



## Strong Girls (BOOKLIST)

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I have become more committed to finding good books for my boys over the last few years. So much has been written about the crisis in boys and literacy that I want to make sure that I have books that will hook them as readers. I have found great resources such as Jon Scieszka's website [www.guysread.com](http://www.guysread.com). But, with the focus on boys and literacy, I do not want to forget the girls in my classroom. Not only do I want to have good books for them to read, I want to make sure they have lots of girls to read about who are strong female characters.

Blogger Vivian Lee Mahoney, of HipWriter Mama (<http://hipwritermama.blogspot.com>), got me thinking about this. In early 2007, Vivian decided to post a weekly Sunday's List of strong girl characters in children's literature. Here is what she said about her own family:

*"So here we are with three girls--8, 6 and 3. All fiercely independent, smart, funny, imaginative, sassy, loyal and spirited. My goal is to keep them that way. I love the fact they are insanely curious (even though they have to ask "Why?" all the time). I love the fact they are not afraid to try new things (Haircut anyone? What about pen tattoos?). I love the fact they stand up for what they believe in (It's not fair! And here's why!). They are assertive (Let's go check...can you just ask?). I even love the fact they question authority (although why it has to be mine at the moment, I'm not so sure) . . .*

*So right now, while I have the clarity of mind and forethought, I want to create a resource of great friends (with books of course!) my girls can turn to, when Mommy Power is just not enough (oh, I can't believe I wrote that down!). It is so important to me that they have an avenue to turn to--where they can find comfort, feel empowered, maybe have an Aha! moment or two, and understand what wonderful individuals they are. I want my children to read about strong girls who can take on whatever life gives them and still find hope, heroism and strength without losing a sense of themselves. I want them to have strong girl role models so they have something to aspire to, to dream about, to think about."*

Needless to say, I have been an avid reader of HipWriter Mama's list and her entire blog. And she has helped me remember how important it is to keep my eye out for strong girl characters in books. Below is the list of my top Strong Girl Characters in recent books for readers in grades 3-6. Some of the books are very appropriate for readers who are somewhat new to chapter books.

**Ivy and Bean** by Annie Barrows and Sophie Blackall

The thing I like about this book is that Ivy and Bean, two neighbors who think they have nothing in common, become great friends. Bean likes to get dirty and stay busy. From Bean's perspective, Ivy is very prim and proper, always reading. The two become friends and have great fun together in each book in this series. I love that two girls who are so different are portrayed as strong, interesting characters.

**Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Stuart Little** by Peggy Gifford

I first fell in love with Moxy Maxwell because she was putting off reading her "required summer reading" book. A little bit of

rebellion against assigned reading drew me to the book. But, as I read, I found that there was so much more to Moxy. To help you know Moxy a bit better, here is the excerpt that made me decide I needed more books about Moxy: "Now, Moxy's mother was not wrong when she pointed out how rare cases of 'in-between' were for her older daughter. To the best of her knowledge, she had never witnessed Moxy in between anything: while Moxy was eating lunch, for example, she was already asking what was for dinner. The day she got her puppy, Mudd, she wanted to know if she could get another to keep him company. Before she could finish one sentence, she had often started another."

### **Clementine** by Sara Pennypacker

Clementine is laugh-out-loud funny. Clementine is a creative soul and her parents and teachers appreciate this about her--even though her ideas often get her into some trouble. Marla Frazee illustrates this series and the drawings add to the fun of getting to know Clementine. How could you not love her when the light in her eyes is so clear in the illustrations!

### **Violet Bing and the Grand House** by Jennifer Paros

Violet Bing is my kind of girl--a bit afraid of taking too many risks or doing things she is not sure of. She does not like surprises or unplanned events. But, she spends some time in the Grand House with her aunt, she learns to have a little fun.

### **Larger-Than-Life Lara** by Dandi Daley Mackall

Lara moves into Laney's 4th grade classroom and is immediately the target of meanness and bullying. Lara is very large--so big that she has to have a special chair and she swishes when she walks. Lara handles the meanness with a positive attitude and is always able to find the best in people. It doesn't end quite the way I had predicted which is always nice--I love a little surprise. It isn't really a happy ending, but there is closure. Laney, a classmate and the narrator of the story, is another strong character in her own right.

### **How to Steal a Dog** by Barbara O'Connor

Georgina has been living in a car with her mother and brother since her father left them. She has to take care of her brother, do her schoolwork while her mom works, and hide her new life from her friends. Georgina tries to help her family get back on their feet in touching and surprising ways.

### **Paint the Wind** by Pam Muñoz Ryan

You can always count on Pam Muñoz Ryan to give us strong female characters. This is the story of Maya, who has lost her parents, and now her grandmother. She goes to live with her mother's family and spends the summer at Sweetwater River learning about her mother, horses and herself. Maya has had lots of hard things happen in life but somehow finds a way to stay true to who she is.

### **Emma-Jean Lazarus Fell Out of a Tree** by Lauren Tarshis

Emma-Jean does not fit in with the other girls in her school. But she enjoys her life and tries to understand those around her. She is a character who is unique, and we learn that strength comes in many forms.

### **Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat** by Lynne Jonell

Emmy is a child who is held captive by a not-so-nice nanny. Her parents don't have much time for her since they inherited a large sum of money. She feels almost invisible at both home and school. But then, with the help of the class rat and her friend Joey, she discovers what has really been controlling her life and she then takes control herself! It is really a fun book. It has many of the traits and situations I've found compelling in other books--a child who isn't getting lots of attention from her parents, a mean nanny, magic and friendship. It is a story told in a way that makes it fun and suspenseful throughout.

### **Into the Wild** by Sarah Beth Durst

This is a terrific fairy tale where we come to know favorite fairy tale characters in new ways. Similar to the SISTERS GRIMM series, the reader gets an inside look at fairy tales, although this book has a bit less humor and a bit more depth than other fairy tale takeoffs that I've read. The concept of this one is wonderful, and the characters are quite believable. Julie (Rapunzel's daughter) is the clever hero in this story.

### **Babymouse** by Jennifer Holm and Matt Holm

I cannot write about strong female characters without including Babymouse! Babymouse is a newer graphic novel series and each book tells us one story of Babymouse. She has big dreams. Babymouse has disappointments too, but she gets through it all with friends and humor.

I know how important Nancy Drew, Betsy by Carol Haywood, and Claudia in *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* were to me. My girlfriends in books when I was growing up were as important as any friends I've ever had. I am glad that there is a new set of strong girls in books for girls today.

