



STORY SUMMARY

When Olive's dad drags himself to work in the morning, the elephant goes with him. When he comes home again, so does the elephant. It's always there, heavy and silent, casting a shadow of sadness over him. Olive knows it has been like this since her mother passed away when she was a year old, and she can't stand to see her father burdened anymore. With help from her grandfather and her best friend Arthur, she hatches a plan to rid her family of the elephant once and for all.

Before long, she'll learn that while happiness isn't that simple, small things can move mountains—or elephants.

PETER CARNAVAS' career as a primary school teacher inspired him to embrace his passion for children's literature. His picture book *Blue Whale Blues* won the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Crystal Kite Award, and *My Sister is a Superhero* won an Australian Book Industry Award. *The Elephant* is Peter's first novel. He lives on Australia's Sunshine Coast with his family.

Middle-Grade Fiction Ages 7–12 | ISBN: 978-1-77278-102-1 | Pages: 176

KEYWORDS: Friendship, Depression, Aging, Family, Intergenerational relationships, Imagination, Problem solving

BISAC CODES

JUV039240 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Depression & Mental Illness

JUV039050 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Emotions & Feelings

JUV013030 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Multigenerational

JUV002080 JUVENILE FICTION / Animals / Elephants

READING LEVEL

Lexile Measure: 700L | Fountas & Pinnell: Q

INTRODUCTION

The Elephant by Peter Carnavas is a delightful story that children ages 7–12 will enjoy. Full of imaginative problem solving and loving relationships between friends and with older generations, this book will engage students as either a literature circle book or as a read aloud. The activities in this Reading Guide could be used for either format.

BEFORE READING

1. In order to initiate anticipation for the book, bring in a purple backpack with the following items:
 - Paper airplane, or paper to fold one
 - Book of poetry, or a poem
 - Book on elephants (nonfiction)
 - Picture of a tree

Ask students to make some guesses about how the items are related to the book.

2. Ask students to talk about (or write about) an older person who is special to them. What do they do when they are together? How do they feel being with that person?
3. Depression is an important theme in this book. Show this video to help students understand what causes depression:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNsTy-j_sQs

Read the first chapter out loud and ask students to record words or phrases that jump out at them to describe depression. (weary, shadow, darkness, rain-cloud eyes, frown, sighed). Does the elephant bring joy or sadness to Olive's dad?

DURING READING

Pages 1–9

1. p. 8 – Olive's thinking spot is in a jacaranda tree:



Photo by Sheba_Also CC BY-SA 2.0

Ask students if they have a 'thinking spot'. Where is it? Are there any trees that are special to them? Why do they think Olive has picked this tree as her thinking spot? Make a list of the criteria one would use to find the 'best thinking spot'. Discuss as a class and see if Olive's tree fits your criteria.

2. p. 19 – Ms. March starts a discussion about the "old, and wonderful things that make up the stories in your lives" with her class. What old, wonderful things do your students have to share with the class? You can either have students bring in their "old, wonderful" things, or make an "old, wonderful" things artifact bulletin board with pictures and drawings.

Pages 20–44

3. p. 28 – Olive and her granddad sing a song together called "Side by Side", originally written by Harry M. Woods. You can find many versions of the song and the lyrics for it online. After listening to "Side by Side", ask students if they have a song that is special to them or their family.

Math Extension: Choose a song that is familiar to the class (maybe a nursery rhyme, or song they've learned in music). Pick a location at your school and estimate how many times the class will be able to sing the song until they arrive at the location. (You might want to choose an outdoor location!)

4. p. 32 – Granddad takes Olive to the top of the cricket field so they can fly paper airplanes, which cheers Olive up. Ask students to make a list of activities that cheer them up. This is a good time to pull out the purple backpack with the piece of paper for the airplane.
5. The 'Side by Side' chapter (p. 26–32) has lots of descriptive language. Find the descriptive phrase or word that jumps out the most for you. What do you like about it? The way it sounds? The words? The picture it puts in your head? Copy out the phrase or word on a piece of paper and make your own paper airplane. These paper airplanes can be hung from the ceiling or a bulletin board for an interactive display.

Science Extension: Have a paper airplane contest. Each student folds a paper plane and flies it down the hallway. Which plane will go the farthest?

6. p. 38 – Olive’s granddad felt connected to his daughter, Olive’s mom, through poetry. Ask students to look through some poetry books and find a poem that is special to them. Have them copy it out and explain why they chose their poem. This is a good time to look at the poem or book of poetry that was packed in your purple backpack.

Pages 45–82

7. p. 72 – Ask students to make a list of the people in their family. What special thing would each of them bring to share? You could also play a game with the class and see if the students can match each student/teacher to the special thing they would bring for themselves.
8. p. 82 – Make a prediction about what will happen next.

Pages 83–112

9. p. 106 – What criteria make a great friend? Is Arthur a great friend to Olive? What does he say or do to support your decision?
10. Who in your life has been a great friend? Have students write or talk about their experiences.
11. p. 111 – Olive says about her granddad, “Grandad rubs out the gray parts of my dad and fills them with color.” What does Olive mean when she says this? Ask students who rubs out the gray parts of their days. Do they rub out the gray parts of anyone else’s day? Make a list of the ways you can ‘rub out the gray parts’ of someone’s day and post it outside your classroom for other students and staff to add to it.

Pages 113–164

12. p. 137 – Olive has a plan to chase away the elephant. What do you think she will do?
13. p. 139 – This is a photo of decorated elephants, like those that are in Arthur’s book:



Photo by RayMuzyka CC BY-SA 2.0

Art Extension: Students can color in the elephant silhouette at the end of this guide in a way that will chase the grays away. You may want to also let students research design patterns that reflect Indian culture.

14. Why is Olive able to say good-bye to Freddy? Why has she needed him up to this point?

AFTER READING/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Olive’s grandad plans fun things for them to do together. Have students plan a day of activities that they and a special person (friend, parent, grandparent, relative) could do together. Where would they go? What would they do?

Social Studies Extension: Students can use a map of the city to locate where the activities are (either a paper map or Google map) and share with the class.

Writers use symbols to represent something. For example, in this book, the elephant that follows Olive’s dad around represents his depression. What do the tortoise and Freddy symbolize?

Ask students to choose three emotions and think of an animal to symbolize each one. Are there certain colors they would also choose? Have students draw a picture of the animal and explain their choice using the following sentence stem:

_____(emotion) is like ____ (animal) because ____ (reason).

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Video analysis of the causes of anxiety and depression through the lense of Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNsTy-j_sQs
- Photograph of a jacaranda tree:
<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/fc01522c-744b-41a4-8835-5265f596e18e>
- Photograph of three painted elephants:
<https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/672b11ee-992c-4780-ae25-a231c4601102>
- Elephant outlines:
<https://clipartion.com/free-clipart-elephant-outline/>

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