

# The Magician's Elephant



By

Kate DiCamillo

A Novel Study  
by Joel Michel Reed

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of *The Magician's Elephant* and is comprised of five of the following activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language Activities
- Extension Activities

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, as well as in reasoning and critical thinking. Students will also be expected to provide clear answers to questions and well-constructed explanations. It is critical as well that students be able to relate events and the feelings of characters to their own lives and experiences and describe their own interpretation of a particular passage.

A strength of the unit is that students can work on the activities at their own pace. Every activity need not be completed by all students. A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) so that students may organize their work and keep it all in one place. A **Student Checklist** is also included (p.6) so that a record of completed work may be recorded.

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include growing up, respect, believing the unbelievable, perseverance when facing difficult circumstances.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homonyms
3. Identifying / creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Use of singular/plural nouns
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Complete a 5W Chart
11. Identify *personification*
12. Identify/create *similes*

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify *cliffhangers*
4. Identify the climax of the novel.

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Relating personal experiences

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research assignments
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write about personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Complete an Observation Sheet
8. KWS Chart

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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## Synopsis

When a fortuneteller's tent appears in the market square of the city of Baltese, orphan Peter Augustus Duchene knows the questions that he needs to ask: Does his sister still live? And if so, how can he find her? The fortuneteller's mysterious answer (An elephant! An elephant will lead him there!) sets off a chain of events so remarkable, so impossible, that Peter can hardly dare to believe it. But it is – all of it - true. (The Publisher – Candlewick Press)

## Author Biography

*Kate DiCamillo*

**Katrina Elizabeth "Kate" DiCamillo** (born March 25, 1964) Born in Philadelphia, Kate suffered from chronic pneumonia. At age five, she moved to Clermont, Florida for her health (warmer climate) with her mother and her older brother, Curt DiCamillo, who would become a noted architectural historian. Her mother was a teacher. Her father remained in Pennsylvania to sell his orthodontic practice and never rejoined the family in Florida.

DiCamillo earned her college degree in English at the University of Florida in 1987 and worked in Florida after graduation. At age 30 she moved to Minneapolis and began working at a book warehouse. That job inspired her to write for children and allowed her to meet a sales representative for Candlewick Press, resulting in submission of a draft that would become *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

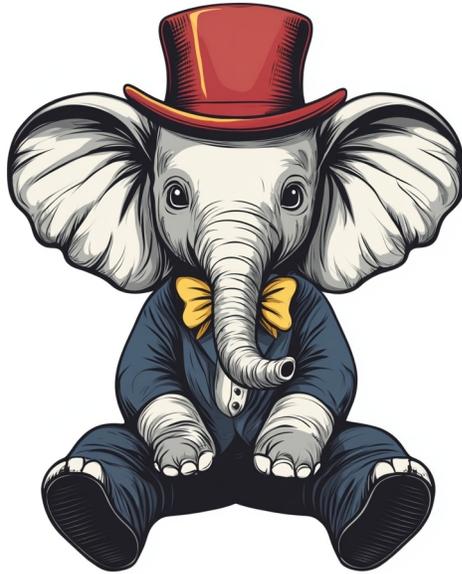
Her 2003 novel *The Tale of Despereaux* was inspired by a friend's son, Luke Bailey, who asked her to write about an unlikely hero with "exceptionally large ears".

(Courtesy of Wikipedia) - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate\\_DiCamillo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_DiCamillo)





# The Magician's Elephant



*By Kate DiCamillo*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1



### Before you read the chapter:

The **antagonist** in most novels features the character often depicted as the “bad guy”. Think back on some of your favorite villains from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an especially interesting **antagonist**?




### Vocabulary:

Draw a straight line to connect the vocabulary word to its definition. Remember to use a straight edge (like a ruler).

1. Guardian
2. Audacity
3. Inscribed
4. Treachery
5. Conjure
6. Accustomed
7. Redundant
8. Sufficient
9. Virtuoso
10. Indisputable

- A. To call upon or command by spell or invocation.
- B. Adequate for the intended purpose.
- C. To mark (a surface) with words or characters.
- D. Customary; usual; habitual.
- E. Unquestionably real, valid.
- F. A person who protects, or preserves.
- G. A person who excels in musical technique or skill.
- H. Violation of faith, betrayal of trust; treason.
- I. Characterized by unnecessary repetition.
- J. Boldness or daring, especially with confident disregard for generally accepted restrictions.

# Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the story as Chapter One begins.


2. Circle the correct writing narrative that the novel follows, and the reason for your choice.

First Person      Second Person      Third Person


3. What question did Peter asked the fortuneteller?


b. What was the fortuneteller's response to Peter's question?

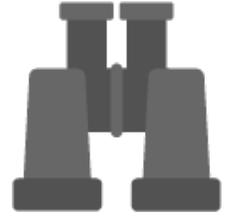

4. Do you think Peter was wrong to spend Vilna's money on a fortuneteller rather than buying food? Be sure to give reasons for your answer.


5. Briefly describe what happened to Madam LaVaughn at the Bliffendorf Opera House.


## Language Activity



**A. Foreshadowing** is a literary device used by authors to provide clues for the reader so they are able to predict what might occur *later* in the story. How might the following statement taken from Chapter One be considered an example of this literary device? *"You must follow the elephant," said the fortuneteller. "She will lead you there."*




**B. A simile** is a comparison using the words "like" or "as". The following is an example taken from Chapter 1: *"You, Peter, who spends money that is not yours - you who spend the money of others like a fool - you will speak to me of who lies?"*



What two things are being compared in this example?

--	--

Invent two of your own **similes** comparing two different things using your imagination:

a)	

b)	

## Extension Activity



### Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of *The Magician's Elephant*. You may wish to practice your drawings before you begin.

1	2
3	4
5	6