

Radical books for kids

Learning anarchy

Egg Syntax
Radym

2004

We're certain that most anarchists can remember at least one book that first introduced them to anti-authoritarianism, political engagement, gender-role-bending, or other topics of lasting importance. But such books are hard to find amid the morass of boring, mainstream kid-lit that reinforces the same capitalist and authoritarian values which are fed to adults (can you say "Disney"?). Here, then, we present a highly subjective and idiosyncratic guide to some of the best work out there. Undoubtedly, we've left off your favorite author; we're sorry, and we meant to check with you before we wrote this, but there are thousands of great children's books out there, and our guide could easily have taken up the whole of this issue if we'd let it. Our selection is ordered, loosely, by age of target reader.

Willis, Jeanne. *I Want to be a Cowgirl*. illus. by Tony Ross. Henry Holt and Company, 2001. Leave the city. Throw down that tea set. Fight back against the education system. Dump your penthouse upbringing. Forget cooking and cleaning, and become a cowgirl. What's so wrong with that?

Cronin, Doreen. *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. illus. By Betsy Lewin. Simon & Schuster, 2000. With factory farms and worsening conditions for farm animals world-wide, it's only a matter of time before the animals start fighting back. Actually, the wait is over. In Cronin's genius children's book *Click, Clack, Moo*, the animals fight back against the oppressive farmer by going on strike.

Gosney, Joy. *Naughty Parents*. Millbrook Press, 1999. While I don't know if the author meant the book to be explicitly political, it's anarchist in the way it portrays two parents as free souls. In *Naughty Parents*, a young girl must keep a sharp eye on her parents as they make their way through puddles, down slides, and more.

McMullan, Kate. *I Stink!* illus. by Jim McMullan. Joanna Cotler Books, 2002. Well, if you haven't told your little one lately about how important garbage trucks and the people who pick up your garbage are, then you better pick up this book. From dirty diapers to rotten radishes, your local garbage workers are doing the under-appreciated (and stinky) job that very few people want from dusk 'til dawn.

Sheldon Epstein, Vivian. *The ABCs of What a Girl Can Be*. VSE Publisher, 1980. If you knew the ABCs of what a girl can be, you'd have just a small idea of the possibilities! This is a very cute book, with retro drawings, and the wildest ideas of what a person can be when they grow up (P is for Parachutist). This is a great book to show your children what they're not learning in school-that girls kick ass!

Yarbrough, Camille. *Cornrows*. illus. by Carole Byard. Coward-McCann, Inc., 1979. This Coretta Scott King Award winner tells the story of hair in Africa and for African Americans during slavery and to the present day through the stories of Mama and Great-grammaw. Together, they teach Sister and Brother (a.k.a. MeToo) about the power and pride of cornrows... from Robeson to Malcolm, from Richard Wright to Langston Hughes, from Mary Bethune to Aretha.

hooks, bell. *Happy to be Nappy*. illus. by Chris Raschka. Hyperion Books for Children, 1999. This is hooks' first children's book, and it makes the reader shiver with excitement. Children will love this book not only for its words, but for Raschka's beautiful illustrations.

Baylor, Byrd. *The Table Where Rich People Sit*. Illus. by Peter Parnall. Scribner's Sons, 1994. Like all of the beautifully-illustrated collaborations between Baylor and Parnall, this story teaches the value of the natural world. Unlike others though, this one is explicit about the relative value of money and freedom, suggesting that money "shouldn't even be on a list of our kind of riches."

de Haan, Linda and Stern Nijland. *King and King*. Ten Speed Press, 2002. This is quite possibly the best pro-queer children's book that I have read to date. The story revolves around a prince who is forced by his mother to marry. After meeting princesses from all over the land, he finally finds his match... the brother of a visiting princess! This book is beautifully illustrated, and treats queer people as if we're normal.

Silverstein, Shel. *Lafcadio the Lion*. HarperCollins, 1963. Lafcadio is a lion raised as a human. He learns to be a sharpshooter and eventually goes on a hunting expedition and encounters his lion kin. Forced to choose between the lions and the hunters, he puts down his gun and walks away to forge his own path.

Lindgren, Astrid. *Pippi Longstocking*. Viking Penguin, 1950. This indispensable inspiration for young anti-authoritarians features Pippi, age nine, who lives without adults and does whatever she likes because "in the whole wide world there was not a single police officer as strong as she."

Dahl, Roald. *Danny, the Champion of the World*. Knopf, 1975. A charming, less-well-known work by Dahl about a boy who lives with his father in a gypsy caravan and learns to poach pheasants. Includes a lucid, class-based defense of poaching.

Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. HarperTrophy, 2003. While Gaiman's charmingly scary children's book is not explicitly political, his protagonist's survival depends on her unwillingness to trust self-proclaimed authority figures and her trust in her own intuition and agenda.

Pinkwater, D. Manus. *Lizard Music*. Yearling, 1976. In quintessential Pinkwater style, *Lizard Music* skewers cultural sacred cows left and right. The protagonist finds himself embroiled in marvelous adventures by rejecting all received truth in order to think for himself.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Kids on Strike!* Houghton Mifflin, 1999. A history of labor conditions and labor resistance a century ago. Both an excellent introduction to labor issues and movements and a paean to the possibility of political engagement by young people. Includes wonderful photos as well.

Tolan, Stephanie S. *Welcome to the Ark*. Morrow Junior Books, 1996. The first in a trilogy following four kids who are involuntarily committed to a youth "rehabilitation" center because of their inability to fit into or accept society. This book poignantly portrays, among many other things, the abuse of power in the mental health system, the importance of communication with the land, and the devaluing of kids in our society.

Allende, Isabel. *City of the Beasts*. HarperCollins, 2002. A wonderfully written book for adolescents that denounces the rapacity of those who want to destroy the Amazon rain forest by exploiting its riches for profit, killing any of the Native population that interferes with their plans. Very funny at times, the book never preaches and the reader learns about the Native peoples and the problems they're confronted with through the eyes of a 15 year old boy who unwillingly accompanies his eccentric photographer grandmother on a magazine expedition.

Llewellyn, Grace. *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*. Lowry House, 1991. Very possibly the most radical book on this list, this fiery guide encourages kids to really think for themselves, drop out of school, and start making their own decisions once and for all.

Some material we omitted (with great gnashing of teeth) includes: Dr. Seuss (our hero!), Lewis Carroll (our other hero!), James Loewen's *The Truth About Columbus*, and the now tragically-out-of-print *Suzuki Bean and Radical Red*.

For more info on these and other great radical kidlit, see Radym's online bibliography at <http://leep.lis.uiuc.edu/publish/asdavis/RadicalParents/RadicalChildren.html>.

Special thanks to the Anarchist Librarians mailing list and the *Fifth Estate* collective for their fine suggestions. The Fifth Estate

<http://www.fifthestate.org/>

Detroit Collective / Subscription Office

P.O. Box 201016
Ferndale, MI 48220
Tennessee Collective / Editorial Office
P.O. Box 6
Liberty, TN 37095
(615) 536-5999
FifthEstate@pumkinhollow.net

fifth Estate

Egg Syntax
Radym
Radical books for kids
Learning anarchy
2004

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/366-fall-2004/radical-books-for-kids>
Fifth Estate #366, Fall, 2004

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/366-fall-2004/radical-books-for-kids)