

A Sweet Celebration of Connection and Inner Softness in a Culture That Encourages Hard Individualism and Prickly Exteriors

A hug is such a simple act. But how anguishing when one is denied this basic exchange of human goodwill and kindness. Surely, one doesn't even have to be human to feel the anguish of that denial.

At first glance, this seems to be the premise behind Hug Me (public library) by animator-turned-children's-book-author Simona Ciraolo — a sweet story about a young cactus named Felipe, who longs for such softness of contact in a family that sees emotional expression as a sign of weakness. Felipe runs away, looking for a new family to give him the affection he yearns for, but only finds heartbreak and rejection.

Felipe's lonesomeness grows deeper when his first friend, a "bold, confident" giant yellow balloon who hovers over Felipe's solitary patch of desert, succumbs to the inevitable outcome of the mismatched relationship. Even as he grieves his friend, Felipe is scolded for his emotional sensitivity rather than comforted with the very hug he needs.

At last, Felipe finds a true friend in a little rock longing for affection amid a family as stiff and stern as his own, a kindred spirit whose cries for connection resonate in perfect unison with his own — a sweet finale reminding us that nothing dissolves loneliness like empathy and the awareness of shared experience.

There is, of course, a deeper allegorical undertone to the tale, beyond the surface interpretation of



celebrating one's inner softness in a culture that encourages a prickly exterior. A subtle undercurrent celebrates the spiritual homecoming of finding one's tribe, the expansive embrace found in a kinship of souls. The story is also a celebration of free will, reminding us ever so gently that whatever our circumstances, we always have choices — and that our inability to see this is perhaps our gravest self-imposed limitation.



Hug Me comes from independent British children's book press *Flying Eye Books*, which also gave us that lovely field guide of mythic monsters and the illustrated chronicle of Shackleton's historic polar expedition.



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About Brain Pickings

Hey there. My name is **Maria Popova** and I'm a reader, writer, interestingness hunter-gatherer, and curious mind at large. I've previously written for *Wired UK*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and Harvard's Nieman Journalism Lab, among others, and am an MIT Futures of Entertainment Fellow.

Brain Pickings is my one-woman **labor of love** — a subjective lens on what matters in the world and why.

Mostly, it's a record of my own becoming as a person — **intellectually, creatively, spiritually** — and an inquiry into how to live and what it means to lead a good life. Founded in 2006 as a weekly email that went out to seven friends and eventually

brought online, the site was included in the Library of Congress permanent web archive in 2012.

Sit back and enjoy the **tops picks!**



Brain Pickings Founder - Maria Popova. Photograph by Elizabeth Lippman for *The New York Times*



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Issue 1 - October 2014 A monthly newsletter by Brain Pickings

Mind & Interest Intriguing Story Telling with Illustrations

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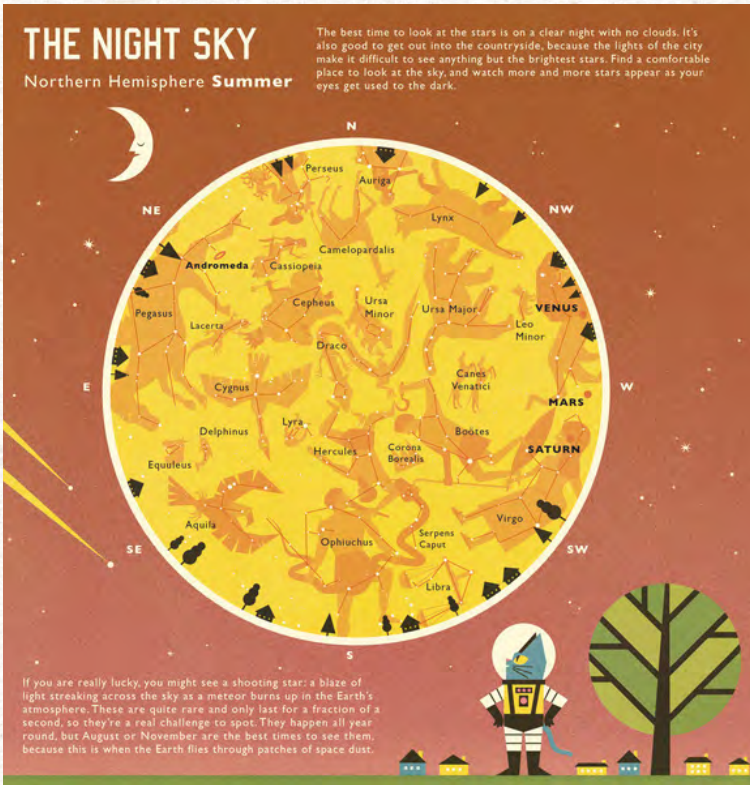
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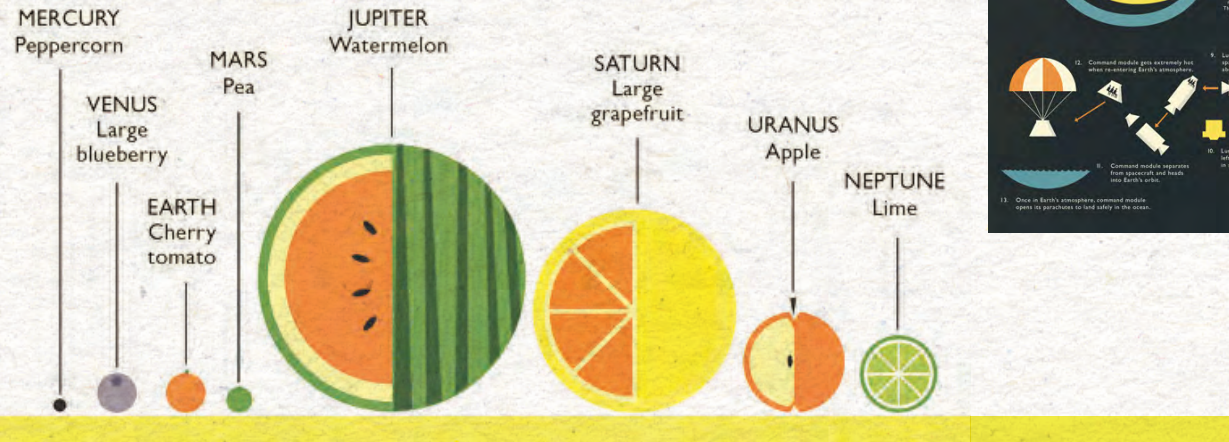
In reflecting on the story of the Golden Record, Carl Sagan, in his infinite poetic powers, celebrated our destiny as “a species endowed with hope and perseverance, at least a little intelligence, substantial generosity and a palpable zest to make contact with the cosmos.”

Given how gravely space exploration has plummeted down the hierarchy of cultural priorities in the decades since Sagan's time, how can we hope to imbue the hearts of the next generation of astronauts, policy makers, and cosmic explorers with the passionate poetics of Sagan's conviction, with the same exhilarating longing to reach for and embrace the stars?

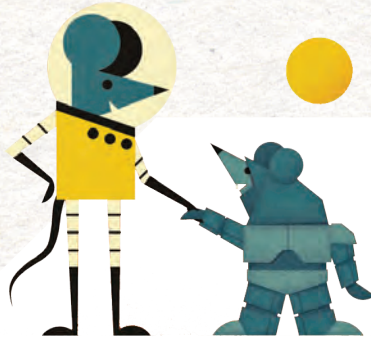
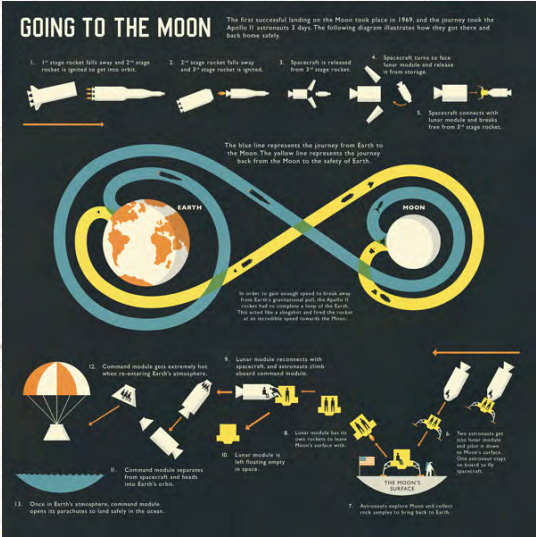


Professor Astro Cat's Frontiers of Space (public library), written by quantum computer scientist Dominic Walliman and designed and illustrated by Ben Newman, is a heartening step in the direction of an answer.

Both modern in its scientific spirit and with a sensibility modeled after the delightful mid-century children's books from the Golden Age of space exploration, it tickles young readers — as well as their space-enchanted parents — into precisely that “palpable zest to make contact with the cosmos.”



From clever visualizations of the scale of the universe to an illuminating primer on how stars are born to an illustrated anatomy of NASA's Curiosity Rover, the book combines solid science (pause for a moment to consider the size of the gaseous giant Jupiter, inside which 1,300 Earths can fit) with curious untrivia (I find poetic symbolism in the fact, previously unknown to me, that Venus spins in the opposite direction to all other planets in the Solar System, and how neat to know that the surface of the moon equals the size of Africa), binding it all together with subtle humor and wholehearted joy in learning.



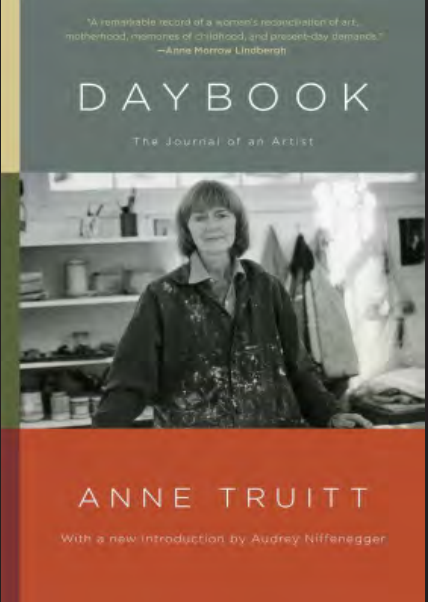
About the Space book

Professor Astro Cat's Frontiers of Space comes from the treasure chest of British indie children's book press Flying Eye Books, which also gave us that sweet celebration of connection and inner softness, the delightful field guide of mythic monsters, and the illustrated chronicle of Shackleton's historic polar expedition.

Complement it with this remarkable vintage children's book, which envisioned gender equality and ethnic diversity in space exploration decades before either became a reality, then revisit the wonderful You Are Stardust, which teaches kids about the universe in lyrical illustrated dioramas.

book pickings

Anne Truitt on Compassion, Humility, and How to Cure Our Chronic Self-Righteousness



Anne Truitt, born Anne Deen was a major American artist of the mid-20th century. She married James Truitt in 1948, and she became a full-time artist in the 1950s.

Countless great minds have attested to the creative and psychological value of keeping a diary, but few have manifested that more beautifully than artist Anne Truitt — perhaps in large part because Truitt's formal training as a psychologist before she turned to art gave her higher-order powers of introspection and self-awareness, which, coupled with an artist's penchant for patient observation, produced a true masterwork of psychological insight.

In one particularly poignant sequence of diary entries Daybook: The Journal of an Artist (public library) — the same soul-stretching collection of reflections on the creative life that gave us Truitt on the difference between doing art and being an artist — she examines the art of humility and the perils of self-righteousness as a gateway to true human connection, the elixir that makes possible what Adrienne Rich would so memorably describe mere months later as “an honorable human relationship.”



Illustration by Maurice Sendak from 'We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy,' an unusual story about compassion and love.

“Love ... is the honoring of others in a way that grants them the grace of their own autonomy and allows mutual discovery.”

Grown-up Advice on Modern Life from Vintage Children's Books

As an enormous lover of vintage children's books, I was instantly smitten with Everything I Need To Know I Learned From a Little Golden Book (public library) — a semi-serious, playful and practical guide to life culling wisdom for modern grown-ups from the iconic Little Golden Books series of mid-century children's books.

From mental and physical health to money to relationships, this charming compendium captions and reframes vibrant vintage illustrations — many by artists whose talent was cultivated under legendary children's book champion Ursula Nordstrom's magnanimous wing — as little reminders about what it takes to live a happy and fulfilling life today.

The project is in many ways an organic extension of the Little Golden Book ethos, which has sustained generations through troubled times with creative nourishment for young souls. This compendium offers

heartening solace for those weary of the hardships our world is currently facing. Diane Muldrow, longtime editor of the beloved children's series, writes in the introduction:

We've been forced to look at ourselves and how we're living our lives. Ironically, in this health-conscious, ecologically aware age of information, many of us have overborrowed, overspent, overeaten, and generally overdone on habits or ways of life that aren't good for us — or for our world. The chickens have come home to roost, and their names are Debt, Depression, and Diabetes.

How did we get here? How, like Tootle the Train, did we get so off track? Perhaps it's time to revisit these beloved stories and start all over again. Trying to figure out where you belong, like Scuffy the Tugboat? Maybe, as time marches on, you're beginning to feel that you resemble the Saggy Baggy Elephant.



From 'Animal Gym' by Beth Greiner Hoffman, illustrated by Tibor Gergely, 1956

Or perhaps your problems are more sweeping. Like the Poky Little Puppy, do you seem to be getting into trouble rather often and missing out on the strawberry shortcake in life? Maybe this book can help you!

After all, Little Golden Books were first published during the dark days of World War II, and they've been comforting people during trying times ever since — while gently teaching us a thing or two.

And they remind us that we've had the potential to be wise and content all along.



From 'The Musicians of Bremen,' adapted from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, illustrated by J. P. Miller, 1954



About the Golden book

Everything I Need To Know I Learned From a Little Golden Book is an absolute delight. Complement it with some actual Golden Books, including I Can Fly by the great Ruth Krauss, illustrated by Disney's Mary Blair, a lovely adaptation of Homer for young readers by creative power duo Alice and Martin Provensen, and perhaps the best of the bunch, The Little Golden Book of Words.