

A Little Lottery-Book for Children. (6th ed.) London: [J. Newbery], 1767. 3 13/16 inches x 2 1/2 inches (97 mm x 65 mm), 64 pages, 52 woodcuts.

This book was published by John Newbery (1713–1767), the Englishman considered by some to be the inventor of children’s literature and by others to have been the first to recognize its commercial potential. Newbery’s publishing career began in 1730 when he was hired by William Carnan, printer of the *Reading Mercury*. Newbery must have pleased his employer, as he inherited a portion of Carnan’s estate in 1737 and married his widow Mary two years later. By 1740 Newbery had begun publishing books in Reading, and he relocated his business to London in either late 1743 or early 1744. His 1744 *Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, often referred to as the first children’s book, was intended to “make Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl,” as stated by the publisher on the title page. A motto in the book, “Instruction with Delight” neatly sums up Newbery’s approach to children’s literature, which underpinned his success. Perhaps a reflection on Newbery’s own history, the children who peopled his tales succeeded or failed according to their virtues. The most noteworthy example can be found in *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), believed to have been authored by Oliver Goldsmith. Newbery also issued books for adults, among them works by Samuel Johnson and the poet Christopher Smart, who wed Newbery’s stepdaughter Anna Maria. Newbery supplemented his publishing business by selling patent remedies, as indicated in advertisements that appeared in certain of his books.

After Newbery’s death in 1767, the publishing business was conducted by two separate firms, one headed by Newbery’s son Francis and stepson Thomas Carnan, and the other by Newbery’s nephew Francis and Francis’ wife Elizabeth. Relations between the competing firms were not friendly, and Carnan and Newbery’s partnership dissolved after a time, with Carnan continuing to publish and Francis selling patent medicines. Eventually John Newbery’s publications became the property Elizabeth Newbery, and numerous publishers came to specialize in children’s literature. The American Library Association’s annual Newbery Medal commemorates his contributions to the genre.

This book is a precursor of educational lotto games that were popular in the nineteenth century. These games were designed around such subjects as spelling, multiplication, history, and animal identification. A prefatory note by “Peter Prudence” in Newbery’s *Little Lottery-Book for Children* stipulated that only nuts and fruit may be wagered in this game. For each letter of the alphabet, shown in capitals and lower case in both roman and italic, are two words beginning with the corresponding letter. Each word is grouped with a number, both in roman and Arabic numerals. Opposite are the two words along with an illustration of what they represent. As a means to promote focus, the instructions recommend having the child poke a pin through the illustrations to the letter on the verso. Once the child can easily identify the letter, the pictures opposite are then revealed. Apparently, this copy was never used as instructed, for it lacks pinholes. The book ends with a five-page advertisement for Newbery’s publications.

This copy of *A Little Lottery-Book for Children* is from the Bodleian Library’s Douce Collection, named for Francis Douce (1757–1834) a British antiquary and the Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum from 1807 to 1811. His bequest of more than 19,000 volumes contained printed books from various periods, including nearly 500 incunables, as well as roughly 425 manuscripts. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century children’s books numbered among Douce’s wide range of collecting specialties. The book is in a contemporary binding of boards covered with Dutch floral paper. The inscription “Lydia Heatons Book” is on the front free endpaper; the stamp “EX DONO FR. DOUCE | BIBL. BODL.” appears on the title page.

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