



## Queenie: One Elephant's Story

Written by Corinne Fenton and illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe

Teacher Notes prepared by Joy Lawn, Children's Literature Consultant

Readership

Primary - Junior Secondary

Class study – Zoos, Conservation, Australia in the early twentieth century

Visual literacy

Independent reading

Genre Picture book, history

There was a time when for tuppence you could ride on the back of an elephant at a zoo. Queenie was one such elephant. Until her death in 1945, she patiently carried up to 500 people a day.

About Queenie: One Elephant's Story

Queenie was found in India. She was captured and taken to Melbourne Zoo, where she gave rides, was teased and retaliated in kind. She was the star of the zoo. When she killed her keeper she was destroyed even though she was loved by many.

Themes

Elephants

Zoos

Bullying

Relationships between humans and animals

Animal death

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## SOSE/HSIE

India Queenie, the elephant, came from India. Discover more about India from the book *Queenie: One Elephant's Story*, particularly from the illustration where Queenie is loaded onto the truck and taken to Calcutta (cows – Hindu, writing, buildings, people, clothes). Also use other sources to discover more about India. Present an Indian scene or story as a moving image. This may be done using Indian shadow puppets. Shadow puppets use the shadows of 2-dimensional figures against a transparent screen, with a light source behind. The Ramayana is a famous story in India, featuring Hanuman the monkey god. Instructions on how to make the shadow puppets for the Ramayana are at [www.civilization.ca/cultur/inde/indact1e.html](http://www.civilization.ca/cultur/inde/indact1e.html)

Animals as transport Students brainstorm a list of animals used for transport, such as elephants, camels, horses, buffalo... Include examples from Australia's past and from other countries. In groups, select an animal. Describe what equipment is used to facilitate transport-use, such as a harness, seat, wagon... What products are (and have been) transported using animals? Where and when did this occur? Present findings in written form, each inside a large cut-out shape (paper or cardboard) of the featured animal.

Famous Animals Research other famous animals, such as Harriet the Galapagos Tortoise, Aneena and Euan – Asian elephants at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park in England, and animals that have saved lives. Present findings by conducting a mock interview with the animal's keeper, owner or discoverer.

Australian History What clues from the text – written and illustrated – show that this story happened in Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century? (clothing, hats, feeding zoo animals, buildings – background of the Centenary Floral Parade).

Primary and Secondary Sources Locate some primary or secondary source material that the author and illustrator may have used to bring Queenie's story to life. For example, newspaper article about the Centenary Floral Parade. What sort of material is available? What else can you discover? Incorporate your findings into an appendix. Why may the author have omitted an appendix from the book? Also source the author's website [www.corinnefenton.com](http://www.corinnefenton.com), the publisher- black dog books, and the Melbourne Zoo website. Wikipedia has a link.

Animal deaths Read the account of Queenie's death, and reasons for it. There seems to be a dual reason for her death: she killed her keeper and the cost of food was too high. Which, or both reason, do you believe to be true, and why? Should an animal that accidentally or deliberately kills a person be destroyed? Consider issues of health and safety. Discover deaths of other high profile animals or groups of animals, such as whales. Extension: compare with the consequence for a human who kills someone else.

## SCIENCE

other sources where possible, with contemporary zoos. Particularly consider habitat. Present findings as a comparison table.

2. Outline improvements in zoo habitats. Present as an upturned pyramid, with major and widespread changes on the top (largest) level.

3. A ride on Queenie was the highlight of a zoo visit. What is a current highlight of a zoo visit? Extension: a field trip to the zoo, focusing on these issues.

**Elephants** Research the differences between Indian/Asian and African elephants. Present findings on labelled elephant diagrams. Research their lives in the wild, including habitat, threats to survival, social structure, communication, sleep, eating and drinking. Asian elephants have been brought to Australia from Thailand in 2006. Explore the legality of this and their current condition. Extension: Adopt an elephant (through a zoo).

**Food** Children left apples and peanuts on the fence posts for Queenie to take. Is this food appropriate for elephants? What should they eat? When living in the wild in India, Queenie ate grass and wild bananas. Which animals can be fed by children today? What should they be fed? Find cases where people are feeding animals inappropriately. (Harry's Practice on TV could be a starting point.)

**Domestic and wild animals** Define the difference between domestic and wild animals. Categorise animals into these two categories. When should animals be taken from the wild? When not? List reasons why wild animals should not be captured (need to be with own species, not humans; may endanger the species; may cause injury or sickness; illegal)

**Poaching and hunting** The capture and death of wild animals today and in the past has threatened many species. Research and list. Indian male elephants are at particular risk because of their ivory tusks. Should Queenie have been caught? Explain.

**Human and animal interaction** After reading about Queenie and her keepers, as well as the zoo visitors, research relationships between animals and humans. Consider how humans affect the lives of wild animals; and how domestic and wild animals respond to humans. Relationships with pets could be studied. Is there more or less opportunity for human and animal interaction now compared with in the past. Consider the different level of interaction by the animal 'professional' (like Steve Irwin), conservationists and other groups. Students take on roles in the 'hot seat'.

One student may take on the role of either a real or fictitious character. Other students take on roles of investigators such as journalists. The teacher takes a mediating role. The questions usually explore why the character has carried out certain actions. (p.15, Board of Studies NSW, A Resource of Classroom Practices, 1998)

## ENGLISH

### Reading and writing

**One Elephant's Story** – This is the subtitle of the book. Write about another elephant's story, possibly an elephant that was never captured, or an elephant that lives in a circus.

**Names** Explain the possible significance of Queenie's name (more common in early twentieth century; iconic connotations; a typical circus name). Would you call an elephant Queenie? Why or why not? Choose an alternative name. What are some other famous animal names (Skippy, Harriet, Lassie, Moby Dick, Babe, Black Beauty) Should animals be called human names or not? Tally the names of pets owned by students. What are the most popular names? What percentage of these names are also human names?

**Icon** What is an icon? (significant image or symbol) Is Queenie an icon? If so, how might Queenie have become an icon? (famous, the best part of a zoo visit, remembered with affection after death ...) Name some other famous Australian icons (places, people...) Select Australian icons to represent as a symbol or simple image.

**Figurative Language** Queenie is described: 'With a slow careful tread, Queenie walked through the years.' This 'picture language' is a metaphor. How does it evoke a timeless dimension to Queenie? Find other examples of figurative language in other literature, then write some of your own. Begin with taking a feature of an animal and writing about it symbolically or comparing it to something else (simile)

**Zoo Utopia** After reading the last double page in the book about the Trail of Elephants and considering what would make an environment ideal for another zoo animal, write a narrative above their utopian (ideal imaginary) life there.

**Humour and Tragedy** Give examples of both humour and tragedy from Queenie. Study both the words and illustrations.

**Comprehending** Why wouldn't Queenie board the truck without the bull elephant? (parent figure, fellow creature ...) Queenie is described as gentle. Is this accurate in light of what happened to her keeper?

**Animation** To develop and refine sequencing skills, create a storyboard or animation of Queenie's life, including being caught and giving rides at the zoo.

**Letter Writing** Children wrote to Queenie when the first merry-go-round arrived in Melbourne Zoo in 1931 in case she was jealous. Imagine that you were a child then. Write to Queenie about this and other issues. Alternatively, write to a zoo about current issues or questions.

## Listening and Speaking

Childhood memories Brainstorm special occasions students remember from when they were younger? Prepare individual talks about memorable visits to special places such as the zoo or Australian fauna parks. Which animals do you remember and why? Share your memories as a talk, beginning with an exciting event and concluding with what you would like to visit first if you returned.

Debate Riding an animal is better than a theme park ride OR Animals should stay in the wild. Hold a 'polarised debate' so that students can change their mind about their belief position during the exposition. The students sit in a horseshoe shape.

Those who agree with the statement to be debated sit on the right side of the horseshoe, those who disagree sit on the left side and those who are undecided sit across the top of the horseshoe.

The debate begins with a speaker who agrees with the statement, followed by a speaker who disagrees with the statement and then by a person who has yet to decide. Students may change positions around the horseshoe... (p.11, Board of Studies NSW, A Resource of Classroom Practices, 1998)

Keep an opinion log and update it when changing positions. (Time needs to be allowed for this.)

Discuss Queenie had Mondays off work. Do animals need a day off? Should they work at all? Give examples.

## VISUAL LITERACY

In a study of visual literacy, identify and comment on the following:

Colours

Title font and colours

Style

Frame The colour is inside and the illustration is sketched outside the frame. Why? What effect does this have? Why has the illustrator cut his frames at certain points – to create a circular, oval or rectangular shape?

Pose Do the other zoo animals such as the zebras and lions, look passive or active? Why? Do you think the illustrator has done this deliberately?

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT/ HEALTH

**Bullying** Some boys tease Queenie by pulling away food and sticking pins in her trunk. Talk about other instances of bullying animals. There may be recent accounts in the media. Is there a difference between bullying animals and humans? If so, what? Does one seem to be more or less acceptable? If so, by what groups of people? How valid are these views? Why is Queenie's retaliatory trick with the dirty water celebrated? Is there a lesson for bullies and the bullied here? Plan some appropriate strategies for known or hypothetical situations.

## CREATIVE ARTS

### Art

**Frame** (see Visual Literacy above) Draw an animal scene using a frame like this yourself.

### Drama

**Shadow Puppets** Make animal shadow puppets and prepare a simple puppet show. (See SOSE/HSIE – India)

### Craft

**Queenie publicity** Queenie was the star of Melbourne Zoo. Riding on her was the highlight of a zoo visit. Posters, pencils and postcards were created and sold about Queenie. These are not shown in the book, so design one of your choice. Pencils could be created by putting a design on paper and gluing it onto a pencil. Ensure that the publicity material is appropriate to the times by using the colours and other features of the book illustrations and design. Extension: have a Queenie party with cake, like children did on Queenie's birthdays. This could be the culmination of all activities inspired by Queenie: One Elephant's Story.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When Corinne Fenton learned about Queenie the elephant, she knew she had to write her story. Corinne has more than fifteen children's books published, but *Queenie: One Elephant's Story* is her first picture book. Corinne is the Victorian Coordinator of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Peter Gouldthorpe was born in Melbourne in 1954 and now lives in Tasmania. He is recognised as one of Australia's most versatile and skilful illustrators, adept at capturing and evoking the deepest emotions through his art, notably in picture books for older readers. Peter also paints landscapes, portraits and commissioned work, and designs stage sets. Peter has received many awards and commendations for his beautiful work, including the Children's Book Council Picture Book of the Year Award for *First Light*.

