

Guided reading

SECTION

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Cover and title page

Many children may already be familiar with Elmer's image before starting school. They may have met him in the form of cuddly toys or other merchandise such as nursery feeding sets of bowls, cups and plates.

Display the cover and invite comparison between Elmer and other elephants. Elmer is camouflaged on the cover and it may take a short while for the children to discern the outline and other features, such as Elmer's ears. Encourage the children to trace Elmer's outline with a forefinger. As this is a picture book, the illustrations are as important a factor as the text. Identify the author's name and the book's title, as well as using the terms 'cover' and 'title page'. Ask the children to compare the cover text and the title page, where title and author word-order is reversed. Can they see the difference and read the words? Can they spot the publisher's logo – the little red fox?

Spread 1

The other elephants are introduced ahead of the main character. After you have read the spread to the children, point out the collective noun 'herd' and compare it with, for example, a herd of cows, flock of sheep, litter of kittens. Note the unusual syntax, where adjectives follow the noun: 'Elephants young, elephants old...'. Make the most of the rhythm of the text as you read aloud. Note how, by putting the noun before the adjectives, the focus is held on 'elephants'. Take time to compare the different elephants, made easier as they are drawn all facing the same direction. Invite the use of comparatives and superlatives. Consider the last words, 'except Elmer'. Ask if any of the elephants is a different colour. The children may suggest that one or two look blue. Talk about shades of colour and show how description can be modified – 'bluish grey', 'pinky grey'.

Spread 2

By varying the shades of grey of ordinary elephants on the previous page – described in the text as 'elephant colour' – the complete contrast of Elmer's colouring is exaggeratedly different. The patchwork patterning, in combination with the diverse bright colours, further defines his complete otherness. Talk in more detail about Elmer's pattern as well as colour, using terms such as 'checked', 'squares' and 'straight lines'. Encourage the children to note the common opening to sentences, 'Elmer was...', and to practise the colour words. Invite them to identify examples of each colour in the picture of Elmer. Also make use of counting opportunities: the birds and leaves on the tree. Discuss what the author-illustrator's use of colour (and the brightly painted sun) suggest about the climate of the story's setting.

Spread 3

Before reading the text, ask the children to describe what is happening in the picture and if they can guess the elephants' mood. Do they know any friends or family members who are like Elmer, always joking or making people laugh? Prompt the children to describe Elmer's position (upside down).

Spread 4

Read the text and draw attention to the humorous use of language: 'think a *think*', using the verb as a noun, instead of 'thought'. Discuss the difference between laughing *with* someone and laughing *at* them. Could this distinction become blurred and make Elmer suddenly wish he were not different? Ask the children to explain the meaning of 'unnoticed'. Encourage them to look closely at the elephants' different positions and attitudes that show they are on the point of waking up after their night's sleep – yawning, half-open eyes, stretching. Draw the children's attention to Elmer's backward

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