



One, Two, Buckle My Shoe; Said Mouse to Mole; Going to the Dentist; The Wonderful Gift; Numbers, Book 1

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The 'START' series of books covers Maths, Talking, Reading and Writing and is intended for home or school use. Each book has a final page of carers' and teachers' notes with suggestions and activities relating to the book's content. There is a danger with this format of giving the message to children and carers alike, that books aren't for enjoyment for their own sake but are only worthwhile if they can be used to further narrow - in most instances - educational purposes. Sadly all too many teachers have already been brainwashed into this attitude.

Aimed at the 2+s, **One, Two, Buckle My Shoe** contains fifteen of the most widely known traditional nursery rhymes and songs, one per page or double spread, and each integrated within a colour illustration. Included are such favourites as 'Humpty Dumpty', 'Hey Diddle Diddle', 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', 'I'm a Little Teapot', 'Old Macdonald' and 'If You're Happy and You Know It'. Both rhymes and pictures are strong enough to invite participation and provide enjoyment so why the need for the spread entitled 'What Do You Think?' containing four inane, closed questions like 'What did Humpty Dumpty fall off?' and, in a series calling itself START Talking?

Said Mouse to Mole is a rhyming conversation between the two characters who both start out feeling miserable. They take turns fantasising about being something seemingly more exciting while the other points out the drawbacks and they finally come to realise they like one another just the way they are. The text does bear reading aloud but the skill required to make it flow would be beyond a child just starting reading. Rescek's bold, quirky pictures are arresting but do not extend the text as one would hope in a START Reading picture book. Once again the 'What Do You Think?' spread

does nothing to encourage children's thinking, rather it's a test of memory, though the notes do offer some scope for extended thinking.

Going to the Dentist (also in the START Reading series) has a young boy narrator describing, in straightforward language, his first visit to the dentist. The narrative has nine sections and is illustrated with colour photos. This book, with contents page, token (four word) glossary and index, is clearly designed to introduce children to information books and how they work, and much of the content of the notes supports this.

One of the START Writing series, **The Wonderful Gift** tells of the sad Princess Starlight and her anxious, doting parents' unsuccessful endeavours to make her happy until, thanks to the grubby gardener's son, she discovers - even though she doesn't realise it - where true happiness lies. Waldek's comic illustrations enliven a passable text, though again, the 'What Do You Think?' spread does little to extend children's thinking despite its potential philosophical theme. The notes, however, offer some interesting possibilities for thinking, discussion and writing.

A book is the last place I'd want to START Maths with a child of three. Early counting, adding, subtracting and making sets should be done through real 'hands on' experiences and **not** books such as **Numbers, Book 1**. In such spreads as 'Say 1 fewer' children are confronted with a picture of objects including four chairs, four knives, five cups and a teapot, are asked to 'Count how many. Say how many. Now say how many if there were 1 fewer.' This is followed by 'What if there were 1 more? How many then?' Does this mean the one more is the previous one taken away or one more than the original set illustrated? I only hope that no well-meaning carer will be naive enough to sit down and waste time with such nonsense.

Running Order:

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