

## *Elephants Have Wings*

by **Susanne Gervay** illustrated by **Anna Pignataro**

TEACHERS' NOTES

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### About the author

Susanne Gervay's award winning books are published internationally and include picture books, children's and young adult fiction. Awarded an Order of Australia, she is a Writer Ambassador for Room to Read, Role Model for Books in Homes, Australia Day Ambassador, Patron of Monkey Baa Theatre, former Chair of the Board of the NSW Writers Centre, head of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators SCBWI Australia East and New Zealand.

Her anti-school bullying '*I Am Jack*' books have become a rite-of-passage series, adapted into a play that has been touring Australia and USA since 2008. Susanne's acclaimed picture book *Ships in the Field* is a moving exploration of the immigrant experience; while *Elephants Have Wings* embarks on the great journey of discovering the humanity in all of us. [www.sgervay.com](http://www.sgervay.com)

### About the illustrator

Award-winning illustrator and best selling Anna Pignataro, has created over fifty books for children. Published in more than seventeen countries and in eleven languages. Winner of the Crichton Award for Book Illustration in 1998, Anna has been shortlisted for picture book of the

year with both the Children's Book Council of Australia and YABBA, and many of her books have been awarded Notable Books CBCA.

Anna hopes to connect with and encourage children to follow their hearts and dreams and to believe that anything is possible.

### **Author/illustrator inspiration**

'Elephants Have Wings' is the creative collaboration of this author-illustrator team. Their first collaboration was 'Ships in the Field' inspired by their personal stories as the children of refugees.

'Elephants Have Wings' is their second collaboration. Inspired by Susanne's journey to India and South East Asia, she returned imbued with the cultures of India and Asia and the parable of the blind men and the elephant and a commitment to open a discussion about pathways to peace.

Anna Pignataro embraced the themes and colours of India and Asia to create an illustrative narrative embedded with symbolism, characterization, cultural indicators through her impressionist free flowing style.

### **Illustrations**

The artwork is created with pencil, watercolour, acrylic, collage using vintage fabric and textiles, interpreting colours, patterns and a feeling of India in an expressionistic way, weaving into a global vision.

A visual feast blending the colours of Asia & India into a universal story, inviting visual exploration to discover the elephants and hidden symbols.

### **Themes and Curriculum topics:**

Study notes on themes and curriculum topics:

Engaging in Asia

Comparative religions

Author engagement

Multi modal literacy – visual literacy

Ethics

### **[LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM](#)**

### **General Capabilities:**

- Literacy
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding

### **Cross-Curriculum Priorities:**

- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (01.1/01.4)
- Sustainability (01.1 – 01.9)

### **Subject Areas for Foundation – Year 2:**

#### **Literacy**

Texts in the literacy continuum – Text knowledge (visual knowledge; visual and multi modal texts)

Texts in context (ACELY 1665)

Interpreting, analysing, evaluating (ACELY 1668)

#### **Literature**

Literature and context (ACELT 1581/1582/1575)

Responding to literature (ACELT 1577/1582/1584/1589)



Examining literature (ACELT 1578)

#### **Modes**


- Reading

- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening

In this teacher guide questions and activities are designed to develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating.

  **Reading and Responding** questions are comprehension based questions and assess students' understanding of visual narrative text type and their own writing responses.

 **Evaluating and Examining** will further develop critical thinking and knowledge of the text.

  **Speaking and Listening** activities will encourage discussion and appreciation of the oral tradition of storytelling and language.

## **Introduction**

'Elephants Have Wings' is a unique inter-faith/multi-faith/humanist, peace picture book fostering social inclusion and cohesion.

On the wings of a mystical white elephant two children embark on the extraordinary journey to discover the meaning of the parable of the blind men and the elephant and the humanity in all of us.

The parable of the blind men and the elephant is found in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sufism and modern philosophy.

## **Themes of 'Elephants Have Wings'**

Multi faith/interfaith.

What is truth?

Search for peace

Family relationships

## **Plot:**

### **Discovery of the Secret**

The father retells the story of the blind men and the elephant told to him by his father. There is a secret in the story.

‘So what is the secret?’

‘It is for you to discover’, Father says.

The children search for the answer on the wings of a white elephant, crossing rivers, jungles, deserts, mountains and the beauty of the universe.

Suddenly the skies crack as war descends. The parts of the elephant are spread across the pages. The children escape on their elephant home, where they discover the secret.

‘Everyone is different, but we’re the same, too. The elephant is in all of us.’

The illustration of the children is in their safe circle. The background contains the symbols of Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam.

### **Why is it called Elephants Have Wings?**

In Hindu mythology during the monsoons that refresh the earth with life-giving rains, the clouds bringing rains are regarded as the ***WINGS OF ELEPHANTS***.



The title ‘Elephants Have Wings’ is symbolic of new life.

### **Questions and Activities:**

## **Reading and Responding**

- What did the children in the book see as they were riding the flying elephant?
- What country or place do you think they lived in? Why do you think that?
- These words from the book describe sounds. What makes these sounds? (crackle; babble; shriek; trumpet; whisper).
- These words describe actions. What might we be doing when we make these actions? (plunge; swerve; whirl; sway; soar; weave; swish).

## **Evaluating and Examining**

- Do elephants really have wings?
- Can you sometimes see pictures in clouds like the wings of elephants? What types of pictures can you make from clouds?
- Lie on the grass or in your back yard and look up at the clouds. What do you see? Draw the shapes.
- If elephants really did have wings, how would it feel if you were to ride one in the air? What could you hear?
- What would you see from so high? Would you see your house, the local park, your school, the shopping centre?
- What creatures have wings?

## Story Background

### **The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant**

‘Elephants Have Wings’ is a re-visioning of the parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant for a universal audience.

There are many versions of the story of the blind men and the elephant, where a group of blind men (or men in the dark) touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each one feels a different part. They argue over what they feel, until they realise they are touching It opens discussion about what is truth.

This parable is told in Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, Jainism and many Asian- Indian religions and studied in philosophy universally.

## Questions and Activities:

### **Evaluating and Examining**

- Imagine you have never seen an elephant, but only felt different parts of an elephant. What would these parts of the elephant remind you of?

Tusks:  
Ears:  
Tail:  
Leg:  
Back:

- Draw these things on a picture of an elephant. How strange does it look?
- Why do you think an elephant is designed this way?
- What is the purpose of each part? For example, the long trunk is for drinking, washing, for touching and holding on another elephant's tail. Why do you think it has such big ears? Why does it have a ropey tail? Its skin is wrinkly – why? Why doesn't it have fur?

### Speaking and Listening

- Listen and watch how others in your class have drawn the parts of the elephant. Who's right? Is everyone right?
- Play the sound of an elephant trumpeting. If you didn't know what the elephant looked like, how would you describe the creature that made that sound? What would it look like? Where would it live? What food would it eat?

### **The Blake Prize**

The Blake Prize for Art and Poetry endorses 'Elephants Have Wings'.

Since its inception in 1951, The Blake Prize has stimulated a fascinating dialogue between art and religion in all its manifestations in Australia. The Prize is named after the legendary British artist and poet William Blake (1757-1827) whose broad range of artistic and poetic innovations, visionary imagination and radical politics made him an outsider in his day.

The Prize was instigated by Jesuit priest, Michael Scott and a Jewish businessman, Richard Morley. They hoped that the establishment of a prize would encourage artists of disparate styles and religious allegiances to create significant works of art with religious content.

Like the Blake art prizes, poets are challenged to explore the spiritual in poetry. First held in 2008, the Blake Poetry Prize encourages Australian poets to engage in the dialogue between religion, spirituality and poetry. [www.theblakeprize.com](http://www.theblakeprize.com)

Blake Prize Entry of 'Elephants Have Wings':

Statement about the work's spiritual integrity

In Hindu scripture, the Divine Elephant conjures up clouds of winged elephants bringing monsoon rains and growth. Within the painting, the complexity of flowers, birds, leaves,



elephant imagery and hints of modernity, references many religions and times, taking children on the journey of spirituality to find the beauty within humanity.

Artist: - Anna Pignataro

**The End papers**

**Imagery and Wisdom:**

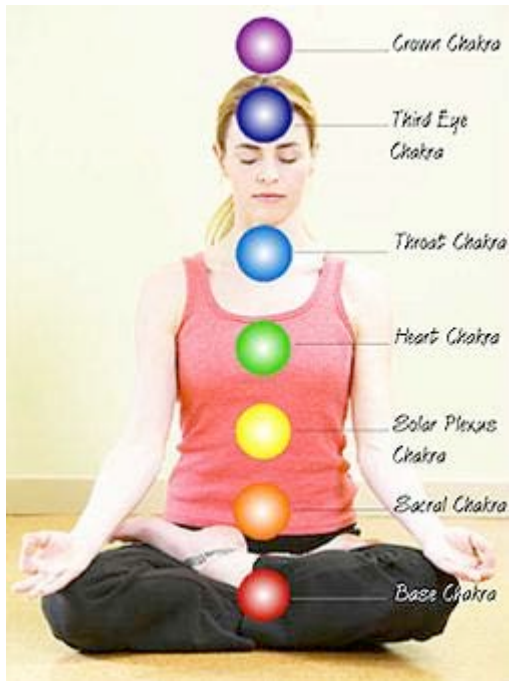
The end papers are symbolic of the journey of the children to find wisdom.

The end papers are inspired by the Buddhist and Hindu chakras where seven parts of your body and the colours associated with these parts are identified on the journey to enlightenment.

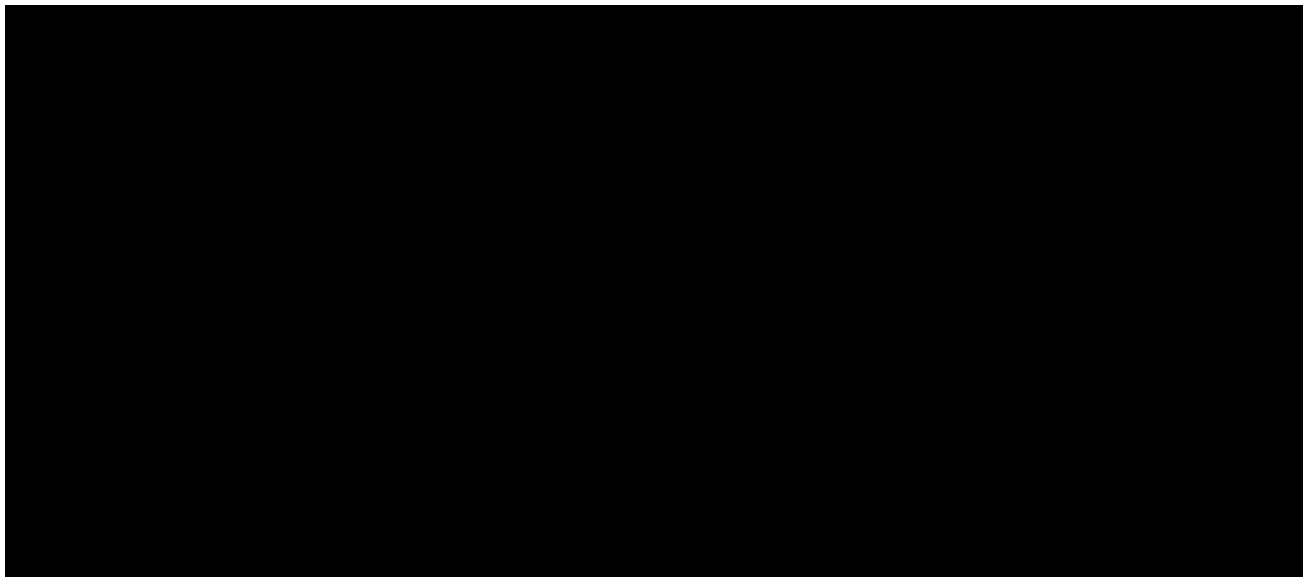
The chakras are:-

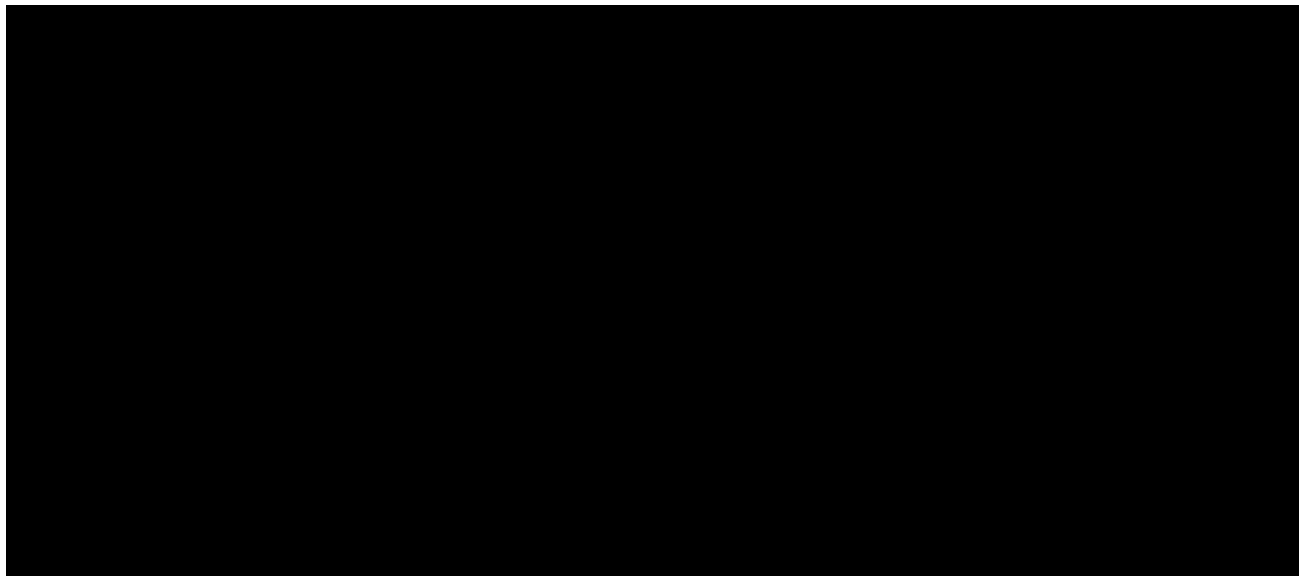
<u>Colour</u>	<u>Body</u>	<u>Search</u>
Violet	top of the head	Peace, wisdom and oneness with God.
Indigo	centre of forehead	Balance, devotion
Blue	throat	Truth through the spoken word
Green	heart	Love
Yellow	ribs	Positive use of personal power
Orange	abdomen	Happiness, confidence
Red	base of the spine	Courage, vitality





The opening end paper is RED – the beginning of the journey to enlightenment  
The final end paper is the 7 colours to enlightenment.





The red wash of the end papers is used to give an impression of Indian and Asian culture. Red is a spiritual and cultural colour in Hinduism, Buddhism and throughout India and Asia.



The design in the Asian and also 'Elephants Have



end papers are derivative of Indian, European folk traditions making 'Wings' have universal relevance.

### Questions and Activities:

#### **Reading and Responding**

- Use the colours of the chakras to decorate the elephant. The top of the head is violet, to the elephant's tail – red – and the relevant chakra colours in between.

### Symbolism in 'Elephants Have Wings'

#### The Tree and leaves

The tree of life is part of most cultures and religions including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Baha' faith, Islam.

The tree of life connects everyone, the past and the present, the earth and the heavens. Its meaning is complex and invites discussion.

Throughout ‘Elephant Have Wings’ the tree of life is present through representations of the brown tree and the small brown leaves that weave through the illustrations. It’s in the end papers woven in the design. It culminates in the extraordinary tree of life in the wordless double page spread with colour, chakras, elephants and growth.

### Questions and Activities:

#### Reading and Responding

- Where can you see trees and leaves in the book?
- Do you think elephants like trees? Why?
- Do you think everyone from all cultures like trees? Why?
- Draw your favourite tree. Write a short poem about your tree. What does it look like? Is it very tall? Does it have large green leaves or small leaves? Maybe it has blossoms and flowers too. Is the trunk rough or smooth, grey, white or black?

#### Evaluating and Examining

- We use a tree to show how we are connected to members of our family. Draw **your family tree**. Use branches to show your ancestry.

#### Newspaper Collage

‘Elephants Have Wings’ revisits the ancient parable of the blind men and the elephant for today’s readers. Symbolic of this are snippets of newspaper clippings dotted throughout the book, on stars, leaves, in the sky, on mountains giving the story modern currency.

#### Birds

Birds, symbolic of journey and flight, reinforce the elephant with wings and the theme of journey. They are found on many of the pages.

### Questions and Activities:

## Reading and Responding

- Count how many birds are in the book.

## Evaluating and Examining

- Which is your favourite bird? Why? What are its features and habitat?
- Is your bird endangered or threatened?
- If so, what do we need to do to make sure it is protected?
- Draw pictures and find information on birds with beautiful feathers or interesting features.

## Mandala

**Mandala** (from Sanskrit *Maṇḍala* means 'circle') is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the universe. Forms which are evocative of mandalas are prevalent in Christianity such as the celtic cross, the halo, rose windows in cathedrals.

The Mandala is use in meditation and represents a journey from the outer world to the inner sacred centre.

The mandala in 'Elephants Have Wings' is a peaceful circle in contrast to the 'shrieking at each other like a babble of monkeys'. It is one of the ways to find truth.

## Questions and Activities:

## Reading and Responding

- Help students to create a mandala using images from the book and their responses after listening to the story.

## Speaking and Listening

- Use a meditation CD with music to help students to get into a state of mindfulness.

## Elephants

Elephants are an inspiration for 'Elephants Have Wings' because of their strength, capacity for love, intelligence, their ability to show grief, joy, anger and play.

They form deep family bonds and live in a herd led by the oldest and often largest female elephants. Extremely intelligent, they have memories that span many years. Roaming in herds

and consuming hundreds of pounds of plant matter in a single day, elephants need a lot of food, water and space. However their habitats are being lost and hunters are poaching them for their ivory tusks.

The African and Asian elephants's survival has been threatened.

There are groups like WWF; Australia Zoo ; Taronga Zoo working to protect elephants.



### Elephants

Elephants are throughout the illustrations. Elephants for many cultures and faiths represent courage, hope, endurance, wisdom. Within the story, the elephant takes the children on the journey across the world to find answers.

As the story opens, there are elephant toys and a drawing in the children's room. Ganesh the elephant God of Hinduism is revered and he must never be at the foot of a bed or beneath a person's feet. So the elephants are on a shelf behind the family.

### Questions and Activities:

#### **Reading and Responding**

- How many elephants can you see in this page (centre spread)?

- Why do you think the illustrator has decorated them?

### Evaluating and Examining

- What are some special things we know about elephants? (good memory, strong, a sense of family, courage).
- Discuss why elephants are important to the people of India and other South East Asian countries. Refer to Elephant Festivals in Jaipur and Karala in India where animals are decorated. This links to cross curricula links to Asian cultures.

### Speaking and Listening

- Decorate your own elephant picture. Talk about why you use those colours and designs and what they mean to you.

### Teacher guided activity:

- Show how elephants are losing their habitats and being killed for their tusks by poachers. Highlight the need for protection of elephants.
- Contact the local zoo and ‘adopt’ an elephant or sponsor one for the class/school.

### **Parts of the Elephant in ‘Elephant Have Wings’**

The parts of the elephant are part of one elephant. This is core to the parable of the blind men and the elephant. The symbols of the parts – rope, branch, marble, scarf and wall – can be found in the illustrations. They are torn apart during war.

### Questions and Activities:

### Reading and Responding

- A parable is a special story with a message. What do you think is the main message from ‘Elephant Have Wings’? Students will need prompting, as it’s a difficult concept. Use the quote from the book – “Everyone is different but we’re the same too. The elephant is in all of us.” In what ways are we different but we are the same too? E.g we all eat but we might like different foods

### Evaluating and Examining

- Look at the illustrations of the five images of the elephant parts – rope, branch, marble, scarf, wall. What do you think these parts of the elephant might actually feel like?

### **Characters**

- A girl – narrator – a searcher, looking after her younger brother,
- Younger brother – trust his sister and follows her on the search for the secret
- Father – teacher of passed-on wisdom
- Mother – protective and loving
- Grandfather -wise
- Children – of differing colours arguing
- The Elephant with silver wings – protector