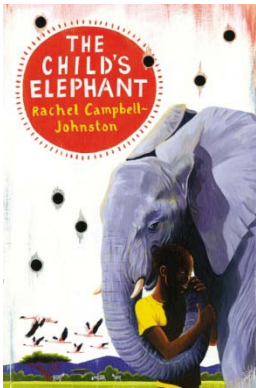


TALKING POINTS

CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist 2014



The CILIP Carnegie
& Kate Greenaway
Children's Book
Awards



The Child's Elephant By Rachel Campbell-Johnston

Before reading

What does the front cover lead you expect from this book? What about the back cover?

The setting

Is *The Child's Elephant* good at creating a sense of place, making you feel like you're there, like you know this world?

Do you think the author needed to do research to make the description of Bat's world seem accurate? What sorts of things did she need to learn?

The three parts of this book feature three strong communities: the village, the child army, and the community of pygmies. They're obviously different in lots of ways – but what do they have in common?

This book is based on real situation in a real place – did it make you want to learn more about it?

The story

How do Bat and Muka become friends? What binds them together?

Why is it difficult for Bat to get Meya to rejoin her herd?

When Bat and Muka are abducted by the army, was this set up in advance by the author, so you could see it coming, or was it a surprise?

Bitek the fisherman says, "Elephants have powers far greater than we can ever know" – what examples of this do we see in *The Child's Elephant*?

Is it clear what Bat and the rest of the child army are fighting for?

Why do you think Meya carried Gulu, when she refused to carry Lobo?

By the time you reach the end of the book, do you feel Bat and Muka are safe at last?

What is the significance of these characters' names: Bat, Muka, Meya, Gulu?



The characters

Bat faces a great challenge in each of the book's three parts – they might be emotional, or psychological, or physical. What do you think his greatest challenge is?

What lessons does Bat learn over the course of the book?

Lobo is Bat's enemy for much of the book, but do you think he can be redeemed? What kind of evidence can you find for that?

What role does Meya the elephant play in each of the three parts of the book? How does her character develop?

War can make good people do bad things (and then suffer from the guilt). Can you think of examples of this in *The Child's Elephant*?

Do you think children in the world of this book (whether living in the village or serving in the army) have to grow up more quickly than in ours? What kinds of responsibilities do they have? How does that make you feel towards them?

How the story is told

"The sound of the rifle shot rang through the air." – a good opening sentence?

Would you describe this as a "realistic" book?

Do you like that the story is illustrated with occasional pictures? Do you think they add something to your experience as you read?

Some themes

Animal stories often anthropomorphise their animals – that is, they give them human characteristics. Do you feel the animals in this book are anthropomorphised, or are they described like realistic animals?

Grandmother says Meya will always be a wild animal at heart; Lobo says she's tame, nothing more than a pet. Who do you think is right?

Read the short "about the author" at the back – how do you think what she's learned from her own experiences fed into this story?

"Hope" is frequently described by these characters as a bad thing, not a good one – why do you think this is?

"Throw your heart out in front of you and run to catch it", that's what Bat's grandmother is always saying. What do you think she means?

