

## Bedtime?!! Already?!!



By Nanette McFadden

It hardly seems fair to tear a child away from his or her big plans to expand the train track into the hallway just because it is bedtime. After all, the clock hand may be slipping past eight but, as your observant little conductor will eagerly point out: *it is still sunny outside!* With bath time over and the glass of water drunk, how do you quell the sounds of revving engines, barking dogs and slapping street-hockey sticks that come drifting through the bedroom window? Against so many lovely distractions, in a still-active neighbourhood, you may need some of these comforting books, whose appealing characters will happily reinforce the message: it's time for bed!

An endearing blue monster takes charge in the spirited bedtime romp *Go To Bed, Fred* (ages 2+). With his shock of bright yellow hair, big eyes and characteristically wide, wide, Muppet® smile, Fred rushes gleefully around his twelve friends, encouraging them to “*Take off your socks, Mr. Fox*” or “*Fluff your pillow, Armadillo.*” This is just the sort of simple text pre-schoolers love to repeat as they give you a hug (“*Ladybug*”!) before going to sleep (“*Little sheep*”!). The enthusiasm for grabbing this sturdy board book off the shelf is made all the greater with the addition of an actual Fred puppet. Made of a lovely, soft plush fabric and sized for a small adult hand, this comforting character is destined to end up under the covers, snuggling next to your happy child.

Little ones are sure to experience a giggle of self-recognition when introduced to the masterful bedtime procrastinator in *Sleepyhead* (age 3-7). On pages whimsically illustrated in soothing nursery watercolours, the delightful text expands, arcs across, contracts and piles over the two protagonists as they negotiate the sleep time rituals. Where Mom-Cat patiently reminds that the story, the cuddle, the tuck-in and the glass of water have all been delivered, Sleepyhead persistently requests yet another book, hug, kiss, drink, cuddle...book! The predictability of the requests for “*just one more*” allows lap-listeners to quickly learn and happily repeat the words along with a reading parent. And as Sleepyhead drifts into his dream world he will finally, comfortingly, fall fast asleep...without a word!

A poetic text and arresting illustrations work well together in the quiet, glorious *Night Cars* (ages 3-7). In a scene achingly familiar to many parents, a wide-eyed baby just won't go to sleep. And so the hours pass to the singsong rhythm of words that reflect the urban streetscape beyond the apartment window: "...*Tired voices Walking feet Passing cars Noisy street...*" The illustrations, rendered in graphite and colour glaze, are magical in their ever-changing perspectives, their subtleties of light and shadow and their pleasing detail. Children love to point out, not only the elements that repeat from page to page (the store signs and building architecture), but also the elements that are ever-changing, from the footsteps in a dusting of snow to the actions of a busy mutt. Juxtaposed with each of these ethereal street scenes are vignettes of the adorable blue-sleepered baby, his every expression of joy, alertness, exhaustion, self-absorption and eventually, deep, deep sleep, expertly rendered in a loving illustrator's hand.

Don't have enough stuffed toys on the bed? In instruction book format, *Short Stuff* (ages 4+) is your child's solution to the quick and easy addition of two unique animal friends. The craft kit component includes everything required and, best part, there is no sewing involved! These colourful, fist-sized creations lend themselves to a variety of expressions and identities via a package of Velcro-on felt ears, wings, tails, mouths and arms. The booklet's graphic layout explores all of the fanciful possibilities of creating funky monkeys, munchie mice, pups, kittens and some satisfyingly silly interspecies characters. With additional instructions on giving a name or playing a hot potato style game, these Short Stuffs are bound to be very popular. And with a tweak of a tail or adjustment of an ear, they will easily offer a fun, comforting presence from the overall pocket to that bedtime pillow.

#### *Craft: Sleepy Time Pillowcase*

After the story, rest that tiny head on a specially decorated pillow. Start off by transferring a family photograph onto a cotton pillowcase. This service can be performed for you at a photographic supply store. Alternatively, you can do it yourself, on your computer, using printer friendly iron-on transfer sheets, available from office supply stores.

You Will Need:

- A white all cotton or poly-cotton pillowcase
- Family photograph
- A hard surface (cardboard or wood panel)
- Masking tape or thumb tacks
- Iron
- Fabric markers or pastels, available from art and craft supply stores.

1. *Stretch the washed, photo-transferred pillowcase out on a hard surface. Tape or pin it down.*

2. *Decorate the area around the picture with fabric markers or pastels. Parents can add reassuring text along the opening edge of the case.*
3. *Parent assist!! Follow the manufacturer's instructions to fix the colours onto the fabric. Usually this is done by placing a piece of cotton between an iron and the drawings, then pressing the iron onto the surface for a few seconds. Use a dry cotton setting.*
4. *Place a small person in bed with the pillow and kiss goodnight!*

*Suggestions:*

*Go to Bed, Fred A Good Night Book and Muppet Puppet* by Alison Inches. Workman Publishing (ISBN: 0-7611-0525-5). Price: \$22.00.

*Night Cars* by Teddy Jam and ill. by E. Beddows. Publ. by Greenwood Books (ISBN: 0-88899-413-3). Price: \$17.00.

*Short Stuff* a Chicken Socks book by Klutz (ISBN: 1-59174-528-4). Price: \$17.00.

*Sleepyhead* by K. Wilson and ill. by J. Segal. Publ. by McElderry Books (ISBN: 978-1-4169-1241-5). Price: \$20.00.

*This article originally appeared in the June 2008 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.*