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## The Allure of Animals

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## The Allure of Animals

Terrell A. Young, Ed.D. & Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D.

Books that feature animals seem to have an almost universal appeal for young readers. Whether they are domesticated creatures such as cats and dogs that are part of many families' lives or animals in their natural habitats in the wild, there is simply something intriguing or endearing about their behavior and personalities. A few years ago, young readers couldn't get enough of the story of a friendship that sprang up between a 130-year-old Alhambra tortoise in Kenya and a baby hippo, marooned after the 2004 tsunami in Asia. Readers of all ages reacted powerfully to their story, told by a six-year-old girl and her father in *Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* (Hatkoff, Hatkoff, & Kahumbu, 2006) and *Owen & Mzee: The Language of Friendship* (Hatkoff, Hatkoff, & Kahumbu, 2007). In fact, other books (Bauer, 2007; Winter, 2006) celebrating this most unlikely friendship were published as other authors became interested in the story. Below we share some recent titles with animals at their heart.

### Grades K-3

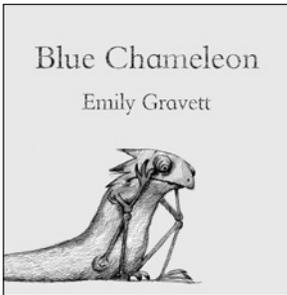
Ehlert, Lois. (2011). *RRRALPH*.

Beach Lane Books/Simon & Schuster. Unpaginated, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-1-4424-1305-4.

An unnamed narrator spends the day with a dog named Ralph. Clearly, Ralph can speak since in addition to his own name, he says words such as "roof," "bark," "rough," "wolf," and "yep" as the two friends walk through the woods and then return home. To distinguish the two voices for young readers, the narrator's observations are in a black font with spoken words in white. Ralph's responses are a series of puns. The illustrations stand out in the book, created from



zippers, wood, buttons, twine, metal, bark, screws, textile fragments, and papers that have been hand-painted and handmade. The woodpecker on the title page with its beak fashioned from a screw is particularly intriguing.



Gravett, Emily. (2011). *Blue chameleon*. Simon & Schuster. 32 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-1-4424-1958-2.

In the opening pages of this picture book, a lonely chameleon sits by himself, hands on his face, unable to find a friend or a place where he fits in. Incidentally, the illustrations and text make it clear that feeling blue is another way to express the feeling of despondency. When he spies other objects and creatures, the chameleon quickly tries to become just like them, down to the colors and shapes: yellow and curved like a banana, pink and strutting like a cockatoo, swirly like a snail, among others. He even tries to blend in with the white page of the book. Alas, the chameleon remains lonely until he finds another chameleon just like him. The illustrations are wonderfully imaginative, allowing the chameleon and his would-be friends to roll, swim, hop, and even hide across the pages.



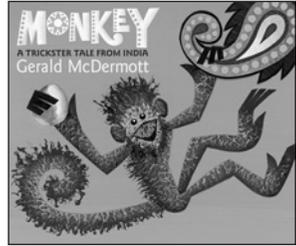
Johnson, Lindsay Lee. (2011). *Ten moonstruck piglets*. Illustrated by Carll Cneut. Clarion. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-6188-6866-7.

Mama Pig slumbers as the dazzling full moon rises in the sky and her ten piglets wander off into the night. Playful rhymes describe the piggies' actions: "All in a scramble,/ all ready to gambol,/ ten moonstruck piglets/ on a midnight ramble" (n.p.). The pigs delight in their adventure until the clouds block the moon's light. "Then 'Hoot!' cries the Owl,/ and fox comes to prowl,/ Jowl-twitching piglets/ scatter and howl, 'MAMA!'" (n.p.). Carll Cneut's whimsical acrylic illustrations establish the magical moonlit setting and point to the individuality and personality of each of the ten piglets. The front and back end pages provide even more insight into the pigs' dispositions and provide readers with their names.

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McDermott, Gerald. (2011). *Monkey: A trickster tale from India*.

Harcourt. 32 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-15-216596-3.



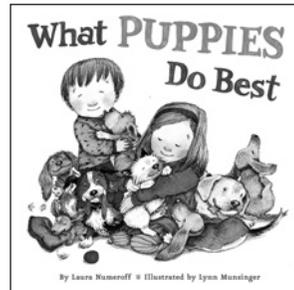
In McDermott's final story in his trickster tales series, Crocodile is determined to make a meal out of Monkey. Monkey, on the other hand, wants to eat the delicious mangoes growing on the island in the middle of the river but he must outsmart the hungry, wily crocodile in order to fill his belly. Can Monkey avoid Crocodile's sharp teeth? McDermott's bold collage made of cut and torn handmade paper from India is the perfect complement to this traditional Buddhist story from the Jataka Tales. Teachers will find this story delightful for reading aloud and their students will enjoy the mischievous monkey's antics.

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Numeroff, Laura. (2011). *What puppies do best*.

Illustrated by Lynn Munsinger. Chronicle Books.

Unpaginated, \$14.99, ISBN: 978-0-8118-6601-9.



Puppies of all colors and all sorts frolic across the pages of this early reader. Almost irresistible, they spill across the pages, dashing from their beds to awaken their human companions, jumping on humans' beds, clamoring for walks, chasing balls, making new friends, and even learning how to retrieve and how to sit. They have slobbery kisses for the humans in their lives, and the boys and girls greet them with affection. In the end, readers are reminded what those of us who share our lives with dogs know: What puppies do best is share their love with others. The watercolor, pen and ink, and pencil illustrations allow the spirited nature of the puppies, whether they're holding up a paw to shake or fiercely shaking a couch cushion, to come out on the book's pages.



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Srinivasan, Divya. (2011). *Little Owl's night*. Viking. Unpaginated, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-6700-1295-4.

Wide awake at night, Little Owl watches his nocturnal friends go about their business. He takes note of everything that's happening around him, even how the moths fly through the air, shedding silver dust, and how the fog moves into the field. As dawn approaches, he begs his mother for a bedtime story. She obliges and describes how night ends and day begins, but Little Owl never hears the end of the story because he's fast asleep. The illustrations are drenched in rich colors that pay tribute to the beauty of the night and its nocturnal creatures that thrive best in the dark.



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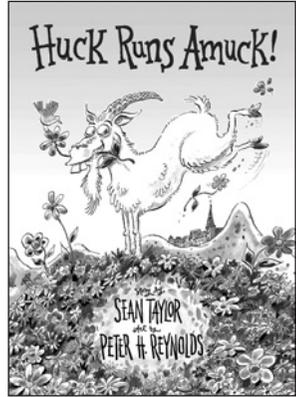
Stein, David Ezra. (2011). *Love, Mouserella*. Penguin. Unpaginated, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-3992-5410-9.

After her Grandmouse goes home, Mouserella misses her sorely. Because she wants to insure that Grandmouse doesn't miss out on the events in her life, Mouserella decides to write her a letter. At first, there seems to be little to say. But as she starts to write, the news begins to flow, and she describes finding a cat whisker at the zoo, teaching a bug how to fetch, and making shadow puppets during a citywide blackout. What makes the story even more appealing is how the book is designed so that young readers read it from top to bottom, just as they would a real letter. The letter also includes photographs and gifts—a packet of ketchup saved from the cafeteria—for Grandmouse from her granddaughter as well as drawings. Although letter writing seems to be a lost art in the era of email correspondence, this book might inspire youngsters to begin their own correspondence with someone, just to get a letter back. The illustrations are created from watercolor, stencils, crayons, and pencils.

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Taylor, Sean. (2011). *Huck runs amuck*. Illustrated by Peter Reynolds. Dial. 48 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-8037-3261-2.

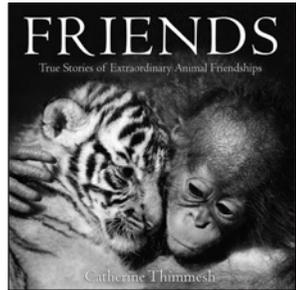
Mountain goat Huck will do anything for the taste of yummy flowers. When it seems that all the flowers in his grazing range have been devoured, he heads to the city to find more. After a series of near accidents, mishaps, and an encounter or two, Huck faces a dilemma. The wind blows the delectable flower-laden hat off Mrs. Spooner, the mother of the bride in an impending wedding, and it lands atop a church spire. Huck races to retrieve the hat, and just as he gets ready to munch on the petals, he hears onlookers calling him a hero. What's a goat to do? Huck climbs down, resists temptation, and gives the hat back to its owner. Huck gets his just reward, and manages to bring down the house—or the flower-bedecked tablecloth—during the party. The watercolor, ink, and tea illustrations capture the almost crazed obsession Huck has for delicate petals.

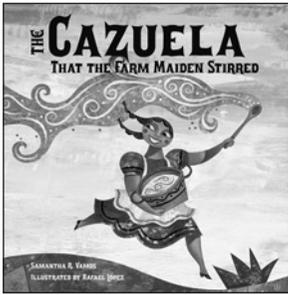


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Thimmesh, Catherine. (2011). *Friends: True stories of extraordinary animal friendships*. Houghton Mifflin. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-547-39010-9.

Catherine Thimmesh blends spare text with stunning color photographs to document 13 unusual animal friendships. Each opening offers a large photograph of the friendly duo, a paragraph explaining the relationship, and a poem. For instance, the poem “No matter/ who’s small,/ or who weighs/ a ton-/friends romp and they roll/ and their days turn to fun” (n.p.) is placed opposite a full page photo of a polar bear and a chained Eskimo sled dog, and an accompanying paragraph explains that the bear and dog frolicked together on Manitoba’s frozen tundra for ten straight days. While these friendships may seem unlikely, evidence of their existence is right in front of the eyes on these pages.



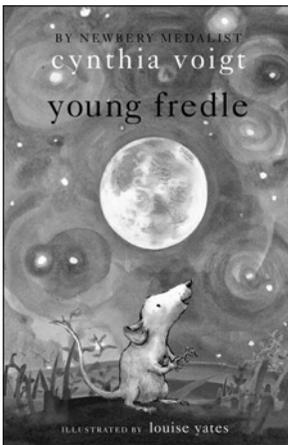


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Vamos, Samantha R. (2011). *The cazuela that the farm maiden stirred*.

Illustrated by Rafael Lopez. Charlesbridge. 32 pages, \$17.95, ISBN: 978-1-5808-9242-1.

In this delightful bilingual cumulative story, a maiden prepares rice pudding by first stirring a pot. One by one, the farm animals join her, churning the butter, producing the fresh milk, purchasing the sugar, and adding all the ingredients for a yummy dessert. But as the concoction begins to bubble, the farm maiden, the farmer, and all the animals get so caught up in celebrating that they almost forget to keep an eye on the rice pudding. Back matter includes a recipe for *arroz con leche* and a glossary of Spanish words. The acrylic illustrations painted on grained wood lend a warm and friendly nature to the engaging text. Some scenes capture perfectly the delight with which the animals, including a goat, a hen, and a donkey, lend a helping hand.



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Voigt, Cynthia. (2011). *Young Fredle*.

Illus. by Louise Yates. New York: Knopf. 240 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0375864575.

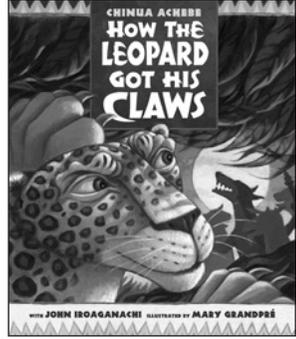
When Fredle, a curious young mouse, and a rodent friend spy a round chocolate patty hidden way in the back of a kitchen cabinet in the house where they live, they end up eating it and becoming quite ill. Because the other mice know little about healing, Fredle is carried outside and left for dead. But Fredle isn't ready to quit the world. With some help from the other mice who live outdoors and a dog or two, Fredle survives being kidnapped by raccoons, a watery voyage, and an encounter with a snake. Once he has made his way home, he is no longer content to hide in the kitchen and never see the world outside, and he convinces a few adventurous mice to join him in looking at the stars in the sky and breathing the fresh air of outside. The illustrations are softly drawn and show Fredle's personality perfectly, reminding readers that there are always adventurers among us.

## Grades 4-6

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Achebe, Chinua, & Iroaganachi, John. (2011). *How the leopard got his claws*.

Illustrated by Mary Grandpré. Candlewick Press. 32 pages (Unpaginated), \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-7636-4805-3.

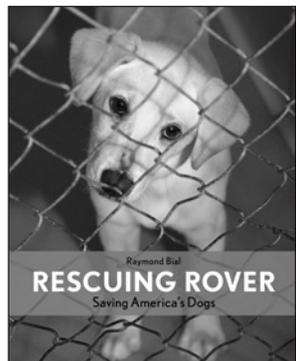


“In the beginning all animals in the forest lived as friends” (n.p.). Their kind, gentle, and wise King Leopard ruled the animals. Of all the animals, only Dog had sharp teeth and claws. The animals needed a shelter from the rain, so the King Leopard called them together to begin building a common shelter. All participated except for the dog and the duck. As the rains began to fall, dog’s cave was flooded and he demanded to enter the village hall. The dog attacked the animals with his teeth and claws to force his way into the hall attacking the animals with his teeth. Soon the animals turned their allegiance to the dog and made him their king. The blacksmith made deadly iron teeth and bronze claws for the leopard, and Thunder gave him a mighty roar. From that time forward the animals were enemies with the strong killing the weak. Dog eventually became a slave to the hunter and leads him to the forest to kill any animals Dog finds.

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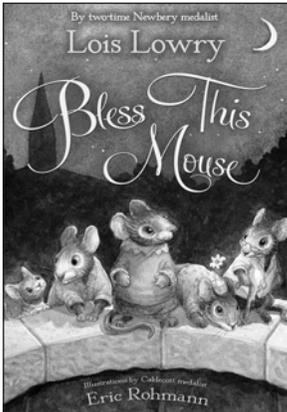
Bial, Raymond. (2011). *Rescuing Rover: Saving America’s dogs*.

Houghton Mifflin. 80 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-5473-4125-5.



Bial has an agenda in his latest nonfiction venture: he wants readers to be mindful of the responsibility of pet ownership, but he also wants to publicize the ever-increasing numbers of dogs who end up in animal shelters. Because so many dogs are never spayed or neutered, unwanted litters of puppies are born each year, and those puppies often have nowhere to go. Bial visits several local animal shelters in Illinois to report on the dogs and the men and women who care for them. In his usual carefully detailed style, he describes the cost of caring for these unwanted dogs and tells some of

their stories. Bial and his family have several family pets that they adopted from the shelters. The book is filled with heart-tugging photographs.



Lowry, Lois. (2011). *Bless this mouse*. Illustrated by Eric Rohmann. Houghton Mifflin. 160 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-5473-9009-3.

The somewhat self-important Hildegarde is the Mouse Mistress of St. Bartholomew Church, home to more than 200 mice. It is her job to keep them safe and out of sight from the humans who visit the church. Most of the time, everything goes well but lately, some of the mice have been taking risks and have been spotted by the humans. Hildegarde now must deal with the Great X as the parish priest contacts an exterminator to rid the church of its rodent problem. She is also in a dither because the Feast of St. Francis is approaching, and she knows the church will be filled with animals of all shapes and sizes, including cats. How she saves the day and insures a safe and blessed future for her mice minions will amuse readers, reminding them that all creatures great and small deserve kindness and a blessing or two.



MacLachlan, Patricia. (2011). *Waiting for the magic*. Illustrated by Amy June Bates. Athenenum. 144 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-1-4169-2745-7.

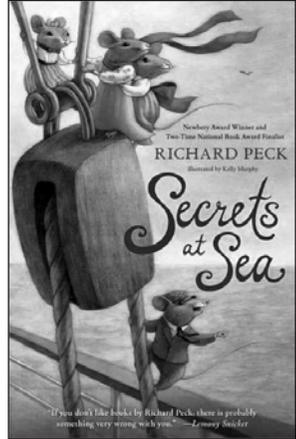
When their college professor father leaves the family in order to write, four-year-olds William and Elinor are confused as is their mother. But Mama decides that what the family needs to fill the void are some furry friends. When they return from the animal shelter, they have four dogs and a cat ranging in size from Neo, a still-growing Great Pyrenees; Grace, a retired Greyhound; Bryn, whose lips curl to show her teeth and who is devoted to Mama; Bitty, a small terrier; and Lula, a cat relaxed enough to let Elinor dress her in doll clothes. When their father comes to his senses and returns home,

the children have all come to recognize that there's something special about these animals: they can talk to those who will listen to them. Along with a surprise Mama has been keeping, they save a family that has drifted apart.

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Peck, Richard. (2011). *Secrets at Sea*.  
Illustrated by Kelly Murphy. Dial. 239 pages, \$16.99,  
ISBN: 978-0-8037-3455-5.

In 1887, two families occupied the Cranston home in the Hudson Valley: the Upstairs Cranstons—a human family—consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Cranston and their two daughters Olive and Camilla; and the other family, the Mice Cranstons who had occupied the home for generations longer than their human counterparts. The mice consisted of four surviving siblings, Helena, Louise, Beatrice, and Lamont. On the day that the mice learn that the social climbing Human Cranstons plan to set sail for England to find a husband for Olive, they refuse to be left behind. Certain that they are needed to shape the destiny of their human counterparts, the Mice Cranstons decide that they also must travel to Europe. The four mice encounter many titled humans and titled mice as they sail on a life-changing journey filled with many dangers and surprises.



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Wagner, Hilary. (2011). *The White Assassin*.  
Illustrated by Omar Rayyan. Holiday House. 242 pages,  
\$17.95, ISBN: 978-0823423330.

Three years have passed since the Catacombs have been freed from the cruel clutches of Killdeer and the blood thirsty Billycan. Since the white rat has disappeared into the swamps, all should be safe; however, Billycan now rules a group of swamp rats eager to help him wreak vengeance on Nightshade City. When he is almost killed as the result of his greed, Billycan is brought back to Nightshade City and given a truth serum so the rats can learn the identity of the



traitor who was helping him. But the truth serum is actually an antidote for the drugs Billycan was given as a lab rat. As secrets about treachery and loyalty are revealed, some old alliances threaten to crack while others are formed. This touching story about rat society also makes astute observations about the nature of humans, animal experiments, and the power of family and forgiveness. As in the previous title, *Nightshade City* (Wagner, 2010), the characters have depth and complexity. Wagner forces her readers to regard Billycan in a different, more sympathetic light through a series of flashbacks in which he remembers more about his days in the laboratory. This title is certain to earn even more fans for the author and the rat society she imagines so vividly.




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Woop Studios. (2011). *A zeal of zebras: An alphabet of collective nouns*.

Chronicle Books. 64 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-1-4521-0492-8.

Starting from A and ending with Z, this delightful alphabet book pays tribute to collective nouns. Some of them, such as a caravan of camels and a yoke of oxen, will be familiar ones, but others, such as an aurora of polar bears and a venom of spiders, will not, leaving readers to marvel at the uniqueness of collectivity and the marvel of wonderful vocabulary words. The whole notion of a troubling of goldfish and an unkindness of ravens is intriguing, in part because of the phrases' unusualness, in part because of the images the phrases conjure. The authors provide thumbnail sketches with additional information about the species in the collective nouns and featured in the poster-quality Adobe Photoshop illustrations.

## Grades 7-12

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Deedy, Carmen Agra, & Wright, Randall. (2011). *The Cheshire cheese cat: A Dickens of a tale*. Illustrated by Barry Moser. Peachtree. 256 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-5614-5595-9.

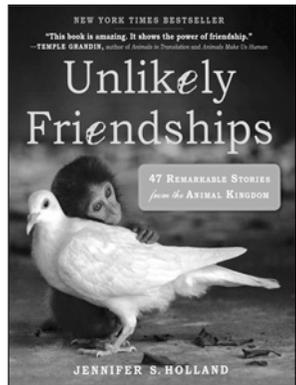
An alley cat looking for shelter as winter draws near, Skilley learns that the local innkeeper is looking for a cat that can keep the mice from his establishment, and he quickly makes himself indispensable. But Skilley doesn't kill the mice he catches, and he quickly becomes friends with one of the mice, Pip, who loves to use large vocabulary words in expressing himself. The inn is one of the favorite haunts of several London writers, including Charles Dickens who is suffering from a writer's block and is unable to come up with the right opening lines for his latest masterpiece. Looking for inspiration, Dickens observes Skilley's antics and realizes that he catches the same mouse over and over again.



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Holland, Jennifer S. (2011). *Unlikely friendships: 47 remarkable stories from the animal kingdom*. Workman. 210 pages, \$13.95, ISBN: 978-0-7611-5913-1.

Holland, a senior science writer for *National Geographic*, points out that empathy and friendship are not unique to humans. Some of her stories are familiar and already well documented such as the ancient tortoise that befriends an orphaned hippopotamus, or the relationship between the gorilla that communicates with humans and her kitten via sign language. Others are lesser known, such as the young leopard and the cow, the horse that protected a fawn from coyotes, or the dog that raised a baby squirrel with her own puppies. Students who have seen the bright color photographs make their rounds over the Internet will enjoy reading the stories behind the intriguing images.



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### About the Authors

Terrell Young teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in children's literature at Brigham Young University. Barbara Ward teaches literacy education courses at Washington State University.

