How the Zebra Got her Stripes

By Tamara Kula

A long, long time ago, when the Earth was young, all the animals were the same color. The flamingo was grey, the lion was grey, the rabbit and the frog and the butterfly were grey. The elephant was grey, of course, but so were the snake, the fish, and even the peacock. The world then was much more boring than the world today.
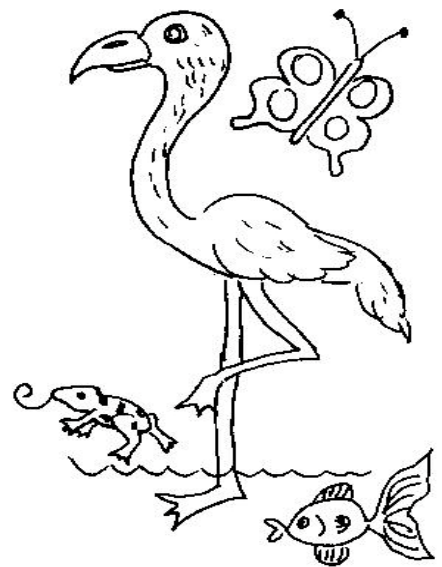
Then one day, a very old man with a long white beard appeared. In his hand he held a palette with paint of all the colors of the rainbow on it. In his other hand he held a paintbrush. He called himself "The Painter." He told the animals that he could paint them any color they wished.
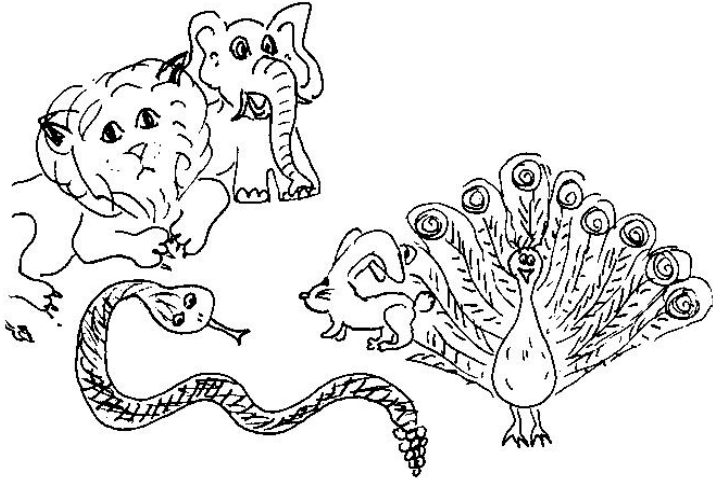
The flamingo was first in line. "Oh please," he exclaimed, "paint me pink!" And the Painter painted him a beautiful bright pink. Then the frog, overcome with excitement, leaped over to the painter and asked, "Can I be green? I've always wanted to be green." And the Painter made the frog a wonderful shade of green, as green as the trees in spring.

Soon all of the animals were eagerly approaching the Painter – all except the elephant, who snorted and said he preferred to remain grey. The Painter made the lion a brilliant gold, the butterfly a cheerful yellow, and the peacock a deep shining purple. The world was filled with color.

Every day, more and more animals heard about the mysterious Painter and came to be painted the color of their desire.

One day, the zebra came to see the Painter. "I want to be black," she told the Painter. The Painter nodded and prepared to paint. Just before his brush touched the zebra's skin, the zebra shouted, "Wait! I changed my mind. I want to be white! As white as a cloud."

The Painter nodded again and painted the zebra white. The zebra was delighted.

But the next day the zebra came back. "I'm sorry, Mr. Painter," she said. "But I changed my mind again. I really want to be black after all."

The Painter sighed, but he did as the zebra wished. The zebra was very pleased with her black-as-night coat.

But the next day, the zebra came back again!

"What is it?" asked the Painter. "Don't you like being black?"

"Well, actually, no," the zebra said shyly. "I think I liked being white better. Can you paint me again?"

The Painter was impatient. "I will paint you," he agreed, "but this is the last time." And he painted the zebra pure white.

"Oh, thank you!" cried the zebra. "This is how I want to be."

But the next day, who came to see the Painter? Of course, the zebra! The Painter was exasperated. "You changed your mind again??" he asked.

"Yes, but this time I am sure that I want to be black!" said the zebra quickly.

The Painter knew better than to believe her. He knew that the zebra would never make up her mind. So he painted her black and white striped – and the zebra never changed her mind again!