



2009

The Magician's Elephant

Donna Cardon

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DiCamillo, Kate. *The Magician's Elephant*. Illustrated by Yoko Tanaka. Candlewick, 2009. ISBN 9780763644109. \$16.99. 201 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Orphans--Juvenile fiction; Missing children--Juvenile fiction; Elephants--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

In order to enjoy this book, the reader must suspend all desire for realism. The events of the story are like the events of an old folktale. Just as one does not ask why the miller has a talking cat in the story of *Puss in Boots*, in this story the reader cannot wonder for too long how an elephant could drop out of the air during a magic show. It just does, and the story goes on from there. The elephant's arrival sparks a series of events surrounding a boy searching for his long-lost sister. Other characters are searching for things too: the police inspector is looking for the answer to "what if?", the stone carver is looking for a reason to stop laughing, and the elephant is looking for a way home. As in *The Tale of Despereaux*, all the yearnings are resolved through the compassion and courage of the main character.

DiCamillo weaves this story like a tapestry, with seemingly unconnected events coming together in the end. The characters are not real people; they are emotions incarnate, symbolizing secret desires of the human heart. DiCamillo's language lulls the reader into a dream-like state with its poetic rhythm and even tempo. Tanka's misty, surreal illustrations match the tone and mood of the book. This is a good book for a young readers' circle because DiCamillo gives her audience much to discuss and ponder.

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