



# Teacher Notes



**Imprint:** Puffin  
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**Format:** Paperback  
**Readership:** 3+

## SYNOPSIS

A child wakes up to find they have a great weight on their chest – it's a blue elephant, which is comfortable there and doesn't want to move. The child is upset, but trying to push the elephant off and all the advice received from family, books and experts doesn't help at first. Eventually Dad suggests a bit of exercise and fresh air. Gradually, as the child comes to know the elephant better and slowly returns to normal activities, the elephant climbs off and changes colour because they are no longer 'blue'.

Warm, empathetic, hopeful and often funny, with the ability to be read on different levels, *My Elephant is Blue* is the perfect story to help children explore and understand the experience of living under the weight of a big sadness.



PHOTO CREDIT: © PHOTOGRAPH NIKI HIL

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Melinda Szymanik** is an award winning author of picture books, short stories and novels for children. Her books include *The Were-Nana*, winner of Children's Choice at the 2009 NZ Post Children's Book Awards and shortlisted for the Sakura Medal. Her picture book *Fuzzy Doodle* was shortlisted for the 2017 NZCYA Awards for best picture book and for the Russell Clark Award, and was selected by the International Youth Library in Munich, for a 2017 White Raven Award. Melinda lives with her family in Auckland, New Zealand.



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## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Vasanti Unka** is an award winning writer, designer and illustrator noted for the originality of her storytelling, her riotously colourful and inventive illustrations and the gorgeous design and production of her picture books. Vasanti's *The Boring Book* won the Best Picture Book Award at the 2014 NZ Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, and was named the 2014 Margaret Mahy Book of the Year. *The Boring Book* was also named a 2014 White Raven Book, and an IBBY Honour Book for the excellence of its illustrations in 2016. In 2021 she won the Arts Foundation Mallinson Rendel Laureate Award for Illustration. Vasanti lives in Auckland, New Zealand.

**Show your child/students the cover and ask what they think the story is about. Why do they think that? What do they think the elephant symbolises?**

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is/are the main character(s) in the story?
2. What do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?
3. How is colour used in the story?
4. Why do you think the author chose an elephant to sit on the child's chest?
6. Why are the chocolates the mum offers on page 12 heart-shaped?

## SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why do you think the elephant is crying on page 15?
2. Why do you think the elephant never leaves?
3. In this story the colour blue represents unhappiness, pink represents feeling good and yellow represents happiness. What colours do you associate with these feelings?
4. Food is mentioned a number of times in the story. What do you think the food signifies? (There may be more than one answer for this.) Why do you think the mum offers the child chocolate? What type of food would your mum try to tempt you with if you were feeling sad?
5. As the story progresses, something is going on outside the window/house. What is it and what does it tell us? Why do you think the illustrator did this?
6. When the brother reacts to the elephant's presence by saying 'Wow, that's different', the child responds 'I don't want to be different. At least, not like this'. What are some good ways to be different or interesting that the child might prefer?
7. Getting outside and having some exercise helps to turn things around for the child and the elephant. What are some other things they could do that might help them feel better? (There might be a lot of answers for this).



## ACTIVITIES

1. Colour is used in the story to represent how the elephant is feeling. List the colours used in the story and the feeling you think each one represents. List four more colours and the feeling you think they are best associated with. Write a poem about one colour and what it represents.
2. Different countries and cultures have different views on what colours match with different feelings – find out what the colour blue signifies in other parts of the world.
3. The illustrator has listed some interesting book titles for Mum to read on page 10. They are a play on the titles of some actual books. Come up with five more 'elephantised' titles that you could add to the pile.
4. The author picked an elephant to represent that way the child was feeling. What might other animals represent? For example, a tiger? Or a monkey? Or a cat? Or a dog? Or a flea? Pick one and make a drawing of what these might look like.



