

MEDIA LITERACY Edutopia Magazine

8 Picture Books About Using Technology to Connect With Others

These books with characters who use tech to communicate with those they can't be with in person should engage early learners.

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Many years ago, a resourceful kindergarten student in my class took a piece of scrap wood, cut out and glued square foam pieces onto the wood, and created a model of a personal cell phone. In the land of pretend, as well as in reality, there are always urgent phone calls, emails, and texts to respond to, and this child's improvised ingenuity told me two things: Cell phones had high value in this child's world, and he wanted a device so much that he was willing to devote time and resources to create one.

The eight joyful picture books that follow celebrate technology as a set of tools and devices that allow characters to communicate with each other and within their world. This collection features characters who use simple technology for self-expression, communication, and relationship building; characters take and send photos, email, texts, and video chat. Reading these books in the classroom offers the opportunity to have foundational social and emotional learning and STEM discussions couched in a literacy setting.

Three titles in this picture book collection—*Marisol McDonald and the Clash Bash*, *See You Someday Soon*, and *Tea With Grandpa*—feature cell phones and computers as valuable tools for fostering intergenerational communication; in each of these titles, young children video-chat with a grandparent.

8 BOOKS WITH CHARACTERS WHO USE SIMPLE TECHNOLOGY TO COMMUNICATE

[See You Someday Soon](#), by Pat Zietlow Miller, illustrated by Suzy Lee. A grandchild and grandmother are geographically apart but find ways to be together, including online and talking on the phone, until they can be reunited. (Preschool–grade 1)

[One Blue Gnu](#), by Danna Smith, illustrated by Ana Zurita. When a box of cell phones falls off the back of a truck at the zoo, eager animals swarm to claim a cell phone for their very own. Gnu begins an unforeseen phone chain that cumulatively invites 54

animals to a pool party at his house (as well as an unexpected carnivorous guest). (Preschool–grade 2)

[*Tabitha and Fritz Trade Places*](#), by Katie Frawley, illustrated by Laurie Stansfield. Fritz the elephant lives in the jungle, and Tabitha the cat is from the suburbs. Both animals seek adventure, and a home swap is arranged via the app Lair BNB. Fritz and Tabitha message each other to share the daily goings on in their new homes. (Preschool–grade 2)

[*Tea With Grandpa*](#), by Barney Saltzberg. Ebook. A grandfather and granddaughter meet for tea each day at 3:30 p.m. They share stories, sing songs, and have a wonderful time. The last page reveals that this daily event is carried out via a video call. (Preschool–grade 2)

[*Dot*](#), by Randi Zuckerberg, illustrated by Joe Berger. At home, Dot swiftly and confidently navigates between her computer, her tablet, and her smartphone. Sometimes, however, too much technology puts *her* system on overload, so she goes outside to recharge by spending time with her friends. (Preschool–grade 3)

[*Goodnight Selfie*](#), by Scott Menchin, illustrated by Pierre Collet-Derby. A young girl inherits her brother’s camera phone. She immediately spends the day taking numerous selfies and some “elsies” (photos with someone else). She ends the day with one final selfie: a “goodnight selfie.” (Preschool–grade 3)

[*I Wanna Go Home*](#), by Karen Kaufman Orloff, illustrated by David Catrow. When their parents go to Bora Bora, Alex and his brother and sister visit their grandparents at Happy Hills Retirement Community for two weeks. In this story, told in a series of emails, Alex sends his parents daily grievances, but very soon he has delightful new experiences with his grandparents that make it hard to leave. (Preschool–grade 3)

[*Marisol McDonald and the Clash Bash*](#), by Monica Brown, illustrated by Sara Palacios. Bilingual (English/Spanish). Marisol McDonald’s birthday is coming up, and she will be 8. As Marisol and her friends and family prepare for the celebration, she thinks of her greatest wish: for Abuelita to visit from far away. Sometimes wishes come true, even if in unexpected ways; Abuelita joins Marisol virtually via her computer on her birthday. There’s also a [teacher’s guide](#). (Kindergarten–grade 3)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some links to some resources with practical advice on how to facilitate sustained video chats with young children:

[13 Activities to Make the Most Out of Video Chats with Kids.](#) Source: PBS Kids for Parents.

[Does FaceTime “Count” as Screen Time for Young Children?](#) Source: *Psychology Today*.

[Engaging Young Children Through Video Chat.](#) Source: Brooklyn Public Library.

[Tips for Video Chatting With Young Children—Staying Connected While Far Apart.](#) Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children.