

*Early Literacy December 2008 Article,
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‘Twas the days before Christmas
When all through the house
Came excited wee wishes
From a small little mouse....

The season is upon us. And helping us to explore the celebrations, excitement, and meaning of this special time of year is a whole cast of children’s book characters. Mice, reindeer, bears, dogs, children and even gingerbread babies are preparing for the holiday season.

Modernized versions of traditional poems, songs or tales are popular. Beginning readers especially find these new-old stories appealing. Their familiar rhythm, words and storyline help children feel more confident that the words they are reading are correct.

“Christmas Wishes” by Tony Mitton is an adaptation of “The Night Before Christmas”. This time, however, it is two mice that are waiting and watching the night sky for Santa on Christmas Eve.

“Twelve Hidden Days of Christmas”, illustrated by Macky Pamintuan, is a story that could be sung. On the first day of Christmas, the reader is told, Santa hides one thing in the house. On the second day of Christmas, Santa hides two more things; on the third day, three more things. At the end of the book a two-page picture unfolds into a large picture with many more objects to search for. In all there are more than 350 items for your child to seek and find in this book.

Jan Brett, renowned for her richly illustrated children’s books, has created another adventure for the Gingerbread Baby. In Brett’s version of The Gingerbread Man called “Gingerbread Baby” the refrain “I’m the Gingerbread Baby, fresh from the pan. If you want me, catch me if you can.” is sung out as the newly baked cookie races to safety ahead of line of hungry critters.

In “Gingerbread Friends” the lonely Gingerbread Baby takes off on another adventure. At a bakery his hopeful but unsuccessful search for friends is suddenly cut short by a hungry fox. Once again Gingerbread Baby escapes to the safety of his home where he unexpectedly discovers newly baked cookie friends. On the illustrated side bars of each page Brett draws ingredients and baking directions to make cut-out cookies. “Gingerbread Friends” is fun to read, talk about, and to use for making cookies with your child.

For children and parents who love dogs “12 Dogs of Christmas” claims to be the “paw-fect gift for all dog lovers.” This rhyming rebus reader includes twelve silly dog tales with photos and illustrations on touch-and-feel pages.

“Why I Love Christmas” may be the most simply told and endearing book of all. Available in both a touch-and-feel board book, and a slightly more detailed paperback version, each page of these books contains the words of a child who explains why he or she loves Christmas.

Stories, traditional or brand new, can be an important part of children's preparations for Christmas, Hanukah, or any other special day. Reading with your child may not be expensive to do, but sharing books and stories together is a gift that can last a lifetime.