

The books we've had forever: The Parent-Observer Diary.

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 **“The books we’ve had forever”: The Parent-Observer Diary**

Virginia Lowe

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**“The books we’ve had forever”:
The Parent-Observer Diary**

Virginia Lowe (bio)



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It was an old-fashioned wicker bassinet painted white; previously it had held not only my daughter, but myself as well. However when my infant son, Ralph, came home to be laid in it for the first time, there was something new. Around the edge there were books arranged by his sister, Rebecca, facing out for him to see the pictures. Yes, he was introduced to his home via books.

Three years later Ralph was puzzled. “Where did our books come from? The books we’ve had forever?” and, a week later, he was still asking about “the ones that the builder builded.” It seemed that nothing could convince him that the house had once been bookless. Books surrounded him from birth.

I had been careful not to go over the top with the first child. I wasn’t going to be one of those mothers who forced Beatrix Potter on the baby from birth! I didn’t read Shakespeare to the babe in the womb. Even though I was all ready to record her book experiences, when she was thirteen weeks old, I still hadn’t begun. As I stood in her father’s library, leafing through a new atlas on a stand, holding Rebecca on my hip, I noticed that her head was following the pages as they turned. This was it! Readiness for books! So as soon as we returned home, I started with Wildsmith’s *Mother Goose*. She clearly enjoyed the experience, and we continued from there.

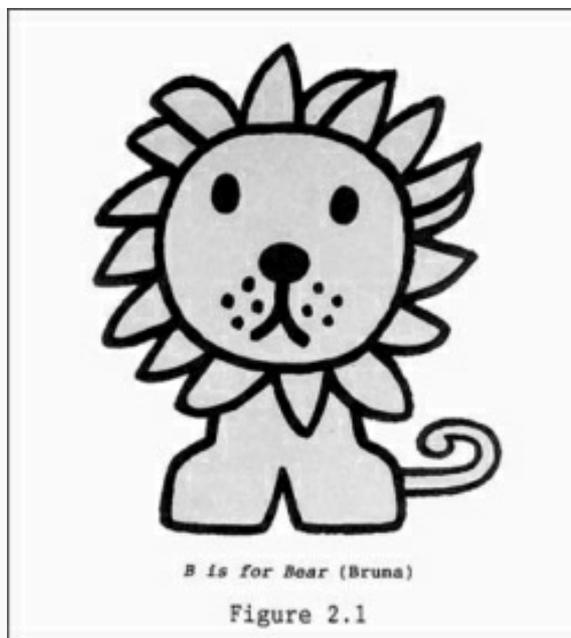


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Some people could (and did) say, “Ridiculous! What can an infant, with no language and no recognition of pictures, gain from books, or tell you about them?” A great deal, as it transpires. **[End Page 58]**

After *Mother Goose* (not the same day), Rebecca and I moved on to Bruna’s *B is for Bear*. This was the first edition, which is larger than the one currently available, with some different illustrations and white instead of colored backgrounds. Almost at once, she expressed her enthusiasm for the lion. I had chosen Bruna expecting that his bright primary colors and strong outlines would appeal to babies, so I felt quite justified. The lion is yellow with Bruna’s trademark strong black outlines and a wonderful spikey pattern for the mane. It was her favorite picture for at least six months, as she showed by vocalizing her appreciation and banging the book with her fists and hands. It was always this image, and that of the yellow bear, to which she responded.



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So I expected that this enthusiasm for the lion, or at least the pictures that were composed from strong blocks of color, would be universal with babies, and expected a similar response from her brother Ralph three years later. But how easily one is proved wrong!

Ralph was sixteen weeks old, and we were lying on the bed after a feed so that I could see his eye movements clearly. He had shown no interest in *B is for Bear* a week or so before when I had tried, but this time it was different. First his eye glanced at the picture and right away from the book, through Apple, Bear, Castle and Duck, and I was just telling myself that they were two different children and comparisons are odious when we came to the Eskimo. Here, there was a complete change. He started at it, his eye going from the feet up to the head, over and over, and he began vocalizing to it, then hitting with his fist in his excitement. He even smiled at it—and I had never seen him smile before at anything other than a real person. After some time I decided to see whether his interest carried over to the other pictures, so I went on—at about “Hammer” he grizzled so I turned back to the Eskimo, and he was happy again. But again I eventually continued—right past the Lion, with no particular notice, but when...

"The books we've had forever": The Parent-Observer Diary

by VIRGINIA LOWE



Virginia Lowe kept a record of her two children's book-responses for twelve years, on which she has published extensively, including her book *Stories, Pictures and Reality* (Routledge). As a children's librarian and a university lecturer, for the past fifteen years she has run Create a Kids' Book manuscript assessment agency (www.createkidsbook.com.au).



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