Animals are certainly some of the most popular characters found in young children’s literature. They are loveable, wily, silly, courageous, loyal ... all characteristics found in human nature. In fact, adults use the "qualities" identified with different animals to teach children the pros and cons about various human character traits.

Children’s animal books can also be more scientific in nature and written to help educate children about the actual lives of various animals. Though these types of books are usually better suited for the older child, I have found a few that are appropriate for older pre-schoolers. Below are some recommendations for both categories:

1. **The Tailor of Gloucester** Written and exquisitely illustrated by Beatrix Potter. The queen of animal tales, Ms. Potter, has created many delightful stories and this is one of my favorites. The tale of an old tailor, whose kindness endears him to a family of mice, who in turn save his business.

2. **The Happy Hedgehog** Written and nicely illustrated by Marcus Pfister (translated by J. Alison James). Mikko, the little hedgehog “loved his garden. He knew every flower, all the herbs, and even all the weeds by name. More than just their names, though, Mikko knew about all their healing powers.” But, to his Grandfather, Mikko’s life was useless, so he is forced to go out into the world and “accomplish something important so you will be happy!” The journey and the end result provide food for thought for young and old alike!

3. **Beautiful Feast for a Big King Cat** Written by John Archambault and Bill Martin, Jr. with rich illustrations by Bruce Degen. This quick moving tale unfolds the story of how a little mouse learned a lesson about tempting fate and teasing cats. It also has some delicious images...if you happen to be a feline! “Your food should be served on a great golden dish- piled high as the sky with freshly caught fish- and fried chicken bones with catnip crust- and plump juicy livers in sweet sugar dust.”

4. **Chipmunk Song** Written by Joanne Ryder and gorgeously illustrated by Lynne Cherry. This is the story of the yearly life of a chipmunk-
what makes it a delight for young children is that the artist has included in each drawing a 6 inch child, who is able to experience life as does the chipmunk. “As the days grow cooler, the birds fly away to warmer places. But you stay, carrying food from the bright world to your dark home.” A lovely way to learn about the life of this animal.

5. **Jungle (Sounds of the Wild)** Written and skillfully illustrated/created by Maurice Pledger. Young children are always delighted with pop-up books and books that make sounds; this one has both! Though its more factual pages would interest older children, the brightly colored and animal rich fold-out pages, along with the cacophony of animal sounds that accompany them, delight my 4 ½ year old grandson. The written text on each page reflects the richness of the pictures and intensity of the jungle sounds, “A hazy blue dawn breaks over the eucalyptus woods. A few birds begin to call, their squawks and screeches ringing out in the cool air. As the sun climbs higher, other birds join the morning chorus. The sky fills with a rainbow-colored cloud of swaying wings and feathers as the calls gather volume to reach a deafening crescendo.”