

The Magician's Elephant

BY KATE DICAMILLO

ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA

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Please visit

www.walker.co.uk/themagiciansselephant

for more resources,
information, and news about
The Magician's Elephant.



A Note from the Author

The Magician's Elephant began for me in the lobby of a hotel in New York City, when a magician appeared before me. He did not literally appear, of course. But the image of him was so strong and I saw him so clearly that it felt almost as if he were standing there in front of me. He was a man of advanced years, a magician of failing reputation, and looking at him, I understood that he was tired of trickery, illusion, sleights of hand. He wanted to perform real magic.

Kate DiCamillo

About the Book

In a dark, cold city at the end of the century before last, a boy named Peter seeks a sister who might never have lived, a magician nearing the end of his career performs a feat that can't be done, and an elephant who doesn't know where she is finds a way home... Impossible quests end triumphantly in Kate DiCamillo's luminous new novel, which conjures a world that is both completely magical and totally true.

Questions to Discuss

1. Peter is told by the fortune-teller that the “truth is forever changing” (page 13). Do you agree? Can something that was once true become false? Are there important truths at the beginning of *The Magician’s Elephant* that aren’t true by the story’s end?
2. The old magician keeps insisting that he intended to conjure a bouquet of lilies, not an elephant. But is he being honest? Why did he want to perform real magic that night in the Bliffendorf Opera House? Why couldn’t he undo his magic?
3. What is the great lie that Vilna Lutz tells Peter? Why does he tell it? What lies do you think the old soldier tells himself?
4. The elephant and the magician have been placed behind bars, but they aren’t the only confined characters in the novel. What restricts Madam LaVaughn? How free are Peter and Adele?
5. One dark day Peter decides “that it was a terrible and complicated thing to hope, and that it might be easier, instead, to despair” (page 57). In what ways is despair easier than hope? Does Peter really believe that hope isn’t worth the fight? Do you?
6. How does the arrival of the elephant stir up the people of Baltese? Why does the countess Quintet regret its arrival? How does she regain the upper hand?
7. When does Peter realize that he doesn’t want to be a soldier anymore? What makes him turn against his military training (page 104)?
8. Discuss the elephant’s predicament. How has she been failed by the magician’s trick? What is the magical transformation she seeks?
9. Sister Marie has no doubt that every creature has its own name, even the elephant (page 96). Why are names so important? Would you be a different person if you had a different name?
10. What does Gloria Matienne long for? Why does she fear she’ll never have it? When does she realize that she will?
11. What promise does Peter make to the elephant? Why does he initially regret making it? How does he succeed in keeping it?



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*“Who could keep
from loving a boy so
brave and true?”*

— *Gloria Matienne*

Activities

1. Have the students imagine that they are making room for an elephant in class. Ask: How much floor space would it need? How much headroom? Invite students to block out the elephant's footprints on the classroom floor and direct you in marking where the top of its head would be – that is, if your ceiling is high enough. Ask them to research what kind of food and how much food an elephant requires and to calculate how much it would cost to feed their visitor for a week.
2. Ask your class: Where would you set *The Magician's Elephant*? Invite children to take cues from the text and decide which region of the world might be home to the imaginary city of Baltese. Have them research some real-life cities that Baltese resembles. Ask them to find images of nineteenth-century cathedrals, marketplaces or grand homes that might exist there.
3. Programme a Kate DiCamillo film festival for your class or as a family-friendly event for the whole school. (Kate Dicamillo's award-winning novels *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *The Tale of Despereaux* have been made into very successful films.) As a related project, brainstorm with students about the cinematic possibilities of *The Magician's Elephant*. Who would your students cast in the leads?
4. In *The Magician's Elephant*, both Peter and Adele dream of being reunited. Ask your students: What do you dream about? Invite them to keep a log of their dreams for a few weeks, just for themselves. Explain that dreams tend to slip away quickly, but that they may be caught if one gets into the habit of writing them down first thing each morning.
5. For a taste of readers' theatre, work with students to stage a dramatic reading of a favourite scene in *The Magician's Elephant*. Ideally, the scene would include several characters and plenty of dialogue. One good possibility is the scene at the beginning of chapter 3, when the bewildered Baltese police department struggles to figure out how to handle an outlaw elephant.
6. In *The Magician's Elephant*, a carving high atop the cathedral depicts the elephant's extraordinary effect on Baltese. Ask students: How does our community commemorate its past? Does it do so in museums, municipal buildings, churches, graveyards? Brainstorm with students to identify local historical sites. If possible, arrange visits with the class.



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Peter felt a small stab of fear. What if, after all this time, he could not bear the truth? What if he did not really want to know?

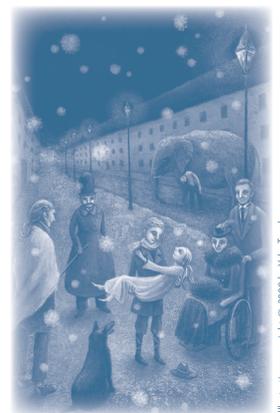


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"Magic is always impossible," said the magician. "It begins with the impossible and ends with the impossible and is impossible in between. That is why it is magic."

About the Author

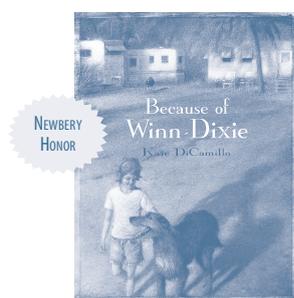
Winner of the Newbery Medal for *The Tale of Despereaux*, Kate DiCamillo has captured a huge audience and nearly every major children's literature award for her novels, early chapter books, and picture books. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Florida, Kate DiCamillo now lives in Minneapolis.

About the Illustrator

A graduate of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, Yoko Tanaka is the illustrator of *Theodosia and the Serpents of Chaos* by R. L. LaFevers and *Sparrow Girl* by Sara Pennypacker. She lives in Los Angeles and Bangkok.

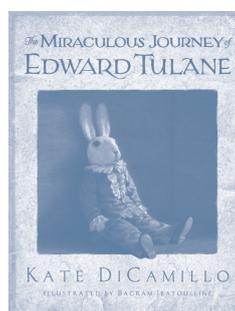
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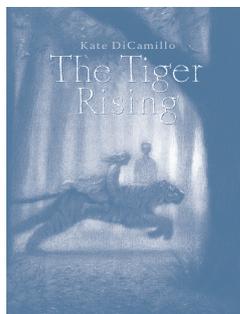
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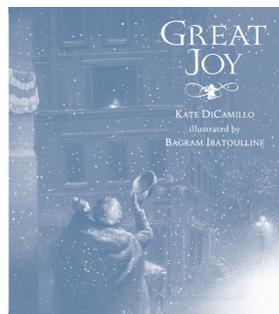
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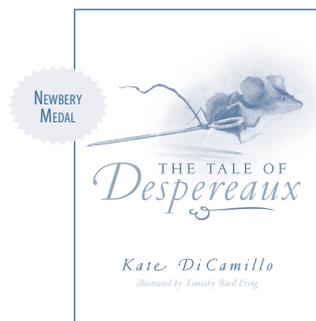
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