Toni Buzzeo is the award-winning Maine children's author of fifteen picture books with four more forthcoming. For sixteen years, she worked as a school librarian in Portland where she honed her knowledge of children's literature. Combining this knowledge with her love of children, Toni writes about characters of all stripes (including dinosaurs, loons, ducklings, teachers, and librarians) who explore their worlds, their relationships, and themselves in settings that include peaceful Maine lakes, rocky lighthouse islands, as well as aquariums and the interiors of fictional public and school libraries. Toni is well known for her lively spirit and her sense of humor.
WAS THERE A PENGUIN MISSING FROM THE NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM?

Begin by introducing the concept of an “urban legend.” Explain that an urban legend is a type of folklore story that is shared widely and seems plausible but quite likely has no basis in reality. To make it seem true, the teller of the tale will refer to a reliable person who is said to have actually experienced the event. An urban legend will often also have an implied moral.

If time allows, present one of the “microwaved pets” legends to your students (see http://www.snopes.com/horrors/techno/microwavedpet.asp for examples). Discuss the plausibility of the tale, its origins, and its implied anti-technology moral.

Then, discuss the origin of One Cool Friend. Tell students the story that Toni Buzzeo heard in a teacher's room. Because she was uncertain that it was true, she did some online research and uncovered this information: by accessing the urban legend at About.com’s urban legends page: http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/animalsinsects/a/penguin.htm

As a fiction writer, Toni didn't feel that she needed to legend to be true in order to write a fabulous book based on the story.

Discuss other ways Toni may have written the story after discovering that the urban legend wasn't true.

URBAN LEGENDS AS FICTION LAUNCHING PADS

After you complete the Urban Legend activity, invite your students, as a group or individually, to create a fictional story from an urban legend of their choosing. Ask students to focus on the plausible nature of facts of the legend and build a story that will entertain its readers.

Because many urban legends online are not appropriate for children, you may want to choose from one of the following:

1. The Package of Cookies
   http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/fooddrink/a/package_cookies.htm
2. Albino Fawn
   http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/animalsinsects/ss/Albino-Fawn-Pictures.htm
3. Elephant Paints Self-Portrait
   http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_elephant_painting.htm
4. How to Cook an Egg with Your Cell Phone
   http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_cook_egg_cell_phones.htm
5. Work Moose in Harness/Moose Logging
   http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_work_moose_in_harness.htm
PENGUIN INVESTIGATIONS

[Note: This activity is part of a Picture Book Extender by Toni Buzzeo, originally published by EBSCO/NoveList (http://www.ebscohost.com/novelist)]

Magellan is a Magellanic penguin from South America. Like many penguins today, Magellanic penguins are threatened by commercial fishing, oil pollution in the ocean, and climate change.

With your students, undertake an exploration of a variety of penguin species and the threats to their health and safety today. Vulnerable, threatened, and endangered penguins include:

- African penguins
- Emperor penguins
- Erect-crested penguins
- Galapagos penguins
- Gentoo penguins
- Humboldt penguins
- Macaroni penguins
- Rockhopper Penguins
- Yellow-eyed penguins

An excellent source of this status information is the SeaWorld website at http://seaworld.org/AnimalInfo/Animal-Info/Animal-InfoBooks/Penguin/Appendix

If time allows, post a world map on the wall or bulletin board and place a pin at the location of each threatened penguin species with a string attached to a fact card about the problem. Or, if you have a large globe, you may want to use it in the same way.

IT REMINDS ME OF MYSELF

One of the reasons that Elliot likes the penguins at the aquarium is that they remind him of himself. Begin by discussing the similarities between Elliot and Magellanic, searching both text and illustrations for as many as you can find.

Next, supply students with an extensive collection of photographic nonfiction books from the library’s collection. Include all families of animals, mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, as well as invertebrates.

Challenge students to find and place a sticky note on the page of any animal that reminds them of themselves. Once they have several marked, ask them to identify the characteristic that makes them similar to this animal. Is it something about the way the animal looks—Red hair/fur? Friendly expression?—or something the animal does well—Swim? Climb? Jump?

If time allows, ask students to create a pair of illustrations—one of themselves and one of their chosen animals. Display each pair of pictures together labeled with the common characteristic.
WHAT WOULD YOU BRING HOME?

[Note: This activity is part of a Picture Book Extender by Toni Buzzeo, originally published by EBSCO/NoveList (http://www.ebscohost.com/novelist)]

Something about the penguins “in their tidy black feather tuxedos with their proper posture” reminded Elliot of himself, so he wanted one of his own. But perhaps your students would rather bring home a different animal from the aquarium, aviary, or zoo.

Begin by reading fictional tales of children with unlikely pets. Suggested titles include:

- 365 Penguins by Jean-Luc Fromental
- Aaaarrghh! Spider! by Lydia Monks
- Billy Twitters and His Big Blue Whale Problem by Mac Barnett
- Buying, Training, and Caring for your Dinosaur by Laura Rennert
- Don’t Take our Snake for a Stroll by Karin Ireland
- No Place for a Pig by Suzanne Bloom
- That Pesky Rat by Lauren Child
- When Dinosaurs Came with Everything by Elise Broach

Next, invite students to brainstorm a list of potential unusual animal pets. Once the list is complete, ask them to complete the matrix for the four or five of the choicest animals.

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<th>Animal</th>
<th>What does the animal need?</th>
<th>What problems might be caused?</th>
<th>What benefits might be gained?</th>
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Now, ask each student to choose one unusual animal they’d like to “adopt” and bring home from the aquarium, aviary, or zoo. Ask them to answer each of the three questions as applied to their chosen animal.

EXTENSION

If time allows or you would like to connect this activity to a science unit on animals, consider allowing students to conduct research on their chosen animal so that their answers to the three questions are based on facts about the animal’s needs, habits, and extraordinary features, which may be either advantageous or detrimental.

As a final product, consider having each student write a persuasive paragraph from the animal’s point of view arguing that it is the perfect pet.