

# The Petit Proust Questionnaire

from Owlkids Books

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## Meet author/illustrator Thao Lam

**THAO LAM** has an insatiable love for colored and textured papers, which she uses to create her exuberant collages. Passionate about children's books, Thao is especially interested in visual storytelling. As an art buyer for an educational publishing company, she has the opportunity to work with thousands of different artists from all around the world. Since studying illustration for three years at Sheridan College in Toronto, Thao has developed her dual careers of illustrating and art buying. Her artwork has appeared in publications such as *Cricket* and *Highlights* magazines. In 2008, she won the Highlights Five Pewter Plate award for verse illustration of the year. She has twice been chosen for the American Illustration Award. She lives in Toronto, Ontario. Visit her website at [thaolam.com](http://thaolam.com) and find her on Twitter as @thaolamdraws.



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*Skunk on a String* is a playful wordless tale about one skunk's day flying high on the tail of a balloon. Paper collage art in whimsical colors and patterns creates a playful dynamic and highlights the beauty of everyday things.

### When you were a kid, what was your favorite thing to do?

I loved going to the library. It was a wonderful place to explore and discover. Each book gave me the opportunity to experience something new and be someone different. I borrowed so many books that I lost track of when they were due, so a lot of my allowances went into paying library fines.

### What did you most dislike doing when you were a child?

Chores. We had two cats growing up, so cleaning the litter box was the worst. I got a cat a few years ago, but now I get my husband to clean the litter box!

### As a child, where did you dream of living?

The Amazon because I always wanted to live in a tree house amid the rainforest canopy. That is, until I discovered it was home to some of the world's largest snakes—I'm terrified of snakes!

### What did you think you were good at when you were a kid?

I was really good at daydreaming, apparently. So good, in fact, that my teachers regularly made a point of it on my report card. But you know, having an overactive imagination came in handy during my long bus rides to and from school. Not so handy when you are in class.

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## When you were a kid in school, what did you look for in a friend?

My family was from Vietnam, so we did a lot of things differently compared to other families here. This made me feel really out of place growing up and so I was always on the lookout for someone who didn't mind that I was different.

## What did you want to be when you grew up?

My family fled Vietnam to come to Canada when I was three. Learning English was difficult, but picture books helped me understand my new home and ignited my passion for visual storytelling. Since discovering picture books, it's become my lifelong dream to publish one.

## What was your favorite book as a child?

My favorite books were written by Robert Munsch with art by Michael Martchenko; I was especially fond of *Mortimer*, *Thomas' Snowsuit*, and *Jonathan Cleaned Up—Then He Heard a Sound*. Robert Munsch's stories are so silly and over-the-top that as a child it blew my mind that an adult was capable of being so funny. I wanted to grow up to be just like him: a big kid at heart who told funny stories. I also spent hours poring over Michael Martchenko's illustrations, studying his characters and learning how to capture facial expressions. I had a chance to meet them both years ago; I was so giddy and nervous, I probably sounded like a silly goose!

## What is your favorite pastime now?

Curling up to a good book with a delicious brownie is heaven to me. So I spend all of my spare time scouring bookstores and bakeries alike, in search of the perfect book and brownie.

## What do you find an absolute chore?

I would have said, "cleaning my cat's litter box," but luckily my husband is taking care of that now! Now that we have a baby, laundry has become the worst. Our daughter Maddie loves to paint and often uses herself as a canvas.

## If you could live anywhere, where would you go?

Somewhere warm but not too hot. I am not a fan of winter. I think there should be a law where if the temperature drops below zero, it's considered a snow day.

## What is the one talent you wish you had?

Rhythm. I love to dance but I am so awkward. It's a good thing I have an active imagination because in my head I am a superstar on the dance floor.

## What makes a good friend?

Someone who loves sugar and butter as much as I do. I just hosted my 10th annual cookie swap. Every year my friends and I meet up to exchange cookies and catch up on life. These are friends I have had for 10+ years. The cookie swap grows every year (luckily, not our waistlines) as we meet new folks that share our love for sugar and butter.

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## If you weren't an author or illustrator, what job would you have?

When I'm not working on a book, I am a freelance art buyer in educational publishing. I love being an art buyer; it has given me an opportunity to work with some very talented illustrators. One of my very first assignments was to commission an illustration by my childhood hero, Michael Martchenko. I was so nervous that when I finally worked up the courage to make the call, I nearly hung up on him! I spent the next 30 minutes going on and on about what I fan I was that I forgot to assign him the illustration. Well, at least it gave me an excuse to call him back again!

## What children's books have caught your attention lately?

Now that I'm a new mother, I find I'm reading more board books. Some of my favorites are *The Odd Egg* by Emily Gravett, *Barnyard Dance!* by Sandra Boynton, *Frog and Fly* by Jeff Mack, and *Dino Bites!* by Algy Craig Hall. When you have to read a book over and over again, it's important that the stories are engaging for both you and your child. After the hundredth read, you need to find a way to keep the story fresh for your own sanity, so stories with memorable characters are really fun to read out loud and give you the opportunity to be creative in your storytelling. I do an okay frog voice but my husband does a really amazing rap version of *Barnyard Dance!*

## If you had to have a motto, what would it be?

Be kind and brave.

