

Teacher Guide

Grades 3–4

The Magician's Elephant

Kate DiCamillo

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THE MAGICIAN'S ELEPHANT

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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research, prediction, cause/effect, compare/contrast

Literary Elements

Theme, symbolism, conflict, characterization, literary devices, setting, genre (allegory, novella, absurdist fiction), tone, mysticism, writer's craft

Vocabulary

Definitions, denotation/ connotation, parts of speech, context clues, root words, figures of speech

Listening/Speaking

Reenactment, discussion

Writing

Essay, poetry, research paper, script-writing, journaling

Across the Curriculum

Literature—other fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen, fable, allegory, symbolism; Art—illustrator study, collage, photography, painting, comic strip, advertisement; History—military history; Music—opera houses; Drama—acting; Film—movie trailer

Chapters Four–Six

Plot events: Madam LaVaughn visits the prison hoping the magician will heal her. The elephant is put on display in the countess Quintet’s ballroom. An orphan girl begins dreaming about an elephant.

Amidst the cold and darkness of winter, Madam LaVaughn visits the magician in prison, but the magician is unable to help her. He and the elephant are both being held responsible for crippling the noblewoman. The appearance of the elephant causes Peter to feel alternately hopeful and hopeless, but for the people of Baltese, the elephant is a vessel through which they can channel their dreams. The countess Quintet takes advantage of the situation by moving the elephant into her ballroom so she will be the center of the social season. Meanwhile, several blocks away in an orphanage, Peter’s sister Adele begins dreaming about an elephant.

Discussion Questions

Vocabulary	
assure	
rehearsed	
mis-	
covered	
lumbering	
prosecution	
indifferent	
drafty	
perennial	

- Which characters suffer in the chapters? Why? (*Madam LaVaughn, because she is crippled and pleads with the magician to make her whole, Peter, because he longs desperately to find his sister, the elephant, because he is held captive by the countess Quintet, and Adele, because she does not have a family to which she belongs.*)
- Why do Madam LaVaughn and the magician repeat the same words in the prison? Why does Hans Ickman finally stop them? (*Answers will vary, but Madam LaVaughn cannot seem to accept her injury, especially because of the bizarre way it happened. The magician seems to feel regret for injuring Madam LaVaughn but not for performing his feat of magic after hearing the exchange many times, Hans Ickman stops the magician in midsentence to express to both parties the importance of speaking “words that matter.”*)
- Why is Hans Ickman’s memory to write a log important? (*The writing was something Hans Ickman treasured and took joy in as a boy. Her ability to help a blind girl regain her a miracle of sorts. While staying in the prison with Madam LaVaughn, Ickman discovers, to his dismay, that he cannot remember the dog’s name. He feels a deep regret that “so many beautiful things [slip] away” [p. 48], and this realization causes him to halt the meaningful exchange between the noblewoman and the magician.*)
- What gives Peter hope that the fortuneteller is right and his sister lives? (*Peter has a dream in which he holds his crying baby sister. Fortunetellerizes the dream as a recollection, which would prove that his sister did not die at Baltese because “you must live to cry” [p. 67]. Since the elephant has appeared, its presence gives credence to the fortuneteller’s prophecy, and Peter is determined to see the elephant as a means of finding his sister, even though Vilna Lutz insists his sister is dead.*)
- As in a fairy tale, what convenient coincidences and unlikely friendships spark hope? (*Madam LaVaughn and Hans Ickman visit the magician, becoming friends through tragedy. This connection creates the possibility that they will help a part in Peter’s quest. The countess Quintet, quite extraordinarily, relocates the elephant to her ballroom, which creates the possibility that Peter may visit the elephant using his connection to the Matienne, a police officer. Coincidentally, Peter’s long-lost sister Adele begins dreaming of an elephant. In her dream, the elephant appears at the orphanage, saying, “I have come for the collection of [Adele]. She is belonging elsewhere besides” [p. 71].*)

6. What evidence of “buried hopes” comes to light in these chapters? For which characters? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: The people of Baltese become obsessed with the elephant, and it changes aspects of their popular culture, such as their food, dance, and idioms. The people seek fortunetellers to reassure them that amazing things are coming. The countess Quintet’s desire for attention is fulfilled by the elephant’s presence. Peter begins to have faith that his sister is alive after the elephant arrives, and Adele’s dreams hint at the potential for the siblings to meet. The various characters are not quite living complete, fulfilled lives, but slowly their buried hopes are gaining the potential to be realized.)*
7. Why might the events of the novel thus far be described as “bizarre”? *(Answers will vary. Suggestions: The elephant’s arrival in Baltese is magical, the fortuneteller’s advice to Peter to “follow the elephant” is mysterious, Madam Tavoght’s injury and the imprisonment of the magician and elephant are tragic, the military oppression of Peter is crazed, the narcissism of countess Quintet and her subsequent disfigurement of the elephant is shocking, and Peter and Adele’s dreams are at once improbable and very real.)*
8. **Prediction:** Will Peter gain access to the elephant? Under what circumstances?

Supplemental Activities

1. Plot: Research other stories that use the “searching-for-one-lost” premise. Create a plot graph for each story, and compare the plots.
2. Genre: Look at criteria for a novel and for a novella. Decide which genre best categorizes *The Magician and the Elephant*. Write a paragraph to support your choice.
3. History: Research the magician Harry Houdini, who made an elephant disappear in 1918 as part of his act. Write a brief news article explaining the trick and how Houdini did it.
4. Archetype: Research the hero and his quest as an archetype. Is Peter a hero? Explain.

Metaphors and Similes

Directions: Identify examples of metaphors and similes as you read. In the first column, write examples of figurative language. In the second column, describe the comparison being made by the author. In the third column, describe or draw the mental image you get from the metaphor or simile.

Example of figurative language:
 "Oh, so small, like a no. 10 pin" (p. 89).
What is compared: The hole as a baby to a small particle of dust.
What you imagine: a tiny speck of a child.

Example of Figurative Language	What is compared?	What do you imagine?

Time Line

Directions: In the numbered boxes below, write four main events from the novel in the order they happened. In the larger boxes, describe the event or draw a picture representing the event.

1.									
2.									
3.									
4.									