

*Growing***UP***Kids Books Evolve**By Meakin Armstrong*

Grandparents read-aloud from "Make Way for Ducklings" or "The Berenstain Bears." Toddlers fondle thick cardboard-bound books, sometimes shaped like cars and trains. A teenaged boy purchases the graphic novel "Bone" at a school fair, while his friends devour fantasy best-seller "Eldest" or recently released teen chick-lit title, "Ready or Not."

Children's publishing is a multi-billion-dollar business that covers a myriad of book titles and products. A four-year-old's interests differ from someone who is eight, while an eight-year-old won't read the same book as someone sixteen. Complicating it further, boys and girls tend to gravitate to different topics. Some children love to read, while others are "reluctant readers."



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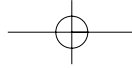


“We’re considered a category, but in fact, we’re the equivalent of the entire adult market,” says Lisa Holton, president of Scholastic’s Trade and Book Fairs division. “We have biography and fiction; we deal with babies, we deal with teenagers. It’s remarkably varied.” Back in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, teachers and librarians ruled children’s publishing: whatever they recommended, children tended to read. And even though schools and libraries still account for some thirty-five per cent of the market, today’s superstore book chains with their expanded children’s sections dominate the landscape. Many claim this has created a larger market overall. However, now that publishers must appeal to the consumer directly, book jackets are much more graphically ambitious, and in-store displays more elaborate.

#### THE HARRY POTTER EFFECT

Coveted most of all by publishers are so-called repeaters, writers who can regularly produce a best-seller—another J.K. Rowling. Call it the Harry Potter Effect, but children’s book publishers also find it appealing when authors are “mediagenic,” when their personalities and life stories play well in our sound-bite society.

As with adult publishing, book editors want a successful franchise—or series—because it can guarantee ongoing sales. “Young people want to keep these books forever and line them up on their walls,” says Susan Katz, president and publisher of HarperCollins Children’s Books. “They also want to be the first to own the latest one.” Adds Daisy Kline vice president of marketing for Random House Children’s Books: “We always look to collectability for our titles.” An additional trend is the growing partnership between publishers and Hollywood. Says Katz of HarperCollins, “A movie can give you a boost of somewhere between three times, all the way to seven times the number of units that you normally sell.”



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CHILDREN'S BOOKS



In short, publishing for children is now much the same as it is for adults, but with one key difference: most of those who'll enjoy the story don't actually purchase the books—their so-called gatekeepers do. “We have to make our books as appealing as possible to the ultimate customer, the child,” explains Katz. “However, we also know that we've got to appeal to the gatekeepers, because if they don't like it, they're not going to be as excited about buying it.”

Given the plethora of books to choose from, how do consumers decide what to purchase? Most tend to buy the ones they grew up with. Classic “Goodnight, Moon,”

## PUBLISHERS' PICKS

**Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem About China** (Ed Young, Chronicle Books) • With a unique format (the book opens vertically with tiered pages) and gorgeous illustrations, this book conveys the many facets of China.

**Can You See What I See? The Night Before Christmas** (Walter Wick, Cartwheel Books) • Scenes from Clement C. Moore's “A Visit from St. Nicholas” inspire fascinating photographs where readers search for intriguing hidden objects.

**Kamishibai Man** (Allen Say, Houghton Mifflin/Walter Lorraine) • After many years of retirement, a retired Japanese storyteller decides to make his rounds once more, even though the children seem to have forgotten him.

**The Last Apprentice: Revenge of the Witch** (Joseph Delaney, Greenwillow) • Thomas was an ordinary twelve-year-old until he became apprenticed to a ghost and had to learn how to battle the most evil of all witches on his own.

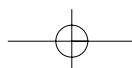
**The Little Engine That Could** (Watty Piper, Philomel) • The classic story of the little blue train that carries a trainload of toys over a mountain by telling itself “I think I can, I think I can” has been given a new, fresh look by illustrator Loren Long.

**MirrorMask** (Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, HarperCollins Children's Books) • Raised in a family of circus performers, Helena dreams of an ordinary life, until mysterious and haunting music draws her into an even stranger realm.

**The Misadventures of Maude March** (Audrey Coulombis, Random House Books For Young Readers) • After they've been orphaned, two whip-smart sisters journey across the Old West. Soon, oldest sister Maude, fifteen, becomes a wanted outlaw.

**New York State of Mind** (Billy Joel, Scholastic Press) • Billy Joel's familiar lyrics invite readers to tag along as two spirited dogs experience the energy and excitement of The Big Apple.

**Tickle the Duck!** (Ethan Long, Little, Brown) • Children get to touch the duck's soft stomach, his hairy armpit, and rubbery foot. Despite his protests, does the duck really like being tickled after all?



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for instance, was published in 1947 but still sells a million copies a year. Additionally, those books awarded Caldecotts or Newbery Medals by the American Library Association are often strong sellers. (Go to [ala.org](http://ala.org) for a list of winners.)

In January, HarperCollins will relaunch its Web site, with a new design feature that recommends books to parents, teachers, librarians, and children. Lisa Holton at Scholastic says her company attracts kids to books through book clubs and festive literary events at school fairs. Events include everything from author visits and read-a-thons, to parties where kids dress up like characters from their favorite books. Scholastic, she says, doesn't "treat books like brussels sprouts." They are instead, "treasures to be discovered, enjoyed, and shared."

#### LITERARY SLUMBER PARTIES

The Young Adult category is booming. According to Rick Richter, president and publisher of Simon & Schuster Children's



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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Publishing, it has risen by thirty per cent each year in the last four years. But the teen category is an age range, not a genre. Today, "Go Ask Alice" would likely be a Young Adult title; some say "Catcher in the Rye" would



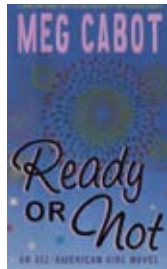
also. Subcategories can include comedic books, fantasy titles, graphic novels, chick-lit, and even controversial titles that address sex frankly. To appeal to this growing readership, some libraries are piping in music to its areas dedicated to teens. Nationwide, others are taking it further, hosting "lock-ins," wherein children and teens spend the night in the library as a sort of literary slumber party. And adult fiction writers are getting into the act. Daisy Kline of Random House points out that authors such as Carl Hiaasen are also now writing children's books.

**FANTASY, THE NEW REALITY**

Fantasy is the booming subcategory. The "Potter" series (which has reportedly garnered \$185 million dollars for Scholastic in the company's 2006 first quarter) has brought new attention to the genre. Parents are seemingly more willing to pay for these

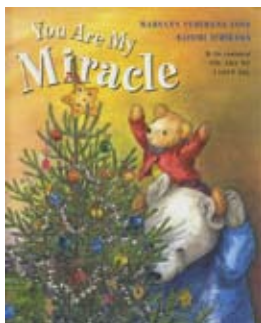
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hardcover titles. “Eldest,” for example, retails at twenty-one dollars. “Every major publishing house has its fantasy titles,” notes Simon and Schuster’s Richter. Many, such as Christopher Paolini’s “Eldest” have become million-copy national best-sellers, while Philip Pullman’s works are also read avidly by adults.



## READING ADULTS

Sure, those involved in children’s publishing often comment that their work is “fun.” Employees might be asked to gather around a conference table to play with and comment upon the latest pop-up book. But according to Richter at Simon & Schuster, most people in the industry are “mission-driven,” and want to share the love of reading. The major publishers are involved in nonprofit reading programs such as First Book and Project Cicero. “Studies show that once a child owns a book, they’re forty per cent more likely to want to own another,” he says. All this leads



to hope for book publishers as a whole: young readers will grow up to become reading adults.