



STORY SUMMARY

In 2013, people across North America were riveted by the story of Toka, Thika, and Iringa, the last elephants at the zoo in Toronto, Ontario. Lonely for a larger herd, sick from the cold climate, and weak from standing for long days in a too-small concrete enclosure, the elephants needed a change. The zoo and animal activists agreed that they should be moved

to a healthier home, but the best option—the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) sanctuary in distant California—seemed like an impossible dream. Based on actual footage of the trip, *Elephant Journey* provides an intimate window into the experiences of Toka, Thika, and Iringa as they braved their long road to a new life.

Rob Laidlaw has devoted his life to protecting animals and empowering others to do the same. He is the founder of Zoocheck, and an author of 5 children’s books about animal welfare and activism. Rob lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Brian Deines is a fine artist and the award-winning illustrator of over 20 children’s books, including *A Bear in War*, *Bear on the Homefront*, and *In a Cloud of Dust*. A graduate of the Alberta College of Art, Brian lives in Toronto, Ontario with his wife and daughter.

ELEPHANTS IN CAPTIVITY

The majority of elephants in zoos today were taken from their homes and families in the wild. Such large and intelligent animals have many complex needs in order to live healthy lives, which zoo exhibits and circuses cannot accommodate. In the wild elephants can live to be 60–70 years old, while captive elephants often die before age 40 from health issues that result from a lack of exercise or insufficient diet.

LEARN MORE THROUGH THESE RESOURCES:

Zoocheck

www.zoocheck.com

Other Books by Rob Laidlaw

roblaidlawbooks.com/

The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/

Elephants: Wild Vs. Captive

www.lanimal.org/index.php/campaigns/elephants/wild-vs-captive

PAIR THIS BOOK WITH:

- *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla* by Katherine Applegate (Clarion Books, 2014)—Nonfiction Picture Book
- *A Passion for Elephants: The Real Life Adventure of Field Scientist Cynthia Moss* by Toni Buzzeo (Dial Books, 2015)—Nonfiction Picture Book
- “Going on an Elephant Journey with Rob Laidlaw, Parts 1&2” http://pajamapress.ca/resource/elephant_journey_the_true_story_of_three_zoo_elephants_and_their_rescue_from_captivity_extra_content/—Pajama Press author interview
- “Elephants on Board: A Journey to Remember” (*The Fifth Estate*) <http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/episodes/2013-2014/elephants-on-board-a-journey-to-remember>—CBC article and documentary

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THEMES

Elephants, Animals in Captivity, Zoos, Animal welfare

BISAC CODES

JNF003070 / JUVENILE NONFICTION / Animals / Elephants

JNF003220 / JUVENILE NONFICTION / Animals / Animal Welfare

JNF003200 / JUVENILE NONFICTION / Animals / Zoos

BEFORE READING

Discuss

- Do you enjoy visiting the zoo? Why or why not?
- What is your favorite animal at the zoo? Do you think a zoo is the best home for them? How could the zoo become a better home for this animal?

AFTER READING

Discuss:

- How did reading the story of Toka, Thika and Iringa make you feel?
- How does being in the captivity affect the lives of the three Toronto Zoo elephants? How would life in the wild be different for them?
- What were some of the challenges faced by the elephants and the crew on their way to the PAWS sanctuary?
- Lots of factual information about elephants is included at the end of *Elephant Journey*. What was one thing you learned about elephants that interested you most?
- Where could you learn more about elephants or other zoo animals?

ACTIVITIES

“I think elephants are...far more like us than most people imagine. They have almost the same life-span as humans, and enormous brains. They’re one of the most social animals in the world, possibly even more so than humans or orcas....It may sound silly but I really think more people should see them as elephant-people. If they saw them that way, maybe their perspective would change and, hopefully they’d then want better treatment for all elephants.”

—Rob Laidlaw, “Going on an Elephant Journey with Rob Laidlaw, Part 2” (pajamapress.ca/interview_going_on_an_elephant_journey_with_rob_laidlaw_part_2/)

- Share the quote to the bottom left. You may also share longer excerpts from the interview with Rob Laidlaw. Brainstorm with the class how elephants are similar to, and different from, people. Organize their ideas in a venn diagram. Discuss how thinking of animals as individuals, or more “person-like,” can help us feel compassion for them, or inspire us to treat them better.
- With input from the class, compare and contrast *Elephant Journey’s* depiction of the elephants’ living conditions and environment in the beginning of the book and at the end. How does the language change? What is different? Does it change how you interpret the story or feel about the elephants? Why might have Rob Laidlaw written it this way? Have the class write short stories from Toka’s, Thika’s or Iringa’s perspective once they are safely at PAWS.
- Ask students how they can tell that *Elephant Journey* is a non-fiction book. They can point out features including the subtitle, photographs, informational pages, and the index. Discuss the difference between realistic fiction and a narrative nonfiction story like *Elephant Journey*.
- Have students write their own short story about the journey to the PAWS sanctuary from the perspective of one of the elephants.
- Model a brief presentation to students about the Dave Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (visit their website at www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org). Depending on curriculum requirements, you might: write a persuasive paragraph about the importance of the Trust and read or recite it; create a poster informing students about the Trust’s work; write a letter to the Trust thanking them for their work; etc. Have students visit the websites of other animal-aid organizations and create their own piece of writing or presentation modeled on yours.
- As a class, brainstorm ideas for a fundraiser to symbolically adopt an elephant. Model the writing of a procedural text that lays out your plan. As you prepare for the fundraiser you can have students create many other kinds of media, including promotional posters, informational pamphlets, oral announcements, and letters to local news media or politicians.