

Focus on Friendship: Books for Kids

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One of the most important skills a child can learn is how to be a good friend. We humans are social creatures, and the friendships we form and keep play a major role in our level of overall happiness. What makes a good friend, though? Kindness, empathy, acceptance, trust... all these things are important elements to being a good friend, and can be found in these children's books.

The World Needs More Purple People by Kristin Bell and Benjamin Hart is an engaging, colorful picture book encouraging readers to embrace themselves and others for who they are. Throughout the story, the narrator, Penny Purple, leads readers through the steps of how to become a purple person. What is a purple person? Ultimately, a purple person is a good friend, but what makes this book unique is its message that, in order to be a good friend to others, we must first be a good friend to ourselves. Another great picture book that shows what it means to be a good friend is *Poetree* by Shauna LaVoy Reynolds. Quiet Sylvia writes a poem to celebrate winter's end, and ties it to the branch of a birch tree. When she returns the next day, though, she notices something amazing: her poem is gone, and a new poem has been left in its place. This book encourages readers to appreciate the natural beauties of the world, and shows that friends can be found in unlikely places.

Sometimes two people (or animals) can be complete opposites, but make the best of friends. In the nonfiction picture book *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* by Isabella and Craig Hatkoff, and Paula Kahumbu a baby hippo, Owen, and a 130-year-old giant tortoise, Mzee, form an unbreakable bond. In the 2-book early reader series *Mac and Cheese* by Sarah Weeks, another unlikely friendship occurs between two alley cats with very different personalities. Fans of Mo Willems' *Elephant and Piggie* will surely enjoy the antics of this comical best friend duo, along with the engaging rhyming text.

No friendship is without its share of struggles. Jealousy, resentment, and life changes can all be causes of such troubles. In the graphic novel *Camp* by Kayla Miller best friends, Olive and Willow, are excited to spend the summer together at camp. When Olive begins to make new friends, though, and Willow doesn't, their friendship becomes strained as Olive feels suffocated by Willow's clinginess, and Willow feels scared that Olive will leave her behind. The fear of being left behind is also present in the graphic novel from the *Emmie and Friends* series by Terri Libenson, *Just Jaime*. Middle schoolers, Jaime and Maya have always been best friends, but when their friend group begins excluding Jaime, Maya doesn't seem to be standing by her. Will their friendship survive? Perfect for fans of Raina Telgemier's *Smile* and Shannon Hale's *Real Friends*.

Being a good friend requires being there no matter what. In *Before the Ever After* by Jacqueline Woodson 12-year-old, ZJ, struggles with the symptoms of his father's traumatic brain injury, a consequence of his career as a pro football player. With the support of his friends, though, ZJ will face this new reality courageously.

Please visit or call the Rizzo Children's Library at 201-891-4866, x3 for suggestions on finding great reads for children of all ages, and ask about joining one of our book clubs for children in grades 1-5.