What happened to Choose Your Own Adventure

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The pick-a-path books many grown-ups remember: where they went, what replaced them, and where to find that kind of story today, free in Peabody's library.

The pick-a-path books many of us grew up with are not on the big bookstore shelves the way they once were, but they are still easy to find, and the idea behind them lives on in video and in games. This list shows where the idea went.

Most of us remember the feeling: a finger holding the last page, a choice at the bottom, and the quiet certainty that we could go back and try the other door. If you have been wondering what happened to those books, here is our short, friendly answer, in seven parts. Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

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1. The books are still out there

As we understand it, the paperbacks began arriving from the publisher Bantam in 1979, and several authors wrote them, including Edward Packard and R. A. Montgomery. Later on, the publisher that owns the name brought out reissues, so new copies exist alongside the old ones.

The old ones are easy to hunt for. Used bookstores, library sales, thrift shops and your own public library are all good places to look, and a librarian can tell you what the system holds. We do not have these books in Peabody, and we are not selling them; we are only telling you where grown-ups usually find them.

2. Other "gamebooks" took the same trick

The trick of a book that asks you to choose spread quickly, and fans call these books gamebooks. Fighting Fantasy began in 1982 and added dice, a character sheet and monsters to the idea. Lone Wolf followed in 1984 and turned one long adventure into a series, where your hero kept what they had learned from book to book.

If you liked the original pick-a-path paperbacks and want something a little crunchier, these are the books to search for. Many are older, so secondhand copies and library loans are the usual route. They are written for older readers, so read a few pages yourself before you hand one to a younger child.

3. The idea moved to video

The same promise, "you decide what happens next," found its way to the screen. Netflix made interactive specials where the viewer picks between two options with a remote or a tap, and Bandersnatch, from 2018, is the one most people name. The story branches, and different viewers can see different versions.

It is a different experience from a book. You do not hold the page, and you cannot easily flip back to peek at the other path, so the choices feel heavier. For a family evening it can be a lot of fun, but check the rating before you press play, because many of these specials are made for grown-ups and teens rather than young children.

4. It moved into games and apps

The branching story is now everywhere in games. Story games let you choose what a character says or does, and the ending changes because of it. Some are long and serious, and some are short and silly. For young readers, the best ones keep the reading front and center, so the child is actually reading each choice rather than tapping through.

When you look for one for your child, we would check three things: does the story read at the right level, can the child hear it read aloud if a word is tricky, and does it ask for an account, a payment or a lot of ads? Those answers matter more than the name on the box.

5. Why kids loved it, and why it helps them read

Here is what we notice at home and in classrooms. A choice makes a reader care about the next page, because the next page is the result of something they decided. Children who might shrug at a story handed to them will lean in when they are asked what the hero should do.

We are careful about big claims. We do not say these books make anyone a better reader, and we do not have a study to wave around. What we can honestly say is that choosing gives a child a reason to read the next sentence closely, and a reason to go back and read the other path. That extra reading is the part we like. Re-reading is how fluency grows, and a branching story makes re-reading feel like a game rather than a chore.

6. And a library of ordinary stories for the quiet evening

Not every night is a choose-a-door night. Some evenings call for a story that simply goes from the first page to the last, read slowly by a tired grown-up or by a child under the covers. The Peabody library has stories and true books at every level, with a read-aloud button on each one, so there is always something close to your child's level.

If you are not sure what level that is, our guide to free stories by reading level is a good place to start.

Where to start with your own child

If your child already reads on their own, pick a book with choices in it, let them choose, and sit nearby, and when they reach an ending, ask what would have happened on the other path. That question is the whole trick of the old books, and it works just as well today.

If your child is still learning, read the story together and let them vote. Our posts on how to teach a child to read and on reading aloud to someone have more ideas for the early steps, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

And if you find an old paperback in a box one day, save it. Read the first page to your child, hold your finger on the last one, and see which door they pick.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/what-happened-to-choose-your-own-adventure