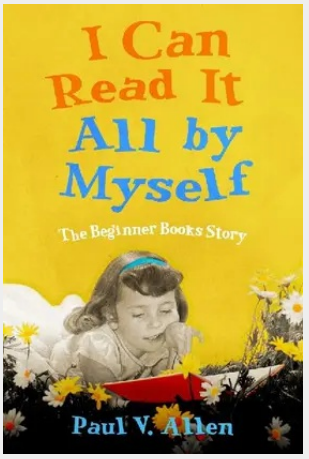
University Press of Mississippi

I Can Read It All by Myself

The Beginner Books Story



127,90 €
127,90 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

In the late 1950s, Ted Geisel took on the challenge of creating a book using only 250 unique first-grade words, something that aspiring readers would have both the ability and the desire to read. The result was an unlikely children's classic, The Cat in the Hat. But Geisel didn't stop there. Using The Cat in the Hat as a template, he teamed with Helen Geisel and Phyllis Cerf to create Beginner Books, a whole new category of readers that combined research-based literacy practices with the logical insanity of Dr. Seuss. The books were an enormous success, giving the world such authors and illustrators as P. D. Eastman, Roy McKie, and Stan and Jan Berenstain, and beloved bestsellers such as Are You My Mother?; Go, Dog. Go!; Put Me in the Zoo; and Green Eggs and Ham. The story of Beginner Books-and Ted Geisel's role as ""president, policymaker, and editor"" of the line for thirty years-has been told briefly in various biographies of Dr. Seuss, but I Can Read It All by Myself: The Beginner Books Story presents it in full detail for the first time. Drawn from archival research and dozens of brand-new interviews, I Can Read It All by Myself explores the origins, philosophies, and operations of Beginner Books from The Cat in the Hat in 1957 to 2019's A Skunk in My Bunk, and reveals the often-fascinating lives of the writers and illustrators who created them.

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Artikelnummer: 9781496834041
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-1-4968-3404-1
Verlag: University Press of Mississippi
Erscheinungstermin: 01.05.2021
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2021
Produktform: Gebunden
Gewicht: 734 g
Seiten: 326
Format (B x H): 161 x 240 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)