This annotated list of reading materials available to American children in 1776 includes both items published on this side of the Atlantic and works issued abroad and sold here as imports. The titles are divided into five categories: (1) primers and other instructional texts, (2) works intended for moral and religious instruction, (3) stories, (4) rhymes and songs, and (5) game and fun books. Historical notes are included with each annotation. (HTH)
A Selection of Titles

Compiled by
Virginia Haviland
This annotated list of reading materials available to American children in 1776 includes both items published on this side of the Atlantic and works issued abroad and sold here as imports. The titles are divided into five categories: (1) primers and other instructional texts, (2) works intended for moral and religious instruction, (3) stories, (4) rhymes and songs, and (5) game and fun books. Historical notes are included with each annotation. (HTH)

“A facsimile of an original Battledore owned by the Boston Public Library.”

Battledores, folded cards with alphabets and syllables, began to come into use in the mid-eighteenth century. Facsimiles of two designs of battledores are available from the Horn Book, Inc.

**The Child’s New Play-thing:** being a spelling-book, intended to make the learning to read, a diversion instead of a task. Consisting of a new-invented alphabet for children. A variety of lessons in spelling, of one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven syllables, with Scripture-histories, fables, stories, moral and religious precepts, riddles, &c. With entertaining pictures to each story and fable. The whole adapted to the capacities of children, and designed for the use of schools, or for children before they go to school. To which is added,—Three dialogues, shewing, first, How a little boy shall make every body love him. Second, How he shall grow wiser than the rest of his schoolfellows. And, third, How he shall become a great man. Philadelphia: Printed by W. Dunlap, at the Newest-Printing Office, on the South Side of the Jersey Market. M.DCC.LXIII. [1763] 136 p. illus.

D’Al’té Welch describes the Boston edition of 1750 as “the first American child’s book with folk tales.” It includes such stories as “St. George and the Dragon,” “Guy of Warwick,” and “ Reynard the Fox.”

**Giles Gingerbread. The Renowned History of Giles Gingerbread.** A little boy who lived upon learning. Price two coppers. Boston: Printed by Mein and Fleeing, and to be sold by John Mein at the London Book-Store, North-side of King-Street. MDCCLXVIII. [1768] At which place may be had, a great variety of entertaining and instructive books for children. 31 p. illus.

A chapbook, one in John Newbery’s Lilliputian Library, tells how Giles learned his alphabet from gingerbread letters.

[Hornbook. n.p., 1760?] 1 leaf, mounted on wood and covered with isinglass.

Contains the alphabet, syllables, and the Lord’s Prayer.
A Selection of Titles

Compiled by

Virginia Haviland
Preface

This little list of primers, stories, rhymes, and other reading matter available to American children in 1776 includes both items published on this side of the Atlantic and works issued abroad and sold here as imports. These are known to us today from copies in rare book collections or from early advertisements by booksellers. The occasional American post-1776 imprint is cited when its British forerunner was obviously available by 1776 through booksellers deriving stock from abroad. Some American editions were issued with changes to make them seem more American.

After the nonimportation agreement went into effect in 1769, most Boston booksellers conscientiously declined to sell imports, although dealers in other cities did not cease to order copies from London and other British publishers. During the revolutionary wartime and preceding years when ink and paper were hard to procure, American publishing for children was lean indeed for such nonessentials as leisure reading. It is clear, however, through examination of early books and study of documentation by historian-bibliographers for those years that children fortunate enough to have books to read could be given stories as well as primers and the Bible; they could enjoy fairy tales and nursery rhymes, if their adults chose to allow them to lighten their days of learning in this manner.

Locations of these early works in rare book collections can be found in d'Alté Welch's Bibliography of American Children's Books Printed Prior to 1821 or the National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints.

Virginia Haviland
Head, Children's Book Section
General Reference and Bibliography Division
Reference Department

Primers & Other Instructional Texts

A BATTCDORE, to instruct and amuse. York [Eng.] Printed and sold by C. Croshaw,
"A facsimile of an original Battledore owned by the Boston Public Library."

Battledores, folded cards with alphabets and syllables, began to come into use in the mid-eighteenth century. Facsimiles of two designs of battledores are available from the Horn Book, Inc.

The Child's New Play-thing: being a spelling-book, intended to make the learning to read, a diversion instead of a task. Consisting of a new-invented alphabet for children. A variety of lessons in spelling, of one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven syllables, with Scripture histories, fables, stories, moral and religious precepts, riddles, &c. With entertaining pictures to each story and fable. The whole adapted to the capacities of children, and designed for the use of schools, or for children before they go to school. To which is added,—Three dialogues, shewing, first, How a little boy shall make every body love him. Second, How he shall grow wiser than the rest of his schoolfellows. And, third, How he shall become a great man. Philadelphia: Printed by W. Dunlap, at the Newest-Printing Office, on the South Side of the Jersey Market. M.DCC.LXIII. [1763] 136 p. illus.

D'Alté Welch describes the Boston edition of 1750 as "the first American child's book with folk tales." It includes such stories as "St. George and the Dragon," "Guy of Warwick," and "Reynard the Fox."

Giles Gingerbread. The Renowned History of Giles Gingerbread. A little boy who lived upon learning. <Price two coppers.> Boston: Printed by Mein and Fleeming, and to be sold by John Mein at the London Book-Store, North-side of King-Street. MDCCCLXVIII. [1768] At which place may be had, a great variety of entertaining and instructive books for children. 34 p. illus.

A chapbook, one in John Newbery's Lilliputian Library, tells how Giles learned his alphabet from gingerbread letters.

[Hornbook. n.p., 1760?] 1 leaf, mounted on wood and covered with isinglass. Contains the alphabet, syllables, and the Lord's Prayer.
"The hornbook was for centuries a child's first introduction to reading. The Nuremberg Chronicle, published in 1493, shows St. Cecilia holding a hornbook."

A replica is available today from the Horn Book, Inc.

The New-England Primer Improved; for the more easy attaining the true reading of English. To which is added, The assembly of divines and Mr. Cotton's Catechism. Providence: Printed and sold by John Waterman, at the Paper-Mills. 1775. [80] p., illus.

This "Little Bible of New England" was issued in many editions from 1683 through 1830, in more than 400 variations.

In 1900 Ginn & Company in Boston issued a "twentieth century reprint" of The New-England Primer Enlarged (Boston: Printed by E. Draper, for B. Larkin, in Cornhill [1785]) from a copy in the possession of Mr. G. A. Plimpton of New York. This edition contains a reproduction of a portrait of Washington attributed to Paul Revere.

Telescope, Tom, pseud. The Newtonian system of philosophy; explained by familiar objects, in an entertaining manner, for the use of young ladies and gentlemen; by Tom Telescope, A.M. Illustrated with copperplates and cuts. A new improved edition, with many alterations and additions, to explain the late new philosophical discoveries, &c. &c., by a Teacher of Philadelphia. Philadelphia: Published by Jacob Johnson, No. 117, High-Street. 1803. 137 p., illus.

First published in London by J. Newbery in 1761, "being the substance of lectures read to the Lilliputian Society, by Tom Telescope, A.M. And collected and methodized for the benefit of the youth of these kingdoms, by their old friend Mr. Newbery, in St. Paul's Church Yard."

Tom Thumb's Play-Book; to teach children their letters as soon as they can speak. Being a new and pleasant method to allure little ones in the first principles of learning. Boston: Printed and sold by Kneeland and Adams, in Milk-Street. 1771. 31 p.

An edition published in Boston in 1764 is described as containing alphabet rhymes ("A a Apple pyc" and "A was an Archer"), a scripture catechism, and prayers.
This title was reissued in Johnsburg, New York, by Buck Hill Associates in 1970.


Works Intended for Moral and Religious Instruction


"The epistle" is signed J. Taylor.

An epitome of the Bible in verse, commonly known as the Thumb Bible because of its diminutive size.


The cuts used for illustration here have been identified as identical to those in a later *New England Primer.*


The young apprentice Isaiah Thomas is believed to have done the crude little woodcuts which appeared in earlier Boston printings of 1747 and 1748.

The *History of Little King Pippin:* with an account of the melancholy death of four
naughty boys, who were devoured by wild beasts. And the wonderful delivery of Master Harry Harmless, by a little white horse. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Young, Stewart, and M'Culloch, the corner of Chestnut and Second-Streets. 1786. 62 p. illus.

An English, Scottish, and Irish edition was advertised in 1775 by Francis Newbery in London. The first Worcester edition is dated 1778 and the second, 1795.


A work first published in England (1671-72), this became the most widely read children's book of the Puritan age.


A compendium of little stories, an alphabet and maxims projecting lessons for behavior and mental improvements, and, also, some riddles.

*The Prodigal Daughter: or, A strange and wonderful relation: shewing how a gentleman of a vast estate in Bristol, had a proud and disobedient daughter, who, because her parents would not support her in all her extravagance, bargained with the Devil to poison them. How an angel informed her parents of their daughter's design. How she lay in a trance four days; and when she was put into the grave, she came to life again, and related the wonderful things she saw in the other world. Likewise the substance of a sermon preached on the occasion, by the Rev. Mr. Williams, from Luke xv. 2-1. Danvers: Printed and sold by E. Russell, next Bell-Tavern [1776?]. 16 p. illus.*

This grim preacherment was issued by various printers up to about 1820.

By the same English divine who created more enduring verses.


Described by Welch as a “gruesome compilation”; one of the earliest American children’s books with religious narratives.

Stories

Aulnoy, Marie Catherine Jumelle de Berneville, comtesse d’. Queen Mab: containing a select collection of only the best, most instructive, and entertaining tales of the fairies: viz. 1. Graciosa and Percineta. 2. The fair one with golden locks. 3. The blue bird. 4. The invisible prince. 5. The Princess Verenata. 6. The Princess Rosetta. 7. The golden bough. 8. The orange-tree and the bee. 9. The little good mouse. Written by the Countess D’Aulnoi. Adorned with curious cuts. To which are added, A fairy tale in the ancient English style, by Dr. Parnell: and Queen Mab’s song. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall. MDCCCLXX. [1770] 367 p. illus.

Another edition of Mme. D’Aulnoy’s tales appeared as The History of the Tales of the Fairies (“newly done from the French”). It contains many of the above stories and was printed in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1800.

Another, A Collection of Novels and Tales (London, 1721. 2 v.) includes “The Story of Finella the Cinder-girl” (the first appearance of Cinderella in English).

Today, “The Blue Bird” (illustrated by Fiona


Defoe, Daniel. The Wonderful Life and Most Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, mariner. Containing a full and particular account how he lived twenty-eight years in an uninhabited island, on the coast of America; how the ship was lost in a storm, and all his companions were drowned, and he only was cast upon the shore by the wreck. With A true relation how he was at last miraculously preserved, by pirates. Carefully abridged. London: Printed for the Booksellers of London and Westminster. 1775. 118 p. front; Contents: The life and adventures of Robinson Crusoe.—Farther adventures of Robinson Crusoe. v. 2.—Robinson Crusoe’s vision of the angelic world. v. 3.

American editions were also available; d’Alte Welch lists a New York (Hugh Gaine) imprint of 1774, and Evans, a Philadelphia (Robert Bell) imprint of 1776.


The earliest dated English edition appears to be the one printed in Birmingham by John Baskerville for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall Mall,

The first edition was printed in London for the author and sold by A. Millar in 1749.

A moral miscellany, sometimes subtitled “or, evening amusements at a boarding school.” This includes the following fairy tale, which was also published separately as The story of the cruel giant Barbarico, the good giant Benefico, and the little pretty dwarf Mignon. Boston: Printed by Mein and Fleeming, and to be sold by John Mein at the London Book-Store, Northside of King-Street. MDCCLXVIII. [1768] At which place may be had, a great variety of entertaining and instructive books for children. 53 p.


Goody Two Shoes. THE HISTORY OF LITTLE GOODY TWO-SHOES; otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes. With the means by which she acquired her learning and wisdom, and in consequence thereof her estate. Set forth at large for the benefit of those, Who from a state of rags and care, And having shoes but half a pair, Their fortune and their fame would fix, And gallop in a coach and six. See the original manuscript in the Vatican at Rome, and the cuts by Michael Angelo; illustrated with comments of our great modern critics. New York: Printed by H. Gaine, at the Bible and Crown, in Hanover-Square. 1775. 156 p. illus.

This one-time nursery favorite, in Newbery’s Lilliputian Library, is available today: The History of Little Goody Two Shoes (New York, Macmillan, 1924).


A medieval romance that survived as a chapbook, this describes the exploits of a knight who overcame a giant.
Jack the Giant-killer. [The History of Jack and the Giants. Part 1. To which is added The third voyage of Sindbad the sailor. Newport: Printed by S. Southwick, 1770] 24 p. This is the earliest known publication of Sindbad the Sailor in the United States.

The King and the cobbler. The Most Delightful History of the King and the Cobbler. Shewing how the King first came acquainted with the cobbler, and the many pleasant humours which happened thereupon, &c. [cut] The cobbler sitting and whistling in his stall. [cut] The cobbler's reception and behaviour at court. [Boston] Printed and sold by John Boyle, in Marlborough-Street. [1770?] 16 p. illus. The king referred to in this "pleasant humour" is Henry the Eighth.

The Mother's Gift; or, A present for all little children who are good. Embellished with cuts. New York: Printed and sold by Hugh Gaine. [1775] One of a series of four instructive stories, the others being Father's Gift, Sister's Gift, and Brother's Gift.

A New Gift for Children: delightful and entertaining stories for little masters and misses. Boston: Printed by D. Fowle. [1756?] 30 p. illus. Like The Prodigal Daughter, this book of stories was published by the Boston printer to whom the young Isaiah Thomas was apprenticed and under whose tutelage he practiced the art of engraving. The New Gift is regarded as the oldest story-book—the earliest non-Biblical child's book—to bear an American imprint. Its title page reveals the moral instruction to be conveyed.

Nurse Truelove's New-Year's Gift: or, The book of books for children. Adorned with cuts. And designed for a present to every little boy who would become a great man, and ride upon a fine horse; and to every little girl, who would become a fine woman, and ride in a governor's coach. But let us turn over the leaf and see more of the matter. The first Worcester edition. Worcester [Mass.]: Printed by Isaiah Thomas and sold at his bookstore. MDCCLXXXVI. [1786] 58 p. illus. English and Irish edition of this work.
which contains "The House That Jack Built" was advertised by John Newbery in 1753.


Earl r English language editions available from London in 1729 and 1763. These classic fairy tales are available today in many picture-book editions as well as in Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales (Illustrated by W. H. Robinson. New York, Dodd, Mead, 1961).

Swift, Jonathan. THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN GULLIVER, in a voyage to the islands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag. Abridged from the works of the celebrated Dean Swift. Adorned with cuts. Philadelphia: Printed by Young and M'Culloch, the corner of Chesnut and Second-Streets. 1787. 128 p. illus.

The Travels and Adventures of Captain L. G., an abridged edition, in chapbook format, was published in London in the 1750s.


The New History of Valentine and Orson, an English abridged edition of this fifteenth-century romance originally published in France, was published in London for E. Midwinter in the 1750s. It served for over a century as an English chapbook—about two brothers separated in childhood, one brought up at court and one by a bear.

The story was later included in Walter Crane's Cinderella Picture Book (London and New York, J. Lane [1897]).

Available today as the picture book *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (Illustrated by Marcia Brown. New York, Scribner, 1950), as well as in many collections and other single-tale editions.

**Rhymes and Songs**

**The New-Year's Gift; or, The first book to teach every little girl and boy the A B C.** Containing The life and death of the apple-pye, with A was an archer, Cock Robin's farewell to all the birds in the air, and Naughty boy Jack. New York: Hugh Gaine. 1774.


**Tom Thumb. The Famous Tommy Thumb's Little Story-Book: containing his life and surprising adventures; to which are added, Tommy Thumb's fables, with morals and, at the end, pretty stories, that may be sung or told. (Adorned with many curious pictures.) Boston: Printed and sold by W. M'Alpine in Marlborough-Street. 1768. 32 p.

The earliest known American children's book to contain the nursery rhymes that later appeared in *Mother Goose's Melody*. All but one of the rhymes had been published previously in England in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (20 p., 1715).


To be found in modern anthologies are such of Watts' "songs" as "A Cradle Hymn," "How Doth the Little Buss Bee," "Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come," "The Sluggard," and "Let Dog Delight To Bark and Bite."

**Game and Fun Books**

*John-the-giant-killer, esq., pseudo. Food for the Slim); or, A new riddle-book, compiled for*


A LITTLE PRETTY POCKET-BOOK, intended for the instruction and amusement of little Master Tommy, and pretty Miss Polly. With two letters from Jack the giant-killer; as also a ball and pincushion; the use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good boy, and Polly a good girl. To which is added, a little song-book, being a new attempt to teach children the use of the English alphabet, by way of diversion. The first Worcester edition. Printed at Worcester, Massachusetts: By Isaiah Thomas, and sold, wholesale and retail, at his Book-Store. MDCCCLXXXVII. [1787] 122 p. illus.

An English edition was advertised by John Newbery in 1744. An edition was printed in New York by Hugh Gaine in 1762.


THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN or, The comical metamorphoses, a work entirely calculated to excite laughter in grown persons and promote morality in the young ones of both sexes; decorated with 34 copper plates curiously drawn and elegantly engraved. [Four lines of verse] Boston: Printed and sold by John D. M'Dougall [and] Company two doors south of the Treasurer's Office. [1780?] 64 p. illus.

John Goodall's wordless picture books of today with their alternating half pages are related to the metamorphosis.