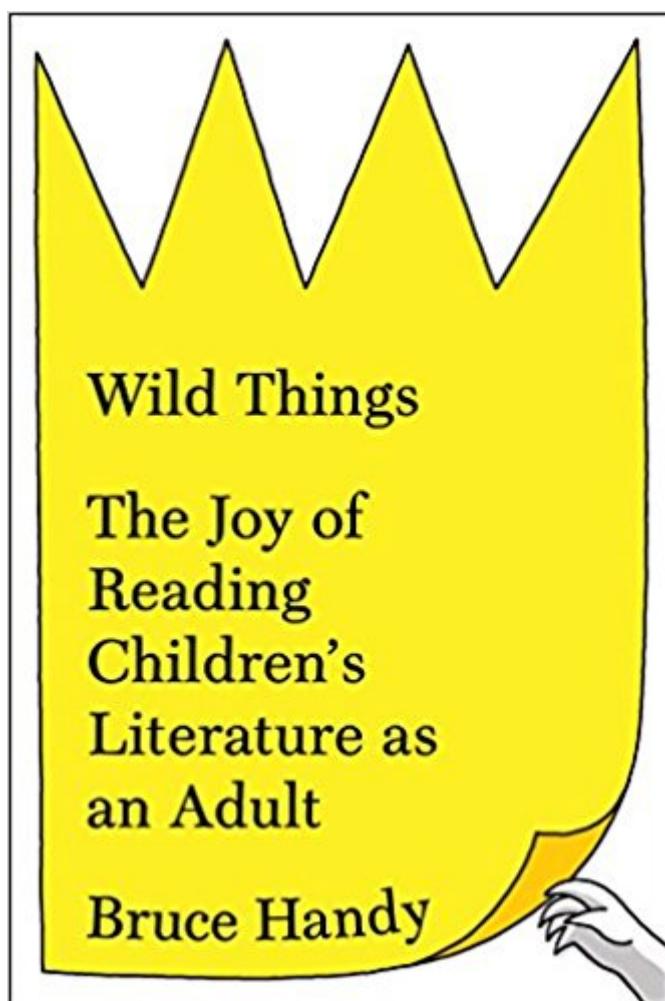


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# Wild Things: The Joy Of Reading Children's Literature As An Adult



## Synopsis

An irresistible, nostalgic, insightful—and totally original—ramble through classic children's literature from Vanity Fair contributing editor (and father) Bruce Handy. "Consistently intelligent and funny" | The book succeeds wonderfully. "The New York Times Book Review "A delightful excursion | Engaging and full of genuine feeling. "The Wall Street Journal "Pure pleasure. "Vanity Fair "Witty and engaging | Deeply satisfying. "Christian Science Monitor

In 1690, the dour New England Primer, thought to be the first American children's book, was published in Boston. Offering children gems of advice such as "Strive to learn" and "Be not a dunce," it was no fun at all. So how did we get from there to "Let the wild rumpus start"? And now that we're living in a golden age of children's literature, what can adults get out of reading *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Goodnight Moon*, or *Charlotte's Web* and *Little House on the Prairie*? In *Wild Things*, Bruce Handy revisits the classics of American childhood, from fairy tales to *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and explores the backstories of their creators, using context and biography to understand how some of the most insightful, creative, and witty authors and illustrators of their times created their often deeply personal masterpieces. Along the way, Handy learns what *The Cat in the Hat* says about anarchy and absentee parenting, which themes link *The Runaway Bunny* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, and why *Ramona Quimby* is as true an American icon as *Tom Sawyer* or *Jay Gatsby*. It's a profound, eye-opening experience to reencounter books that you once treasured after decades apart. A clear-eyed love letter to the greatest children's books and authors, from Louisa May Alcott and L. Frank Baum to Eric Carle, Dr. Seuss, Mildred D. Taylor, and E.B. White, *Wild Things* will bring back fond memories for readers of all ages, along with a few surprises.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A terrific rumpus of a journey into the world of illustrated and young reader classics . . . Wild Things makes a convincing case for reading children’s books as an adult.

The A.V. Club “A charming, discursive encounter with classic children’s literature from the perspective of a parent . . . Mr. Handy writes with zip, sincerity, and good humor. . . For parents who are embarking on this phase of rediscovery, for those in the thick of it, and for those for whom it is a warm and recent memory, Wild Things will be a delightful excursion. . . . It is also engaging and full of genuine feeling, and I liked it very much.

Meghan Cox Gurdon, *The Wall Street Journal* “Consistently intelligent and funny . . . The book succeeds wonderfully. . . . The Handy children’s appearances are brief but disproportionately memorable. Just as almost all kids’ books, with their frequent appearances by talking animals, are part emotional masquerade, Wild Things, too, is in disguise. It reads as a companionable romp through all the stories you sometimes tire of reading to your own children. But like *The Runaway Bunny*, it’s really a gently obsessive tale, a man gathering up so many words and ideas as if to create a magical stay against his own children growing up.

Rivka Galchen, *The New York Times Book Review* “Nothing less than a Golden Ticket into the Whipple-Scrumptious world of children’s classics, where mystical and marvelous surprises await . . . Literary criticism through the prism of memoir, Wild Things is a ride! of pure pleasure.

Vanity Fair “Wild Things is relaxed, discursive, and personal. . . . The result is very pleasing to read. . . . Handy quotes liberally from each book he admires, and he curates those passages beautifully, allowing readers both literary pleasure and a kind of time travel. His analyses are affectionate and often eccentric. He’s got a magpie’s eye for odd and shiny details. . . . His foray into children’s literature allowed him more than a simple chance to re-encounter the favorite books of his youth. It allowed him the chance to hold close his children’s younger selves.

“By one measure, I suppose, he writes, “you are holding in your hands a work of sublimated grief. How beautiful, and how painful, and how incontrovertibly true.”

The New York Times “A clear-eyed and often hilarious deep dive into

some old standbys of children's literature. Though it would be easy to fall into either rapture or diatribe, Handy treats his literary subjects like family members, with admiration and infatuation and love. He is a perceptive and affable close reader. USA Today "Delightful . . . Ranging from Goodnight Moon to Charlotte's Web, Handy cogently captures each book's artistic and emotional qualities while deftly placing it in cultural and historical context. Witty and engaging . . . Inspired by reading to his own kids, Handy's brief but deeply satisfying survey of children's literature marries curiosity, humor, and downright excitement. . . . Wild Things showcases the universality of children's literature, the best of which inspires readers of all ages. Samantha Bronkar, The Christian Science Monitor "Rollicking and razor sharp, consistently engaging, always on point, and packed with history, theory, and humor . . . Highly recommended for anyone who reads or has read children's literature. Library Journal (starred review) "Highly engaging . . . The author demonstrates a deep love of children's literature and a keen understanding of the ways in which reapproaching beloved texts can highlight the connections and differences between a child's perception and adult reality. As well-researched as it is seamlessly composed, this book entertains as it educates. Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "Catnip to lovers of children's literature and a cordial invitation to strangers to that world to discover what they've been missing . . . One of the very best books of its sort in, well, ever. Encore! Encore! Booklist (starred review) "A spirited, perceptive, and just outright funny account of reading childhood favorites through adult eyes . . . Handy's breezy, friendly style lends the book a bright feeling, as of old friends discussing old friends, and this book will surely leave its readers with a new appreciation for childhood favorites. Publishers Weekly "In Wild Things, Bruce Handy offers a rousing and nostalgic romp through the classics of children's literature from the latter half of the 20th century, from Goodnight Moon to Ramona to The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Clearly passionate about his topic, Handy dives into the context of the publication of these books with enthusiasm and verve. . . . This is a compulsively readable and entertaining collection of essays that will take readers back, in the best sense, to books they may have nearly forgotten but will delight in remembering. Bookpage (starred review) "From the moment I picked up Wild Things, I couldn't put it down. I only wish the book were ten times longer. It was a joy to learn more about so many of my favorite masterpieces of children's literature. Gretchen Rubin, author of The

Happiness Project  
“Brilliant, revelatory, and endlessly entertaining. I’ve read these books a thousand times, but only now do I finally understand them.”  
Lev Grossman, author of the Magicians trilogy  
“A wonderfully entertaining tour of a dozen gems from Goodnight Moon to Charlotte’s Web.”  
Full of humor and insight, Wild Things in its evocation of our young reading lives is also as poignant as some of the masterpieces it celebrates. I loved it.  
Ann Packer, author of The Dive from Clausen Pier

Bruce Handy is currently a contributing editor of Vanity Fair. A former writer and editor at Spy and Time, his articles, essays, reviews, and humor pieces have appeared in such publications as The New York Times Magazine, The New York Times Book Review, New York magazine, Rolling Stone, Vogue, The Village Voice, and The New Yorker. Handy was nominated for an Emmy in 1993 as a member of Saturday Night Live’s writing staff. He won a GLAAD Award in 1998 for his “Yep I’m Gay” Time cover profile of Ellen DeGeneres. At Vanity Fair, he has written on topics and personalities as diverse as Mad Men, Amy Schumer, film composer John Barry, PeeWee Herman, Miley Cyrus, the J.T. Leroy hoax, Cinerama, and the history of flight attendants. A native of California and a graduate of Stanford University, Handy lives in Manhattan with his wife, novelist Helen Schulman, and their two children. Wild Things is his first book.

This is a delightful, insightful book! I am simply amazed that anyone thinks this book reads like a PhD thesis. On the contrary, it is stylistically fresh, interesting, and frequently witty. (You don’t find much wit in PhD theses.) And the audience is obvious: it’s anyone who has made a habit of reading to their children or grandchildren night after night and/or who were childhood readers themselves. I enjoyed this trip down memory lane so much I actually ordered a couple of my remembered favorites so that I could read them again. I should say that I had not read all of the books that come in for analysis, but that did not diminish my interest in what Handy had to say about them! Seems to me you have to be a real sourpuss not to like this book if you are at all familiar with or have an interest in children’s literature. And presumably if not, you would not be inclined to consider reading this book in the first place. The book is a real joy. I recommend it without reservation.

Bruce Handy’s *WILD THINGS: THE JOY OF READING*

*CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AS AN ADULT* reflects upon re-reading

children’s literature as an adult (please, please, WITH a child!). It begins with

toddler books such as GOOD NIGHT, MOON, and the uptick in popularity this work had  
but well after it was first published, and it ends with "The End" a chapter discussing how children's literature deals with death and loss. In between the toddler books and "The End" Handy works his way through a child's development and the development of the child's reading skills. Ink is not spared on everything from Beatrix Potter to the Dick and Jane books to the Ramona Quinby books to the Narnia series to the LITTLE HOUSE series. I liked the depth and coverage of this book. The chapters are best read as they are, but, if necessary, could be read freestanding if a teacher or librarian needs a quick check for a particular age group. On the "dislike" side, I would have liked to see more readers' reactions (children and adults) to the works under discussion; there are points where Handy seems to focus on his own personal reactions, which may differ from others'. I also see some slump in Handy's style and interest when he is discussing books that are not his favorites, such as the Narnia books. Overall, though, I would recommend this book for parents, and particularly for teachers and librarians. I would strongly advise it as course reading for a children's literature course for pre-service teachers and librarians.

I've taken this book with me to a couple of public places to read as I enjoyed coffee for a couple hours at a time and both times, adjacent customers asked what I was reading because I would chuckle aloud. I can honestly say that reading *Wild Things: The Joy of Reading Children's Literature as an Adult* by Bruce Handy actually did bring joy into my life as an adult. His style of writing delivered so much new information as well as memories of children's stories from my past in an endearing way that caused me to stop the reading to write down an author's name, new book, or tidbit to research later. I'd love to learn what Mr. Handy thinks of Aesop's Fables.

I am an elementary school librarian and lover of children's books. This book was screaming my name. However, while I did find it interesting, I kept questioning who this book was intended for. It's not easily accessible reading, written more like something a college education major would have to read for a class than something a layperson would choose to read. Even many educators I know who enjoy children's literature wouldn't find this particularly interesting reading, and people who don't have any familiarity with names such as Margaret Wise Brown or EB White would find themselves out of their depth. Handy's history of children's literature and anecdotes about authors

and books is perhaps only for a select audience, but a book that true children's lit lovers will appreciate.

Years ago I knew someone who would volunteer to read children's books to nursing home residents. At the time I thought it was perhaps a bit patronizing (I was still young myself) but later came to realize how much some of these seniors enjoyed reflecting on the simplicity of a short story. They were better able to follow along even with neuro/cognitive impairment and others just enjoyed the creative element. Fast forward a few years and I have found my own fondness for antique children's books as well as bilingual or translated books from other nations....I guess you can call it a bit of a hobby. So, it was with some excitement that I looked forward to reading this book - there are not that many people who share this odd little obsession so not unexpectedly, there were no other reviews to go on. The book finally arrives and sadly, it is not exactly academic but it's also not warm, inviting or even very interesting. It reads as though it would have/could have been an academic style text - but not quite. It lacks the rigor. It also lacks the interest to appeal to the majority of lay persons. It's not without merit, the author does a nice job presenting a personal journey with examples throughout but overall the target audience is confusing.

As a mother of small children I currently read my own childhood stories too I found this book to be very interesting. It never occurred to me to ever think of what time or place a person might have been in their life while writing one of my own beloved children's stories.

Loved this book so much. I tried reading 50 or so pages a day to make it last, but that was hard to do. It was so interesting to read all about favorite childhood books and authors that I loved as well. Just wish there was a sequel!

Utterly delightful! Even if you haven't read some of the books Handy writes about, he is such a smart and stylish guide that he makes you want to read HIS book aloud.

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