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Books for Laughing Out Loud

Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D. & Terrell A. Young, Ed.D.

While there are many moments in life that call for somberness and even prompt us to pause and reflect, there are also moments in which we simply celebrate the joy of being alive and savor the funny side of our days. Writer Mark Twain, an authority on what makes us laugh, once stated, “humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.” Humor and laughter certainly add to life’s pleasures, and sometimes it is a good idea not to take life or ourselves so seriously. Certainly, when it comes to humorous books, young readers cannot get enough of them. Teachers looking for a way to hook reluctant readers on a book may find that humorous texts provide one way to do so.

Naturally, there are many different types of humor and quite divergent reactions to humorous books. While younger readers chortle at silly slapstick stories that are often too predictable to appeal to their older siblings, older readers may delight in clever puns and word play. Then again, as was the case with the wildly popular *Chicken Butt* (Perl, 2009) and its successor *Chicken Butt’s Back* (Perl, 2011), young readers relish word play based on homonyms and homophones as well. Decades after its publication, *The King Who Rained* (1988) by Fred Gwynne still prompts snorts and guffaws. Boys may hoot and holler about books that many girls find humorless and disgusting. While there are no books that are universally funny to both genders or all age groups, there are certainly a variety of books available that are sure to tickle some readers and bring smiles to some faces. Sometimes the humor comes through the text, sometimes it is enhanced by the illustrations with cleverly hidden comic elements, and sometimes both text and illustrations make readers laugh. We share some of our favorite funny books below.

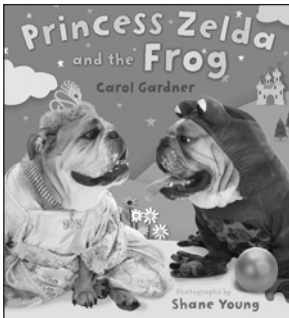
Grades K-3



Bardhan-Quallen, Sudipta. (2011). *Chicks run wild*. Illustrated by Ward Jenkins. Simon & Schuster. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$15.99, ISBN: 978-1-4424-0673-5.

Poor Mama! After a long day she puts her chicks to bed but, time after time, once the door has closed, they refuse to settle down. In desperation, savvy Mama joins the fun, and she runs those chicks

ragged. Finally, utterly exhausted, they fall to sleep, leaving her to enjoy some solitude. The clever story of chicks getting their comeuppance is completed by amusing illustrations such as a DVD playing the movie *Gone with the Wind*. If the drawings on the wall in the chicks' bedroom look as though they were drawn by children, that's because they were. Those pictures are the products of the author and the illustrator's children. This one is filled with treats for the eye and ear and will make adults laugh as much as their offspring.



Gardner, Carol. (2011). *Princess Zelda and the frog*. Photographs by Shane Young, Feiwei and Friends. 40 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-312-60325-0.

Children will relish this delightful retelling of “The Frog Prince” with photographs of costumed English bulldogs. Princess Zelda was so beautiful that “her smile had been known to stop villagers in their tracks” (n.p.). Her adoring parents were able to grant her every desire except for a good night’s sleep. When her golden ball lands in the mud, Zelda must make a decision. Does she allow the ugliest frog that she has ever seen retrieve her ball or does she change into her “fetching purple bikini” (n.p.) and get it herself? Must a princess keep a promise she made to a frog? Do the unsightly frog’s snores become melodious music to an insomniac princess?

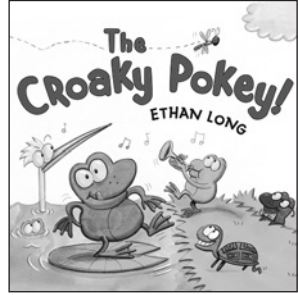


Harper, Charise Mericle. (2011). *Just Grace and the double surprise*. Houghton Mifflin. 167 pages, \$14.99, ISBN: 978-0-547-37026-2.

In the seventh title in this series that is likely to appeal to fans of the *Clementine* and *Judy Moody* books, third-grader Grace and her best friend Mimi are in for some surprises. Mimi longs for a sister, but when someone new joins the family, the new addition is not quite what she expected. Grace, on the other hand, gets exactly what she has wanted for a long time, but she finds that her surprise brings lots of unexpected responsibilities as well as some early waking hours. How the two friends navigate school, disappointments, and family dynamics provides plenty of amusing passages as well as some good life lessons.

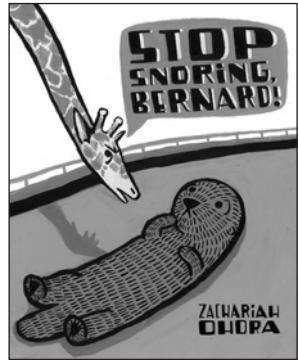
Long, Ethan. (2011). *The croakey pokey!*
Holiday House. 32 pages, \$14.95, ISBN: 978-0-8234-2291-3.

Amphibians abound, and tongues are flapping and zapping across the pages in this hilarious send-up of the classic sing-along taught in many schools. In this version of “The Hokey Pokey,” frogs and a turtle are in pursuit of a fly buzzing tantalizingly nearby, and as they try to catch him, he stays just out of reach. As their tongues fly out, they end up wrapped around each other, leaving the fly free—or is he? Young readers—and older ones too—will laugh at the illustrations and sound effects provided with a resounding “WHAP!” It is impossible to resist the humorous lines and the temptation to dance as you read this one aloud.



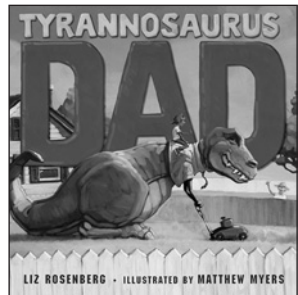
Ohora, Zachariah. (2011). *Stop snoring, Bernard!*
Holt. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99,
ISBN: 978-0-8050-9002-4.

Bernard is an otter that loves living at the zoo. His favorite time is nap time, but Bernard’s loud snoring bothers the other otters. Grumpy Giles even tells him to “snore somewhere else!” (n.p.). Although Bernard dutifully tries napping in other places, he is always awoken with the irritated and loud refrain: “Stop snoring, Bernard!” (n.p.). Poor, Bernard! What is he going to do? How is an otter to get any sleep with all that moving around?

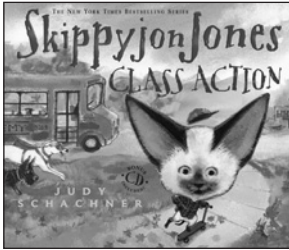


Rosenberg, Liz. (2011). *Tyrannosaurus Dad.*
Illustrated by Matthew Myers. Roaring Brook.
32 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-1-59643-531-5.

Tobias’s dad is a lot like other dads in that he likes corny jokes, magic tricks, and meat; wears a tie; and works hard. But unlike the other dads, Tobias’s dad is forty feet long, fifteen feet tall, has teeth as sharp as steak knives, and weighs as much as a steam locomotive. That makes sense since his dad is a tyrannosaurus! Unfortunately, sometimes he is so preoccupied with work that he has to miss some of Tobias’s events. Tobias hopes his dad can come to his school’s Field

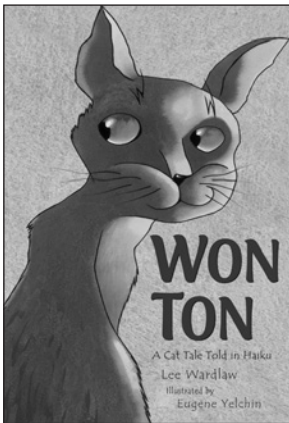


Day baseball game but when the Chickenbone Gang tries to take over the game and his father hasn't arrived yet, readers will wonder whether Tyrannosaurus Dad will show up and save the day.



Schachner, Judy. (2011). *Skippyjon Jones: Class action*. Dutton. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-525-4228-0.

More than anything else, Skippyjon Jones wants to go to school. But Mama Junebug Jones reminds him, "School is for the DOGS! ... They're unruly and drooly" (n.p.). Not even his mother's protests can keep Skippyjon Jones from going off to school "with a grande ol' bunch of poochitos" (n.p.). Once he arrives there, this kitty with an identity problem excels in all subjects and impresses his art, music, and French teachers. Yet his most important work of the day is when "El Skippito" saves his canine friends from the wooly bully, the terror of the playground. Fans of this series will love this new addition to the *Skippyjon* collection.



Wardlaw, Lee. (2011). *Won Ton: A cat tale told in haiku*. Illustrated by Eugene Yelchin. Holt. 40 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-8050-8995-0.

Told in a series of *senryu* (a form of Japanese poetry with 17 syllables that focuses on the foibles of human [or cat] nature), this beguiling story of a shelter cat and the boy who adopts him will bring laughter to the lips and warmth to the heart. As visitors arrive at the shelter, the aloof cat wonders whether they will choose dogs or cats: "Dogs have hair. Cats, fur. / Dogs whine, yip, howl, bark. Cats purr. / I say: No Contest" (n.p.). After the adoption, there is the necessary time of adjustment, and the cat's true personality is revealed: "Sorry about the/squishy in your shoe. Must've/ been something I ate." This is one cat with his own ideas about house rules: "Scratching-post? Haven't/ heard of it. Besides, the couch/is so much closer" (n.p.). Cats' ideas about ownership often differ from those of humans: "Eavesdropping, I hear:/ "My cat." Great Rats! Don't you know/ yet that you're My Boy?" (n.p.). Kids will return to this book over and over as they are reminded of how poetry can be so funny and so much fun!

Wheeler, Lisa. (2011). *Spinster Goose: Twisted rhymes for naughty children*.

Illustrated by Sophie Blackall. Atheneum. 48 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-1-4169-2541-5.

Because some children just never learn their lessons from the kindly Mother Goose, she must send the hardest cases to her sister, the much tougher Spinster Goose. They have met their match in this taskmaster as she makes sure that Lucy Locket, Wee Willy Winkie, Mary and her lamb, Little Jack Horner, and a host of other nursery rhyme characters are properly disciplined, no matter what it takes. It's great fun to read and laugh at these rhymes and the literary license the poet has taken with 27 of the familiar stories and characters. While young readers will delight in repeating these out loud, older readers will delight in the zing and utter meanness of them all, and be glad to see the miscreants get their just desserts. There will be no complaints if you read this one again and again.

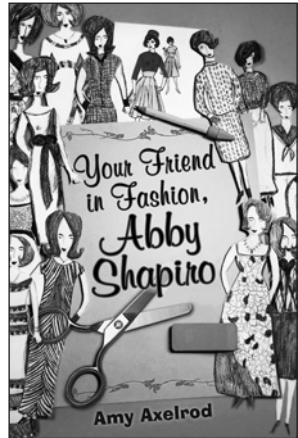


Grades 4-6

Axelrod, Amy. (2011). *Your friend in fashion, Abby Shapiro*.

Holiday House. 261 pages, \$17.95, ISBN: 978-0-8234-2291-3.

In this hilarious yet moving story set in 1959-1960, sixth grader Abby Shapiro lives with her extended Jewish family in a large house and all she really wants is a bra and a Barbie doll, both of which all of her friends seem to have. Precocious Abby spends her spare time sketching and designing clothing. Recognizing a kindred soul in the always-fashionable Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of the Massachusetts Senator and later President, Abby begins writing her. She pours out her soul in those letters as well as offering her design ideas to Jackie at a discount rate. While Abby struggles with a mean girl at school and family dynamics that include more than a handful of secrets, her voice and determination never flag. The book contains actual sketches made by the author when she was young.





Bruel, Nick. (2011). *Bad Kitty meets the baby*. Roaring Brook. 144 pages, \$13.99, ISBN: 978-1-59643-597-1.

Kitty has faced many indignities in life, far more than any feline should have to endure. First, there was the disgusting dog: “worse than its ugliness, worse than its terrible stink, and even worse than the never-ending trail of ooze it left behind wherever it went was that the beast never seemed to sleep” (pp. 11-12). Then, there was the time Uncle Murray came to care for Kitty and Puppy, which didn’t go very well. Now a new, noisy creature enters Kitty’s life: a baby! How could a baby displace Kitty? The adoption of the baby triggers many zany events in the family’s life, but readers find out Kitty’s true feelings toward the new addition when it is time for the baby’s bath.



Banks, Tristan. (2011). *Mac Slater vs. the city*. Simon & Schuster. 184 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-1-4169-8756-1.

Utterly uncool Mac Slater and his friend Paul head off to New York City, courtesy of a website dedicated to identifying what’s cool and hip before it becomes that way. As coolhunters, their job is to identify trends in the making before the other coolhunters do. Things go wrong from the first. Mac’s fancy camera is stolen by some skateboarders. When he finally does find a girl with all sorts of cool gadgets, she doesn’t want any publicity. When Mac stumbles on a perpetual motion car that requires no costly fuel, he faces a moral dilemma. One of the best parts of the book features Mac’s hilarious interviews with kids whose parents are so charged with caffeine that the kids sleep in retaliation.

Franco, Betsy. (2011). *A dazzling display of dogs*. Illustrated by Michael Wertz. Tricycle Press. 40 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-1-5824-6343-8.

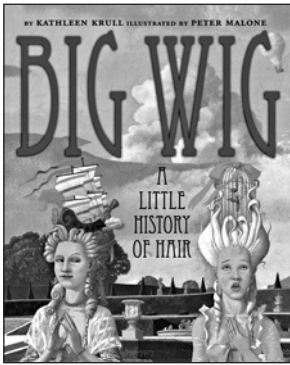
As they did in the earlier *A Curious Collection of Cats* (2009), Franco and Wertz team up to pay tribute to dogs. Thirty-four concrete poems describe vividly the myriad personalities, behaviors, and breeds. There are poems about dogs alone and dogs with other dogs, and all of them are doing the most dog-gone things. In these poems, canines slobber all over tennis balls until they have just the right moisture level, run through parks, take their owners on walks, and simply make life for those lucky enough to live with a canine such doggone good fun. Irreverently, Franco captures the revulsion of being in an enclosed car with a dog that farts. Anyone who has watched a dog circle almost endlessly for just the right spot in which to settle down will enjoy these spot-on poems. Although the vibrant illustrations sometimes threaten to overpower the poems, they, too, add to the fun of celebrating a dog's life.



Hauth, Katherine B. (2011). *What's for dinner? Quirky, squirmy poems from the animal world*. Illustrated by David Clark. Charlesbridge. 48 pages, \$13.22, ISBN: 978-1-570-91472-0.

Twenty-nine poems, some as off-putting as they are amusing, show that biology and poetry make a perfect pairing. In graphic language, the amusing poems describe how various life forms survive, making it clear what they prefer to eat and in some cases, how long it takes for the food to be digested. Back matter includes additional scientific information on each of the living things, which range from sloths to wood turtles. There's even a poem about the Venus flytrap. The cartoon illustrations add to the fun.

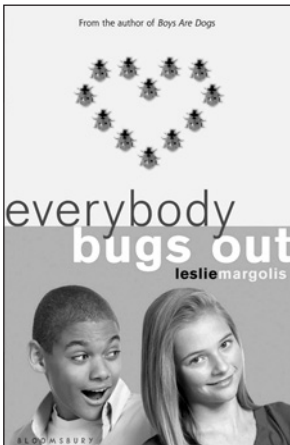




Krull, Kathleen. (2011). *Big Wig: A Little History of Hair*.

Illustrated by Peter Malone. Arthur A. Levine/Scholastic. 48 pages (Unpaginated), \$18.99, ISBN: 978-0-439-67640-3.

Filled with detailed illustrations and engaging text, this text takes readers on a hair-raising ride through history by describing the hairstyles and adornments for the hair of men and women through the ages. The author starts with the prehistoric period when paintbrushes may have served as grooming aids, and then moves through several historical periods. By doing so, she allows readers to note the hair trends that came and went and came back again; you might be tempted to say they were hair today and gone tomorrow. The gouache illustrations highlight interesting hair notes; for instance, insects have been known to be found in the teased beehives popular in the 1960s. Young readers will enjoy learning the lengths that men and women went to to beautify their heads. They'll shake their heads and laugh at the many possible cures for baldness including all types of animal urine. Back matter includes additional hair facts complementing each of the historical periods described earlier and a list of references.



Margolis, Leslie. (2011). *Everybody bugs out*.

Bloomsbury. 192 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-1-59990-526-6.

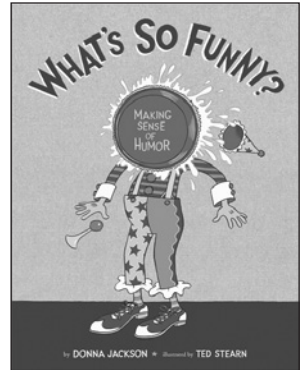
This third title in the Annabelle Unleashed series follows the intrepid Annabelle through further perils of middle school. Everyone in her class is excited about the upcoming school dance, and they all have dates. Or so they say. And while Annabelle doesn't really think she needs a date, she starts to have unexplained feelings toward her friend Oliver with whom she is working on a project for the science fair. But her crush will have to remain secret because, alas!, her friend Claire has already announced her fondness for the same boy. What's a girl to do if she wants to keep her friend? Annabelle decides to keep her feelings to herself. As might be expected, much amusement and embarrassment ensue as the coupling proceeds.

Grades 7-8

Jackson, Donna M. (2011). *What's so funny? Making sense of humor.*

Illustrated by Ted Stearn. Viking. 64 pages, \$16.99,
ISBN: 978-0-670-01244-2.

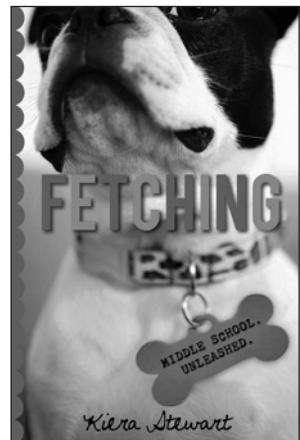
Donna Jackson interviewed 19 experts about different aspects of humor to write this fun treatise on what makes people laugh. Jackson is able to explain how one's age, gender, and culture contribute to what is considered funny and appropriate to laugh about; how television made use of "canned" laughter to encourage more laughter in live audiences; the anatomy of a laugh; how to tell jokes that will make others laugh; and much, much more in this entertaining volume. Stearn's hilarious illustrations are the perfect complement to Jackson's amusing subject matter.



Stewart, Kiera. (2011). *Fetching.*

Disney/Hyperion. 304 pages, \$16.99,
ISBN: 978-1-4231-3845-7.

Tired of the top dogs at her middle school keeping everyone in their place, Olivia draws on her experiences with the animal kingdom to shake up the social order. She decides that people are actually a lot like dogs, and can be categorized as certain dog types. Subsequently, she and her friends begin to "train" their classmates, rewarding them when they shun the school Mean Girl, Brynne, or do something that supports their cause. As the alpha dog loses her place in the school social order, Olivia realizes that there is a high price to pay for popularity, and maybe, just maybe, being able to "fetch" popularity by manipulating others isn't worth the price.



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