

STAR the Elephant

Remy Lai



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Recommended for: 6 to 9 year olds

Themes: Friendship, animals, climate change, conservation, adventure, survival, science, nature, environment

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature

Summary

Hi! I'm Star and I'm an elephant. There isn't enough food left on my island, so my herd has to split up. But the world out there is so big! Soon I am lost and alone, facing giant spiders and a big, wild ocean and the scariest thing of all ... humans! Will I ever see my family again?

A Word from the Author

'I have always loved animals, and as a kid, I devoured fiction and non-fiction books about them. Inadvertently, reading about animals led me to finding out about other issues. Because animals are so connected to everything, they became my gateway to the rest of the world.

'While researching for a project, I came across the true story of elephants who swam from Malaysia to Singapore, and I was riveted. In 1990, three bull elephants in Malaysia lost their home due to deforestation. The smallest elephant was 1.8 metres tall at shoulder height. In search of a new home, the elephants swam 1.6 kilometres across the Johor strait to the neighbouring country of Singapore. They landed at one of the islands, Pulau Tekong, which is home to a military base. The three bull elephants were first spotted on 29 May. They were not seen again for about a week, but they left plenty of evidence of their presence. The Singapore armed forces worked with the Malaysian wildlife department and the Singapore zoo to track down the elephants and relocate them to Endau-Rompin national park in Malaysia.

'To protect animals like Star from the effects of deforestation, you can help reduce the demand for timber products by recycling and cutting down on paper waste. You can help in other ways, too, like planting trees and raising money to donate to organisations that help the environment and animals.

'All of the books in the series have a theme of hopefulness. While humans have contributed to the animals' plight, in the end, it's the humans who can (and do) save the animals. It is up to us humans to help. Together, we can protect the earth!'

– Remy Lai

NEW SERIES:
Surviving the Wild

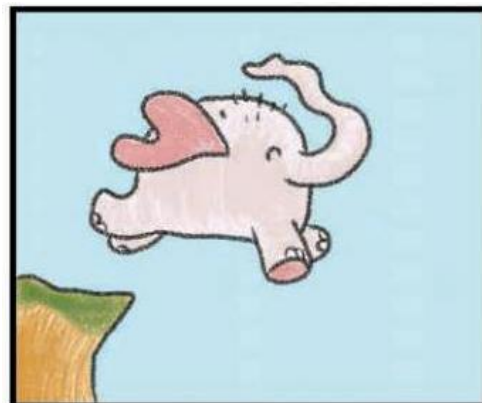
A heartfelt and hopeful **early reader graphic novel** series featuring adorable animals surviving in the wilderness despite the perils of climate change, from the award-winning creator of *Pawcasso*.

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before Reading

Hold up the cover of *Star the Elephant*, while masking the book's title with your hand. Now ask the following questions:

- What kind of animal is Star? [Reveal the title once it is established that Star is an elephant.] What are the two main types of elephants? How can you tell the difference between these two main types? Name some countries you might expect to find elephants. What sort of food might Star eat?
- Explain to students that this is a book in a series called *Surviving the Wild*. [Point to the logo in the upper right-hand corner and ask questions, such as] What sort of dangers do you think Star might face living in the wild? What can we do to keep creatures like Star safe in the wild?



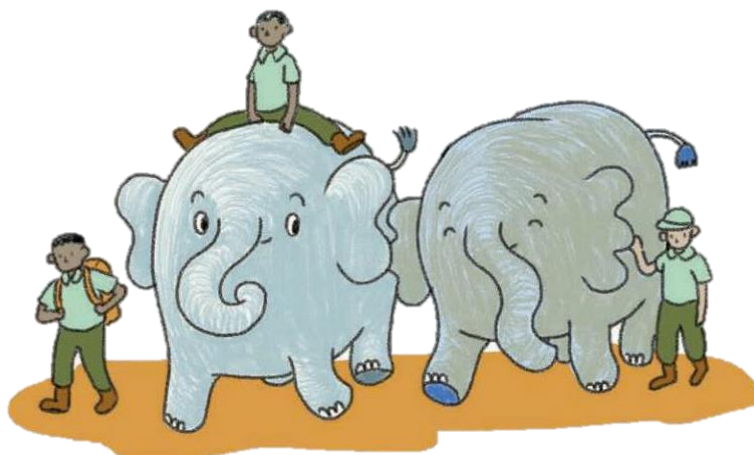
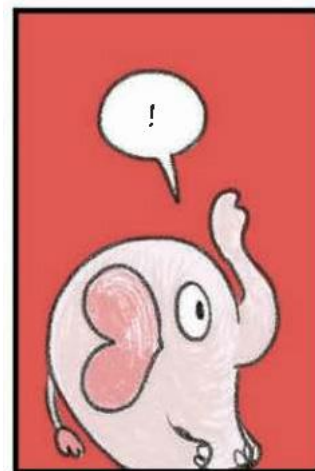
Comprehension Questions

1. Fill in the blanks: Star's mum's most important rule is, 'Don't go
.....' (page 4) Aunty's most important rule is, 'Stay
.....' (page 6)
2. Why does Star's herd have to split up and go to different places?
(pp 8–12)
3. What do Star's mum, Star and Aunty discover when they go in
search of bananas? (pp 14–16)
4. How do elephants find and eat palm oil fruit in the wild? (pp 18–19)
5. What dangers do humans pose to elephants in the wild? [Hint: think
about the type of food Star likes to eat, how it grows and the types
of things we see humans doing to Star's home.]
6. How did the human react to Star when he fell in the water after
chasing the giant crab? (pp 37–40) Why do you think he reacted this
way to meeting an elephant?
7. Why does Star's mum change her most important rule after being
shot with a tranquiliser dart? (page 61)
8. Which sense (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) does Star use to
track his mum and Aunty on the island? (pp 68–69)
9. Do all humans in the story pose a threat to Star and the other
elephants? What good things do humans do in the story?
10. List three things you learned about elephants from the information at
the end of the story (pp 100–103) and three things about fighting
deforestation. (pp 104–107)



Visual Literacy in Graphic Novels

- Read pages 4 and 5 of the book and with your finger trace the direction that you read the story. Did your finger trace a letter Z? If it did, that's good, because that is how many graphic novels are meant to be read. If it didn't, go back and see if you can re-read the pages using the Z-shape. Did the story make more sense this time? For older students: not all graphic novels are read left-to-right. Research the term 'manga' and explain how those books are meant to be read.
- Graphic novels show you how a character is feeling. Star sometimes feels happy, scared and exhausted in the story. Can you find images of Star feeling these emotions and explain what it was in each image that helped you recognise that feeling?
- Onomatopoeia is when words sound like their meanings – for example words such as *boom*, *crash* or *bounce*. Graphic novels often feature lots of onomatopoeic words – and these are often handwritten in special lettering, so the word also looks like its meaning! Turn to page 54 and look at the word *CRACK!* How does the way the word is presented (including the coloured shape around the jackfruit) help us understand what is happening? And sometimes words aren't necessary at all. Turn the page and look at the three letters – *ZRB!* – that convey the sound of the tranquilliser dart hitting Star's mum and Aunty. Can you find another example of letters forming a non-word to convey a sound a few pages later? [Answer: *FWUMP!* on page 60.]
- The term *panel* is used in graphic novels to describe each sequential image and its accompanying words. Panels are often similar in size but can be bigger or smaller at points as a special way to tell the story. Turn to pages 2 and 3 to see an example of very tall panels. Why do you think the book's creator decided to use tall panels to show Star diving deep in the water? Can you find other examples where changing the size or shape of panels helps tell the story?
- Panels in graphic novels are often, but not always, framed with a thin, black line. So, frames are the borders around panels. Frames, and sometimes the lack of them, can tell us quite a lot in graphic novels too. Turn to pages 24–28 and describe why you think the frame disappears the further Star swims in the ocean. Can you find other examples in the book where the frames change shape or disappears?
- The story in a graphic novel is usually shown within the frames around panels ... but not always! Look at how the water breaks the frame on page 37 when Star falls in. What does breaking the frame here suggest about how much water was splashed up? There's a similar example on page 60. Can you explain why you think Aunty's body breaks the frame here?



- A gutter is the blank space between panels in a graphic novel. This space is often, but not always, thin. Gutters may look simple but they do a very important job because they help us understand changes in the story over time. Turn to page 76 and look at the three images of Star in the water. In the first, Star is exhausted, sinking and about to drown. In the next we see human hands with a rope around the elephant. While in the last panel, Star is being raised to the water's surface. There are no words on this page but our brains help us work all of this out, as well as imagine the boat carrying the humans finding Star, deciding to save the elephant, throwing the rope in the water and hauling Star into their boat. The gutter made you, the reader, create the part of the story that Remy Lai left blank. Can you find other examples of this occurring in the story?
- For older students: Now that you know about panels, frames and gutters, try creating your own short story in a comic format. The story can be about anything you like but it should include simple text and feature at least six panels.

Climate Change Activism

- As a class, make a poster of the many ways students can help stop deforestation and display it around your school.
- Why not organise a Fight Climate Change Day at your school canteen? Try serving only vegetarian food for a day (if we eat less beef, forests don't need to be destroyed to make way for cattle) and make sure that palm oil is not used in any of the products sold. (Palm oil production is directly related to farmers cutting down trees in forests in Asia).



About the Author and Illustrator

Remy Lai was born in Indonesia, grew up in Singapore and currently lives in Brisbane, Australia, where she writes and draws stories for kids with her two dogs by her side. She is also the award-winning creator of *Pie in the Sky*, *Fly on the Wall* and *Pawcasso*.

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