals itself in its children's books. For about two hundred years, from the printing in 1646 of the first children's book in America, John Cotton's *Milk for Babes, Drawn out of the Breast of Both Testaments*. . . the Puritan influence of the "good Godly books" persisted. The scant and mediocre children's literature of the period was "overloaded with precocious goodness, morbid piety, and sickly sentiment,"<sup>1</sup> and was designed to edify if not to terrify.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, America entered upon her Golden Age of children's literature, in spite of a stream of poorly written information books and the stilted, repetitious Elsie Dinsmore and Rollo travel series. Such writers as Mary Mapes Dodge, Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Joel Chandler Harris, Howard Pyle, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Laura E. Richards, and Frances Hodgson Burnett brought new stature and distinction to children's books. Two epoch-making books of that period are Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) for its genuine realism and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) which "carried realism across the tracks."<sup>2</sup>

Three early children's magazines—*Our Young Folks*, Horace Scudder's *Riverside Magazine for Young People* and Mary Mapes Dodge's

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*St. Nicholas*—served as “nurseries for children’s books”<sup>3</sup> where editors sought out, encouraged, and guided young writers. They exerted a profound influence on children’s books and authors, and prepared the way for the rapid development in children’s book publishing in the early 1900’s.

At this time there was a new emphasis on the child as an individual, resulting in new types of schools and new methods of teaching. Public and children’s librarians engaged in many activities “pointing up the joy and the value of children’s books.”<sup>4</sup> Publishers, noticing the effect on sales figures, began to pay more attention to children’s books by bringing out the old stand-by classics in editions with better print, illustrations, and bindings. These, together with inexpensive fiction series and a sprinkling of new books, made up the bulk of publishing for young people.

Between 1915–30 significant developments affected children’s book publishing.<sup>5</sup> In 1919, the Macmillan Company was the first publisher to establish a department devoted to the production of children’s books. However, Macmillan along with many other firms produced important children’s books before a separate department was established. By 1925, there were five or six such departments. Louise Seaman Bechtel, a former children’s librarian, became the first children’s book editor. Children’s Book Week was initiated in 1919. The first standards for school libraries were adopted in 1920, and in 1925 similar standards were prepared for elementary school libraries. In 1922, F. G. Melcher established the Newbery Medal Award presented annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children, and in 1937 the Caldecott Medal Award for the illustrator of the best picture book for children. The influence of these two awards on the improvement of children’s books and on the prestige of writing for children cannot be underestimated. May Masee, acknowledged dean of children’s book editors today, left *The Booklist* in 1923 to become head of Doubleday’s children’s book department. In 1924, *The Horn Book Magazine*, devoted entirely to children’s literature, was established by Bertha M. Miller. The same year children’s book reviewing came into its own with Anne C. Moore’s articles in *The Bookman* and her famous “Three Owls” page in the *New York Herald Tribune*. The National Society for the Study of Education produced in 1925 the first of three important yearbooks on reading. From 1920–30, over one hundred studies of children’s reading interests were made.

Children's book publishing ceased being considered "books not quite good enough for adults" or "a sort of Cinderella literature practiced by hacks, failures and literary incompetents."<sup>6</sup> Efforts of leading educators and librarians to provide broader and more meaningful reading for children began to bear fruit. More books, more beautifully illustrated, appeared as the result of new processes in color, print, and design.<sup>5</sup> In 1920, juveniles ranked eighth in the list of categories of titles published,<sup>7</sup> whereas from 1930 on they held second place in the total production in any category.

Mary K. Eakin has said that "Few decades have given to children so many titles with so much promise of lasting value as did the years between 1930 and 1940."<sup>8</sup> She attributes this to the establishment of elementary school libraries, increased use of trade books in teaching, and publishers' recognition of children's books as big business. Her analysis of the period indicates a steady increase in both fiction and nonfiction; a higher quality of writing and illustrations in picture books and fiction than in informational books; biography geared to the junior and senior high school level, much of it of the "written-to-order" type; regional stories successfully launched; similarities rather than differences among children emphasized in books treating minority groups and peoples of other countries; humor in many forms of expression; and the triumph of imaginative picture book classics.

However, increased costs, wartime restrictions and other economic factors affected children's publishing during the years 1940-45. Hastily written, poorly illustrated picture books substituted for toys and flooded the market. Good standard titles went out of print, as did promising titles with no opportunity to establish themselves. This period, however, did produce such "classics" as Armstrong Sperry's *Call it Courage* (Macmillan, 1940), Genevieve Foster's *George Washington's World* (Scribner's, 1941), Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for the Ducklings* (Viking, 1941), Eleanor Estes' *The Moffats* (Harcourt, 1941), Virginia L. Burton's *Little House* (Houghton, 1942), Esther Forbes' *Johnny Tremain* (Houghton, 1943), Robert Lawson's *Rabbit Hill* (Viking, 1944), and Lois Lenski's *Strawberry Girl* (Lippincott, 1945).

The postwar period saw unparalleled growth and development in the industry. At least twenty new juvenile departments or juvenile houses were established with editors appointed in all but two, and great expansion took place in juvenile departments already established. Newcomers to the field include Broadman Press, Harvey House, Par-

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nassus Press, Prentice-Hall, and Sterling. Latest statistics show ninety-six publishers specializing in children's books or with special juvenile departments. There were fifty juvenile editors in 1949 and over sixty in 1957.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of production and sales the growth is phenomenal. The juvenile market has become a big business and one of the mainstays of publishing in this country. As shown in the table below there was approximately a 67 per cent increase in volume of production from 1947-57.

TABLE I  
*Growth of Juvenile Book Publishing*

Year	Juvenile Books Published		Total	All Books Published
	New Titles	New Editions		Total
1946	798	79	877	7,735
1947	834	99	933	9,182
1948	844	85	929	9,897
1949	846	133	979	10,892
1950	907	152	1,059	11,022
1951	982	90	1,072	11,255
1952	1,094	151	1,245	11,840
1953	1,264	130	1,394	12,050
1954	1,193	149	1,342	11,901
1955	1,372	113	1,485	12,589
1956	1,384	111	1,495	12,538
1957	1,420	137	1,559	13,142

Compiled from annual statistics and summary numbers of *Publishers' Weekly*.

The main reasons for this tremendous output are the greatly expanded public and school library market, the varied outlets for many categories of books, and the new publishers attracted to this lucrative field. Mary K. Eakin,<sup>8</sup> William Jovanovich,<sup>10</sup> F. G. Melcher,<sup>11</sup> and Lillian H. Smith<sup>1</sup> express grave concern over the relationship of the flood of children's books to their quality. *Time* indicates that over 350 million copies of children's books, including approximately two thousand new titles, came from the presses in 1957—about one in three of the total books published. Children's books comprise two-thirds of Grosset and Dunlap's output, 35 per cent of Random House's sales volume, and \$13 million of Simon and Schuster's \$18 million gross in 1956.<sup>12</sup> Viking's juvenile department's business represents one third of the company's total.<sup>13</sup> An established juvenile title continues to sell anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 copies a year over a long life span, while the profitable life expectancy of an adult best seller may be no more than six months.

Juvenile book sales fall into two main categories: books that sell for one dollar and over retail, and those that sell for less than one dollar retail. The main outlets for the first group are book sections of department stores, bookstores, and school and public libraries. Schools and school and public libraries comprise the largest market. Fifty per cent of Houghton Mifflin's juveniles were sold to these institutions in 1945, and in 1953 it was safe to assume that 85 per cent of the juveniles of all publishers were bought by librarians and teachers.<sup>14</sup>

Books in the second group are available in supermarkets, drug stores, newsstands, variety stores, candy and stationery stores, through mail order houses, and the regular book channels. One publisher of inexpensive juveniles estimated that between twenty and twenty-five million copies were sold through super markets alone in 1957. Inexpensive books fill a real need. In 1942 Simon and Schuster in co-operation with the Artists and Writers Guild began to publish the Little Golden Books for children, which sold for twenty-five cents and had remarkable success. They have been followed by the more expensive Giant Golden Books and other titles designed for different age groups.

C. B. Grannis estimates that juveniles accounted for close to 120,000,000 copies of the 760,000,000 books sold annually between 1953-55.<sup>15</sup> In 1956, there were 26,546,000 juveniles sold which retailed at one dollar and over, an increase of 38 per cent over 1954. In the same year, 118,386,000 copies which retailed under one dollar were sold, an increase of only 12 per cent, making a 50 per cent increase in total juvenile sales—the highest increase in all categories except paperbound books. Total dollar value of juvenile books sold in 1956 was \$45,244,000, an increase of 38 per cent over 1954. These figures include only 71 per cent of all general publishers and omit sales of textbooks and encyclopedias.<sup>16</sup>

Reasons for the increased sale of children's books which began in the middle forties include increase in child population; growth of school libraries; increased use of trade books in the expanded school curriculum; improved quality and attractiveness of books; increased number and greater variety of books; greater awareness and appreciation on the part of parents and the public of the need and value of books for children; increased prosperity; better advertising, promotion, and publicity; awakened interest in reading during the war-time shortage of toys; greater emphasis on increased service to

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children in public libraries; television creating interests in new fields and expanding children's horizons; mass production and distribution of attractive and inexpensive books; and more research in children's preferences in books and greater skill in using the findings.

The juvenile department of a publishing house may be integrated with other departments using all company facilities and services, or it may be a relatively separate unit, depending on the size of the firm.<sup>17, 18</sup> The organization of juvenile departments, methods of functioning and backgrounds of editors vary from one publisher to another. The majority of departments as reported by twenty-two houses on the questionnaires sent to juvenile editors have an editorial assistant or associate editor and secretary. Juvenile editors have varied backgrounds. They were previously teachers, librarians, authors, bookstore clerks, and employees of publishing houses.

The main considerations in planning a juvenile list are the literary, artistic and useful quality of the material to give the book permanent interest and value; variety and balance in types of books for all age groups; current needs and existing vacuums in the market; and sales potential. Most editors stress quality with less concern for balance. Since schools and public libraries comprise the overwhelming market for children's books, they have a direct effect on publishers' lists. Librarians and/or teachers guide the present and future reading of most of America's children and thus influence the policies of children's book publishing.

The number of manuscripts received yearly by the juvenile editors ranges from one hundred to over one thousand. Between 80 to 85 per cent of these are unsolicited, and the rest come from agents and previously published authors—about equally divided. Eighteen juvenile editors reported that their departments attempted to specialize in either books for particular age groups or types of books such as activity books, picture books, short books and books for primary grades, and information books about other countries.

Authors of children's books may receive outright payments or a lump sum ranging from \$100 to \$500 for a manuscript instead of the customary royalty.<sup>19</sup> This is common practice among publishers of inexpensive books retailing up to one dollar. Royalties differ according to the publisher's practices, the individual book, the author's previous sales record, market possibilities, and the author's future potential in supplying good manuscripts. Ten per cent of the retail price is a customary royalty. Usually illustrators of books for older boys and



girls are paid an outright fee. When text and illustrations are equally important in a picture book, author and artist share evenly in royalty arrangements.

There is a decided increase in the number of American children's books printed abroad. Both Europe and Asia are good markets. From data supplied by twenty-six juvenile editors, the four countries publishing the largest number of titles in rank order are Germany, France, Sweden, and Britain. R. G. Lynip's *Democracy* (Harcourt, 1940) has been published in twelve languages, among them Bengali, Burmese, Hindi, and Tagalog. One publisher reported that 260 foreign permissions had been given since 1946. Foreign children's books are translated in the United States less frequently. Juvenile imports reached 116 titles in 1956 and 128 in 1957, an increase of 10 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

The channels for promoting and distributing children's books have expanded and increased in importance during the past decade. Special school and public library service consultants or directors have been added to juvenile departments to work with key librarians and educators. Review copies are distributed more liberally to school and public libraries for the purpose of centralized reviewing and ordering. Promotional devices and activities, such as Children's Book Week, book fairs, book awards, book clubs, special radio and television programs based on books, displays and special exhibits, book reviews, and approved lists prepared by educational and library agencies, have focused increased attention on children's books.

Children's Book Week has had a far reaching effect on the publishing and distribution of children's books.<sup>21</sup> It motivates extensive book reviewing in newspapers, stimulates articles in magazines generally on children's books and reading, and encourages book fairs and book programs in schools and communities. The Children's Book Council,<sup>22</sup> a nonprofit organization composed of children's book editors, was established in 1945 as national headquarters for Book Week and as the information and promotion center for children's books. The Council has built up a mailing list from 11,000 in 1948 to 32,000 in 1957 to receive free its quarterly *Calendar*. The Children's Book Council joined with the American Museum of Natural History and the *New York Times* in sponsoring the first Annual Boys' and Girls' Book Fair in 1947. Since then the book fair movement has spread rapidly, and the co-sponsoring and encouraging of book fairs has become one of the major activities of the Council. For the past three years books provided for exhibit by member publishers have been

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made available for loan to teacher-education institutions and university education departments. Ultimately the books are donated to charitable organizations.

Commercial or publisher sponsored exhibits include the Children's Book Caravan, Evanston, Illinois, directed by Ruth Tooze who takes her exhibit to small places from Maine to California and lectures to children and parents on books and reading; the Combined Book Exhibit displayed by its director, T. J. McLaughlin, at library and educational meetings; and E. G. Wood's Books on Exhibit, loaned to large city school systems. Some state library commissions or departments of education exhibit books supplied by publishers. Traveling Book Exhibits, under the directorship of Ruth Gagliardo, of the Kansas State Teachers Association, is one of the most successful of these.

There are at present twenty-nine children's book awards. The prizes most coveted which have stimulated greatest effort and interest in the children's book field are the Caldecott and Newbery Awards and the *New York Herald Tribune* Children's Spring Book Festival Awards. Juvenile book clubs which began with the Junior Literary Guild have grown to fifteen and are supplying books on a large scale distribution. Most of these make provision for various age groups and some of them distribute paperbound editions. There are twenty-four established radio and television juvenile book programs covering all age levels. Through book discussions and reviews, author interviews, dramatizations, and story hours they create and deepen interest in children's books and reading.

Awakened interest on the part of educators in trade books for schools has resulted in exhibits and programs related to books at educational meetings. Publication of books written especially for parents and teachers on children's books and reading has increased. Among these are Ruth Tooze's *Your Children Want to Read* (Prentice-Hall, 1957), Phyllis Fenner's *Proof of the Pudding* (Day, 1957), Annis Duff's *Longer Flight* (Viking, 1955), and Josette Frank's *Your Child's Reading Today* (Doubleday, 1954). Children's book reviewing has a special and recognized place today, and is doing much for the children's book field. More serious reviewing of children's books is being done in a variety of places and greater space is given to reviews in literary and educational journals.

In evaluating the effectiveness of all promotional devices, juvenile editors rated highly the following: appearance of titles on approved



lists, book reviews in professional journals, exhibits at library and educational meetings, review copies sent to schools and libraries, and publishers' catalogs.

The most obvious trend of the postwar period is the steady increase in the flow of children's books from the presses, accompanied by a rise of prestige and status of juvenile book production in the total publishing picture. The recent concern of parents and educators with children's ability to read effectively has resulted in a second trend towards greatly increased use of children's trade books by schools. Producers of children's books are now guided by research in the areas of educational trends, curriculum development, the qualities in books that attract children, and their comprehension levels.

Books are made more accessible to children through a variety of outlets, including more school libraries, book fairs, and mass media of distribution. The cost of children's book production has increased steadily during the past decade. Juvenile editors agree that the increased prices of books have not absorbed the increase in cost of book production. As a result royalty free inexpensive editions of the classics and larger editions of established authors are competing with new titles. Siri Andrews,<sup>23</sup> Vernon Ives,<sup>24</sup> and May Masee<sup>25</sup> point out that costs have prevented the publication of experimental books and books of promising new authors, and this has resulted in fewer developments and less originality in the field. More and more of the older titles are going out of print because often it is not economically feasible to reprint even when the author accepts a royalty reduction. There is evidence to indicate that higher prices have affected the trade market adversely but not decreased school and library purchases to any extent.

The improved format and attractiveness of children's books, due to creative design and technological advances in book manufacture is another important development. The format is less conventional, more varied, and appropriate. Bindings are better and sturdier and new methods of reproduction have increased the range and effects possible in illustration. Marcia Brown has been particularly successful in experimenting with color and techniques in illustrating famous folk and fairy tales, including *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (Scribner, 1950), *Cinderella* (Scribner, 1954), *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Harcourt, 1957), and *The Flying Carpet* (Scribner, 1956).

More authors of adult books as well as illustrators are entering the

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juvenile field. There is now status and prestige attached to writing and illustrating for children. In addition, information books require authors who are subject matter specialists and who have had previous writing experience in a particular field.

Perhaps the major trend in postwar children's publishing is the phenomenal growth of publishers' series, which are books similar in format, written by the same or different authors on different or related subjects, and issued by the same publisher under a series name. Earlier series were planned around a single character or family and still continue to this time. Series deluging the market are primarily nonfiction, covering a variety of subjects but emphasizing history, biography, and science, among them *The First Books* (Watts), *The Landmark Books* (Random House), *The Real Books* (Garden City), *The Signature Books* (Grosset), and *The True Books* (Children's Press). The *Landmark Books* have sold more than ten million copies since 1950 when the series started. In 1952, there were ninety-three series being issued by thirty-six publishers, whereas at the beginning of 1958 there were 148 series from fifty-four publishers.

Statistics reported of titles published in various categories for 1947, 1953, and 1957 show the greatest increase in science books first, biography second, and history, geography, and travel third.<sup>26</sup> Books of folklore and folktales, especially for the younger group, increased as did books of poetry, religion, and hobbies. Sports books showed a marked decline, whereas new books on art and music are among the weakest fields. The continued over-all increase in informational books on all age levels "reflects the growing awareness of a need for simply written but highly interesting materials"<sup>27</sup> that can be used by teachers in regular class work. More and better books on all aspects of science and nature are being written especially for younger people. Outstanding authors include Lancelot Hogben, H. C. Holling, Herman and Nina Schneider, Millicent Selsam, and Herbert Zim.

The second World War and the number of recent series relating to historical personages as well as a renewed interest in American history and heroes, particularly the lesser known men and women, may account for the increase in biography and history. The decade has produced such outstanding biographies for both younger and older readers as H. S. Commager's *Robert E. Lee* (Houghton, 1951), Alice Dalgliesh's *Columbus Story* (Scribner, 1955), Elizabeth Yates' *Amos Fortune* (Aladdin, 1950), and a number of simply written biographies

by Clara I. Judson, known for her literary excellence and historical accuracy. Books dealing with other countries are increasing after the decline following the second World War.

There is also interest in books for special groups, such as slow readers for whom many new titles are brought out each year. Another important development is the publishing of quality trade books designed for beginning readers to supplement or possibly replace traditional "readers" used as texts. Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat* (Random, 1957), Remy Charlip's *Where is Everybody?* (Scott, 1957), and Else Minarik's *Little Bear* (Harper, 1957) are good examples.

Since 1950, publishers have been successfully experimenting with colors in picture books, sturdier bindings, and other techniques to meet library needs. While the over-all quality may not measure up to the 1930 decade, there has been considerable originality and distinction in some of the picture books, such as Leo Politi's *Song of the Swallows* (Scribner, 1949), Selina Chonz' *A Bell for Ursli* (Oxford University Press, 1950), Lynd Ward's *Biggest Bear* (Houghton, 1952), Robert McCloskey's *One Morning in Maine* (Viking, 1952), Marie H. Ets' *Play With Me* (Viking, 1955), Antonio Frasconi's *See and Say* (Harcourt, 1955) and Bruno Munari's *Tic, Tac, and Toc, Animals for Sale, Who's There?*, and *Open the Door* (World, 1957).

Many outstanding older titles that went out of print during the war and the years following are being brought back into print. The number of reprint series has doubled since Mary K. Eakin's and Blanche Janecek's study in 1947,<sup>28</sup> and many new titles have been added to reprint series already in existence. A less welcome tendency is the publication of many unsatisfactory editions of the classics and the numerous "adapted classics" which continue to find their way on the market.

The past decade was a leveling off period in children's publishing caused by the desire to reach and to satisfy the widest possible audience. To meet the needs and to maintain a profitable business in the face of rising costs, a flood of books was released. Many of these were poor, many good, but few truly great books.

What now lies ahead in the world of books for children? Reports from juvenile editors and observation in the field point towards greater expansion in the field of science books for children at every level; continued emphasis on informational books for all ages, particularly in the areas of geography, history, and biography; increase in books in all subject fields covered by the school curricula and still greater

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use of trade books in the schools; more and better writers; possible resurgence of interest in imaginative stories; growth in the international exchange of books through translations here and abroad; more attention to better books for the middle age group of children; increase in outlets for children's books; and possible extension of paperback books to quality juveniles and teen age novels for home use.

The major problems to be faced, as seen by the same group of editors, are problems of production and costs, and problems relating both to the product and the consumer. Maintaining a high standard of quality for children's books and keeping prices down in face of rising production costs is a serious problem. Securing good manuscripts with a fresh viewpoint, original approach, and imaginative insight is also difficult. Locating and launching new authors and avoiding duplication of the same authors on publishers' lists present problems as well. In addition, there is the problem of producing books which must appeal to both the reader (the child) and the buyer (the librarian, teacher, and parent).

The juvenile book business will continue to flourish, however, in the next decade because a larger number of children than ever before must have books for enlarged purposes. On December 30, 1957, there were 29,000,000 children in school in grades kindergarten through eight and 9,000,000 in grades nine through twelve. The number of pupils is expected to increase by about 6,000,000 in the next five years, according to the U.S. Office of Education statistics. To provide the quality and the quantity of books needed by these boys and girls to develop their fullest potential and to become worthy citizens is a challenge to the creative efforts of authors, artists, and publishers.

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