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How to choose and use English books for Hong Kong children aged 0-3: Recommendation from linguists

Introduction

This book list is suitable for the following families:

- Parents whose native language is English.
- Parents whose native language isn't English, but who can read English fluently with good pronunciation.
- Parents who can have simple conversations in English using basic vocabulary and sentence patterns for at least 15 minutes without needing a script.
- Parents who want to, or are already helping, their 0-3 year old child develop English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills from birth.

Important Notes:

- If your child starts learning English later (e.g., after age three), some of the reading materials on this list might not be suitable. Parents should adjust the materials to match their child's language and cognitive level. Otherwise, the materials might seem too simple and childish for older children, which could make them less engaging.
- This research team has no cooperation or direct interest relationship with the authors and publishers in the book list.

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For children 0-1 Years Old

When should I start to read books to my child?

You can start engaging your child with books when they are able to sit up independently, around six months. Before this, you can look at large, colorful cards or learning posters with your child. These should have clear outlines and simple content.

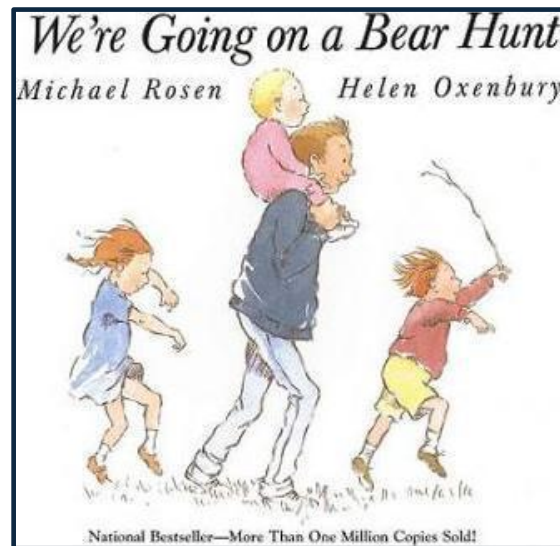
How should I choose books for my child?

After your child can sit up, you can choose board books with rounded corners. At this stage, your child's vision is still developing, so opt for books with thick picture lines, large areas, and fewer details. Whether the book has text or not isn't crucial. Since your child is still learning about time and causality, they might not understand the connection between pages, but they can grasp individual pictures or content on a single page. Let them look at the same page repeatedly or ask you to repeat sentences. There's no need to force them to sit through an entire book.

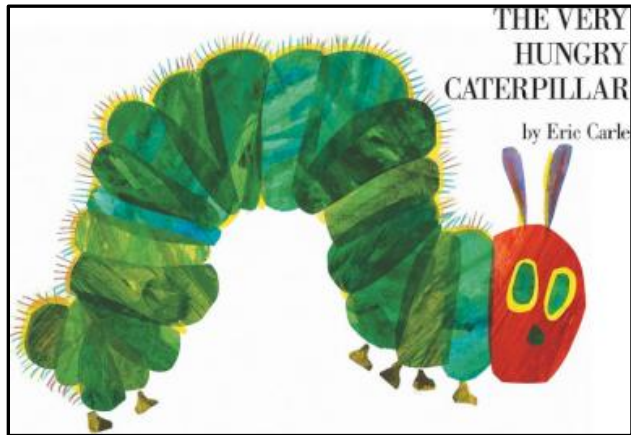
Suggested books:

1. We're Going on a Bear Hunt (Board book), by Michael Rosen

This book is rich in onomatopoeic words like "splosh" and "splash," and includes many common English consonants and consonant clusters. It can be a great first board book to help your child get used to unique English pronunciations. You can find videos of the author performing the book online, which can guide you to tell the story and act it out with your child. Doing the actions together can be a fun way to engage your child.



2. The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Board book), by Eric Carle

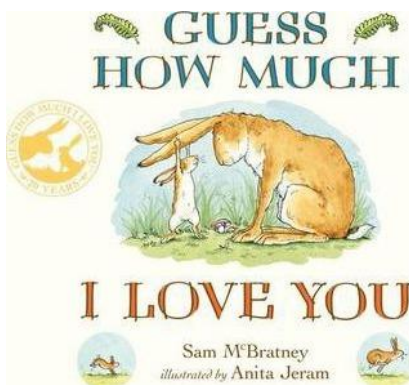
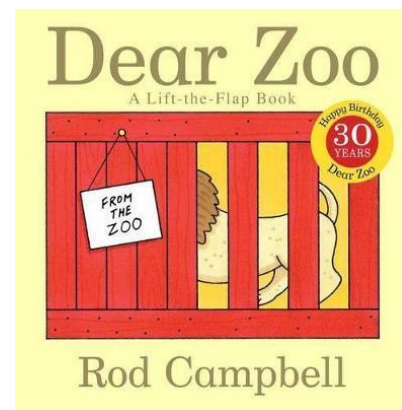


In this classic children's book, the caterpillar goes through a week of being "hungry" and eventually transforms into a butterfly. The book introduces your child to the days of the week and food-related nouns. You can also use it to help your child understand singular and plural nouns in English by emphasizing plural forms like adding "-s" (e.g., strawberry – strawberries). For example, you can point

to a strawberry and say, "What's this? It's a strawberry!" Then, pointing to two strawberries, you could say, "What are these? These are two strawberries! How many strawberries are there? Two!" Comparing sentences like these helps children learn about articles (a/an, the), numbers, and singular and plural nouns.

3. Dear Zoo: A Lift-the-flap Book (Board book), by Rod Campbell, illustrated by Rod Campbell

Children love animals, and this book is great for teaching animal-related vocabulary. Each animal has unique characteristics. Parents can describe these features, like a short tail or long neck, and imitate animal sounds and movements, which can make your child laugh.



4. Guess how much I love you (Board book), by Sam McBratney, illustrated by Anita Jeram

The book includes common adjectives like "high" and "far." Parents can help children understand these abstract concepts by acting them out, so children can experience comparisons of height, length, and distance. This book encourages physical interaction and uses joyful, warm language.

For children 1-2 Years Old

How should I choose books for my child?

For this stage, choose books with detailed pictures, character details, and simple plots.

Books like those in the Richard Scarry series, where a single page can tell a complete story,

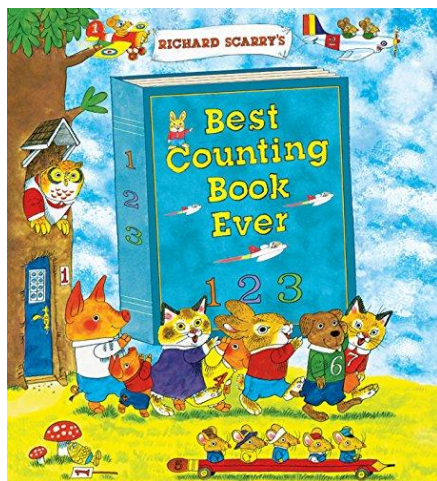
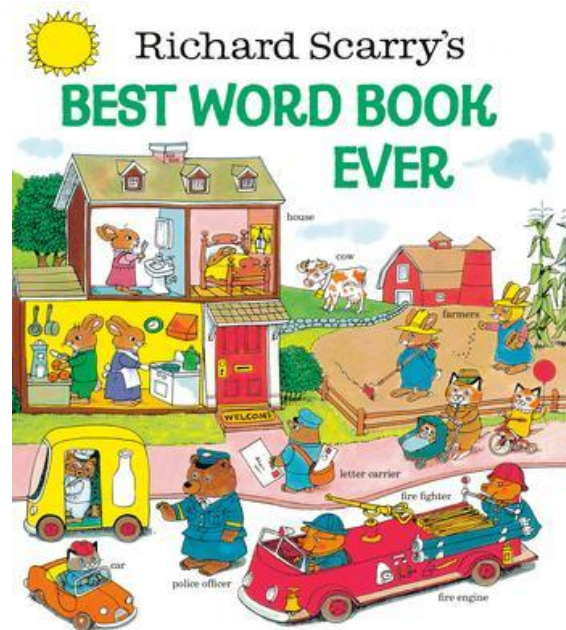
or books like those by Oliver Jeffers, where a small story unfolds across several pages, are both suitable options.

Suggested Books:

Richard Scarry Series: This series of storybooks features a complete story on each page. It's a large collection from the United States, and parents can start with the simpler books in the series.

5. Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever (Hardback), by Richard Scarry, illustrated by Golden Books

This book is divided into scenes from everyday life, covering themes like clothing, food, housing, and transportation. It introduces English vocabulary in detail for each scene, grouping words and items by theme on the same page to enhance learning. The pictures are colorful, the information is rich, and there are many hidden details that can surprise children. Using this book during the child's rapid vocabulary growth phase at 1-2 years old can help boost their vocabulary.

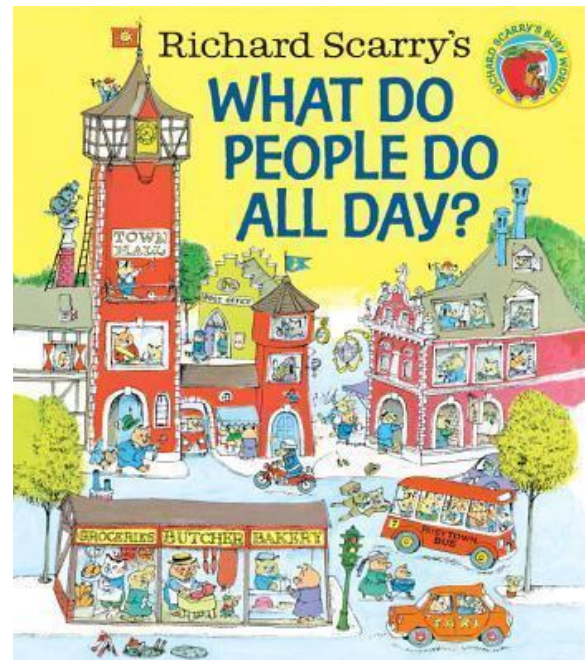


6. Richard Scarry's Best Counting Book Ever (Hardback), by Luna Rising Editors

Children who enjoy counting will love this book. Each page features a counting task, with engaging and easy-to-understand pictures. The rich and coherent storyline helps children step into the world of numbers and learn them gradually. Similar to "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," this book offers a great chance to teach children about singular and plural noun forms (e.g., car, cars).

7. Richard Scarry's What Do People Do All Day? (Hardback), by (author) Richard Scarry

This book introduces various occupations through cute animal images. Each page shows an occupation with its daily tasks, accompanied by a short sentence. This is a great opportunity to teach children correct verbal usage and different ways to describe actions and events. For example, the book includes many sentences with third person singular verbs. Parents can use these sentences effectively when reading with their children and focus on verb accuracy during interactions, emphasizing the “-s” ending on most of these verbs. However, the third person singular “-s” is a feature that native English speakers often master in later childhood, so don't worry if your child doesn't pick it up right away!



If you start reading the above books to your child from age 1, by 18 months, they should be able to understand basic English instructions and say some simple words. At this stage, you can try reading storybooks with continuous but simple plots to them.

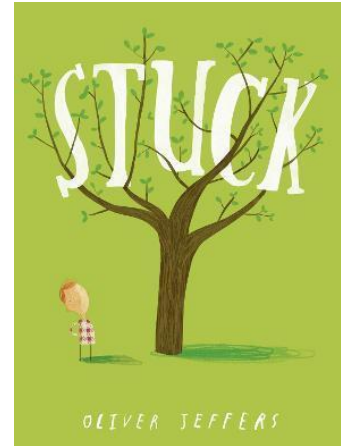
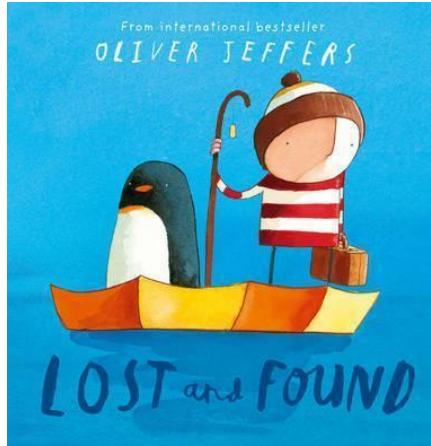
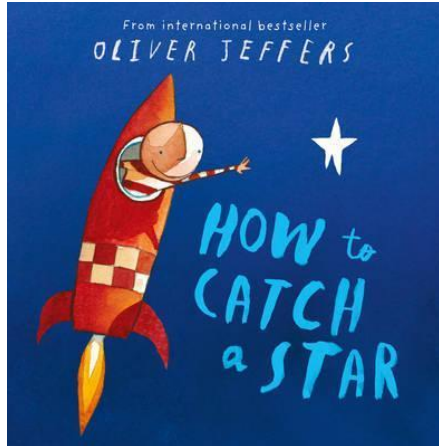
Suggested Books:

We've selected the following books from three best-selling children's book series, which are well-suited for children's language and cognitive level at this age. The plotlines center on topics familiar to children, and the illustrations and texts are very engaging.

Oliver Jeffers Series

These books use simple words but have longer sentences with more complex structures. Many sentences express parallel, causal, and contrastive relationships, introducing children to conjunctions like "and" and "but" that connect sentences to show different logical relationships.

The following three books by Oliver Jeffers are written in the past tense, featuring many past tense verbs like "was," "threw," "caught," and "climbed." These verb forms might be challenging for non-native English speakers. Parents can use these books to introduce the past tense by emphasizing verb tenses when reading and interacting with their child.



8. How to Catch a Star (Paperback), by Oliver Jeffers

The story is about a child who wants to pick stars from the sky but can't. Instead, they pick up a starfish on the beach and head home.

9. Lost and Found (Paperback), by Oliver Jeffers

A little boy finds a lost penguin and wants to return it to Antarctica. However, he discovers the penguin isn't lost—it came to him because it misses him dearly!

10. Stuck (Paperback), by Oliver Jeffers

A little boy's kite gets stuck in a tree, and he throws various items to try and retrieve it. The story is humorous and engaging for children.

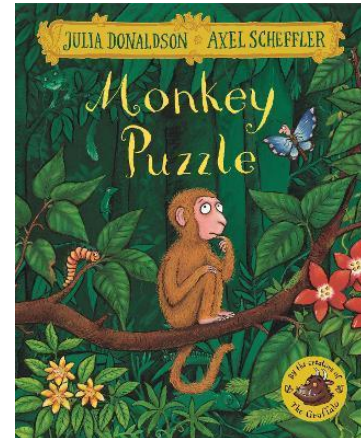
Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler Series

This author-illustrator duo has published many classic works. Julia Donaldson, an English writer, is known for her stories filled with rhyming sentences, making them read like a song. This makes them easy for parents and children to read and remember. However, due to the rhyme scheme, she sometimes uses literary or old-fashioned vocabulary. If parents come across unfamiliar words, there's no need to worry!

At this stage, we recommend:

11. Monkey Puzzle, by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler

The story follows a little monkey searching for its mother. Parents can use this book to introduce children to the characteristics of the animals they meet along the way. The plot is structured and easy for children to follow.



12. Usborne Phonics readers series

This set of books was originally designed for native English-speaking children aged four to five who are starting to learn phonics. However, they're also great for early parent-child reading, as they increase targeted phonetic input and improve your child's phonetic awareness, laying a solid foundation for future phonics learning. Each book focuses on a specific vowel phoneme in English to organize the vocabulary and develop the plot.



When reading aloud, parents can emphasize the vowels the book focuses on, paying attention to the subtle differences between them. Encourage children to follow along and read aloud to prepare them for systematic phonics study later on.

According to the difficulty of pronunciation and vocabulary for Hong Kong parents and children, we have sorted and arranged them as follows:

Hong Kong parents and children can read the vowel sounds in these books more easily, because there are similar phonemes in Cantonese Chinese:

- Bee Makes Tea
- Shark in the Park
- Goose on the Loose
- Mouse Moves House
- Sam Sheep Can't sleep
- Frog on a Log
- Fox on a Box
- Toad Makes a Road
- Crow in the Snow
- Big Pig on a Dig

These books look simple, but their vowel sounds are difficult for native Cantonese speakers to pronounce accurately:

- Ted in a Red Bed
- Ted's Shed
- Hen's Pens
- Fat Cat on a Mat

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