

Sure, everyone knows the rhyme-y alphabet song we all learn as kids, but a whimsical and creative selection of children's books can take the ABCs well beyond what we've always taught and learned. Check out these fun abecedary books to elevate your storytime *and* your alphabet game.

“A is for Audra: Broadway’s Leading Ladies from A to Z” by John Robert Allman and Peter Emmerich (2019)

Shining a spotlight on the best and brightest stars of the Great White Way, performers from Audra McDonald to Liza Minnelli are celebrated in rhymes with caricatured illustrations highlighting each actress in a leading role.

“A is for Elizabeth” by Rachel Vail and illustrated by Paige Keister (2019)

Elizabeth finds her name has too many letters to fit on a school poster and envies Anna, a classmate who always gets to go first and whose four-letter name fits easily on her poster. A playful and heavily illustrated beginning chapter book reinforcing fairness and friendship.

“A Visit to Grandad: An African ABC” by Sade Fadipe and Shedrach Ayalomeh (2019)

Adanah visits her grandfather and explores his welcoming community in this delightful Nigerian narrative that works its way through the alphabet and rewards observant readers: additional words representing the highlighted letter hide in plain sight on the page.

“Alphabet Kingdom” by Starla Michelle Halfmann (2019)

Vivid and textured illustrations celebrate animals from armadillo to zebra across double-page spreads of this oversized wordless picture book, with a key in the back for young admirers who may not recognize the whimsically rendered nyala or yak.

“Bear Is Awake!: An Alphabet Story” by Hannah E. Harrison (2019)

A bear wakes early from hibernation to surprise a girl in a nearby cabin. After an alphabetical and adventure-filled day together that includes sophisticated words like “intrigued” and “oblivious,” she settles her new friend back down to bed.

“Comics: Easy as ABC! The Essential Guide to Comics for Kids” by Ivan Brunetti (2019)

An introduction to comics for parents, teachers, and librarians that reinforces the approachability for kids of all ages to make comics of their own. Not an alphabet book, though a section includes using the basic shapes of letters as springboards for doodling new characters.

“¡Olinguito, de la A a la Z! Olinguito, From A to Z!” by Lulu Delacre (2016)

In 2013, the small and very shy olinguito, a resident of the Andean cloud forest, became the first mammal discovered in over 35 years. It is celebrated here in a Spanish-first text full of rhymes and alliteration with gorgeous artwork from a native-speaking author-illustrator who visited the Ecuadorian forests to bring the alphabet of plants and animals to the page.

“Take Away the A” by Michael Escoffier and Kris Di Giacomo (2014)

An “alphabeast” of a book in which removing one letter from a word changes its meaning dramatically, with playful illustrations highlighting the before and after words. Take away the “A” to morph BEAST to BEST, while a monstrous looking creature receives an award as “scariest” and “hairiest,” and the alphabet proceeds from there.

“Z Goes Home” by Jon Agee (2003)

Z makes its exit from the zoo sign and works his way home, stopping through double-page spreads with oversized illustrations highlighting each letter, such as nibbling enough bundt cake to leave it shaped like a “C” before moving on through the alphabet.

After you turn the alphabet inside out and upside down with these reading suggestions, try a family activity to extend your learning and fun:

- Take turns working through the alphabet with the most outlandish words you can think of to represent each letter.
- Building on the above activity, older readers might string your original vocabulary into a story of their own or illustrate a few of the words.
- Help emerging readers write out each letter in a bold marker and encourage them to illustrate the basic shape, creating new characters from their imagination.
- Go for a walk around your neighborhood and try to spot something that represents each letter of the alphabet—no need to find them in order!