

Participation Palooza!

Creating a Festive Storytime Atmosphere with Interactive Books

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Interactive books are ideal for storytime.
Photos courtesy of Brown County Library.

A storytime audience does not have to be listeners only. Although your audience might be captive, what you really want is to *captivate* them.

Participation stories, loosely defined as picturebooks that invite audience involvement whether through voice or movement, are an increasingly dynamic storytelling tool. I've broken the participation genre into four categories, with suggestions for when and how to use each type and a list of recommended titles.

Get Moving: Exercise in Disguise

Move-around time is an essential component of most storytimes, and the most common way to combat restlessness between sit-down stories is with music ("Shake Your Sillies Out," anyone?). Books that provide the opportunity to be active are an invigorating outlet that can help librarians break out of the repetitive, yet often cumbersome, "story, song, felt board, story, song" routine.

Any story that asks the kids to get up and move around—even if light on actual physical exertion—keeps the young and restless crowd from falling into a storytime stupor. Classic animal locomotion stories such as Eric Carle's *From Head to Toe* or Steve Jenkins's *Move!* are classics, but they could grow weary from overuse. They can stay fresh when used in conjunction with newer titles.

Overt aerobic titles such as Doreen Cronin's *Bounce/Stretch/Wiggle* trilogy and Taeun Yoo's *You Are a Lion! And Other Fun Yoga Poses* are wonderful for restless crowds. Classic chant stories such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Michael Rosen's large-format version is a staple) and *The Berenstain Bears and the Spooky Old Tree* keep up a fast-paced tour with enough suspense to keep your fellow adventurers engaged.

Overreliance on these standbys, however, dims their charms and might lead to audience (and librarian) fatigue, so why not explore new releases? One recent entry in this genre, which invites listeners to take a thrill-seeking journey, is David LaRoche's splashy, stomp-y *It's a Tiger*. A crafty tiger disguises himself in a variety of scenes, and just when you think you've lost him, he reappears. Running, climbing invisible ladders, and swimming strokes are a few of the moves required of young listeners.

To further explore the rascal-like, yet noble, nature of the tiger, pair this story with Peter Brown's recent *Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*. Or create an animal escapade event by including Peggy Rathmann's zoo-escape caper *Good Night, Gorilla*. Gorilla shares the same expressions as Tiger, varying between showy smiles and enigmatic Mona Lisa glances. Preschoolers will love to share their thoughts on the motives behind the madcap antics of this mischievous duo.

Light on locomotion, but with the dynamic nature to charm a crowd, Jan Thomas's *Can You Make a Scary Face?* will get toddlers and preschoolers on their feet. The bossy ladybug narrator of this short and frenzied delight demands the audience stand up, sit down, stand up again, and do the chicken dance in an increasingly frenzied manner. Of course, making a scary face is



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also required, and asking the children to show their adults and peers their best effort extends the glee of this event.

Touch This Book: Flaps, Die-Cuts, and other Interactive Features

If *Can You Make a Scary Face?* has demonstrated that your audience likes to be bossed around by a book, try *Press Here* by Hervé Tullet and *Tap the Magic Tree* by Christie Matheson. *Press Here*, an interactive conceptual emporium of a book, demands audience engagement. Dots change in number, shape, size, and pattern as children follow the book's commands. Children will enjoy touching the dots, shaking the book, and turning pages to produce ever-transforming results.

Press Here is the distinguished founder in what will surely be an increasingly large field of books that seemingly respond to touch, much like an app. Case in point: *Tap the Magic Tree* features an apple tree that cycles through the seasons in response to tapping and shaking of the pages.

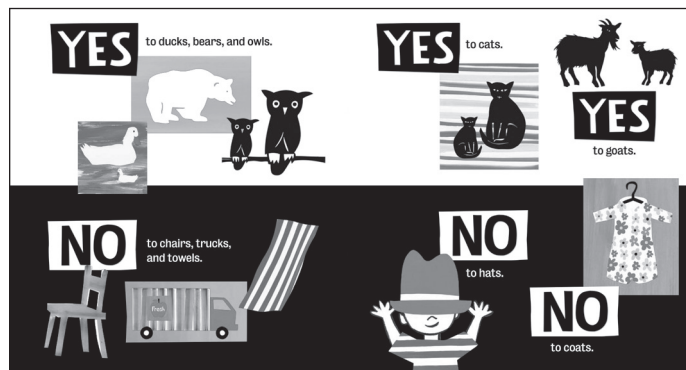
These types of book work best with a small audience so every child can have a turn experiencing the empowering results of their literal handiwork. One librarian found these books especially useful with a small group of students with sensory needs—allowing them to interact more fully with the book. The emphasis on following directions to achieve a reward is sugar-coated medicine.

Classic third-wall-breakdown stories such as *The Monster at the End of this Book* by Jon Stone can be performed by the librarian without children touching the pages. This experience works well when you have a large group and don't want to incite the drama that comes with picking a select few children to star as page-turners. When reading *The Monster at the End of this Book*, I read Grover's commands and then promptly ignore them by turning the page, much to the audience's endorsement.

Open Very Carefully: A Book with Bite by Nick Bromley shatters the third wall with the appearance of an unwanted guest. An ill-tempered alligator is trapped in the tale of *The Ugly Duckling*. The traditional tale fades to the background as the duckling (who is actually quite adorable) advises the audience on how to deal with the scaly nemesis. This entails rocking the book back and forth to lull the beast into slumber and then drawing a ballerina ensemble on the snoring creature with pink crayon (the duckling can't resist).

At the end of the tale, the scaly grump eats his way out of his paper purgatory by bashing a literal hole in the book. This delightful hole-in-the-last-page device has also been used in Corrine Demas's *Always in Trouble* and Emily Gravett's *Again!*, featuring, respectively, a disobedient dog and a belligerent baby dragon as the culprits.

Beyond being a theme unto themselves, interactive options can instantly invigorate timeless themes. *Press Here* fits seamlessly into color and counting themes, and Jess Klausmeier's *Open This Little Book* highlights colors, patterns, and sizes via clever engineering that feels like a cross section of the rainbow. A pro-



Interior pages from *Do You Know Which Ones Will Grow?* by Susan Shea, illustration by Tom Slaughter. Photos used with permission of Blue Apple Books.

gression of animals (and a giant) open their own storybooks, and the character within that book opens another book, leading to progressively smaller books. The center book is a Thumbelina-sized curiosity, and from there the reader closes all the previously opened books until the last page is reached. Each book is a different rainbow color with patterned covers that gives a hint to the identity of the next reader. For example, the little green book with a lily pad pattern contains a frog who opens a carrot-patterned orange book to read about a rabbit. The final page unites all the animals in a whimsical forest library.

Use Your Voice: Chants, Refrains, and Music

The most self-explanatory category of participatory reads—there is a wide variety of vocal-centered books from traditional songs to rollicking tongue twisters. There are an ample number of classic children's songs in picturebook format, many of them with their own unique twists on well-known favorites.

The Seals on the Bus by Lenny Holt and Paul Brett's mud-pie infused *Little Bunny Foo Foo: Told and Sung by the Good Fairy* are examples of these amped-up singable stories. For those of us who are not confident singers, many titles make use of exclamations and utterances as central to the story.

Granny's incredulous refrain "Whaaaaat?" in Kate Lum's aptly titled *What? Said Granny: An Almost Bedtime Story* is easy for the audience to repeat in unison. *More Bears!* by Kevin Nesbitt also contains the title refrain. Best used with preschool to second-grade audiences, this zany tale of an author losing control of his story is surprisingly sophisticated. As the author's tale is overrun by an eclectic array of bears (demanded by the audience with the straightforward command, "More bears!"), the author finally regains control only to introduce a surprise visitor on the last page. If your audience is too shy to shout the refrain, have a fellow staff member or volunteer planted in the audience (preferably with a megaphone) whom you can cue to shout "More bears!"

Make a Guess: Books that Ask Questions

This category of participation story appeals to children's innate

desire to share opinions and knowledge with others. Susan Shea's *Do You Know Which Ones Will Grow?* teaches the concept of animate versus inanimate through rhyming questions, while Laura Vaccaro Seeger's *First the Egg* uses clever die-cuts to reveal answers about the order of things. Channeling children's seemingly random asides into a guessing session keeps the focus on the experience of sharing a particular book, rather than a distraction.

For an audience of preschoolers or school-aged visitors, try William Steig's fast-paced flurry *Which Would You Rather Be?* Harry Bliss's cartoonish illustrations, set against a solid backdrop, show a young boy and girl poised in front of a magician's hat. The simple formula involves posing the titular question involving two opposing people or things as they appear from a magic hat, and then letting this book work its ice-breaking siren song.

As children excitedly opine whether they'd rather be day or night, an elbow or a knee, a mouse or an elephant, they learn more about each other. Be sure to pepper your reading with asking "Why?" because the reasoning behind certain answers often entertains the adults in the audience as well.

Elementary-aged groups can often be intimidating (the too-cool-for-storytime effect), so I will offer up one more audience-

pleaser: *Guess Again!* by Mac Barnett. Completely one-of-a-kind, this little book of riddles overturns the expected answer in favor of impossible-to-guess answers. Sample riddle: "He steals carrots from the neighbor's yard / His hair is soft, his teeth are hard / His floppy ears are long and funny / Can you guess who? That's right! My . . . Grandpa Ned!"¹

Irreverent, quirky, and slightly subversive, Barnett's book offers children the freedom of guessing without the expectation of being anywhere near correct.

Sharing books with children is the reason our job exists. Children need books, but there are some books that need the interaction of children to fulfill their mission, whether it is a chorus of singers, a stampede of dancers, a cacophony of guessers, or even the tactile interaction of a child turning a page. Whether gently imploring or bossily demanding attention, these stories will enchant audiences by calling out for each participant as if by name. ☺

Reference

1. Mac Barnett, *Guess Again!* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), unpagued.

Recommended Participation Stories

All picturebooks are unpagued unless noted.

Bluemle, Elizabeth. *How Do You Wokka-Wokka?* Illus. by Randy Cecil. Candlewick, 2009.

Boudreau, H el ene. *I Dare You Not to Yawn!* Illus. by Serge Bloch. Candlewick, 2013.

Haughton, Chris. *Oh No, George!* Candlewick, 2012.

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. *I am a Backhoe.* Tricycle, 2010.

Jenkins, Steve and Robin Page. *Move!* Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Klausmeier, Jesse. *Open this Little Book.* Illus. by Suzy Lee. Chronicle, 2013.

Kohuth, Jane. *Duck Sock Hop.* Illus. by Jane Porter. Dial, 2012.

LaRochelle, David. *It's a Tiger!* Illus. by Jeremy Tankard. Chronicle, 2012.

Lewis, Ann. *Fly Blanky, Fly!* Harper, 2012.

Matheson, Christie. *Tap the Magic Tree.* Greenwillow, 2013.

Nesbitt, Ken. *More Bears!* Illus. by Troy Cummings. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2010.

O'Byrne, Nicola and Nick Bromley. *Open Very Carefully: A Book with Bite.* Nosy Crow, 2013.

Rosenthal, Amy Krouse. *Duck! Rabbit!* Illus. by Tom Lichtenheld. Chronicle, 2009.

———. *Exclamation Mark.* Illus. by Tom Lichtenheld. Scholastic, 2013.

Saltzberg, Barney. *Beautiful Oops!* Workman, 2010.

Savage, Stephen. *Where's Walrus?* Scholastic, 2011.

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro. *First the Egg.* Roaring Brook, 2007.

Shea, Susan. *Do You Know Which Ones Will Grow?* Illus. by Tom Slaughter. Blue Apple, 2011.

Thomas, Jan. *Can You Make a Scary Face?* Beech Lane, 2009.

———. *Is Everyone Ready for Fun?* Beech Lane, 2011.

———. *Rhyming Dust Bunnies.* Atheneum, 2009.

Thompson, Lauren. *Hop, Hop, Jump!* Illus. by Jarrett Krosoczka. Margaret K. McElderry, 2012.

Timmers, Leo. *Who is Driving?* Gecko, 2006.

Tullet, Herv e. *The Game of Light.* Phaidon, 2011.

———. *Press Here.* Chronicle, 2011.