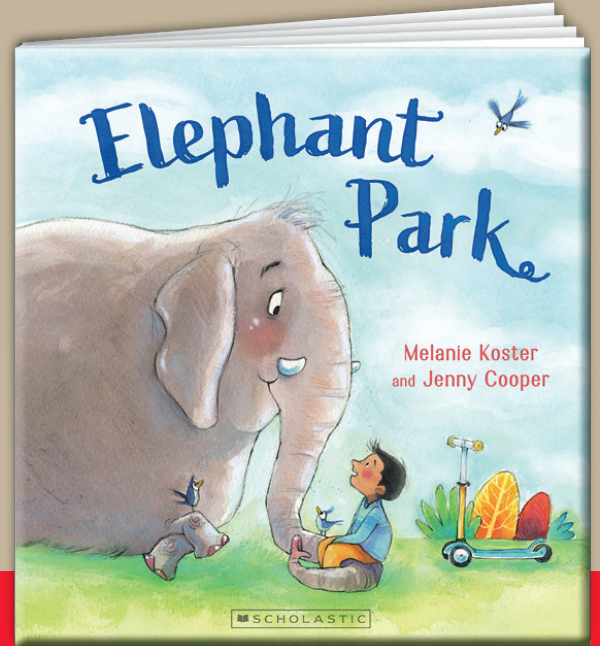


# Elephant Park

By Melanie Koster

Illustrated by Jenny Cooper



• Reading • Writing • Social Studies • Art

## Synopsis

This is a heartwarming story about a boy, Noah, who befriends an old elephant that has stood for years as the slide in a local park. The park has all sorts of new attractions, and the tired old elephant is largely ignored. So Noah invites Elly to come home with him for the weekend.

When his dad sees the elephant, he recognises it as the slide he also used to play on as a child. He offers her a cup of tea then leaves her to have a sleep. The elephant stays on for dinner and a play in the paddling pool, then watches TV with Noah and Dad. Come bedtime, the boy and Ellie camp out in the garden.

Next morning, after breakfast, Dad and Noah give the elephant a makeover before riding her back to the park. Along the way, they meet a number of people, including other adults who remember the elephant. Everyone joins the procession back to the park where they all have a picnic while the children enjoy the refreshed elephant slide.

## About the Author

**Melanie Koster** was born on the wild West Coast of the South Island and was brought up in a book-loving, story-telling family. She lives in Ōtautahi, Christchurch with her whānau of artists, inventors and tinkerers.

Melanie is the author of picture books including *The Reluctant Little Flower Girl* and *Milly Maloo and the Miracle Glue*, and has been shortlisted six times for the Joy Cowley Award, finally winning the award in 2022 with *Tama and the Taniwha*, inspired by the song 'Don't Put Your Waewae in the Water' by Linda McGilvary.

Melanie works as a teacher aide at a local primary school, where she enjoys helping young writers hone their craft.

## About the Illustrator

**Jenny Cooper** lives in Amberley, near Christchurch, and has been illustrating children's books for over 20 years. After gaining a qualification in graphic design, Jenny and her family moved to Samoa, where she taught art, before returning to live in Christchurch and beginning a career as a children's illustrator. In these days of digital art, Jenny is proud to be 'old-school' and still creates her art in pencil and watercolour. In 2015 she won the Mallinson Rendel Illustrator's Award.

With dozens of children's books to her name, Jenny is perhaps best known for her hilarious illustrations for the Topp Twins' sing-along books, as well as her war stories with Glyn Harper.

# Writing and Illustration Style

*Elephant Park* is a 32-page paperback picture book written for children aged 3–7. It's a touching story about a young boy who, unlike the other children at the playground, noticed the elephant slide looked sad and tired. The story is written in third person past tense, with a range of short and long sentences, including dialogue from the characters. The author has used adjectives, alliteration and a simile (gleamed like china plates) to add interest to the text. At the beginning, the book's genre is realistic, but as the story progresses, the lines get blurred between reality and fantasy. The end result is a magical picture book that takes children on a gentle and poignant journey in which a young child and his unlikely elephant friend become the heroes.

Jenny Cooper, an award-winning illustrator who lives north of Christchurch, has created the illustrations in pencil and watercolour. Her gorgeous illustrations capture the emotions of Elly and Noah. Done in a realistic style, with a good dash of humour and whimsy, the illustrations complement the text beautifully. The story is typeset in Harman Elegant with some important words set in a larger font size.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Asking questions before, during and after reading helps students to make sense of the characters and events in a story. Questions also help them to make connections to their own lives, past experiences or prior knowledge. Use the following questions to promote discussion. Prior to reading the story, tell the students that the story was inspired by a real place. Ask them if they have read any other story that was based on a real person, animal, place or event.

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- What do you think *Elephant Park* is?
- Do you think the elephant is friendly? What makes you say that?
- Look at the elephant's expression on the back cover. How do you think the elephant is feeling now?
- What does it mean when you 'have lost your shine'?
- How might Noah be able to bring the elephant's sparkle back? What does that saying mean?

### COMPREHENSION:

- Read the author's text on page 2 about the real *Elephant Park* in Bishopdale Park in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Does a playground near you have an iconic piece of play equipment that has been there for many years? What is it? (p.2)
- Why did the elephant sigh and say she was tired? (p.3)
- If something is chipped, cracked and flaking, what does this suggest about its usage and age? (p.3)
- How would you feel if you had to stand in one spot for a very long time? (p.4)
- Did the elephant want to feel needed? (p.5)
- Would you rather play on the elephant slide or the fancy new mega-slide? Explain your answer. (pp.6–7)
- Why might the bigger kids who skateboard down Elly give her a headache now? (p.7)
- Do you think the kids visiting the playground would notice if the elephant slide was missing over the weekend? (p.7)
- Which words on page 8 tell you that the elephant was not used to walking and moving? (p.8)
- How did the elephant's expression change once she broke free of the slide? (p.8)
- On page 9, why did the elephant tire so easily? (p.9)
- What does the word 'foraged' mean? What other words could the author have used instead? (p.10)
- The elephant and Noah loved the dessert. What is your favourite dessert? Why? (p.10)
- Noah and the elephant had fun in the paddling pool. How do you think Dad felt when the elephant sprayed water over him with her trunk? (p.11)
- The elephant loved cooling off in the paddling pool. Have you seen elephants in the wild or at the zoo in water and spraying water out of their trunks? Tell us about it. (p.11)
- Look at Noah's cat. What do you think it's thinking? (p.12)
- The elephant used her trunk like a hand. Would you like a trunk as well as your two arms? Explain your answer. (p.13)
- Would Elly have been better to have gone on the top bunk? Why or why not? (p.14)
- Was camping outside a good idea? Explain why. (pp.14–15)



- What jokes would you have told Elly and what songs would you have sung with Elly? (p.15)
- Noah had a N-shaped pancake. The elephant had an E-shaped pancake. If you were to give the elephant a female name that started with the letter E, what would it be? (p.16)
- Why do you think no one had given the elephant a makeover? (p.17)
- If you were to give the elephant a makeover, what would you do and how would she look at the end of it? (p.17)
- Do you have a photograph of you on the same thing or at the same place as your father or mother when they were children? If so, tell us about it. (p.17)
- Have you ever had a green face mask on? How did it feel? How do you think the elephant was feeling now that she was getting mended? (p.18)
- Why did the author say that Elly's toenails gleamed like china dinner plates? What other item could she have compared the toenails to? (p.18)
- Dad resprayed the elephant in glimmering grey. What did the machine that he used look like? Have you ever seen someone get a spray tan, or spray paint a fence or deck? How did the machine look similar? (p.19)
- Why did the author say that Elly felt like a calf again? (p.20)
- Have you ever heard the saying that 'an elephant never forgets'? People often use this saying when they are talking about a person who has a very good memory. (p.23)
- Why do you think people often like to talk about old memories? (pp.23–25)
- Do you know what the word 'elephantine' means? If not, can you take a guess based on the rest of the sentence? If you need help, look up the word in the dictionary. (p.26)
- How do you think Elly felt when all the children had a turn on the slide? (p.28)
- What is the difference between the sad kind of tired and the good kind of tired that Elly felt at the end of the story? (p.30)
- Apart from the makeover, what did Noah and his dad give Elly? (pp.30–31)
- Elephants use their trunks to communicate. What was Elly trying to tell everyone when she let out a long, loud trumpet sound? (p.32)

# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: ROCKET PARK OR ROBOT PARK

The story is based on a real place affectionately referred to as the Elephant Park. In the story, Elly had lived in the playground for many years. In the beginning of the story, she was sad because the children always played on the fancy new playground equipment and ignored her. Imagine that you're a designer and have been asked to create a new playground called Rocket Park or Robot Park. Draw what the playground might look like. For instance, it might have a giant-sized rocket with stairs going up the centre of it and a slide going down it. Or the playground might have a very large robot and the head has a viewing platform where you can see across the whole playground. The robot's eyes could have binoculars or telescopes set into them.

## ACTIVITY 2: ELEPHANT MAKEOVER

The author was inspired by the iconic elephant slide in a park in Christchurch, New Zealand. The slide was built in the 1970s, so has probably had at least one makeover between then and today. Elly the Elephant of Elephant Park had a makeover during the story too. Dad filled in the gaps, fixed her broken tusks and painted her toenails. He also resprayed her a new grey. Imagine that you were a local artist who could paint Elly any colour and add interesting patterns to her. Draw Elly the Elephant's outline on a large piece of paper. Using paint and even glitter, give Elly your very own makeover. If you're needing inspiration for how to paint your elephant, look on the Internet for the Elephant Parade, which was a real art exhibition that was held across the world in which famous and unknown artists hand-painted large elephant statues with their own unique designs. Display all your finished elephant pictures on the classroom walls.

## ACTIVITY 3: PLAYTIME!

Elly and Noah had fun playing in the paddling pool and camping outside in the back yard. What would you do if you had Elly come for a sleepover? List five things on a sheet of paper and then draw your favourite pasttime on the sheet of paper too. Add speech bubbles to the characters. Have Elly and Noah say something about what they are doing.

## ACTIVITY 4: AN ELEPHANT-SIZED MENU

On page 10, Noah foraged in the vegetable garden and fetched a bucket of carrots, potatoes and bok choy for Elly to eat for dinner. Dad brought out mint chip ice cream and strawberries for dessert. Plan a dinner menu for Elly. Write what you could have for the starter, the main meal and the dessert. Look at a real menu to see how the chef describes his or her dishes. Remember, elephants eat a lot of food!

## ACTIVITY 5: HOLIDAY FOR TWO

Noah thought that Elly needed a holiday and suggested that she went home with him for the rest of the weekend. Imagine if Noah and Elly went much further afield and that they both went on holiday in another part of the world. For example, they could go skiing in Switzerland, snorkelling on a reef in Fiji or hiking in the mountains in Canada. Draw the outfit that Elly and Noah would wear on their holiday and write which country they went to and what they did.

## ACTIVITY 6: A PLAYGROUND MEMORY

Elly the Elephant remembered when Mrs Henderson had her sixth birthday party at the park and when Mr Sisifa knocked a tooth out on the ladder. Pretend a piece of playground equipment that you've played on remembered something that you did. It might be a happy occasion or it might even be when something not-so-happy happened, such as what happened to Mr Sisifa. Get into small groups. Taking turns, tell one playground memory that you've experienced to the others in the group.

Written by Janine Scott