



Elmer

Written by David McKee

1989 Anderson Press (30 pages)

NOVEL STUDY

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SUMMARY

Most elephants are huge with big long trunks and their skin is grey. Elmer is not like most elephants though, he is average in size, with a big long trunk but his skin is covered in multi-coloured patchwork. Elmer also stands out from the crowd because he likes to play tricks and make everybody laugh. In this tale, Elmer finds it hard to be different to everyone else and must come to terms with how he looks and behaves. Along with all the rest of the elephants, Elmer learns to value and celebrate his unique characteristics.

CHARACTER REVIEW

Elmer

All the other elephants

Other animals

SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK

- Friendship
- Role taking
- Feelings review: shy, scared/afraid, worried, embarrassed, sad, happy, proud

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pages 1-4

- **Can you sort the elephants into tall, small, young or old?** Ask the children to point to elephants they think are tall, small, young or old.
- **Look at the picture of Elmer across the pages. How many colours can you see?** Allow the children to point and name each colour.
- **How do you think Elmer felt, being different to all the other elephants?** Perhaps he may have been feeling a bit left out or maybe he was sad because he didn't want to stand out from all the others. Allow the children to share their ideas.
- **Do you think the other elephants noticed that Elmer was different?** They seemed happy but they must have noticed Elmer. Are you just like all your friends? What is different about you? Encourage the children to share their special talents or something others don't know about them.

Activity

- **Patchwork Elmer** – Use coloured paper to tear up pieces and create your own Elmer. You may ask the children to add in some drawings of other elephants and colour them grey. On another day you might ask the children to make patchwork art of themselves.

Pages 5 and 6

- **In what way did Elmer make all the other elephants happy?** He would joke with them and if there was a smile it was usually Elmer who started it. Ask the children if they think it was Elmer's job to make the other elephants laugh? Or was Elmer just funny all the time and the elephants couldn't help laughing at him?
- **Do you think Elmer liked to make the other elephants happy?** Is this a great thing to do? Should all the elephants be funny? Sometimes it can be hard to always be the one who keeps others happy? Do you think if Elmer didn't want to be the joker anymore he could change?

Activity

- **Can you tell a joke?** – Share some jokes with children and let them make up their own.

Pages 7-10

- **Why could Elmer not get to sleep?** He was thinking too hard about how different he was to all the other elephants and that he was tired of being different. Ask the children what they think about being different to each other. Talk about how they are different, e.g. hair, eyes, skin colour etc.
- **Elmer slipped away unnoticed, why did none of the elephants see him go?** He went before all the other elephants were awake and slipped quietly along.
- **Who did Elmer meet as he went through the jungle?** He met the other animals in the jungle. They all said 'Good morning Elmer' and he replied 'Good morning' to each with a smile.
- **Do you think all the animals liked Elmer, and was he a good friend?** They seem to be pleased to see him as they always say 'Good morning Elmer'.

Activity

- **A Good Friend** – draw somebody who is a good friend and get an adult to help you list the things you like about them. Talk to children about what qualities make a good friend. Does your friend play nicely with you? Do they share toys? Does your friend help you out? What is your favourite thing about your best friend? Do you think you are someone's best friend?



Pages 11 and 12

- **Elmer found something he had been looking for. What was it?** *Elmer found a great big bush covered in grey coloured berries.*
- **What do you think Elmer planned to do?** *Talk to the children about Elmer shaking the bush to get the berries down. Was this okay or not okay behaviour? What do you think Elmer wanted to do when he was shaking the bush?*

Activity

- **Hand print picture** – **Use your handprints to create the leaves of a huge bush. Paint your thumbs grey and add the berries.** *Discuss how Elmer was feeling when he shook the bush. Sometimes when we feel uncomfortable we do things that are not okay. Have you ever done something which was not okay when you felt uncomfortable. Allow children to share their experiences.*

Pages 13 and 14

- **Elmer rolled around in the berries until he was completely covered. What do you think he wanted to happen by doing this?** *He might have just wanted to see what it was like, or was he trying to change how he looked?*
- **Do you think Elmer thought he could change the way he looked forever?** *Talk about how we sometimes like our friends so much we want to be like them. Does this mean we should dress the same and do all the same things? Ask the children what would it be like if everybody looked the same and did all the same things every day.*

Pages 15-18

- **On his return journey Elmer met all the other animals once more. What did they say to him this time?** *They still said 'Good morning' only this time they didn't add Elmer but elephant instead.*
- **Why did the other animals not recognise Elmer?** *He had covered himself in berries and couldn't be seen.*
- **What happened when Elmer returned to the rest of the herd?** *He made his way into the middle and nobody recognised him. They were all standing quietly. Ask the children why not one elephant said anything to Elmer. Discuss why they were standing so still. Do they think maybe the elephants missed Elmer?*

Activity

- **Greetings Walk** – **Go on a morning walk and say 'Good morning' to everyone you meet. Give a smile as you go and see how many people smile back or reply to you. Explain to children if people don't reply or smile back that they may be very busy and not have noticed them but those who do smile back will have been made very happy by your gesture.**

Pages 19-22

- **As he stood there Elmer felt something was wrong. What do you think was wrong?** *Talk about how everyone looks as they always did and the jungle is just the same. Elmer is hidden though, could that be why he feels that something is wrong? Maybe Elmer liked it better when he stood out from all the rest.*
- **All the elephants were very serious, Elmer had never seen them so serious. Why do you think this was?** *Perhaps they were missing Elmer for all his smiles and jokes.*
- **Why do you think Elmer wanted to laugh?** *Sometimes we want to laugh out loud when it seems like the wrong thing to do. This is because our feelings are very strong and we don't know how to manage them. It could be Elmer felt nervous about what the other elephants might think of him or maybe he is excited to see who will guess who he is first. When we feel like this we could try*

*'Doing Turtle' to help us stay calm. **'Doing Turtle' is easy – Step 1 Tell yourself to stop. Step 2 Take along deep breath. Step 3 Say the problem and how you feel.***

Activity

- **Puppet Show – Using lollipop sticks and paper plates, create your own stick puppets of Elmer and some of the other elephants.** *Ask the children to paint their puppets grey and multi-coloured just like Elmer and his friends in the story. You could then have them act out the story when you have read it all. Put on a show and have your puppets parade for Elmer's Day.*

Pages 23-26

- **Why did Elmer shout 'Booo!'**? *He wanted to startle the rest of the elephants because they seemed so serious. He was playing a trick. He wanted to show himself to them.*
- **The elephants jumped and fell all ways in surprise.** *Have you ever felt surprised? Sometimes this can be comfortable and other times it is an uncomfortable feeling. Talk to the children about surprise and give examples of the different kinds. Let the children share about times they felt surprised.*
- **All the elephants were helpless with laughter and they knew 'it must be Elmer' and they laughed like never before. Why did the elephants find this so funny?** *Talk about how Elmer is the joker and this was how they recognised him. They are laughing because he played this joke on them.*

Activity

- **Role Play 'A Big Surprise' – Act out being surprised.** *Try it with a comfortable surprise, like when Elmer shouted Booo!; Now try it with an uncomfortable surprise, as though something scared you. Take turns with a partner.*

Pages 27-30

- **What happened when the rain came?** *Elmer began to appear as the juice washed off his patchwork skin.*
- **Why do you think the elephants loved this joke so much?** *It was so funny and was Elmer's best joke ever.*
- **Do you think the elephants love Elmer just the way he is?** *They seemed very glad to see Elmer once more. Ask the children if they would want their friends to change. Talk about how they enjoy their friends for how they are and what they can do.*
- **How do the elephants show their love and acceptance of Elmer?** *They decided to have a special day every year where they would decorate themselves and have a parade. On this day Elmer would paint himself grey. Ask the children how they would feel if all their friends dressed up as them once a year.*

Activity

- **I am special because...** - *In a circle each time you get the talking object, say something about you that makes you special. Talk to children about how it is important to know about what makes them special. Encourage them in the circle to share compliments for each other too.*

Additional Activities

- **Count the elephants on Page 1&2**
- **Name all the colours on Elmer's multi-coloured skin**
- **Use different coloured crayons to cover a page, paint it black and scrape out shapes to make Elmer**
- **Play guess the feeling using feelings from the story**
- **Practice telling jokes to one another to make each other feel good**



- **Take turns to do Boo!**
- **Paint the jungle, don't forget to add your elephants.**
- **Ask an adult to help bake Elmer shaped cookies.**