How Rocket Learned to Read
Author and Illustrator: Tad Hills

- **Summary:** A little yellow bird teaches Rocket, a dog, the alphabet, and Rocket discovers the joy of spelling out words and reading stories.

- **Awards:**
  - Irma Simonton Black & James H. Black Award for Excellence in Children’s Literature.
  - 2010 Parents Choice Silver Honor Award
  - 2011 Children’s Choice Book Award Finalist
  - New York Times bestselling picture book

- **Book Reviews:**
  - Review from the Boston Globe, October 3rd, 2010:
    "A picture book all about the joys of reading could easily turn preachy and dull. But “How Rocket Learned to Read” defies gravity. Rocket is lovable, the little feathered teacher adorable. Hills tells his sprightly story as needed, not one word more or less. His pictures flow with soft color and movement. Hills makes this a story of friendship. It may persuade tentative kindergarteners that school is worth a try; teachers and librarians will love it." [http://tinyurl.com/7b3yojh](http://tinyurl.com/7b3yojh)
  - Review from Booklist:
    “Who says you can't teach a young dog new words? Looking a bit like Gene Zion's lovable Harry, Rocket is minding his own business one fall morning when a little yellow bird gets him hooked on a story she is reading aloud. She proceeds to give him leisurely lessons in the alphabet before flying away for the winter. He practices all season long, spelling out words in the snow and in the mud. Hills, best known for his Duck and Goose series, offers up an appealing picture of the learning-to-read process: the bird is an enthusiastic instructor, teaching Rocket to love the sounds and meanings of words. Hills' oil-paint and colored-pencil illustrations nicely capture both the sweetness of pupil and tutor and the prettiness of the changing seasons. When the little yellow bird returns at last, the two of them settle down to read books together, and it’s clear that a wonderful adventure has begun for Rocket. Grades K-2. --Abby Nolan” [http://tinyurl.com/6tkufkq](http://tinyurl.com/6tkufkq)

- **Author’s Webpage:** [http://tadhills.com/](http://tadhills.com/)

- **Discussion Questions:**
• **Pre-reading:** Who do you think Rocket is? Who do you think will teach Rocket to read? Who taught you how to read?

• **While reading:** How does Rocket feel about school at the beginning of the book? How does Rocket discover he enjoys reading? Can you try to spell the words Rocket spells?

• **Post-reading:** What did Rocket discover during the book? What did Rocket learn before he learned how to read? How do you think Rocket got his name?

• **Activities to use with this book:**
  
  • **Reading/Oral Language:**
    o Have the teacher or students read the story aloud. Have students talk about their experience in learning how to read.
    o Read the book or watch the video, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Martin
  
  • **Writing:**
    o Have students write their own story in which Rocket learns to do something else.
    o Have students write about the characteristics of the different seasons that Rocket experienced.
    o Have students write a summary of the story.

  • **Science:**
    o Have students tell you what they discovered birds do during the winter.
    o Talk about the four seasons Rocket experienced.

  • **Social Studies:**
    o Compare the English alphabet to alphabets of other languages
    o Discuss what makes a good teacher
    o Make a chart of all of the things that a teacher does during the day

• **Art:** Have students draw a picture of their favorite part of the book.

• **Music:**
  o Have students sing the alphabet song
  o Locate one of these videos on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and have students sign along:
    ▪ *Phonics Song 2*
    ▪ *ABC Seven Steps Song*
    ▪ *English Alphabet Sing the Alphabet With Me*
    ▪ *ABC Song – ABC Superstar! With the Giggle Bellies*

• **Food:** Help students make some “People Chow” to enjoy as a snack
  o **Ingredients:** 9 cups crispy rice cereal squares, ½ cup peanut butter, 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate morsels, 1 ½ cups powdered sugar
  o In a saucepan over low heat, melt the chocolate morsels
  o Add peanut butter and stir until smooth
- Remove from heat
- Add cereal and stir until coated
- Pour powdered sugar in a large plastic bag
- Add the coated cereal and shake until cereal is coated with powdered sugar
- Store in an airtight container

- **Related Books:**
  - *Yoko Learns to Read* By Rosemary Wells
  - *Born to Read* By Judy Sierra, Illustrator Marc Brown
  - *Reading to Peanut* By Leda Schubert, Illustrator Amanda Haley
  - *Edward and the Pirates* By David McPhail
  - *Henry and the Buccaneer Bunnies* By Carolyn Crimi

- **Other books written by Tad Hills:**
  - *Duck and Goose*
  - *Duck, Duck, Goose*
  - *What’s up Duck?: A book of Opposites*
  - *Duck and Goose: How are you Feeling?*
  - *Duck and Goose 123*
  - *Knock Knock Who’s There*
  - *Waking up Wendell*
  - *The 12 Days of Christmas*
  - *My Fuzzy Safari Babies*
  - *My Fuzzy Farm Babies*
  - *My Fuzzy Friends*

- **Related Websites:**
  
  - [http://childrenschoiceaward.wikispaces.com/file/view/HOW+ROCKET+LEARNED+TO+READ+2.docx](http://childrenschoiceaward.wikispaces.com/file/view/HOW+ROCKET+LEARNED+TO+READ+2.docx) : Here are some more educational activities related to *How Rocket Learned to Read* that teachers can do with their students.
  
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmGNtz9FKaw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmGNtz9FKaw) : Here is a link to a YouTube video about the *How Rocket Learned to Read* book on the iPad. The book on the iPad looks very interactive, educational and fun, so it is worth looking at!