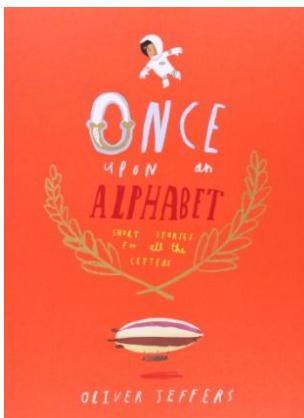


# Alphabets

There has been a mini explosion recently in sophisticated alphabet books with appeal for older children. The books in this list range across a variety of topics and approaches and are playful, pictorially and textually. All are beautifully designed. They can be enjoyed by children with a range of reading ability. Teachers may find them especially useful and delightful to share with less experienced readers in KS2.

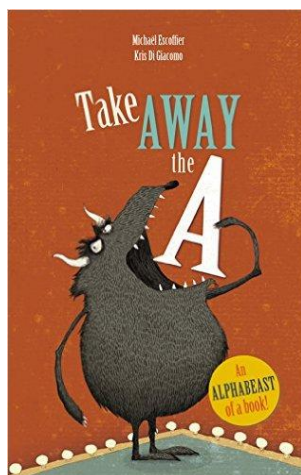


*Once Upon an Alphabet. Short Stories for all the Letters* by Oliver Jeffers

HarperCollins 9780007514274

A brilliant, humorously executed, concept based around the idea that each letter must have a story because 'If words make up stories, and letters make up words, then stories are made of letters'. A very brief, frequently philosophical, story is attributed to each letter. The meaning is melded together by Oliver Jeffers' expressive cartoon style drawings and by the inclusion in the text of several words beginning with that letter. Thus battling Bernard and Bob burn a bridge, and Mary discovers that molecules matter. An implied moral can be teased out from some of these short fables. Unexpected links occur between several stories. Find out what elephants and envelopes have got to do with the letter N. Meet recurring characters the owl and the octopus who roam the world solving problems.

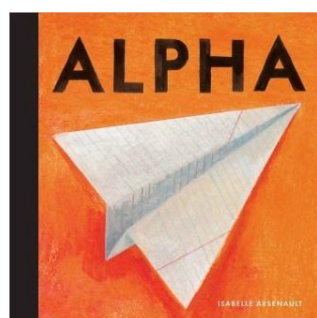




***Take Away the A* by Michaël Escoffier and Kris Di Giacomo**

Andersen Press 9781783443444

What happens when you take the 'k' away from monkey? It makes money! What happens if you take the 'w' away from the witch? She has an itch! An inventive and sophisticated alphabet book which makes you think in new ways about words and how they are spelled. Recurring characters appearing in the illustrations are integral to the humour. Knowledge of nursery rhymes and fairy tales enhances the enjoyment of the pictures. 'Without the V Seven are Seen' is illustrated by seven small figures with pickaxes resting on their shoulders who are being observed by a toothsome wolf.



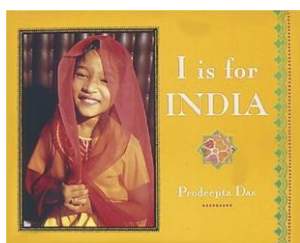
***Alpha* by Isabel Arsenault**

Walker 9781406361834

A sophisticated alphabet book based on the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet. One of the major uses of this is by the emergency services and it may be particularly familiar to viewers of police dramas on TV - one even had a name originating from this – Juliet Bravo. The pictorial representation for each letter really makes you think about the reason for its choice and requires a wide general knowledge to interpret. C for Charlie is symbolised by a bowler hat such as the one worn by a well-known star of the silent screen. M for Mike is represented by a pair of boxing gloves.



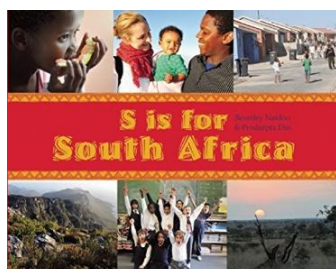




***I is for India* by Prodeepa Das**

Frances Lincoln 9781847807571

Photographer Prodeepa Das takes his readers on an alphabetical tour through Orissa in eastern India and introduces them to many aspects of life, both traditional and contemporary – ‘M is for Mehndi, a tattoo-like decoration often worn by young women at weddings and festivals’ while ‘C is for Cinema’. A revised edition of this book with new photographs will be issued in March 2016. A revised edition of Ifeoma Onyefulu’s *A is for Africa* the first book in this publisher’s world alphabet series is also due in 2016.

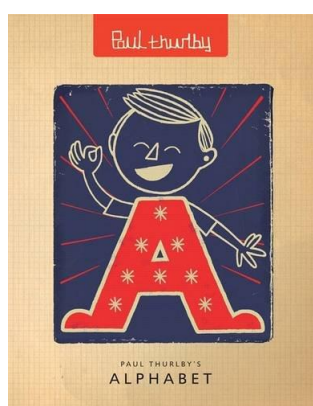


***S is for South Africa* by Beverley Naidoo and Prodeepa Das**

Frances Lincoln 9781847805027

Beverley Naidoo celebrates the country where she grew up, beginning with A for Apartheid Museum, demonstrating that this is in the past. She moves forward through the alphabet to ‘Homes and Hoping for a future where every child has shelter’ recognising that the promise has not yet been achieved. Overall this is an optimistic book, recognising the diverse people, cultures and environment of the rainbow nation, ranging over the musical instrument Imbira, Ndebele house-painting, Table Mountain and the isiXhosa language.



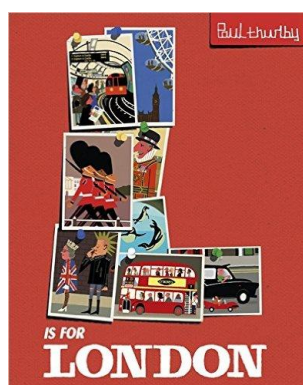


### Paul Thurlby's *Alphabet*

Templar 9781848770096

Paul Thurlby takes his inspiration from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century design and illustration and has developed a style sometimes described as 'retro-modern', here using strong regular shapes, set against a background that mimics graph paper, a technique he also used in *Numbers* (Hodder 9781444918762). For this alphabet, he has aimed to 'fuse the object of the word with the shape of the letter'. So – two capital Es are locked in an Embrace while a saxophone in the shape of a J represents J is for Jazz.

Paul Thurlby has also produced an alphabet book with a London theme:



### *L is for London*

Hodder 9781444918779

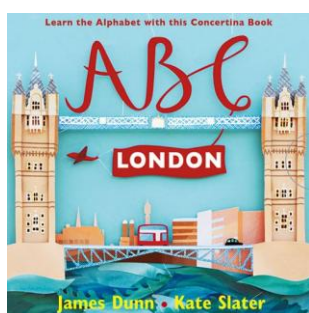
It opens with an attractive map on which are marked many of the places referred to throughout the book. The place or object exemplifying each letter is named with its own stylistically appropriate lettering and briefly described in a couple of sentences, and for most there is also an additional interesting fact. Long established landmarks are well represented and newer attractions such as the Olympic Park and the London Eye, complete with a map outlining the 32 London boroughs represented by its capsules, also find a place.





Paul Thurlby's book is one of a trio of London ABCs and it's fascinating to compare the similarities and differences between what has been chosen to represent each letter across the three books. For example, the only two words that cut across all three are: U is for Underground and W is for Wimbledon. At other times they are radically different: F is for Fashion, Fish & Chips and Foyles; L is for Lions, Lord Mayor's Show and London Bus.

In Thurlby's book A is represented by Abbey Road, with four people traversing the zebra crossing seen on the cover of the Beatles iconic album, with portraits of the Fab Four on the opposite page. Whereas in:



***ABC London* by James Dunn and Kate Slater**

Frances Lincoln 9781847804952

The book ends with Z for Zebra crossing, echoing the Abbey Road crossing. This is suggested in the glossary at the end of the book which supplements but does not interfere with the pictures as there is no explanatory text on each page. The bright collage illustrations emphasise the vibrancy of the city. They embrace tradition (C is for Changing of the Guard) and modern buildings (G is for Gherkin) while R is for River flows across a double page spread with many London landmarks highlighted on its banks.

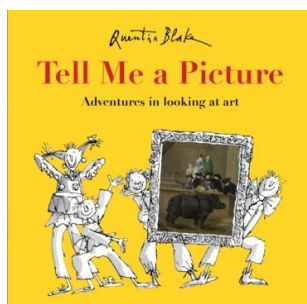


***London ABC* by Ben Hawkes**

Corgi 9780552566742

This book is aimed at a slightly younger audience than the other two books indicated by a simpler style of illustration and the presence of a Penguin character popping up in each picture. There are other things beginning with each letter to spot and these are listed at the end, as are landmarks featured in the book and suggestions others to visit.

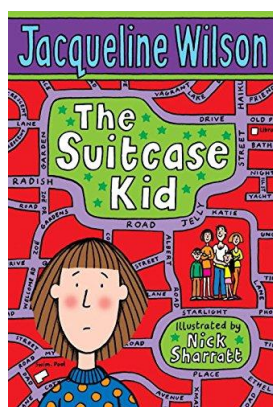




### *Tell Me a Picture* by Quentin Blake

Frances Lincoln 9781847806420/9781847807656

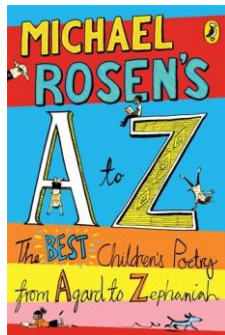
Subtitled ‘Adventures in looking at art’ this book has its origins in Quentin Blake’s time as the first UK Children’s Laureate when he curated an exhibition at the National Gallery combining the work of illustrators and painters, arranged alphabetically and enhanced by Quentin’s own cartoon style commentary voiced by a collection of children. The diversity of style and subject matter of the pictures is wide and there are brief notes about each one and its artist at the back of the book. To give an idea of the range of artists included: Michael Foreman is followed by Goya, Edward Hopper and Roberto Innocenti.



### *The Suitcase Kid* by Jacqueline Wilson

Corgi 9780440867739

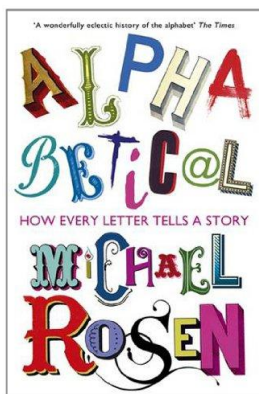
The story of a girl who has to divide her time between her divorced parents, told with wit and humour. Each chapter begins with a letter of the alphabet, focusing on different aspects of Andrea’s life, a device that is very effective in moving the reader quickly through the book.



***Michael Rosen's A-Z. The best children's poetry from Agard to Zephaniah***

Puffin 9780141324500

The arrangement and organising principle of this anthology is based on the alphabetical sequence of poets' surnames, resulting in interesting random juxtapositions of subject matter and forms. The poets are contemporary and each is represented by two poems, giving a flavour of their work, and enticing readers to go and discover more. In his introduction, Michael Rosen urges children to collaborate and create their own A to Z anthology.



***Alphabetical: How Every Letter Tells a Story by Michael Rosen***

John Murray 9781848548886

This list began with a book of stories for each letter of the alphabet and ends with a book for adult readers subtitled 'How every letter tells a story'. At the beginning of each chapter, Michael Rosen describes how an individual letter took its present form. He then goes on to talk about its pronunciation, in the process proving that systematic synthetic phonics taught in isolation is not the best method to teach reading, a thread that runs throughout. A word is chosen to represent each letter, allowing for a brief essay which ranges across history, linguistics and the politics of literacy, incorporating anecdote, often taken from his own family life, recounted with his characteristic humour. Some of the choices are unexpected, for example you might expect this author to choose the word Nonsense to represent N but maybe not K for Korean? H is for H-Aspiration is another interesting choice. Although it's possible to dip in and out, a narrative builds throughout the book and there is considerable cross-referencing, so reading in alphabetical order means you get the most from it.

