

## Sharing books...

# Elmer

by **David McKee** (Andersen Press, 1989)



**E**lmer is 30! This classic picturebook about a patchwork elephant has been enjoyed by millions of children worldwide. Elmer is the joker of the herd, keeping everyone happy with his games and pranks, but we meet him at a point in his life when he does not want to be different.

He dyes himself grey to be like everyone else and rejoins the herd unnoticed. He soon becomes bored as the rest of the herd stand silent and still. So, he lets out a big 'boo' and the herd fall about in shock.

Elmer laughs and so too do the other elephants. After a rain cloud washes off Elmer's grey dye, the old elephant of the herd declares an annual Elmer day, when all the elephants except Elmer will be colourful.

### A GOOD CHOICE

Elmer has universal appeal and many of today's parents will remember Elmer from their childhood. It is a book that toddlers can enjoy as they look at the elephants, while older children will understand and be able to talk about the storyline.

The book can also motivate Years 1 and 2 children who are familiar with the text to try out some independent reading.

### SHARING THIS BOOK

This is a picturebook that children often want to look at more than once. If children are new to *Elmer*, it is worth sharing it in pairs or small groups. Read through the story, then reread it so that children can look in more detail at the pictures.

With older children, it is worth checking that they understand how Elmer was feeling before he decided to camouflage himself.

### SUPPORTING LEARNING

#### Language development

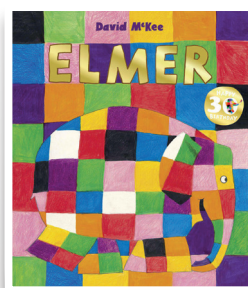
There are plenty of opportunities for children to enjoy and learn new words in this book. First, there are words that describe the characteristics of different members of the herd such as 'young' and 'tall'. Play a game in which the children have to identify the elephant that you are describing – for example, 'I am looking at a tall elephant with angular ears who is smiling.'

The text also features alliterations – for example, when Elmer rejoins the herd, a series of three words beginning with 's' are used: serious, silent and still. See if children can understand each of these words by miming them.

#### Personal, social and emotional development

One of the reasons for Elmer's continued popularity is that he helps children to realise that we are all different and that differences can be good. You could see if children can explain why Elmer wanted to be the same and explore how Elmer was actually valued for being different. You can then plan some activities that help children see how they are each different – for example, exploring their favourite foods or games, or maybe what they find funny.

Elmer makes the other elephants



#### ABOUT THIS SERIES

Over the course of this monthly series on sharing books with children, **Penny Tassoni** will look at a range of fiction and non-fiction titles, from rhyming books for babies to picture books that adults and children can explore together.

happy by being funny and joking. Discuss other ways to make others happy – for example, by being kind, sharing and being ready to help.

#### Mathematics

There is plenty of scope for exploring mathematics within *Elmer*. You can look at the number of elephants, but also encourage children to talk about the position of elephants. Where was Elmer in the herd when he came back camouflaged? With older children, you can also play a game where you describe an elephant on the first page according to its position. Can you find an elephant who is large, in the centre of the page and standing behind a smaller elephant?

#### Expressive arts and design

The story ends with the elephants decorating themselves in celebration of Elmer Day. Talk to the children about the decoration that they like most, as well as the patterns and colours that are used. Children can also decorate their own elephants using a wide range of materials including beads and sequins, strips of wrapping paper and markers, as well as different coloured paints and paper.

#### Understanding the world

Elmer camouflages himself in order to fit in with the other elephants. Explore with the children how camouflage is used by a range of other animals. Using images from the internet or film clips, you can show children examples of camouflage and also animals such as chameleons changing colours – see, for example, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioblgpA5eTo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioblgpA5eTo).

Finally, it is worth making a safety point. While Elmer dyes himself with berry juice, children should never pick and eat berries unless an adult is with them. ■

