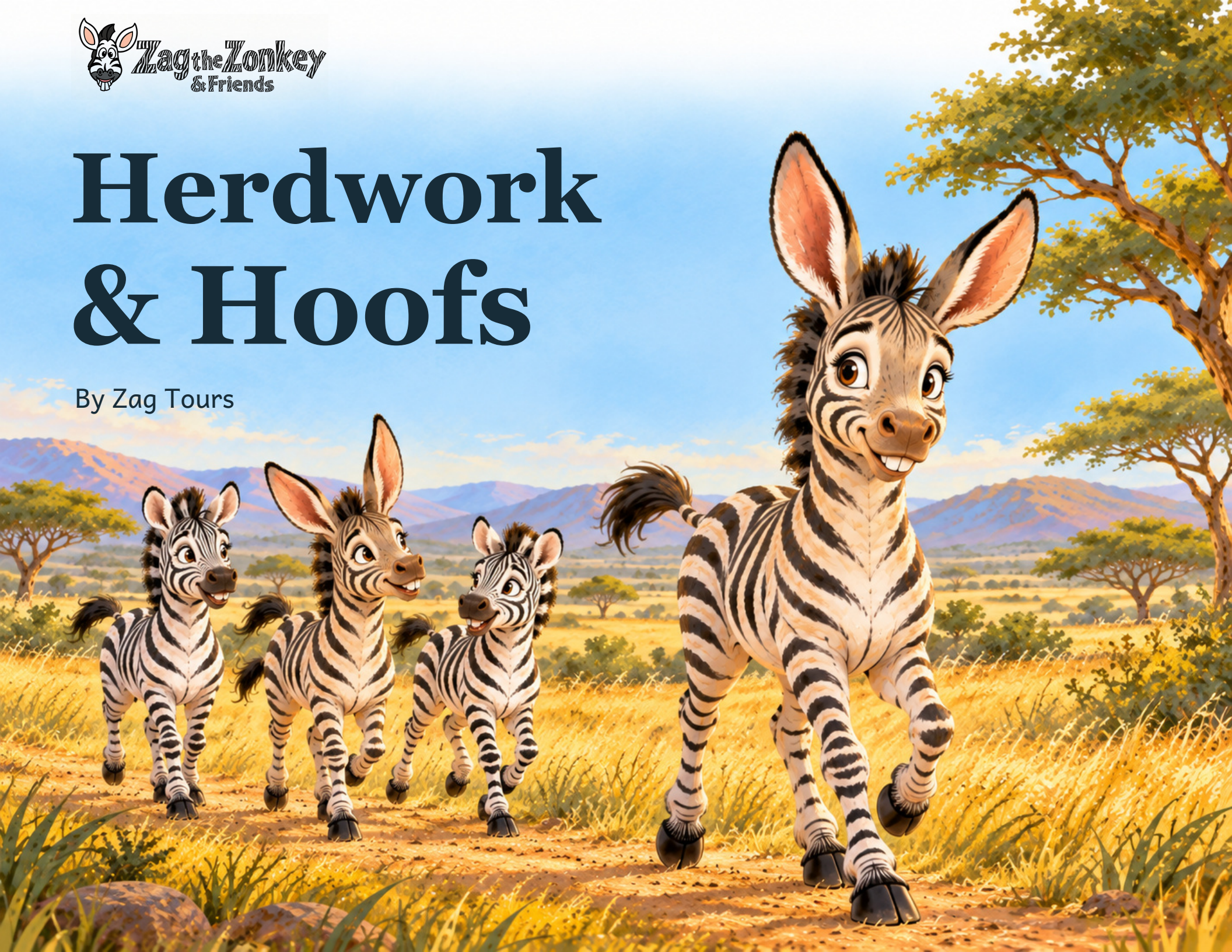




Herdwork & Hoofs

By Zag Tours





Zag's dad was a donkey. His mom was a zebra.
Zag was a zonkey!
He loved racing across the meadow.
But the young zebras always reached the tree first.



“Too slow!” shouted a zebra. Another laughed at Zag’s ears. Zag wished he could hide them. His little sister, Zig, stayed beside him. “That’s not kind!” “Let’s find Dad,” she said. Zag went with her.



Zadda listened. “No teasing,” he told the zebras.
“There’s room for everyone.”
He nuzzled Zag. “You belong here.”
Then he showed them the forked tree.
“Stay on this side, near us. Call if you need help.”



Later, Zag went to the shop with Mom.
Gold hoof shoes gleamed in the window. Maybe I'll be faster,
Zag thought. Maybe they'll choose me!
His mom, Zomma, helped him find four that fit.
Zag paid with his birthday coins. Clip-clop! Sparkle, sparkle!



Back in the meadow, Zag showed the zebras his new shoes.
“Wow!” said the zebras.
Zag lifted his shiny hooves. He felt bright and bouncy.
One zebra looked beyond the forked tree.
“Bet you can race to that grass and back!”



Zag looked at the tree. Then at his shoes.
Stay near us, Dad had said.
But what if they laughed again?
One step past the tree. Two steps. Three.
His tummy tightened.



Far away, a lion stood up.
Zag froze. Thump-thump went his heart.
He didn't have to finish the dare.
He turned toward his family.
“Zadda! Zomma! I need help!”



“I’m here!” called Zadda. “Come to my voice.”
Zig made room as Zag hurried back.
Squish! A gold shoe stuck in the mud. Zag left it behind.
Dad met him at the tree. Together, they rejoined the herd.



In another meadow, Zag leaned against Zomma.
“I’m glad you called,” she said. “I wanted them to like me.”
“You deserve kindness,” said Zomma. Zadda stayed close.
“Past the tree was too far. Next time,
come find us before you go.”



When Zag felt ready, the zebras came over.
“We’re sorry we teased you and dared you.”
“No more laughing at me,” said Zag.
“We’ll stop,” they promised.
“We’ll help,” said Zadda. “You can say no.”



Near the grown-ups, they played Follow the Hoofprints.
Zag slipped off his three shoes.
Zig wiggled. One zebra walked. Another hopped.
Zag tried a zigzag.
When someone fell behind, they waited.



Long ears. Slender legs. Two peeking teeth. Zag was still Zag.
He liked shiny shoes. He liked muddy hoofprints.
But he didn't need either to belong.
That was herdwork: looking out for one another.
“Come on, Zig! There's room for you, too!”

A note for grown-ups

Read, look, pause, and enjoy this story together. It is written for shared reading with children ages 4-8, not as a reading test.

There is brief teasing and a distant lion scare, without an attack or injury. Preview the story and follow your child's pace. The animals live in a make-believe world; this is not wildlife-safety guidance.

Zag deserves kindness before the shoes and after the mistake. Notice who listens, who helps, and how the game changes. A child can say no, ask for help, or simply listen without sharing a personal experience.

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A little herdwork, together

Choose one question. Point, talk, draw, act it out, or just listen. There is no test and no need to share a personal story.

- 1 What did Zig do when Zag was being teased?
- 2 Who helped Zag when he felt worried?
- 3 How did the zebras change their game to make room?
- 4 What could you say if a game did not feel safe?

Try these words: "No, thank you." "Please stop." "I need help." "Would you like to join us?"

You deserve kindness even when you make a mistake. If someone keeps hurting or excluding you, tell a trusted grown-up. If that person does not help, tell another.