

A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL HALL

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I was working on a book for my brother and sister-in-law that used heart shapes to retell the story of their meeting and engagement in San Francisco. After I added a heart-shaped elephant seal, I kept seeing other animal possibilities. Eventually, I put the book aside and continued to make animals out of hearts.

How long did it take you to write *My Heart Is Like a Zoo*?

I worked on this book along with five others over the course of three or four years.

What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

It was a struggle to find a cover that satisfied me as well as the publisher. For a long time I worried that my first book would end up with a cover that I didn't like. Finally, when I enlarged the lion's face so that it spilled off the edges of the cover, we had a solution that worked for everyone.

What do you hope your readers take away from *My Heart Is Like a Zoo*?

That it's normal to have lots of different feelings, and it's okay to talk about them.

"It's normal to have lots of different feelings, and it's okay to talk about them."

What was your journey to becoming a published author.

I wanted to be a writer when I was very young. But I had dyslexia (which makes it hard to read) and struggled in English classes, so the notion faded. In college, I focused on the sciences, but found myself writing stories constantly. I was too embarrassed to admit that I loved to write, so all my stories were embedded in fanciful letters to friends. I would say something like: "Dear Jean, I was chased by a brontosaurus this morning — which seemed odd because I thought they were vegetarians." They went on and on. I rarely mailed them.

After a few unfulfilling years in biomedical research, I went back to school in graphic design and began a long and satisfying career expressing ideas with shape and color. My favorite projects were the ones that I wrote and illustrated as well as designed. This gave me a sense of how I might approach children's books. I worked on my own books for six years before contacting a publisher. *My Heart Is Like a Zoo* was published four years later.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

The long winters are helpful in that one can work comfortably for long hours without the nagging need to go outside and play.

I live in Marine on St. Croix, which is a very supportive community. Many of my neighbors are artists of one kind or another. We rarely discuss our creative work, but their presence seems important somehow.

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

Spending time with family and friends and taking long, long walks.

Minnesota Book Award Categories:

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A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by The Minnesota Book Awards & The Friends of The Saint Paul Public Library

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Children's Literature Winner

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My Heart Is Like a

ZOO

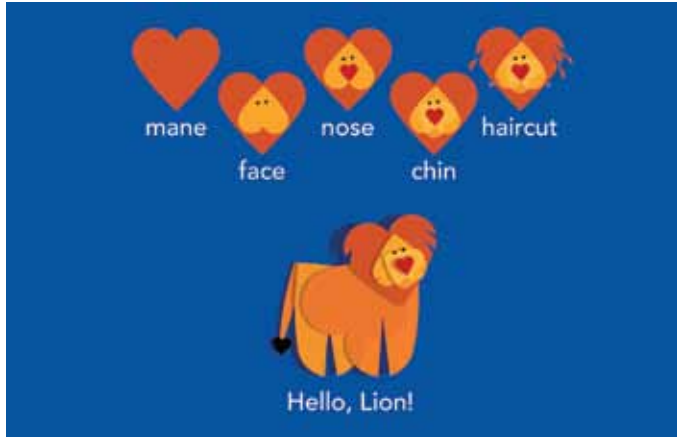
Michael Hall

My Heart Is Like a Zoo

by Michael Hall

GREENWILLOW BOOKS/HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS

My Heart Is Like a Zoo



SUMMARY

This bright picture book features twenty animals created out of heart shapes. Michael Hall invites his young readers to encounter familiar and new animals in his colorful zoo land through playful rhymes and bright descriptions. The book encourages children to familiarize themselves with the animals, discuss emotions and feelings, and explore shapes and colors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which is your favorite animal, and why? What colors remind you of that animal?
2. What feelings or characteristics do you think of when you think of a bear, weasel, hornet, butterfly, snake, giraffe, horse, tiger, mouse, mosquito, rat, bird or fish?
3. Which animal do you think is the most lonely, happy, friendly, worried, quick, scary, funny, angry or silly?
4. Which animal reminds you of yourself the most? Is this the same animal as your favorite animal?
5. Why do you think the animals are all

made out of hearts?

6. What other animals could you make out of heart shapes?
7. What animals would you have put in this book? What shapes would you use to make your own animals?
8. What is your favorite page in the book, and why?
9. The author wrote the book in a style that's called poetry. What is poetry?
10. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?

ABOUT MICHAEL HALL

Michael Hall is an award-winning graphic designer whose work has been widely recognized for its simple and engaging approach. He studied biochemistry and psychology at the University of Michigan and worked in biomedical research for several years before becoming a designer. He is the co-owner and principal designer at Hall Kelley, Inc., and lives with his wife and two daughters in Minnesota. This is his first book for children.



Learn more about the author and his work at www.michaelhallbooks.com.



The 23rd annual Minnesota Book Awards is a project of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul. Presenting sponsor: RBC Wealth Management. The Book Awards is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).
The 23rd annual Minnesota Book Awards is also supported by: Beaver's Pond Press; Capstone; Coffee House Press; Common Good Books; Graywolf Press; HarperCollins Publishers; Lerner Publishing Group; The Loft Literary Center; McGrann Shea Carnival Straughn & Lamb, Chartered; Metropolitan

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