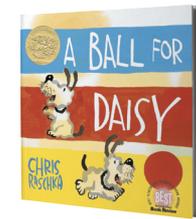


Pet portraits

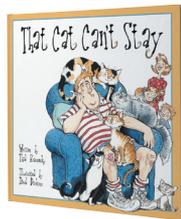
We round up a litter of great picture books about our furry, fluffy and scaly friends.
By **Jonathan Fullmer**



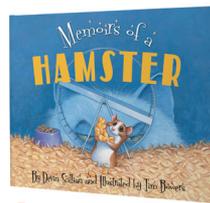
1
A Ball for Daisy
by **Chris Raschka**
(Schwartz & Wade Books, \$17)
The skilled Raschka earned his second Caldecott Medal with this wordless story of a pooch, her favorite toy and the restorative power of friendship in the face of misfortune. Daisy and her red ball do everything together—play, nap, walk—until one day, on a stroll through the park, another curious pup accidentally bursts it, along with Daisy's joie de vivre. Raschka's uniquely abstract watercolors evoke the hazy space between emotions, helping little readers empathize with Daisy in her heartbreak and eventual transcendence.



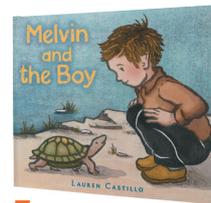
2
Boot & Shoe
by **Marla Frazee**
(Beach Lane Books, \$17)
Meet Boot and Shoe, two adorably shaggy pups born in the same litter. The best-friend siblings eat together, sleep together, even pee together—everything except lazing about. Boot lounges on the front porch, Shoe on the back. Enter one pesky squirrel, whose harassment leads to a hilarious, futilely slapstick chase that leaves Boot and Shoe on opposite porches, where they wait for each other in vain. Two-time Caldecott Honor Medalist Frazee frames her gorgeous gouache and black-pencil artwork within plenty of white space that highlights the friends' loneliness. The witty, repetitive prose mirrors the dogs' similarities and reinforces their joyful reunion after a sleepless night apart.



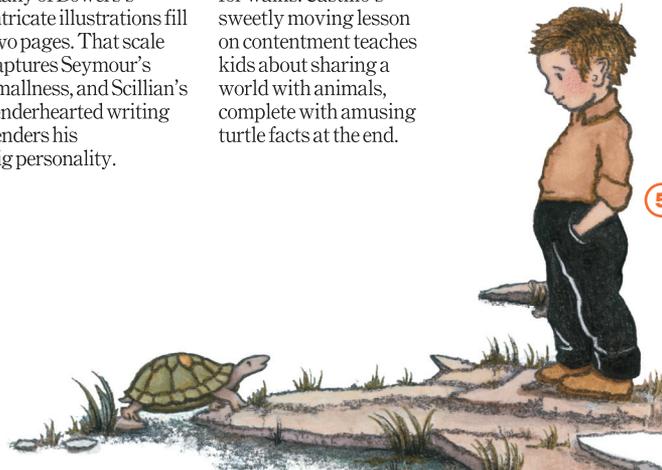
3
That Cat Can't Stay
by **Thad Krasnesky & David Parkins**
(Flashlight Press, \$17)
Teaming up with seasoned children's illustrator and political cartoonist Parkins for a second collaborative effort, West Point Army officer Krasnesky showcases his tender side in a humorous tale about a family whose mom and kids can't help themselves anytime they encounter a stray. Then there's Dad, who repeatedly cries "They scratch my knees" and "They make me sneeze," among other complaints. But as the helpless adoptees accumulate, even Dad can't help but pity their plights. With detailed caricatures and Seussian rhymes chronicled by the family's precocious daughter, this romp is big fun (whether you like cats or not).



4
Memoirs of a Hamster
by **Devin Scillian & Tim Bowers**
(Sleeping Bear Press, \$16)
Who's the luckiest hamster in the world? Seymour is. At least that's what he believes, living the good life relaxing in his wood shavings, munching yogurt drops and running on his wheel. His happiness fades after Pearl, the sly cat, taunts Seymour with visions of a sunroom brimming with yogurt. So Seymour plots a daring escape from his caged paradise—into dangers he never imagined. As in the duo's preceding *Memoirs of a Goldfish*, many of Bowers's intricate illustrations fill two pages. That scale captures Seymour's smallness, and Scillian's tenderhearted writing renders his big personality.



5
Melvin and the Boy
by **Lauren Castillo**
(Henry Holt, \$17)
In Castillo's writer-and-illustrator debut, she delivers her characteristically soft and intimate paintings to portray a nameless city boy who envies his pet-owning neighbors. Reluctant Mom and Dad find one reason after another to refuse his desperate pleas—dogs are too big, monkeys too demanding, birds too loud. After discovering a box turtle at the park one day, our little hero names him Melvin and takes him home, only to learn that turtles don't like pretzels, are shy in front of his friends and are impossible to take for walks. Castillo's sweetly moving lesson on contentment teaches kids about sharing a world with animals, complete with amusing turtle facts at the end.



6
My Snake Blake
by **Randy Siegel & Serge Bloch**
(Roaring Brook Press, \$17)
Despite his mother's protests, our young narrator receives a pet snake for his birthday. But Blake is no ordinary reptile. Very long and bright green, Blake communicates with his new owner by curling his body into cursive words. He cooks dinner, cleans the dishes, helps with homework and even walks the dog. Award-winning artist Bloch creates understated drawings and distinctive red-and-green shades that really pop, especially on the book's atypically wide pages, while Siegel spells out hilarity in his fun and crafty story line.