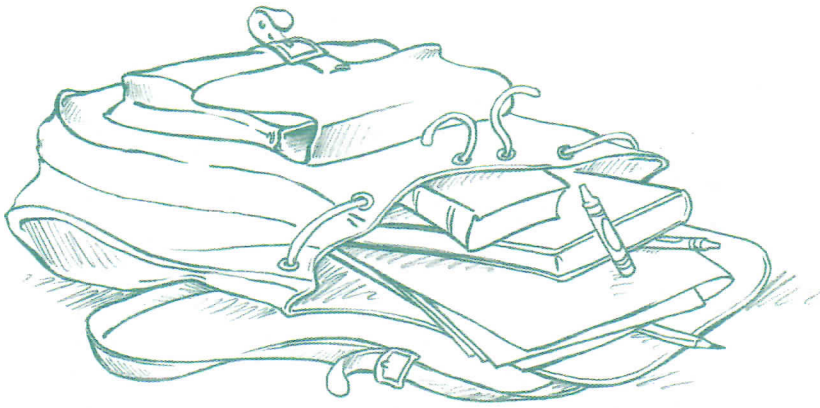


BOOKBAG

Books About Friendship

By Mary Anne Duggan



My kids have this fine-tuned sonar tracking system that detects when I'm on the telephone with a friend and alerts them to do everything they can do to distract me and discourage a long conversation.

So I doubt they'd agree if I told them how much *they* benefit from my friends. The true blessing of my adult friendships is the model they provide for my children on how to be a friend.

Many books offer examples for building and nurturing strong friendships. *Charlotte's Web*, *The Secret Garden* and books authored by Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl and Judy Blume guided an entire generation toward more meaningful friendships. Now considered classics, these books and authors continue to touch young lives. But a number of new books that address friendships recently have surfaced.

One, for ages 4 to 8, is *Don't Need Friends*, written by Carolyn Crimi and illustrated by Lynn Munsinger. Rat and Dog are anything but friends. Although neither one has other friends, each prefers to keep his respective distance. Munsinger's illustrations charm readers as they learn that unlikely friendships can blossom.

My own unlikely friendship with a woman named Caroline had a shaky start and I share that story with my children to illustrate just how unpredictable friendships can be. Childhood liaisons might best be described as "a roller coaster on a runaway track." Certainly as a kindergarten teacher, I often witnessed friendships won, lost and won again, all in the span of a 20-minute recess.

Although children are usually drawn toward other children with similar maturity levels, odd couples can attract—and often what they attract is intense drama. In

Greta's Revenge, Greta the bad witch and Alice the good witch cast spells on each other and change places. This tale, for ages 4 and up, written by Steven J. Simmons and illustrated by Cyd Moore, contains words and pictures that keep readers howling with delight. The result of the witches' spells is empathy, a cornerstone of friendship.

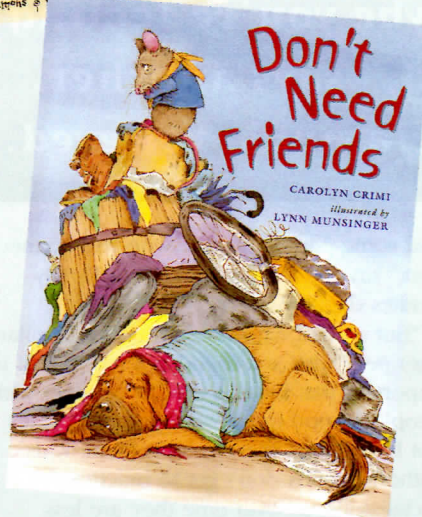
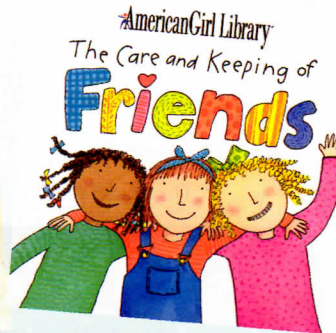
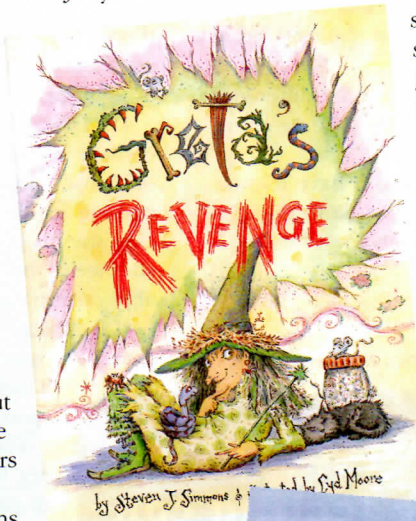
Girls ages 8 and older will devour *The Care and Keeping of Friends* in a single gulp. This addition to the American Girl Library series touches on topics like where to look for friends, how to keep in touch with faraway friends, seven top trouble starters and eight great ice breakers. It's an easy read for girls

at the age when the "fun" of girl friendships really takes off.

More subtle lessons on friendship can be found in chapter books for older readers ages 9 and up: *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, *Beethoven in Paradise* by Barbara O'Connor and *The View from Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg. Paula Danziger skillfully looks at friendships in *Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon*, from the Amber Brown series.

Empathy and other friendship skills also are addressed in a must-have-must-read book for busy parents: *Playground Politics: Understanding the Emotional Life of Your School-Age Child* by Stanley I. Greenspan. Eyebrow-raising research demonstrates that "popular" children are skilled at paying attention to others, offering praise, showing affection and cooperating. These skills

come easier when a child has a solid sense of self. *Playground Politics* guides parents toward helping children develop "an inner center of gravity, an independent self image that will be vital—and tested again—in adolescence."



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