

The  
**Parents' Guide**  
to **My First**  
**Reading Library**



# About My First Reading Library

**My First Reading Library** brings you the **Usborne Very First Reading** series and a special selection of titles from **Usborne First Reading**, written and developed for children who are learning to read. Together, these two series support children as they take their very first steps in reading.

## Read at home, read at school

The books can be used either on their own or together with the reading program or curriculum used by your child's school. They can easily be combined with many popular reading programs.

## Getting started - reading with an adult

In the first seven stages of **Very First Reading**, adult and child take turns to read, with the child reading more and more in each book. By book eight, the child reads the story and the adult is able to listen and help where needed. Shared reading of a story provides great support and motivation for beginning readers, allowing them to take part in an exciting story using very few words.



## Inspiring stories, fun puzzles

Each book contains an imaginative story with a theme that really appeals to children: animals, knights and castles, pirates and so on. After the story there are puzzles for the child to do with an adult's help. These test understanding of the story and provide further reading practice.

## Online support

You can also find plenty of support, advice and downloadable extras online at [www.veryfirstreading.com](http://www.veryfirstreading.com)

## Successful reading strategies

**Very First Reading** makes extensive use of scientifically based research to support the teaching of reading. **Very First Reading** actively develops the five skills that all children need to master in order to become fluent readers: **phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension**. What's more, the engaging stories and bright, appealing illustrations help develop the motivation that children need in order to become successful readers.



## From “can read” to “loves reading”

Once children have read all the titles in **Very First Reading**, they will have a sound basis to start reading more widely. **Usborne First Reading** is a wonderful introduction to the world of books that will give your child a solid foundation for years to come. Compelling stories and illustrations encourage your child to take pride in their own library of classic folktales from around the world, original stories and popular rhymes.

## Supporting your child at every stage

**First Reading** provides a choice of stories, graded into levels depending on the length and difficulty of the text. The books do not have the close, formal structure of **Very First Reading**, but are easy to read with occasional help from an adult. Gradually your child will develop reading skills and stamina, while enjoying fantastic stories.

All of the **First Reading** stories are written to specific guidelines so that vocabulary, sentence length and overall length are manageable for the beginning reader. At the same time, the language is fresh and natural and the stories are a pleasure to read and re-read.



## Questions and answers

- **When should I start reading with my child?**  
Every child is different, so do take your cue from your own child. You can encourage an interest in books from an early age, reading to your child and visiting your local library. Look for signs of “reading readiness,” when children start taking an interest in words they see around them – “Mommy, what does that say?” – typically around four years of age, sometimes earlier.
- **My child has already started reading at school. Won’t he get confused?**  
**Usborne Very First Reading** closely supports the synthetic phonics methods used by many schools, and provides valuable reading practice even if your child is using a different method.
- **My child can read a little already. Does she really need to start with Book One?**  
You may find that it’s reassuring to start at a level or two below your child’s ability and progress quickly, and children will enjoy all the stories even if the text is comparatively easy.

You can find more questions and answers at [www.veryfirstreading.com](http://www.veryfirstreading.com)



# About phonics

Many schools now use phonics teaching in the early stages of reading. **Very First Reading** uses a particular style of phonics teaching, known as **synthetic phonics**.



## What is synthetic phonics?

Synthetic phonics involves learning to recognize the distinct sounds, or phonemes, that go together to make up words. There are 44 phonemes in the English language. Some phonemes correspond to a single letter, like the c-a-t sounds (“cuh-ah-tuh”) in the word “cat,” and others to combinations of letters, such as the sh-ar sounds in the word “shark.”

## How does it work?

Children start by learning just a few phonemes, then learn to combine these in order to read whole words (“synthesizing” the phonemes, or running them together, hence “synthetic phonics.”) This gives them the confidence to tackle new and unfamiliar words, an important step toward independent reading. They are soon introduced to additional phonemes, then learn different ways of spelling the phonemes they know.

**Usborne Very First Reading** introduces all the phonemes in a tried and tested order of progression, from simple letter-sounds to complex and variable spelling and pronunciation.

## Irregular words

Words can be divided into two basic groups: regular phonic words, such as “cat,” and words that are wholly or partly irregular.

Around 85% of words in English are regular, but some very common words, such as “I” and “the,” are irregular. These are sometimes called “sight words” or “tricky words.” Each book in **Very First Reading** introduces one or two of these “tricky words,” at the stage when children can best decode them. In this way, children learn tricky words easily, naturally and without disruption or confusion.

**Very First Reading** proves that it is possible to tell inspired, imaginative stories based on a rigorous phonic framework, giving children both the phonic skills and the motivation to become successful readers.



## Online help

The Usborne Very First Reading website offers additional help and support for both parents and teachers. Just go to [www.veryfirstreading.com](http://www.veryfirstreading.com) and you will find:

- general advice on teaching your child to read
- more information about the series structure
- an audio guide to pronouncing phonemes
- practice activities and games for each book.

## Our reading experts



**Alison Kelly** worked for many years as a teacher, and retired as Principal Lecturer in English Education at Roehampton University in London. She is also the expert adviser on Usborne's **First Reading** and **Young Reading** series, which have



sold over 10 million copies worldwide. **Anne Washtell** is also a former teacher and teaching adviser, and retired as Senior Lecturer in English Education at Roehampton, specializing in phonics.



**Kathy Daily M.S.** is Associate Professor of Developmental Studies and Reading at Tulsa Community College, Oklahoma.

# Sample pages

On the following pages you can see some samples from **Usborne Very First Reading**, and find out more about what your child will learn in each book. For each of the first seven stages there are two books, in order to offer your child extra practice.

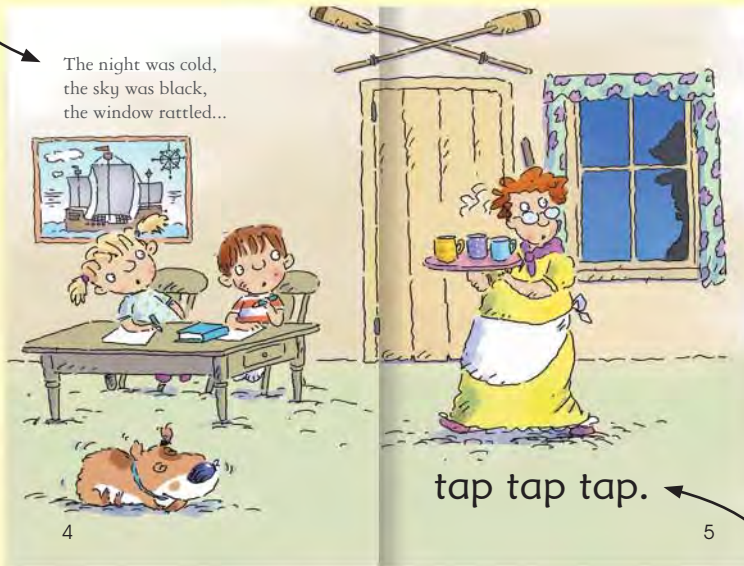




## Book One: Pirate Pat and Double Trouble

These two books allow the very beginning reader to take part in lively and exciting stories, using short sentences and simple words made up of only the letters **s a t p i n m d**. You read the first few lines on each double page, setting up a rhyming pattern, and your child then reads the last line.

You read these words.



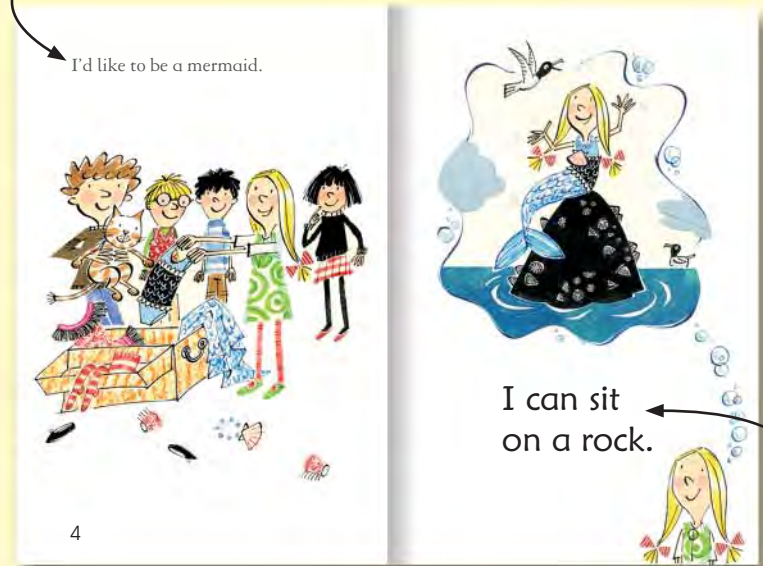
Your child reads these words.

Irregular words:  
I is

## Book Two: The Dressing-Up Box and Captain Mac

These two books introduce the letters **g o c k c k e u r**. The sentences are a little longer, and your child reads more words overall. The repetition of “I can” on each double page of **The Dressing-Up Box** helps to build your child’s confidence and increase reading stamina.

You read these words.



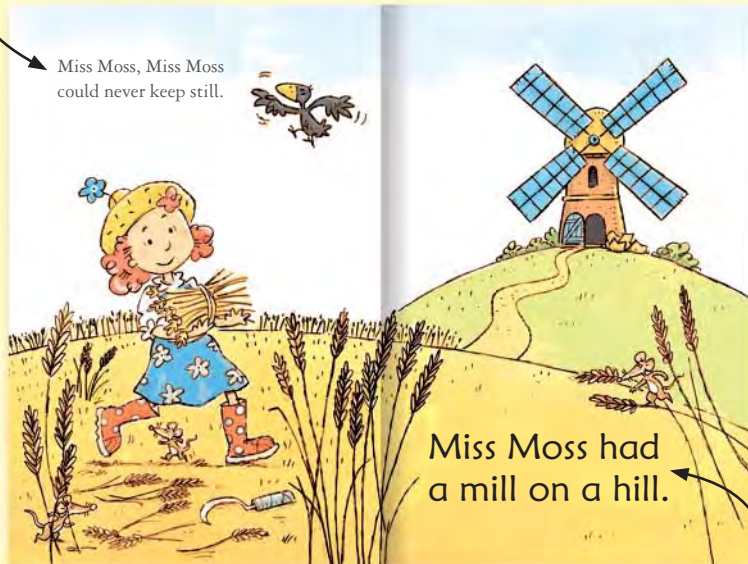
Your child reads these words.

(No irregular words)

## Book Three: A Bus for Miss Moss and The Perfect Pet

These two books introduce the letters h b l ll f ff ss. Your child will now be reading longer sentences, strongly supported by the rhyme and rhythm of the story; by this stage, your child will be reading as much of the story as you are.

You read these words.



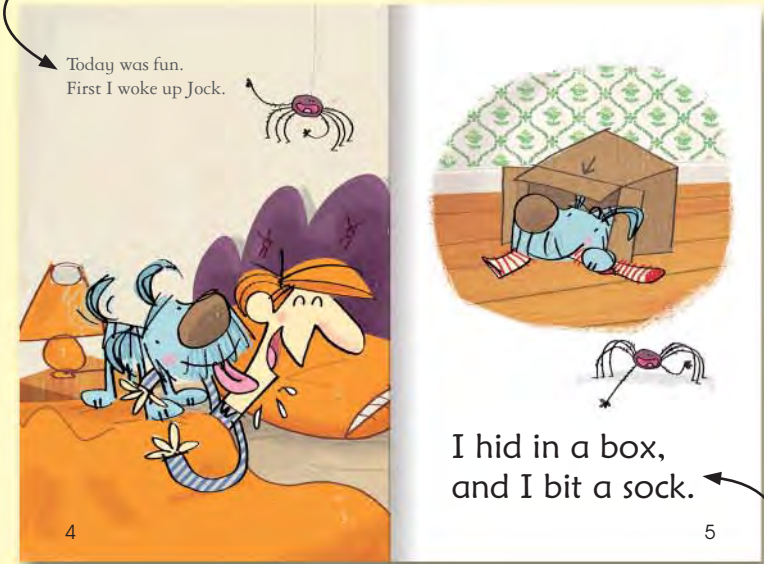
Your child reads these words.

Irregular words:  
go no of

## Book Four: Dog Diary and Bad Jack Fox

These two books introduce the letters j qu v w x y z zz. Your child will now be familiar with all the letters of the alphabet in their most regularly pronounced forms, making it possible to read over 300 everyday words. This is a great achievement and boost to reading confidence.

You read these words.



Your child reads these words.

Irregular words:  
as his to

## Book Five: Grizzly Bear Rock and The Magic Ring

These two books introduce the useful letter-combinations **ch sh ng** and **th**. It's important for your child to learn to recognize these combinations and read them correctly as distinct sounds, not just read the sounds of the individual letters.

You read these words.



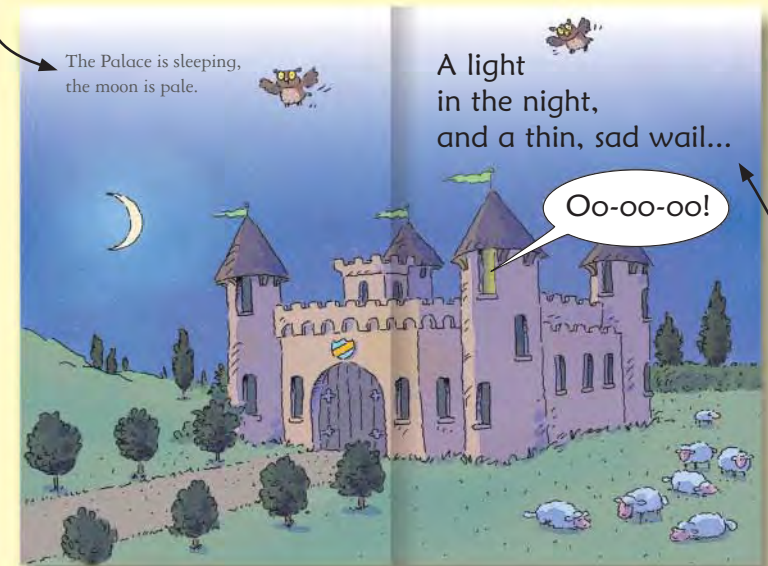
Your child reads these words.

Irregular words:  
be do he me she so the

## Book Six: The Queen Makes a Scene and A Fright in the Night

These two books introduce the letter-combinations **ai ee igh oa oo** (pronounced both as in **book** and as in **moon**). Again, it's important to learn to recognize these combinations. By this stage, your child will be reading about two-thirds of the story.

You read these words.



Your child reads these words.

Irregular words:  
we



## Book Seven: Stop That Cow! and The Deep Dark Woods

These two books introduce the letter-combinations **ar** or **ur** **ow** **air** **ear** **ure**. Having learned these, your child will be familiar with almost all the sounds of English in their most regular spellings, making it possible to read over 700 everyday words with confidence.

**You read these words.**



**Your child reads these words.**

Irregular words:  
oh

## Book Eight: Moon Zoom

**Moon Zoom** introduces and practices longer words that begin or end with more than one consonant (**sleep**, **fills**, **speeds**) and simple two-syllable words (**rocket**). This stage almost doubles your child's reading vocabulary. Your child should now be trying to read the whole story, but may need help with a word here and there.



**Encourage your child to read all the words.**

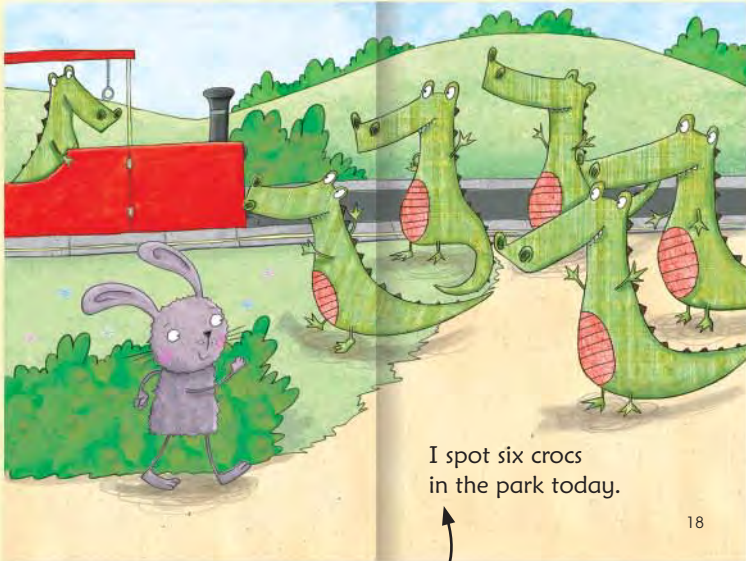
Irregular words:  
into

## Book Nine

# Run, Rabbit, Run!

Run, Rabbit, Run! introduces different ways to spell sounds your child has met in previous stories:

ai	ee	igh	oa	oo
ay	ea	ie	ow	ew
ey	e	y	oe	ue



Encourage your child to read all the words.

Irregular words:  
you

## Book Ten

# Late Night at the Zoo

Late Night at the Zoo introduces the pattern sometimes known as “the magic e,” where the final e changes the earlier vowel sound:

a e	e e	i e	o e	u e
late	these	time	home	tune



Encourage your child to read all the words.

Irregular words:  
are have

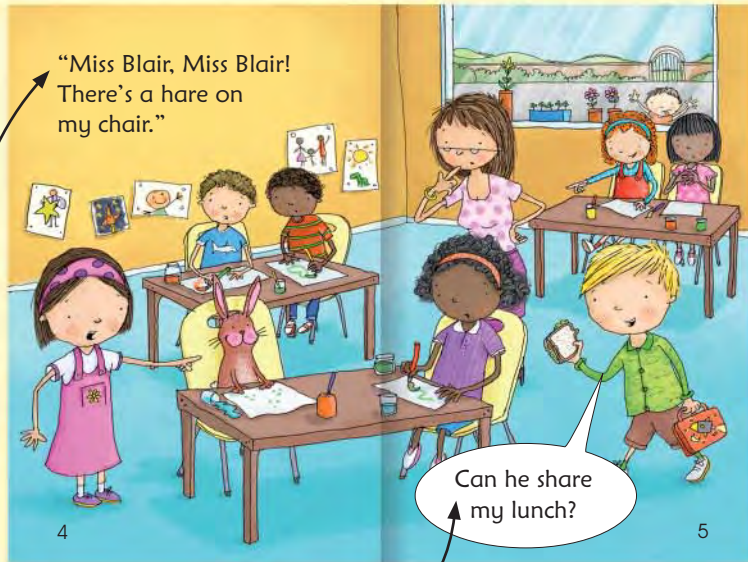


## Book Eleven

# Wild School

Wild School introduces more ways to spell sounds your child has met in previous stories:

air	or	ur	ow	oi
are	our	er	ou	oy
ere		ir		



Encourage your child to read all the words.

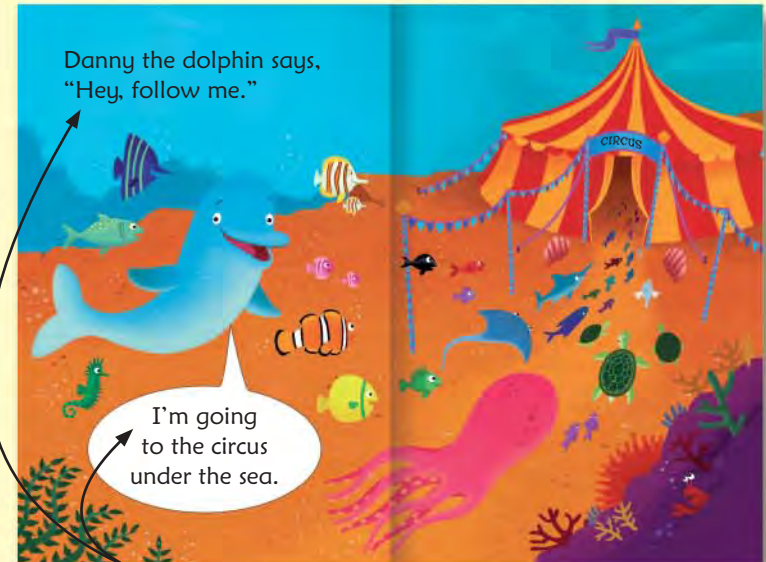
Irregular words:  
there

## Book Twelve

# The Circus under the Sea

The Circus under the Sea introduces the "soft" pronunciation of c and g, as well as the combinations wh, ph and the final y sound.

ce/ci	ge/gi	wh	ph	-y
race	magic	whale	phone	Eddy



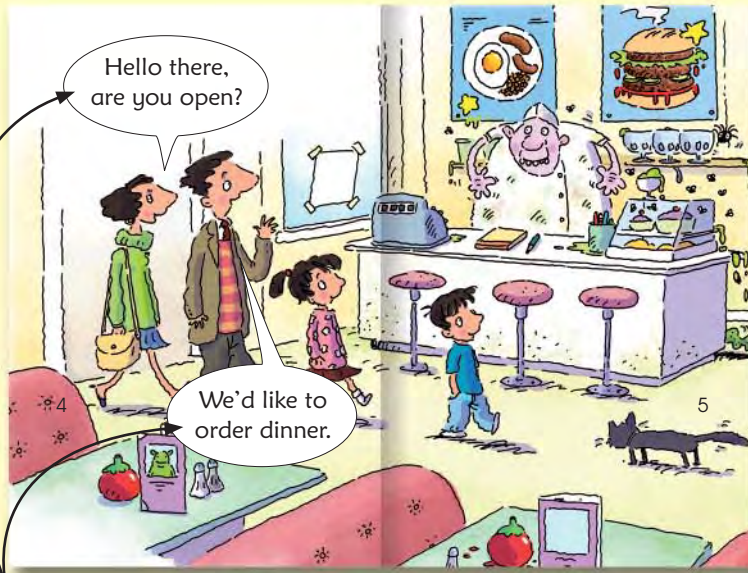
Encourage your child to read all the words.

(No irregular words)

## Book Thirteen

# The Monster Diner

**The Monster Diner** introduces different ways of pronouncing letters or letter-combinations your child has already met in their more regular forms, such as **a** (as in **apricot** or **was**), **i** (as in **kind**), **o** (as in **open** or **month**), **u** (as in **put**), **ea** (as in **bread**), **ear** (as in **earth**), **ie** (as in **shriek**) and **or** (as in **worm**).



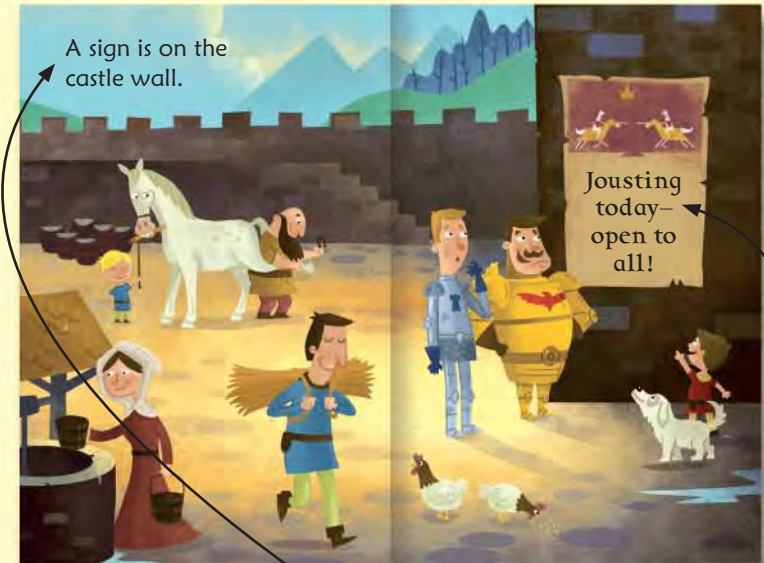
Encourage your child to read all the words.

Irregular words:  
come was what

## Book Fourteen

# Knight Fight

**Knight Fight** introduces the "silent consonants" in combinations of letters such as **ch**, **gn**, **kn**, **ld**, **lm**, **mb**, **mn**, **rh**. These can often prove tricky, especially when it comes to spelling, and it's worth spending a little time to be sure of mastering them. By now your child will have a potential reading vocabulary of over 2,500 words.



Encourage your child to read all the words.

Irregular words:  
all people



## Book Fifteen: Mr. Mystery

**Mr. Mystery** introduces combinations such as gh (silent, as in **though**, or pronounced “f,” as in **laugh**) and endings such as -sion and -tion. It also gives children practice in reading longer, three- or even four-syllable words. Your child will now have an excellent all-round foundation to develop reading independence and confidence.



Encourage your child to read all the words.

High frequency words:  
came children could from little looked  
made Mr. one out said saw some



## The next stage

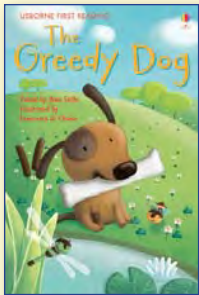
Now that **Usborne Very First Reading** has given your child a good foundation, **Usborne First Reading** is the next step toward reading independently and with confidence. Your child should be able to read these books with very little help. The first few books are short, simple yet satisfying stories. The books gradually become longer and more challenging, while still providing plenty of support for the developing reader.



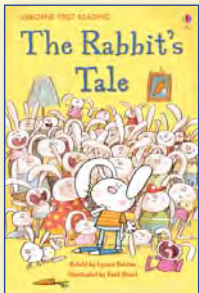
# Storybook magic

Books in **First Reading Level One** have a short, simple story followed by fun puzzles, designed to test a child's reading and understanding.

The range of stories and bright, lively illustrations help children to gain confidence while developing their enjoyment of books and reading.



**The Greedy Dog** comes from the great collection of Aesop's Fables – classic stories which have been enjoyed since ancient times.



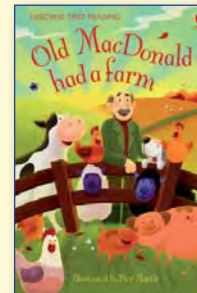
In **The Rabbit's Tale**, Rabbit is dissatisfied with his home: it just doesn't feel big enough. He goes to see his friend Owl, who has some surprising advice.



**Anansi** is a popular character from the West African and Caribbean tradition, the spider king who is not always as smart as he imagines.



Wouldn't we all like to have **Three Wishes**? But it's important to use your wishes wisely, as Ned and Nat find out in this classic folktale.



Reading familiar nursery rhymes is a great way to boost young readers' confidence. **Old MacDonald had a farm** combines a popular rhyme with glorious bright illustrations.

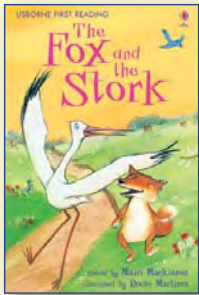


**The Ant and the Grasshopper** are very different characters. Grasshopper sings all summer long, while Ant works. Will Grasshopper come to regret his choice?

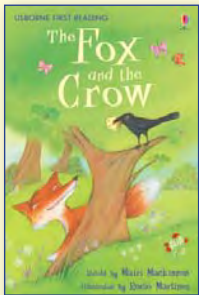
# Classic fables

Many of the stories at this level are drawn from Aesop's fables, and are retold in a lively, readable and natural style.

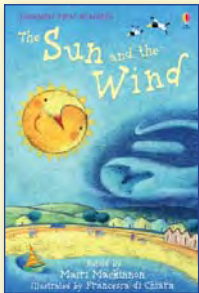
Told and shared over thousands of years, they are part of a common culture of stories that are known and loved all around the world.



**The Fox and the Stork** warns against the habit of playing tricks on your friends. Sneaky Fox fools Stork once too often, and gets a taste of his own medicine.



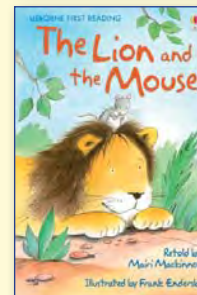
**The Fox and the Crow** is an age-old tale of trickery and flattery. The woodland illustrations are full of character and life.



**The Sun and the Wind** has a strong message about the virtues of persuasion over brute force, with wonderfully atmospheric illustrations.



What do we mean when we talk about “the Midas touch”? The Ancient Greek myth, **King Midas and the Gold**, reminds us once again to be careful what we wish for.



**The Lion and the Mouse** is one of the gentlest of Aesop's fables, about an unlikely friendship that turns out to be life-saving, with charming illustrations.

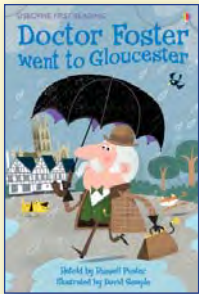


**The Wish Fish** is a simple yet powerful story of good fortune, greed and magic. A delight to read, time and again.

# Moving on up

The stories in **First Reading Level Two** stretch the reader a little more than Level One, with more advanced sentence structures and vocabulary.

The stories at this level are slightly longer and more complex. They, too, are followed by puzzles to test reading and comprehension.



**Doctor Foster Went to Gloucester** takes a well-loved rhyme as its starting point. Being familiar with the first part gives readers confidence to continue the developing story.



**The Magic Melon** is a cautionary tale from China. Lee doesn't care for working or helping others, so a magic melon that can provide all his meals sounds perfect. There's just one catch...



**How Bear Lost his Tail** is a native North American legend. Other animals admire Bear's luxurious tail, and jealous Fox decides to play a trick – but has he gone too far?



**Little Miss Muffet** again starts with a familiar rhyme, then takes it in a surprising direction. Bright illustrations, full of rich detail, complement the lively story.



**Old Mother Hubbard** went to her cupboard, and didn't find a bone for her poor doggie – but a shopping trip provides them with a few surprises and a stroke of good luck.



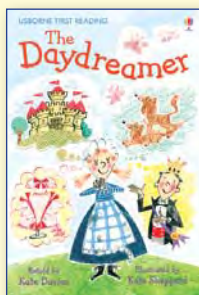
**One, Two, Buckle my Shoe** turns the familiar counting rhyme into an inventive picture story, as a sneaky fox chases a pet hen through yard and kitchen and back again.



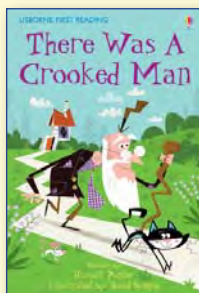
# Stories old and new

Whether it's a classic fable read for the first time, or a familiar rhyme with an unexpected twist, these books appeal to children's imaginations.

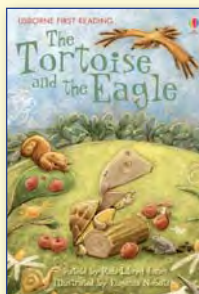
Fresh, contemporary illustrations by international artists provide plenty of opportunities for spotting and discussing details.



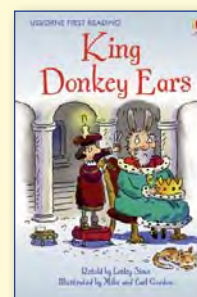
**The Daydreamer** is the story that tells us not to count our chickens before they are hatched, nor to cry over spilled milk, as dizzy Daisy gets carried away by her daydreams.



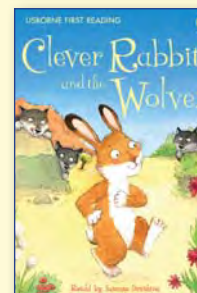
**There Was a Crooked Man** again takes the well-loved rhyme as its starting point, developing it into a delightful story with fun, quirky illustrations.



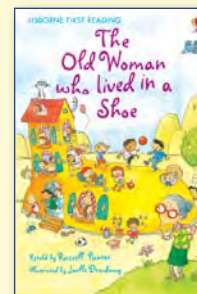
In **The Tortoise and the Eagle**, Tortoise longs to fly like the mighty eagle he sees in the sky – but is he really cut out for the high life? Eagle will help him to find out.



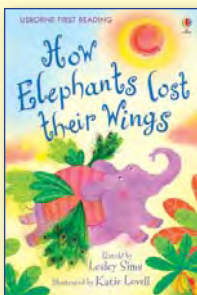
**King Donkey Ears** is so afraid of people discovering his secret that anyone who cuts his hair is sent to prison. He takes pity on Meg – but can Meg keep the secret herself?



**Clever Rabbit and the Wolves** is a lively and funny story from North America, featuring a quick-thinking rabbit – and an irresistible wolves' dance routine.



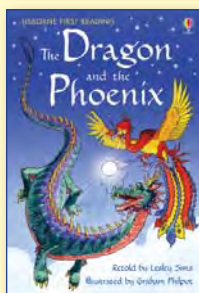
**The Old Woman who lived in a Shoe** and her many children are badly in need of a new home. But where do you buy shoes big enough to house an entire family?



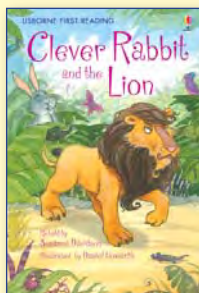
“Once upon a time, elephants could fly...”  
**How Elephants Lost their Wings** is a magical folktale from India, with beautiful, vibrant illustrations.



“Putting the genie back in the bottle” is another common saying. **The Genie in the Bottle** tells the original story from the Arabian Nights of the furious genie and the quick-witted fisherman.



**The Dragon and the Phoenix** tells an evocative story from China, little known in the West, of two mythical creatures and a priceless treasure.



**Clever Rabbit and the Lion** is another classic story from India, telling how Rabbit saves the small creatures of the jungle by outwitting a mighty lion.

## What next?

Once children have read all the titles in **My First Reading Library**, they will have a solid foundation to start reading more widely. There are many Usborne story collections for more confident readers, offering a wide range of timeless stories and helping children gain fluency and develop the habit of reading for pleasure. Find out more at [www.usbornebooksandmore.com](http://www.usbornebooksandmore.com)

