

Halloween, like so many things, will be different this year. But we can still make it feel special for our kids by shifting our focus from trick-or-treating to celebrating that unique feeling of October. There are still leaf-peeping hikes to be taken, jack-o-lanterns to be carved, candies to be eaten, and spooky stories to be shared. Here are some creepy books for your families, ranked from least to most scary. I hope they inspire you to invent your own tales around a campfire this autumn.

“The Scariest Book Ever,” by Bob Shea. The title of this picture book makes a pretty big claim, but don’t let it scare you away! You’ll meet a ghost who is too afraid to go outside so he sends you, the reader, instead. When you tell him there’s nothing outside except for pumpkin picking and cupcakes, he finally finds the courage to go outside himself. But when he does, he gets a surprise!

“The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything,” by Linda Williams and illustrated by Megan Lloyd. This interactive book, perfect for preschoolers, follows a little old lady through the woods at night. A shirt, pants, and boots start creeping up behind her, and despite her claims of not being scared, she hurries home. She thinks she’s safe and sound when she gets there until there’s a knock on the door. Who could it be?

“Are You Scared, Darth Vader?” by Adam Rex

A group of monsters tries to scare Darth Vader, but he is totally unaffected by any of them because he is, of course, all-powerful and unafraid of anything. Or that’s what he’d like us to believe! The monsters discover what Darth Vader is afraid of, and you get to help scare him at the end of the book.

“Creepy Carrots!” by Aaron Reynolds and illustrated by Peter Brown. Jasper Rabbit just loves eating carrots... until they seem to start following him. He thinks he sees the creepy carrots everywhere, but no one believes him. He works out a plan to keep them away, but it might end up helping them instead.

“The Dark,” by Lemony Snicket and illustrated by Jon Klassen. A little boy named Laszlo is afraid of the dark, but he knows where the dark hides so he’s usually able to avoid it. One night, the bulb in his night light goes out and the dark finds him. The dark speaks to him and says he wants to show him something in the basement and Laszlo, foolishly or bravely, listens. There’s a surprise waiting down there in the dark!

“Outside Over There,” by Maurice Sendak. This book might deserve the title of “Scariest Book Ever” because the dark story is accompanied by Maurice Sendak’s creepy illustrations. A baby is stolen by goblins who leave a terrifying melting ice baby in her place. The baby’s older sister has to go out and rescue her, but has to subdue the goblins, who all look like scary babies, in order to reach her. Best for older readers!

“Scary Stories To Tell in the Dark,” by Alvin Schwartz and illustrated by Stephen Gammell. This classic collection of spooky stories still thrills kids 40 years after it was first published. The stories are short and satisfying and they’ve got terrifying illustrations. Perfect for upper elementary students looking for a scare.

“The Night Gardener,” by Jonathan Auxier. This might be the scariest book I’ve ever read. Siblings Molly and Kip have found jobs in an English manor that everyone says is cursed. They need the work, so they try not to let the strange things that happen there frighten them away. Somehow it’s all linked to the enormous gnarled tree that grows next to the manor house and the history of the family who lives there.