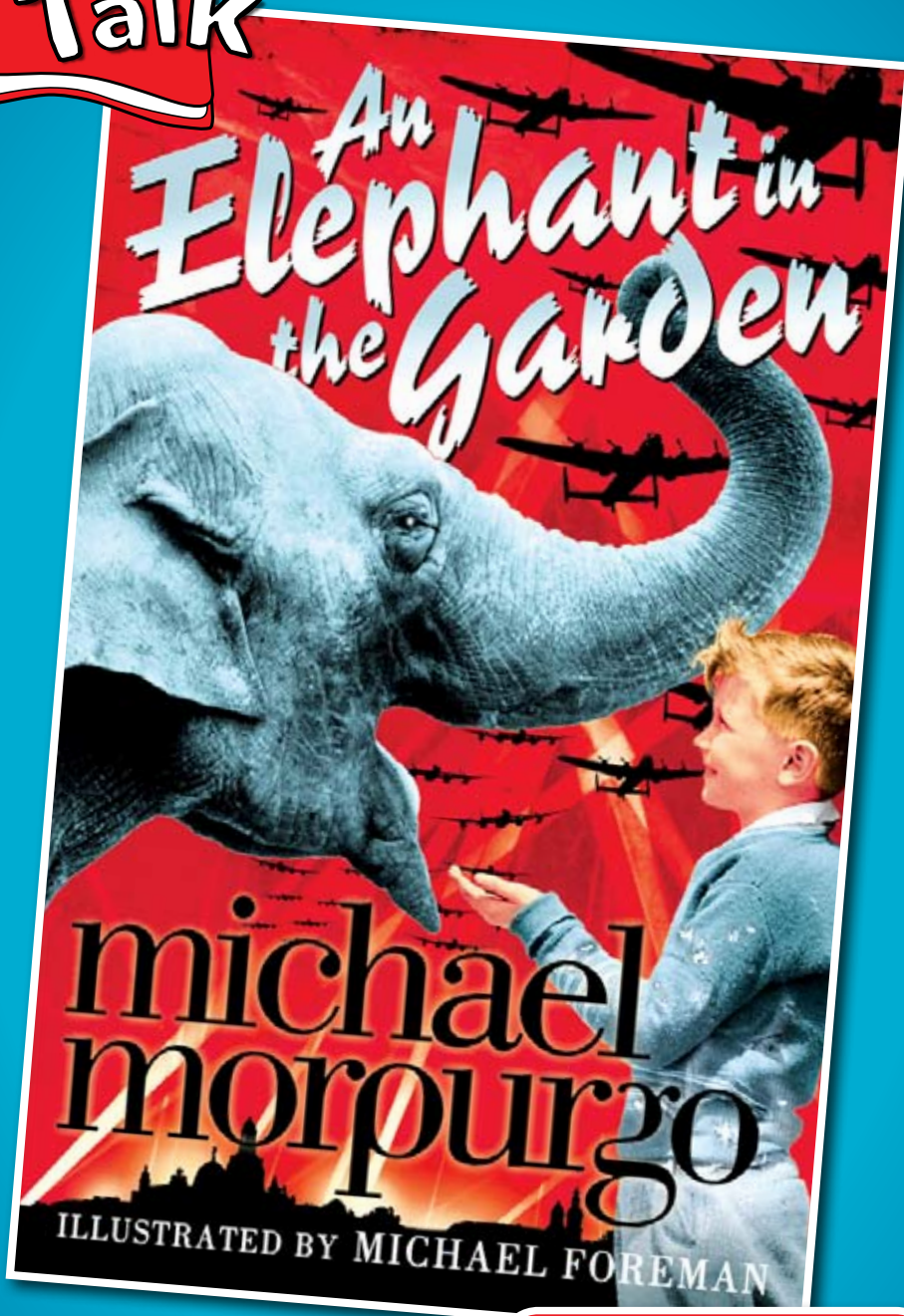




 SCHOLASTIC

**Book
Talk**



AGES 8+

**Engage and inspire your
pupils with a Book Talk!**

Illustrations © 2010 Michael Foreman from *An Elephant in the Garden* by Michael Morpurgo, published by Harper Collins



Look out for this book at your Fair!

AGES 8+

Price	£4.99
Case	Read On
Author	Michael Morpurgo
Illustrator	Michael Foreman
Publisher	Harper Collins

Using this book in your classroom

Themes

This thought-provoking novel gives readers an insight into **life in the Second World War** from the point of view of a German family caught up in the bombing of Dresden. It also encourages reflection on the nature of **friendship** and **loyalty** – both for humans and for animals.

Summary

Lizzie is 82 years old and lives in an old people's nursing home in Canada. She is an independent-minded and spirited person, and she comes to befriend one of the nurses and, in particular, the nurse's young son Karl. To Karl and his mother, she tells an astonishing story of her childhood in Dresden, Germany, at the time of the Second World War – a story of hardship, love, friendship and bravery.

The starting point for Lizzie's story is her memory of the time when her family had an elephant living in their garden. It sounds so unlikely that no one except Karl really believes her. However, as Karl and his mother discover, every word is true. The elephant had been rescued by Lizzie's mother, who worked at Dresden Zoo. The elephants and other large zoo animals were all due to be shot to prevent them causing danger to humans if the zoo was bombed. But Lizzie's mother got permission to bring Marlene, her favourite elephant, home. After the city of Dresden was destroyed in a series of harrowing bombing raids, Lizzie's family had to leave their home, and they took Marlene with them. Their journey to safety was a long and perilous one, but strong ties of loyalty bound the family and Marlene together. Along the way, they met another unlikely friend – a Canadian airman who had been shot down during the Dresden raids. Although officially enemies, they come to rely on each other with mutual loyalty, support and even love.

Did you know?

- Michael Morpurgo has written many books that feature animals as innocent victims in human wars and disasters. Other books by Michael Morpurgo which touch on this theme include *War Horse*, *The Butterfly Lion* and *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips*.
- The elephant in this story is fictional – but the head keeper of Dresden Zoo was in reality ordered to shoot the large or dangerous animals when Dresden was at threat. Many animals from Dresden Zoo died in the allied bombing raids.

The Story Session

1. Introducing the book

- Ask the children what they would think if an elderly person told them that they had once had an elephant living in their garden. Would they think it was a joke, or that the elderly person's memory was playing tricks? Do they think it could possibly be true?
- Explain that, in this book, an 82-year-old woman tells a boy about her life as a young girl in Germany during the Second World War. Share what the children already know about the Second World War. Ask: "Have you ever read a book that tells what life was like for children in Germany during the War? Do you think their lives would have been similar to British children's lives at the time?"

2. Reading the story

- Read the first section ('Ring of Truth', section 1). Pause to ask the children what kind of person they think Lizzie is. Do they agree with Karl when he says, "I don't think you're batty at all, or loopy"? Encourage them to predict how they think the elephant might end up changing – and saving – Lizzie's life and that of the rest of her family.
- Read the rest of the book together, or encourage the children to read it independently. If possible, pause to discuss the book as the children read. Encourage them to think about what Marlene the elephant meant to the different members of Lizzie's family. Ask them also to look out for clues about what life was like in the aftermath of the Dresden bombings.
- At the end of the book, ask: "Do you think Lizzie was right to say that Marlene saved her family's lives? Or do you think Lizzie and her family saved Marlene's life? Or maybe both are true?"

3. Follow-up

- Talk about the compass that Lizzie gives to Karl at the end. Ask children to think about why the compass is important in the story (e.g. it belonged to Peter, the Canadian airman who became so important to Lizzie and her family; it helps the family to find their way to safety but also results in them nearly getting turned over to the police; and it is a symbol for the way love and loyalty help us to find our way in the world).
- Encourage the children to talk to their grandparents or other older relatives, to find out what life was like when they were young. Ask the children to write about one story or anecdote from the older person's earlier life, and explain why it is interesting or different from life today.
- Ask the children to do some internet research to find out more about the bombing of Dresden, e.g. by looking at the following BBC web page: <http://bit.ly/anHhc>
- Encourage them to find out more about life for German children in the Second World War. This link gives an account from the point of view of a German girl who survived the allied bombings: <http://bit.ly/4IDqJx>

YOU TELL US

- Did you use these notes to have a Book Talk in class?
- Were they helpful?
- Are there any changes you'd like to see to make them more useful?

We're always happy to hear your comments, so please email us!
Please email: bookfairs@scholastic.co.uk