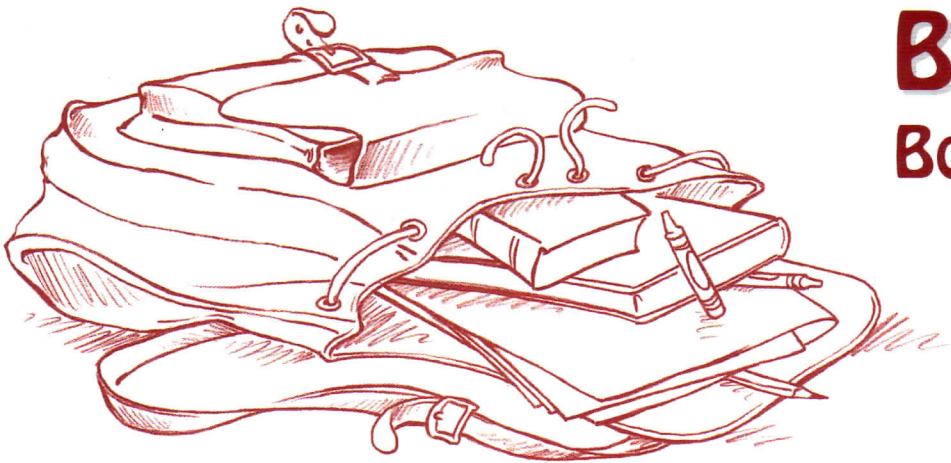


BOOKBAG

Books that make learning fun

By Mary Anne Duggan



There are always a few children who beg for more homework, love standardized tests and live for extra credit. But most kids need a little motivation to hook into learning.

Motivation can dwindle when young school children leap from concrete to more symbolic activities. A child may take to rhyming words in kindergarten but by the later primary years parts of speech seem distant and confusing. Children leave one grade learning math by cooking and enter another being asked to carry and borrow numbers on paper.

Alfie Kohn, author of *Punished by Rewards*, believes we can't truly motivate someone else. Instead, adults can offer children stimulating experiences in a caring environment so "kids can act on their own natural desire to find out."

Children's books can close the gap between skills children need to learn and the way they'd like to learn them. Ruth Heller has taught essential skills to children over the last decade through her colorful, nonfiction books. Among her many series, Heller's books on the parts of speech pave the way for young readers to grasp this symbolic concept.

Heller started this series with *A Cache of Jewels and Other Collective Nouns* and has gone on to write books about verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs, prepositions and pronouns. Her latest, *Mine, All Mine: A*

Book About Pronouns, takes this mind-numbing topic and turns it into a fun ride.

Mine, All Mine, like all of Heller's books, grows with the reader and can be enjoyed by the whole family. A preschool or kindergarten reader will appreciate the rhyme and humor. Early elementary folks will learn how to spot pronouns and older readers will pick up on the nuances of pronouns. Did you know "they" had nuances?

As active as kids are, action verbs can be perplexing. *Add It, Dip It, Fix It* by R. M. Schneider gives funky graphics to action

verbs, rendering them less mysterious. This book also is helpful for emerging readers needing explicit picture cues to figure out words.

Kids must be able to recognize what a quotation is before they can understand how to put little marks around them in their writing. Tobi Tobias brings us *A World of Words: An ABC of Quotations*, with brilliant illustrations by Peter Malone. Each letter of the alphabet is accompanied by quotations from the words of Thomas Jefferson, William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes and Edna St. Vincent Millay, among others.

I tried to be a kind teacher but I never thought I put a math curse on my kids. According to Jon Scieszka in *Math Curse*, however, I did. The teacher in *Math Curse* says (as I once did), "You know, you can think of almost everything as a math problem." This sends one child into a tailspin of numbers when he sees everything he encounters as a math problem. This book, too, spans age levels but is especially ripe for second through fourth graders.

Math Curse makes light of math phobia and *Marvelous Math: A Book of Poems*, selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins and illustrated by Karen Barbour, does the same, with lines like:

"Math makes me feel safe knowing that my brother will always be three years younger than I am, and every day of the year will have twenty-four hours."

One Hundred Is a Family by Pam Munoz Ryan and illustrated by Benrei Huang shows children how to count by 10s. *More Than One* by Miriam Schlein and illustrated by Caldecott Honor recipient Donald Crews teaches how the number one can refer to more than one of something, as in seven days in one week and nine players on one baseball team.

The *M & Ms Brand Chocolate Candies Counting Book* by Barbara Barbieri McGrath and *The Crayon Counting Book* by Pam Munoz Ryan and Jerry Pallota,

encourage children to use readily available items to practice math

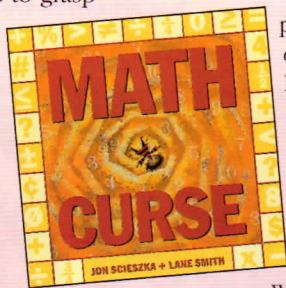
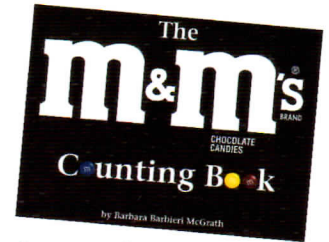
skills. Both books are a pleasure to read but are much more fun when acted out with crayons or M & M's.

Multiplication and division are tackled lightly in *One Hundred Hungry Ants* and *A Remainder of One*, both written by Elinor J. Pinczes and illustrated by Bonnie MacKain. Children with a budding awareness of these concepts will benefit most from reading these books, although the words alone are pleasing.

Division is introduced to much younger readers in *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins. A mother makes a batch of cookies for her two children to share (read: divide). When the doorbell keeps ringing with more visitors, the division continues, until Grandma comes a knocking with another batch of cookies.

Marilyn Burns, nationally acclaimed math expert and author of *The I Hate Mathematics! Book*, reaches out to young mathematicians with her "Brainy Day Books" series. *The Greedy Triangle* follows a triangle as it changes into a quadrilateral, pentagon, hexagon and even a dodecagon. Do you know what a dodecagon is? Readers of *The Greedy Triangle* know that it is a 12-sided-shape, which proves to be too many for even the Greedy Triangle.

There never can be too many books to show children that learning can be fun!



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