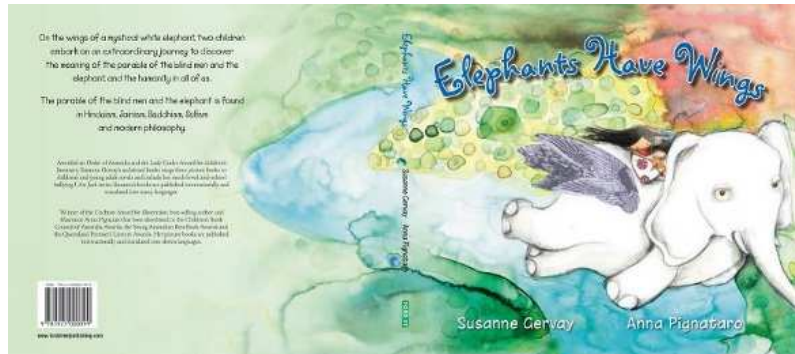


Elephants Have Wings – Page by Page Study Guides

by Susanne Gervay illustrated by Anna Pignataro

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The page notes below accompany the reading of 'Elephants Have Wings'.

'Elephants Have Wings' revisions the parable of the blind men and the elephant.

It is at its core an ethics and philosophy book for young

people as they seek to discover their understanding of - what is truth?

**See Study Guide for more information including related links:-**

<http://www.sgervay.com/books/picture-books/elephants-have-wings/>

## Design of the pages

Each illustration has a white border, with the artwork within a border. The edges of the art are free-flowing impressionistic water colours, like individual art pieces. This invites staying on the page for a while, to reflect and image.

## The Secret

'Elephants Have Wings' is about discovery, the search for the secret of – what is truth?

## Family

The narrators are a multi-generational family passing on wisdom. Personal and intimate, the journey is universal.

## Elephant

In Hinduism Airavata is a white elephant with wings, the king of all elephants, who is the mount of the god Indra.

In Hindu mythology, the flying white elephants bring the monsoon rains to refresh the earth.

The white elephant is mystical with many traditions in Eastern faiths. It is a protector of humanity.

## Elephant's eyes

The elephant's eyes communicate. On the front cover, the elephant is looking out at readers, inviting them to come inside the story.

On pages 22-23, the elephant's eyes look to the next page – where the extraordinary painting of the elephant within the physical world opens up answers and more questions.

On pages 16-17, the elephant closes his eyes in meditation at the beauty of peace and the universe.

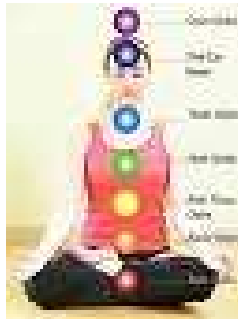
At other times, the elephant looks back to protect the children, looks ahead as guide to the world, cries when the world is torn with conflict, stares towards home.

## **Parts of the Elephant**

The Elephant is made of parts symbolised by rope, branch, marble, scarf, wall.

## **End Papers**

### Colours



The opening end paper – red

The closing end paper - 7 colours from the base of the spine to the top of the head are:-

red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

The colours represent the 7 chakras in Hindu, Buddhist, Yogic, Eastern traditions and the New Age spirituality, on the pathway to enlightenment and wisdom.





## Red

Red is a spiritual and cultural colour in Hinduism, Buddhism and throughout India and Asia.

## Folk Design

Indian design

European design



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The design of the end papers references Indian, Asian & European folk traditions creating universal feel.

## The Tree of Life

The tree of life is part of most cultures, beliefs and faiths including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Baha'i faith, Islam and folklore.

It is a symbol of immortality and eternal life.

The tree of life is throughout 'Elephants Have Wings' from the end papers within the designs. At times the tree of life is evident through shedding leaves, growth, blackened with conflict, re-grows and buds.

## Circle of Life

The circle of life is core to many faiths and philosophies and this motif in many images encases the scene.

## **Stories through Generations**

Stories are passed from generation to generation – from grandfather to father to children. The value and re-interpretation are part of passing on knowledge, culture and ideas,

## **Newspaper Collage**

Although the father re-tells an ancient story, its currency is reflected through the use of newspaper collage throughout the book.

## **Hands**



Symbol of Jainism.

Hands represent connection and are motifs within ‘Elephants Have Wings.’

## **Red flower**

The red is a spiritual colour. The red flower represents life and is a motif throughout the book.

## **Universe**

Stars and celestial bodies represent the universe.

## **Birds**

Birds are the motifs for flights, sometimes birds are going in the wrong direction, other times they are moving forward.

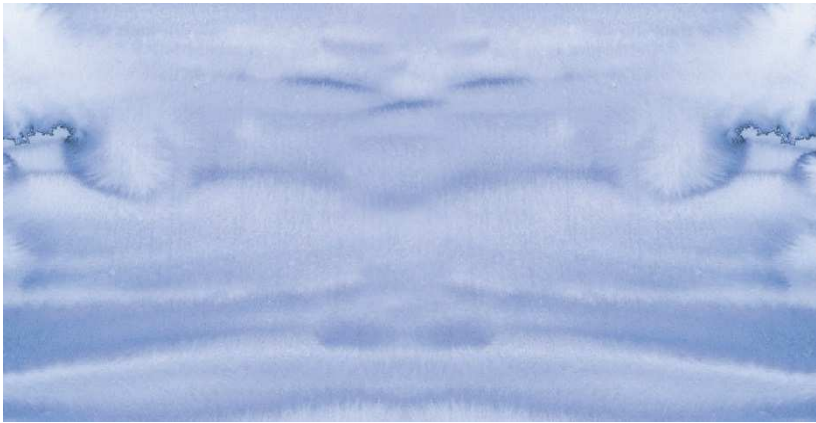
## **Cultural diversity**

Set within an Indian-Eastern landscape, the characters are ethnically diverse.

**\*\* PAGE by PAGE insights \*\***

## **Pages 2-3**





## Elephants Have Wings



The texture of the blue page is identical to the texture on the end papers. The blue symbolises the sky and the journey of flight.

### Pages 4-5



### Tree of life

It is viewed through the window.

### Elephants

Elephants are considered sacred and are never below the feet of humans. The elephants in the room are on the shelf and painting is on the wall, in the hangings.

## Hands and symbols



Discover the hands (Jainism) and the Hindu symbol on the flags below the shelf.



The Hindu symbol: -

## Clothes

The clothes are a mixture of Indian and Western clothing. The father's jacket and the motif of the flower on the girl's dress, reappears in the later pages.

The father is not wearing a turban and does not maintain that tradition. It is controversial when new generations do not maintain the traditions of the past. It opens the question – is that important? In the Roman Catholic faith, women are no longer required to wear a head scarf in church in many countries.

## Red flower

The red flowers on the walls and girl's skirt.

## Family

Father, mother, older sister and young brother,

## Pages 6-7

Father always pretends he won't tell us, but he always does.  
Each time, the story is more amazing.  
'All right tonight I will tell Grandfather's story.'



My brother snuggles next to me, under the covers.

## Motifs

Elephant; clothes; colour red; multi-generational passing on story; red flowers; turban.

## Pages 8-9



*Our house was earthen and small, but always warm. It was surrounded by green vegetable fields.*

*One night, your grandfather told me and the other children to go outside and search for the secret.*



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### Motifs

Tree of Life (brown leaves, green shoots); newspaper collage; circle of life; clothes, red flower, universe, ethnic diversity, birds.

### The Secret

This begins the search/discovery of the secret of life. It is a process of discovery through experience and questions.

### Pages 10-11

*It was dark, and my heart beat too quickly. Then I heard rustling.*

*'A rope,' I called out.*

*The children laughed and told me that I knew nothing.*

*'It's a tree branch, rough and wrinkly.'*

*'You're wrong. It's marble, smooth and cold.'*

*'Don't be a fool. It's a scarf swaying in the wind.'*



*'You're all wrong. It's a sandy wall.'*

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### Motifs

Tree of Life (brown leaves); clothes; circle of life; universe, ethnic diversity; collage; parts of the elephant; red flower; clothes.

### Pages 12-13

*We argued until everyone was angry.*



*Until we were shrieking at each other like a babble of monkeys.*



*We all believed that we were right.*

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### Motifs

Tree of Life (brown leaves); Tree of life in mandala (green bushes, green leaves); universe; bird; clothes; circle of life; clothes;. Red flower, colour red; ethnic diversity

### Anger and conflict

The children argue as they believe they are right. The children's body language reflects their conflict. The monkeys in the circle of life with its peacefulness contrasts to the conflict of the children.

### Monkeys

The monkeys are present in the collage within the circle of life and mandala. They are real monkeys ranging from the old world monkey with its blue face and to modern monkeys.

### Mandala

The circle of life is also the mandala (Sanskrit: मण्डल Mandala, 'circle') which is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the Universe. The Mandala is personal reflection, meditation in the search for the secret.

### Pages 14-15





### Motifs

Tree of life (brown leaves; grey burnt tree); parts of the elephant; circle of life; universe; turban; passing down of story.

### Clothes

The grandfather wears traditional clothes and the turban which is worn by men. Turbans are worn by Sikhs, Muslims, often by nobility regardless of religious background, and historically in Judaism and some Christian sects. The questions about passing on this tradition relates to the circle of life – is the turban important? Or faith and family?

### Light

Yellow light – to show the way. Spiritually, there are many references to light, as symbolic of providing insight.

### Pages 16-17



### Motifs

Symbolism of the elephant; universe; diversity; circle of life; tree of life; elephant's eyes; part of the elephant; ethnic diversity; collage.

## Pages 18-19

'So what is the secret?'  
'It is for you to discover,'  
Father says.



'Can you hear him?' I whisper to my brother.  
'Yes, I can.'  
'Can you see him?' I whisper again.  
'Yes, I can.'



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## Motifs

Circle of life; colour red; clothes; red flowers; family.

The search for the secret.

## Pages 20-21

'Come on,' I say to my brother.  
We clamber onto the elephant's back,  
and the elephant begins to sway.  
'Hold on,' I sing to my brother.  
Soaring into the air, the wind gashes  
past. We fly faster and faster.



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## Motifs

Circle of life; elephant; colour red; elephant's eyes; red flowers; collage (elephant's wings).

The white flying elephant takes them on a journey over the world with all its beauty. The elephant's eyes invite readers to turn the page.

The landscapes are presented as impressionist water washes – reds for deserts; greens-yellows for jungles; blue-greens for rivers.



The children are safe between the wings of the elephant.

### Pages 22-23



#### Motifs

Tree of life; family; birds; colour red; red flowers; elephant; collage; hands; universe; circle of life, elephant's eyes; elephants; hands.

The white elephant with wings takes the children into the heart of the beauty of the world and universe. Its eyes close in blissful meditation. The tree of life flourishes and moves forward with nature, hands connecting with the universe. Elephants are integral to the patterns, with birds hidden within their designs.

### Pages 24-25



#### Motifs

Birds; newspaper collage; collage; universe; elephant's eyes; the earth; family.

As the elephant flies across the world into the universe to show the children amazing creation, it protects the children, looking back at them with his brown eye.

### Pages 26-27



'Look up,' I sing to my brother.  
The sky is diamonds  
and the moon golden.

### Motifs

Universe; newspaper collage; collage; circle of life; elephant's eyes.

There is elation as the white winged elephant takes the children across the universe, his eyes look ahead and they smile.

### Pages 28-29



Our elephant swerves, plunging through  
cracked skies and into babbling noise.  
'Hold on,' I cry to my brother

### Motifs

Tree of life; newspaper collage; collage; parts of the elephant; elephant's eyes; world.



The elephant turns, plunging through skies and a world cracked by conflict and war. The symbols of war – tank, soldier, displaced houses.

The elephant is torn apart – with his parts the rope, tree branch, marble, scarf, sandy wall – thrown across the pages.

The tree of life is black and burnt.

The children are afraid and hold each other and the elephant is crying.

But there is hope – there are brown leaves from the tree of life and the elephant is still flying.

## **Pages 30-31**



Our elephant raises his trunk and trumpets.



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## **Motifs**

Elephant; collage; world; elephant's eyes; tree of life; universe; bird; circle of life.

The elephant rises from the conflict with his eyes looking forward, crossing the earth and the universe, flying faster and faster, taking the children to home.

Water colour blues, greens, yellows, whites create a sense of rivers, jungles, mountains, valleys, forests, nature, then man's world of cities and towns.

The tree of life is budding in front of the children's home. The universe sparkles. The elephant and protector, closes its eyes knowing the children are safe.

## **Page 32**

'I know Grandfather's secret now,' I whisper.  
My brother waits.



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### Motifs

Family; colour red; red flower; hands; religious symbols; elephant's eyes; circle of life – mandala.

The secret is revealed – 'Everyone is different but we're the same, too. The elephant is in all of us.'

While this is an answer, it is also a question. How is humanity the same? How is humanity different?

What is the elephant in all of us?

What is truth?

The elephant remains on the page as protector, a wisdom keeper, a way towards truth.

The children are in the circle of life which can be seen as a mandala too, representing the search for enlightenment. In the background of the circle with its red colour of spirit and flowers are symbols of Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam and the hands connecting all people.

### Art Note

The use of muted colours create reflective moods – from browns for the earthen village; pale red of family; the muted creams as the children lie in their room waiting for the elephant.

This contrasts to the strong colours of the wordless double page spread of the elephant in the beauty of the universe; the bright golden sun and deep blues of the elephant soaring through the universe.

The heavily textured backgrounds reflect the themes for example:-

the scene with the elephant crying the textures of the background are as broken as the landscape.

the scene with the elephant taking the children across the earth, is richly layered with whites of clouds, and multi tones of blues for the skies.

The mixed medium use of collage and water colours, create more depth and texture and a three dimensional aspect that enhances each page in different ways.

The loose pencil lines, soft water colours with their blurred edges, layers of colours create a mystical feel and take the reader into this extraordinary journey.

Susanne Gervay

[www.sgervay.com](http://www.sgervay.com)