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Friend Friday

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Serendipitously, Laura Purdie Salas and I were seated next to one another at a Golden Kite luncheon a few years back. Though we'd just met, I cheered loudly for her honor award in the poetry division. As someone who loves to read poetry but is flummoxed by the writing of it, I have delighted in following Laura's career ever since. She has encouraged me to look at leaves, water and now families in brand-new ways. Today, Laura shares about her family and how it inspired her latest project, *Meet My Family!* (Millbrook Press), illustrated by Stephanie Fizer Coleman.



Laura Purdie Salas

Meet My Family!

It's funny to be here today inviting you to *Meet My Family!*, because when I was a kid, that was the *last* thing I wanted.



Me and my dad



My Mom

My family felt very different from other families I know. Among our many rules:

- No more than 5 hours of TV per week
- No sleepovers at friends' houses (because—reciprocation)
- Electric bill overages were paid out of our allowances



The whole family heads out for a bike ride

And it wasn't just the rules. It was the lack of connections. My best friends all seemed to have large, noisy, extended families always visiting, but not us. I don't know why, exactly, though I remember one fight my parents had with rare visitors who expected freshly laundered towels every day. My aunt and uncle left in a huff, and I never saw them again. I met one older cousin a couple of times with his "good friend" (as my grandmother called him), but he died when I was still a teenager. And one of my sisters has OCD, which was not identified nor treatable in those days. She washed her hands hundreds of times a day, and the unofficial diagnosis was "crazy."



Me and my sisters (I'm the smallest one.)

To say that my family felt different is an understatement. I felt like my family came from another planet altogether!

Today, I meet lots of kids who feel that way. They are embarrassed by their family's size, structure, religion, ethnicity, behavior, etc. It's heartbreaking when a student "confesses" to living in a single-parent home, to having gay parents, or to some other family situation that makes them feel like outsiders.

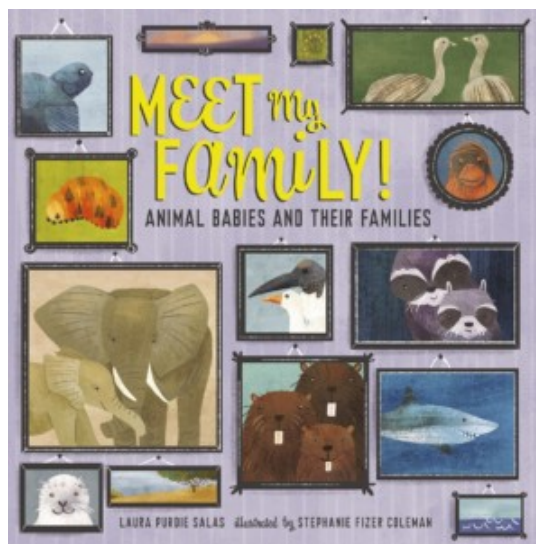
I've thought a lot over the years about what makes a "normal" family and what book I might offer up to explore that question. *Meet My Family!* is my answer, though most readers won't

ever guess that it was inspired by anything other than scientific curiosity and cute baby animals.

The book is light-hearted and lively (despite its angst-filled inspiration), with 20 baby animals introducing their family in rhyming text, with more details in prose sidebars. From big families to small ones, families that “match” and ones that don’t, families connected through blood or adoption—all of these animal families work! And they have counterparts in humans, the final animals celebrated in the book.

I love writing about animals! I love mashing up poetry and prose and science. I love working in tidbits of different languages, and I love celebrating the diversity of our world. But most of all, I love the idea that this book might erase some of the shame so many kids feel about their families.

To me, my family is weird. In fact, my working title for this book was MY WEIRD FAMILY! But any family that has at least one responsible adult taking care of and loving a child is really the just-right kind of family. The rest of the stuff—color, size, gender, etc.—that’s all just details.



Meet My Family! Animal Babies and Their Families

Former teacher Laura Purdie Salas has written more than 125 books for kids, including Meet My Family!, the Can Be... series (Bank Street Best Books, IRA Teachers' Choice), BookSpeak! (Minnesota Book Award, NCTE Notable), and If You Were the Moon. Laura shares inspiration and practical tips with educators about poetry, nonfiction, and more. You can learn more about Laura on her [site](#) or her [blog](#).

You can also enter to win a free signed copy of Meet My Family! Click this link to [Rafflecopter](#). Please note, you need to do the actions by clicking on the option(s) you want to do. That's how Rafflecopter tracks your actions which enter you in the random drawing. Thanks!