



A Conversation with Samantha Bell

author of
The Perfect Pet

*What is the one thing you would like people to know about **The Perfect Pet**?*

The Perfect Pet is a fun, educational story that kids and their parents will relate to if they've ever considered adopting a pet.

What inspired you to write about animal classification?

I love animals, I love learning about animals, and I love drawing animals, so creating a book about animal classification was an easy decision! I enjoyed the research, the writing, and the illustrating – it was just a fun project to work on.

To put the idea of animal classification in story form, I had only to look to my own daughter for inspiration. She has been on the search for a “perfect pet” for years. When she had a cat, she thought she was more of a bird-person, so she gave the

cat to her sister. When she had a bird, she decided she was more of a dog-person, so she gave the bird to her older brother. When she had a dog, she decided she might be a fish-person, so she gave the dog to her younger brother. We still have some of the fish, but they belong to the family now.

How did you decide which animals to include in the book and where did you begin your research?



It was so fun choosing the animals to include! When I was growing up, we had so many kinds of pets: cats, dogs, chickens, horses, goats, birds, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, ferrets, squirrels, and even a raccoon. So when I was writing the story, I picked animals that a child might want for a pet, no matter how impractical it might be. After all, how neat would it be to have a pet whale or a pet crocodile? Then, when I was working on the illustrations, I wanted to add even

more; I decided to include some children would already be familiar with as well as some they may not have heard of before. In the pages, you'll not only see a panda bear, an octopus, and a flamingo, but you can also find a prehensile-tailed skink, a serval, and a dingo.

I started my research online, and then I checked out tons of wildlife books from our library. I say "tons" because most of them were very large and very heavy! There's also both a zoo and a nature center within an hour of where I live which are great resources too.

As the author and illustrator, do the words come before the picture or the picture before the words?

I think they come at the same time. I wrote the story before I did any illustrations, but as I was writing it, I was thinking about what the illustrations would look like. So when it came time to start drawing, I already knew a lot of what I wanted to include.

What is most rewarding and/or challenging about writing children's books?

The most rewarding part of writing children's books is reading them is snuggling up with my own children on the sofa and reading them together.

Do you have any advice for parents about choosing a pet?

I wish I did! I have a child who's always on the look-out for the perfect pet. Before getting a pet, she reads lots of books, learning all about the animal and how much care is involved. She even does a trial run by taking care of other people's pets. But when the pet is actually her own, she finds herself losing interest, and Mom gets another pet!

What is next?

Seems like I always have a project (or two or three) going on. Right now, I'm writing a couple of nonfiction books about marine animals and illustrating another author's book about two young rabbits in Bolivia. I also have an easy reader and a couple of picture books in the

works. So many projects...so little time!

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