

## The Top 100 Collectible Children's Books:

### Introduction and the Marquis 25

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## Top 100 Collectible Picturebooks - Overview

A series of articles to select the Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks, providing the rationale for each book's inclusion, with an objective of providing readers with the context for valuing first editions within the genre.

Within the hobby value is a combination of scarcity and collectibility: very scarce and very desirable lead to very valuable. Scarcity is a function of the number of copies in the first printings and the subsequent attrition over time due to natural causes. Collectibility is more elusive, outlined heretofore as a complex intermingling of eight rated factors.

## Introduction

Taken as a whole, the Collecting Children's Picturebooks website provides collectors and booksellers with the context for specific first edition picturebooks within the collectible children's book market. This context is based upon the intermingling of two primary ingredients, the relative scarcity and the relative collectibility of the book.

The relative scarcity of a first edition book is a function of the demand and supply equilibrium in the market.

The relative collectibility of a book is a potpourri of [Factors Affecting Collectibility](#), which were first described in Chapter 2 of the ***Children's Picturebook Price Guide***. From Chapter 2:

*"Note the key factors that impact the collectibility of the books. Each is a high quality story with imaginative or inventive illustrations, therefore the reading public has recurrently purchased the books for decades. Because of this, the books have stayed in print since their original publication and gone into many, many printings. Many of the books have earned a children's picturebook award, while many of the*

*illustrators have won numerous awards. All of the illustrators have high esteem within the book publishing market place. Many of the book's characters became franchise characters, where one or more sequels were published, and line extensions have been made into other consumer product areas (i.e. toys, games, dolls, costumes, decorations, etc...). Lastly, many of the books or characters have crossed over into pop culture, either via a TV or feature film adaptation."*

Experienced book collectors and booksellers have an idea of the relative scarcity and relative collectibility of a book, therefore understand its context within the market and within the hobby. This information lets them make an educated estimate for the value of the book, and depending upon which side of the ledger they reside, either purchase or sell the book at a fair price. As an experienced book collector I continually make context based buy-side decisions. To expand upon this, it is important to understand that booksellers make pricing decisions, while book buyers make valuing decisions.

Booksellers make pricing decisions based primarily upon the asking prices for comparable books currently in the market, sometimes research the history of comparable books sold, mixed with their experience associated with the book's particulars (i.e. author, illustrator, genre, and so forth). While this is an oversimplified synopsis, suffice it to say pricing a book is more art than science.

Buyers of collectible books are aware of 'the art of pricing', therefore understand the why's and wherefore's for a particular book's offering price. Obviously it is easy to assess whether the price is a fair price relative to comparable books on the market. But is it a good value? Since buyers of collectible books have limited resources – money – they must deploy it effectively. Effective purchase decisions are based upon more than whether a book is fairly priced relative to comparables, and instead weigh this price against the value of the book in the context of other elements.

To help readers establish their own context, this series of articles will develop the list of Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks and explain the rationale for each book's inclusion. After the list is completed, the reader should have a good understanding for the context I use to classify most first edition picturebooks. Understandably the Top 100 will be my myopic perspective – it is not meant to be definitive and instead just a vehicle for our use.

## **Criteria for Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks**

Selecting the books would be easy if market value was the sole criteria. The 25,000 books in my picturebook database could be sorted by value and the hundred most valuable selected. Easy as pie, but not especially insightful.

Instead, the basis for selecting the Top 100 picturebooks are the six [Factors Affecting Collectibility](#) (numbered, below, for reference purposes only, not meant as a prioritization), with two other factors thrown in.

1. [Aesthetic Quality of the Illustrations and the Story](#)
2. [Eminence of the Illustrator](#)
3. 1st – Early – Late in the illustrator’s body of work.
  - o Is the book a notable illustrator’s first work?
  - o Is the book early in their career?
  - o Is the book late in their career?
4. Collectibility of the Author
  - o Are the author’s first edition books desirable in the children’s book collecting market?
5. [Book’s Illustration Awards](#)
6. [Copies Sold / High Printings](#)
7. [Franchise Books](#)
8. [Pop Culture](#)

The reader might ask, “Why add the complexity of eight factors to the selection process?” A valid question. Selecting the Top 100 Collectible Picturebooks is wrought with subjectivity. There is simply no way around it. To help reduce this subjectivity, I rated each book from 10-to-1 in each of the above eight factors.

Understandably there is subjectivity rating each book for each factor. However subjectivity across eight factors is an improvement over rating the book’s ‘Collectibility’ as a single comprehensive value, since making a mistake in one of eight factors has a lower impact on the end result. Considering the eight factors together improves the quality of the subjective Collectibility rating of a first edition picturebook. A tedious process, but one which I thought would reduce the subjectivity of the selections and improve the overall result.

The mathematicians among the readers are clamoring for a weighting of the eight factors, thereby providing the opportunity for a calculated Collectibility. While technically possible, and fairly easy to do, at this time I do not want to debate the relative worth of the aesthetic story versus the illustrator’s esteem versus the copies sold and so forth. It probably is a worthwhile discussion, which will be tabled for the present.

## Prerequisites

The domain of this list is Contemporary American Picturebooks - picturebooks published in the US from the beginning of the contemporary genre - the 1927 publication of Wanda Gag’s *Millions of Cats* - to present day. In addition, the books must be issued with dust jacket. The estimated values provided are for first edition books with dust jackets.

## Overall Outline

Over the course of the series of articles I will sequentially build the list of Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks. This series should be viewed in total. During the course of this series the reader might not

understand the rationale for a book or a rating, however additional details will be provided in subsequent articles. The intention is to provide the information in logical digestible steps. Once the series is complete the reader should understand the rationale for each book.

Important aspects of this understanding are the analysis *after* the Top 100 is selected. These articles will order the Top 100 by value and by scarcity, and also group by illustrator and author, providing the reader with additional context. Finally the Top 100 will be sorted by overall Collectibility, the amalgamation of the eight factors.

The general outline for the process:

- Part 1: Build the Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks
- Part 2: Scarcity, Obtaining & Unobtainium
- Part 3: Various Views of Valuation
- Part 4: Ranking The Unrankable
- Part 5: Epilogue

## Building The Top 100

The Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks will be put together in a sequence of partially logical steps. Clearly a sequence of partially logical steps is logically no different than partially illogical steps. Suffice it to say the following sequence of steps segments the Top 100 into smaller digestible bites. Selecting the Top 100 Collectible American Picturebooks in a single undertaking is overwhelming, both for the selector and for the reader.

The partially logical steps:

- No-Brainers – The Marquis 25
- Nearly No-Brainers
- Key Caldecott Medals
- Beginner Books and the Early Readers
- Almost Nearly No-Brainers
- First 12 Little Golden Books
- The Debatable Eight

## The Marquis 25

The first twenty-five books, listed here chronologically, nearly select themselves, no-brainers in common parlance. Proclaimed The Marquis Twenty-Five, each book is a children's classic, enjoyed for years by

multiple generations. In most instances, the book's embrace by the reading public was not expected by the publisher, so the first printing is minuscule compared to the number of people who have enjoyed the book.

The following chart provides a single line summary of the rationale for the book's selection, along with the estimated market price. The market price is for the first edition book with the corresponding first edition dust jacket, both in Very Good or VG+ condition. The list is sorted in chronological order.

Year	Title	Illustrator	Author	Rationale - Summary	VG	VG+
1928	Millions Of Cats	Wanda Gág	Wanda Gág	Seminal picturebook, beginning of the genre; winner of Newbery Honor.	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1930	The Little Engine That Could	Lois Lenski	Watty Piper (pseud)	Popular beloved classic by prestige illustrator; franchise book; scarce..	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,600
1933	The Story Of Babar	Jean de Brunhoff	Jean de Brunhoff	Popular beloved classic; 1st Babar franchise book; scarce..	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1936	The Story Of Ferdinand	Robert Lawson	Munro Leaf	Popular beloved classic by prestige author & illustrator; franchise book; scarce..	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,800
1936	Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain	Edward Ardizzone	Edward Ardizzone	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; 1st Little Tim.	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,300
1937	And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street	Theodor Geisel	Theodor Geisel	Seuss's first children's book; rare.	\$ 10,000	\$ 13,000
1937	Animals Of The Bible	Dorothy P. Lathrop	Helen Dean Fish	First Caldecott Medal winner.	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1938	Pumpkin Moonshine	Tasha Tudor	Tasha Tudor	Tudor's first children's book; scarce.	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1939	Madeline	Ludwig Bemelmans	Ludwig Bemelmans	Popular beloved classic; Bemelmans' first children's book; franchise book.	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
1939	Little Toot	Hardie Gramatky	Hardie Gramatky	Popular beloved classic; scarce.	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,300
1939	Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel	Virginia Lee Burton	Virginia Lee Burton	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; scarce.	\$ 4,000	\$ 5,200
1941	Curious George	H.A. Rey	H.A. Rey	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; rare - sold at auction for \$22,000 in 2007.	\$ 16,000	\$ 20,800
1941	Make Way For Ducklings	Robert McCloskey	Robert McCloskey	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; Caldecott Medal; rare.	\$ 14,000	\$ 18,200
1942	The Little House	Virginia Lee Burton	Virginia Lee Burton	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; Caldecott Medal; rare.	\$ 9,000	\$ 11,700
1945	The Carrot Seed	Crockett Johnson	Ruth Krauss	Popular beloved classic by esteemed illustrator (husband) & author (wife).	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1947	Goodnight, Moon	Clement Hurd	Margaret Wise Brown	Popular beloved classic by esteemed illustrator & author; rare.	\$ 8,000	\$ 10,400
1955	Harold And The Purple Crayon	Crockett Johnson	Crockett Johnson	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; 1st of franchise; scarce.	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,900
1955	Eloise	Hilary Knight	Kay Thompson	Popular beloved classic by esteemed author / illustrator; 1st of franchise.	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600
1957	The Cat In The Hat	Theodor Geisel	Theodor Geisel	Changed how kids learn to read; very popular beloved classic; Seuss's first Beginner Book.	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1957	How The Grinch Stole Christmas	Theodor Geisel	Theodor Geisel	Very popular beloved classic; Seuss; basis for 1960's TV cartoon + 1990's feature film.	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600
1960	Green Eggs And Ham	Theodor Geisel	Theodor Geisel	Extremely popular beloved classic; Seuss; scarce with sticker.	\$ 5,000	\$ 6,500
1963	Where The Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	Maurice Sendak	Very popular beloved classic; Sendak Caldecott Medal; feature film.	\$ 12,000	\$ 15,600
1964	The Giving Tree	Shel Silverstein	Shel Silverstein	Popular modern classic, timeless.	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600

Year	Title	Illustrator	Author	Rationale - Summary	VG	VG+
1969	Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Eric Carle	First of many popular beloved children's classics by highly esteemed illustrator/author; scarce.	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1985	Polar Express	Chris Van Allsburg	Chris Van Allsburg	Popular beloved classic; 2nd Caldecott Medal for esteemed author / illustrator; major feature film.	\$ 400	\$ 500

Some comments on specific books:

- *The Story of Babar* (1933) was originally published in French; the issue referenced in the table is for the English language translation published by Smith & Haas.
- Similarly *Curious George* (1941) first made his appearance in the 1939 French book *Rafi et les 9 Singes* which was translated and published in the US as *Cecily G And The 9 Monkeys* in 1942. A very nice first edition *Curious George* sold in 2007 for \$22,000 at a PBA Galleries auction.
- Of the Marquis 25, *Animals Of The Bible* (1937) is the least embraced book by the general public. The illustrations appear dated and the story, Bible passages selected by Helen Dean Fish, don't capture a young child's attention. Ironic that the book awarded the first Caldecott Medal, honoring the most distinguished picturebook published in America, is nearly not a picturebook by the classical definition. Although clearly *Animals Of The Bible* belongs in the Top 100, I waffled over putting the book in the Marquis 25. The significance of the Caldecott Medal to the picturebook collecting hobby weighted the scale in favor of its inclusion.
- While winning the Caldecott Medal contributed heavily to *Animals Of The Bible* inclusion in the Marquis 25, it did not influence as much the selection of the four other award winning books on the list. *Make Way For Ducklings* (1941), *The Little House* (1942), *Where The Wild Things Are* (1963), and *Polar Express* (1985) each have strong other merits.
- *Polar Express* is the only book published since 1980 to make the Marquis 25. *Polar Express* and Van Allsburg's *Jumanji* (1980), his other Caldecott Medal book, were two of the three books published after 1980 to make the Top 100.
- Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) and Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964) are two contemporary classics which justifiably make the Marquis 25. While neither is the first book by the illustrator, the enormous success of each book propelled the creator's career. Carle and Silverstein later became staples within the children's picturebook market. Even without consideration of their contemporary publications, first edition copies of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Giving Tree* are difficult to find.
- Some may be surprised to see *The Carrot Seed* (1945) in the Marquis 25. The story is a children's classic, and was one of the first books produced by the husband & wife team of Crockett Johnson and Ruth Krauss. Johnson's popularity would skyrocket a decade later upon the publication of *Harold And The Purple Crayon* (1955) and the subsequent books in the franchise, while in the early 1950's Krauss authored some wonderful classics illustrated by Maurice Sendak prior to his rise within the children's book industry.

## The Marquis 25 - Scarcity

Surprisingly, the first editions of a number of the books are quite scarce, even rare. Traditional booksellers consider a book to be rare if there are less than 10 known copies. Currently, this is difficult to assess with

children's picturebooks since many libraries do not distinguish the first edition when cataloging their holdings. This is either due to the library not caring whether their copy is a first edition, or not knowing whether their copy is a first edition.

The following books might be rare by the classic bookseller's definition (less than 10 known copies), and are certainly very difficult to find in first edition. Several are not currently on the market, or if offered, for a fairly rich price:

- ***And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street***
- ***Curious George***
- ***Make Way For Ducklings***
- ***The Little House***
- ***Goodnight, Moon***
- ***Harold And The Purple Crayon***

While not rare, several of the Marquis 25 are scarce in first edition. Collecting first edition contemporary American picturebooks is a fairly young hobby, without a high number of participants, and without much notoriety in the general population. Most people do not realize contemporary picturebooks have any value. As the hobby matures and the value system becomes somewhat stable, more people will enter the hobby, causing more booksellers to add contemporary American picturebooks as a focus area.

When the number of collectors increase, and the number of specializing booksellers increase, one could anticipate an increase in the number of first edition examples. Additional first edition books might surface which otherwise would have been unattended, or discarded without significance into the used book market. Without this potential future influx, the following are currently scarce in first edition format:

- ***Millions Of Cats***
- ***The Little Engine That Could***
- ***The Story Of Ferdinand***
- ***Little Toot***
- ***Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel***
- ***The Giving Tree***
- ***Very Hungry Caterpillar***

## The Marquis 25, Take Two

Four Dr. Seuss books are in the Marquis 25, his first children's book ***And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*** (1937) along with three other of his most popular classics ***Cat In The Hat*** (1957), ***How The Grinch Stole Christmas*** (1957), and ***Green Eggs And Ham*** (1960). ***Green Eggs And Ham*** was the fourth Alltime Bestselling Children's book according to Publisher's Weekly. Due to their high collectibility and relative notoriety among general antiquarian booksellers, several of the other Dr. Seuss first edition books

are more valuable than many of the Marquis 25. Value was not the determining factor for inclusion in the Marquis 25.

Referring to the Factors Affecting Collectibility, I rated each book across the eight different, but related factors. The chart, above, provides a single line summary of the rationale for the book's selection in the Marquis 25 - a simple topline synthesis of the ratings.

The following chart provides the 10-to-1 rating I gave each book along each factor, with 10 being a highly good thing. The market price is for the first edition book with the corresponding first edition dust jacket, both in Very Good or VG+ condition. The list is sorted in chronological order.

Year	Title	Illustrator	Story	Illustrator	1st - Early - Late	Author	Awards	Copies Sold	Franchise	Pop Culture	VG	VG+
1928	Millions Of Cats	Wanda Gág	7	9	10	8	NH	6		3	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1930	The Little Engine That Could	Lois Lenski	10	9	9	3		10	Y	10	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,600
1933	The Story Of Babar	Jean de Brunhoff	9	8	10	8		10	Y	7	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1936	The Story Of Ferdinand	Robert Lawson	10	9	9	7		10	Y	9	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,800
1936	Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain	Edward Ardizzone	10	8	10	8		8	Y	5	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,300
1937	And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street	Theodor Geisel	8	10	10	10		6		3	\$ 10,000	\$ 13,000
1937	Animals Of The Bible	Dorothy P. Lathrop	5	6	8	5	CM	4		3	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1938	Pumpkin Moonshine	Tasha Tudor	8	9	10	9		9		5	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1939	Madeline	Ludwig Bemelmans	10	8	10	8	CH	8	Y	9	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,000
1939	Little Toot	Hardie Gramatky	10	7	10	7		8		7	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,300
1939	Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel	Virginia Lee Burton	10	7	10	7		8		8	\$ 4,000	\$ 5,200
1941	Curious George	H.A. Rey	10	9	10	7		10	Y	10	\$ 16,000	\$ 20,800
1941	Make Way For Ducklings	Robert McCloskey	10	9	9	8	CM	10		8	\$ 14,000	\$ 18,200
1942	The Little House	Virginia Lee Burton	10	7	9	7	CM	7		8	\$ 9,000	\$ 11,700
1945	The Carrot Seed	Crockett Johnson	10	9	9	9		9		8	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1947	Goodnight, Moon	Clement Hurd	10	7	9	10		10		10	\$ 8,000	\$ 10,400
1955	Harold And The Purple Crayon	Crockett Johnson	10	9	8	7		10	Y	10	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,900
1955	Eloise	Hilary Knight	10	7	9	7		10	Y	10	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600



Year	Title	Illustrator	Story	Illustrator	- 1st - Early - Late	Author	Awards	Copies Sold	Franchise	Pop Culture	VG	VG+
1957	The Cat In The Hat	Theodor Geisel	10	10	7	10		10	Y	10	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,300
1957	How The Grinch Stole Christmas	Theodor Geisel	10	10	7	10		10		10	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600
1960	Green Eggs And Ham	Theodor Geisel	10	10	6	10		10		10	\$ 5,000	\$ 6,500
1963	Where The Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	10	10	8	8	CM	10		10	\$ 12,000	\$ 15,600
1964	The Giving Tree	Shel Silverstein	10	9	9	8		10		10	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,600
1969	Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	10	9	9	7		10	Y	10	\$ 800	\$ 1,000
1985	Polar Express	Chris Van Allsburg	10	10	9	8	CM	10		10	\$ 400	\$ 500

Over the course of the next couple of articles, as I build the list of the Top 100 Collectible Picturebooks, I will provide two charts similar to the above for each portion of the list. The first chart will provide the one line summary rationale for the book's inclusion, and the second chart will provide the 10-to-1 rating along each category. In the ensuing discussion, the reader will become acclimated to some of the objective information I used to give the subjective 10-to-1 rating.

The next article in the series will present The Nearly No-Brainers.