

SYLVIA BISHOP

ERICA'S ELEPHANT

About this resources

This pack begins with questions about the whole book, suitable for a book club. It then contains, by chapter:

Discussion questions

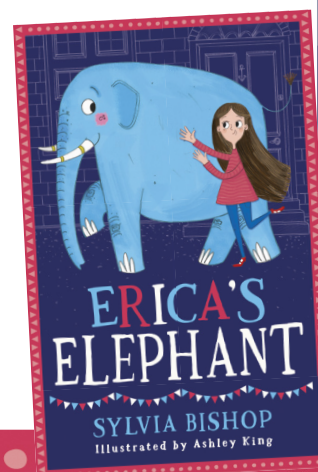
For whole class responses, book clubs etc.

Comprehension questions

Suitable for guided reading sessions
or for written work.

Writing exercises

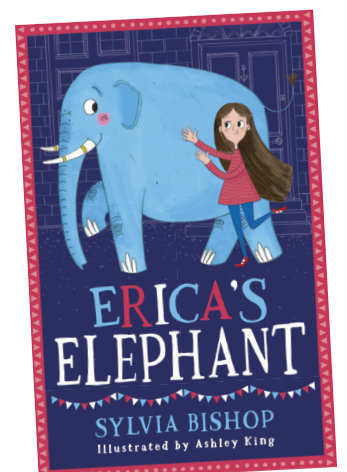
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Whole book questions

1. Do you think the ending was happy or sad? Why?
2. Why do you think the Elephant found it so difficult to make his final choice?
3. What kind of person is Erica? Do you like her?
4. Things were very difficult for the Elephant at first. Why?
What kind of real life situations might make people feel like the Elephant?
5. Erica misjudges people in the book, and at one point says sadly, 'It's people I can't get the hang of'.
Why do these incorrect judgements happen, do you think?
6. At the end, Erica tells us that she had to stop the story somewhere, but that life of course carried on. What does this suggest about the difference between books and life? How do you think authors decide where a story ends?



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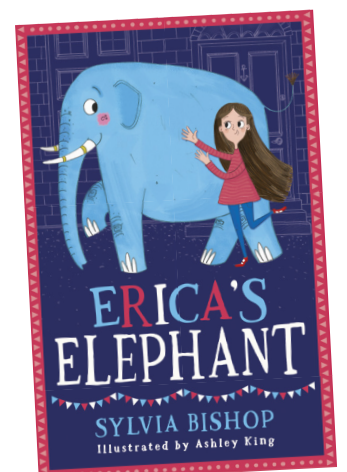
The First Chapter: In which the Elephant arrives

Discussion questions

- Would you invite the Elephant inside? Why/ why not?
- How do you think the Elephant is feeling throughout this chapter?
- What kind of person does Erica seem to be?

Comprehension questions

1. When Erica lets the Elephant inside, the author describes her house. Which detail tells us that Erica's house is by the seaside?
2. What do you think Uncle Jeff is like? Find words or phrases that suggest this.
3. When the Elephant discovers the mirror and starts TRONKing in terror, Erica sighs. Why? What might she be thinking?
4. Find two details that tell you that the elephant is upset when Erica doesn't eat the bird.
5. The author describes the ferris wheel as 'Impossible'. Why do you think she used this word?
6. The author tells us that Erica and the Elephant 'crunched along the beach'. Why does she use 'crunch' – what does this tell us?
7. Earlier in the chapter we were told the Elephant 'flicked his tail around nervously'. Find the word in the paragraph beginning 'So Erica got on the Elephant's back' that tells he is now feeling more confident.
8. The Elephant starts eating people's front gardens, and Erica plans to talk to him about it later. What do you think Erica is worried might happen as a result of this.
9. Look at the passage where Erica explains the leaflet headed THE SEABREEZE ZOO. Find one phrase that tells us Erica is nervous about what she has to say.



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The First Chapter: In which the Elephant arrives

Comprehension questions (cont.)

10. How does the Elephant feeling about Erica's explanation of this leaflet? Pick out three details the author uses to show us what he feels.

What do you think will happen to Property in the next chapter?

Writing exercise

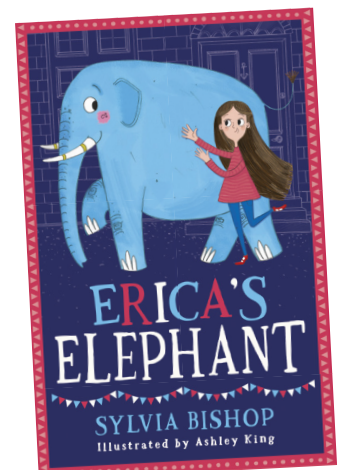
In this chapter, an elephant arrives on Erica's doorstep. Choose another animal and write about its arrival (the human can be Erica, or someone different!)

Hints for planning:

- Decide how the human feels about the animal, and how the animal feels about being there. This will make it easier to decide what they will both do and say.
- Brainstorm ways that your chosen animal behaves, e.g. elephants stamp heavily, eat greenery, etc.
- Hint: Can you combine these two points of your plan? For example, a scared elephant might carefully nibble a leaf; but a curious elephant would try everything in the garden.

Hints for writing:

- This piece should be in the third person, and the past tense
- Don't forget to think about the sights, sounds and smells that will make this scene vivid and alive for your reader.



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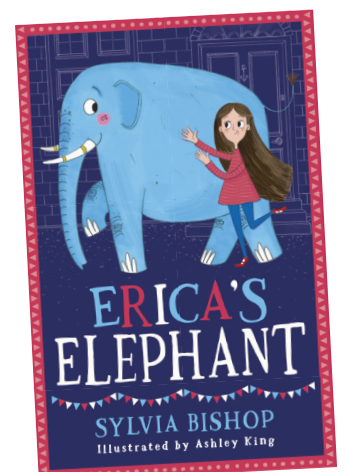
The Second Chapter: In which the Elephant earns a reputation

Discussion questions

- What kind of person do you think Miss Pritchett is?
- How do you think the Elephant's feelings have changed since the first chapter? Why?

Comprehension questions

1. In the first sentence, Erica's visitors are described as a 'gaggle'. The word 'gaggle' is normally used to describe a group of geese. What does it suggest about the humans on Erica's doorstep?
2. After Erica confirms that she has an elephant, we are told that 'this information made the Gaggle brave'. Which details tell us that the Gaggle was not brave before?
3. Erica makes a plan after the Gaggle leave. Summarise this plan. How will it help her and the Elephant?
4. Look at the passage beginning 'Then they waited'. Which phrase tells us that the Elephant is hungry?
5. After the queue appears, Erica and the Elephant race about getting ready. Is the Elephant's knee still causing trouble? Pick out the phrase that tells you this.
6. When the Elephant is performing, one boy climbs a tree and watches in 'awe'. What does 'awe' mean in this context?
7. Look at the passage beginning 'And so they settled into a happy routine'. Erica initially bought cabbage from the local shop, but she does something different now. What has she changed? Why do you think she did this?
8. Look at the introduction of Oliver Drew. Which word tells us that as well as being very tall, Oliver Drew was very thin?



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The Second Chapter: In which the Elephant earns a reputation

Comprehension questions (cont.)

9. Summarise what Oliver tells Erica about how elephants communicate over long distances.
10. What do you think might happen next after this chapter?
Why shouldn't Erica ignore Miss Pritchett?

Writing exercise

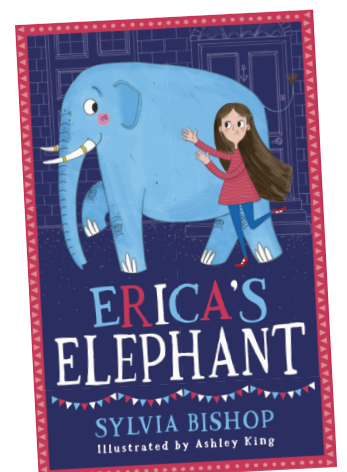
Write a diary entry about the entry from Miss Pritchett's point of view.

Hints for planning:

- Re-read the passage with Miss Pritchett, and note down any key events
- Think about how else the Elephant might have affected Miss Pritchett's day, living next door in a small house...
- Brainstorm what Miss Pritchett might think and feel about all this

Hints for writing:

- A diary entry should be in first person, past tense
- To really bring your writing alive, try and write in Miss Pritchett's 'voice'. What words and phrases would she use? This might be different to how you would write as yourself.



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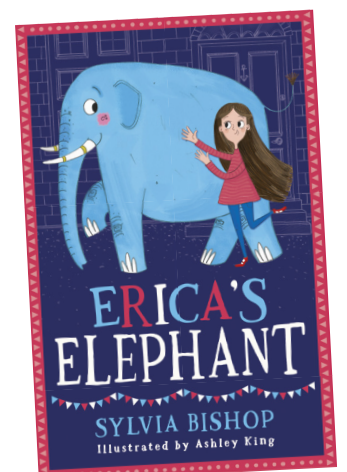
The Third Chapter: In which the problems really begin

Discussion questions

- 10. What kind of person do you think Amy Avis is? How do you feel about her?
- Would you have followed Miss Pritchett? Why/Why not?

Comprehension questions

1. While Erica is talking to Amy Avis, ‘An almighty CRASH came from the bathroom upstairs’. Why – what might have happened?
2. What do you think Amy Avis is like? What does she do that suggests this?
3. Summarise what Amy Avis has come to tell Erica.
4. Erica asks Amy Avis “What happens if I don’t let you take him?”. Did Amy Avis expect Erica to answer back, or is she surprised by this? How do you know?
5. Erica plans to find somewhere to ‘lie low’. What does this mean?
6. When Erica tells the Elephant what happened, he stood, but ‘staggered’. What does the word ‘staggered’ tell us about the way the Elephant is walking?
7. Why does Oliver say it is important that the Elephant doesn’t try walking on his bad knee?
8. Find two ingredients from Oliver’s medicine recipe.
9. The Elephant trod ‘gingerly’ down the stairs. What does ‘gingerly’ mean in this context?
10. At the end of the chapter, the author tells us that ‘Erica didn’t know what to think’.



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The Third Chapter: In which the problems really begin

Writing exercise

In this chapter, Amy Avis comes to tell Erica the Elephant must be taken away. Imagine this same scene, but invent a new character instead of Amy Avis, who comes from the council with the news.

Hints for planning:

- Look back at how the author introduces Amy Avis. Notice that as well as being told what she looks like, we are told how she moves, what she does, and what she says
- For your character, think about one adjective to sum them up.
Then using this to guide you, brainstorm:
 - > What they might look like
 - > How they would move and speak
 - > What they might do and say

Hints for writing:

- To fit with the story, this should be in the third person and the past tense
- To really bring your piece alive, remember to think about how Erica responds to this person.



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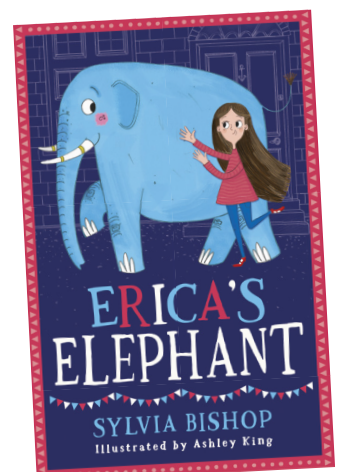
The Fourth Chapter: In which hiding an Elephant proves to be tricky

Discussion questions

- Erica feels she misjudged Miss Pritchett. Why did think this happened? What might have clouded her judgement?
- What do you think of Miss Pritchett now?

Comprehension questions

1. What is the effect of finding out that Miss Pritchett keeps such unusual pets? How does it change your opinion of her?
2. Does the Elephant like ants? How can you tell?
3. Look at the passage beginning “Erica began to feel very foolish”. Summarise what Erica is realising here: what did she think Miss Pritchett was telling her before, and what does she think now?
4. Miss Pritchett says ‘I was cross with you for parading him around’. What does ‘parading’ mean in this context?
5. Summarise Miss Pritchett’s plan in your own words.
6. When the Elephant hides in Miss Pritchett’s bathroom, she warns him not to move. What would happen if he does move?
7. When Erica tells Miss Pritchett that the Elephant has run away, her voice is ‘quivering’. What does ‘quivering’ mean in this context?
8. While Erica is answering questions, before the strange noises begin, how does she feel? What words or phrases tell you this?
9. The author writes: ‘Again the awful noise blasted out’. What does the verb blasted tell us about what the noise is like?



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The Fourth Chapter: In which hiding an Elephant proves to be tricky

Comprehension questions (cont.)

10. The chapter ends with Amy Avis going upstairs to the bathroom.
What do you think is about to happen?
11. At the end of the chapter, the author tells us that 'Erica didn't know what to think'.
Why doesn't she know what to think – what is she confused about?

Writing exercise

In this chapter we see a new setting – Miss Pritchett's house. Imagine now that Miss Pritchett is full of something else unusual, instead of ants. If you like, you could use any of:

Balloons — Clocks — Parrots.

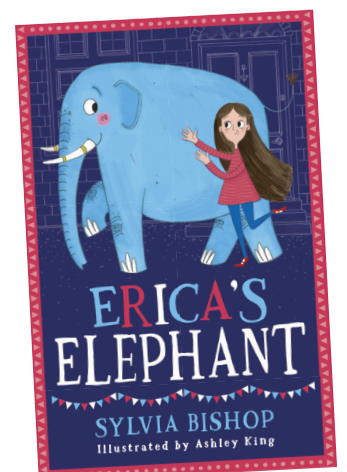
... or choose your own. Describe Erica and the Elephant arriving in this house.

Hints for planning:

- Brainstorm what sights, sounds, smells and touch sensations would be in this house.
- Next to your favourites from this list, note down how both Erica and the Elephant might react.

Hints for writing:

- To fit with the story, this should be in the third person, past tense.
- Notice how the author mixes together a description of the house with comments on Erica and the Elephant's reactions. Try to mix together both of these in your writing to make it come alive.



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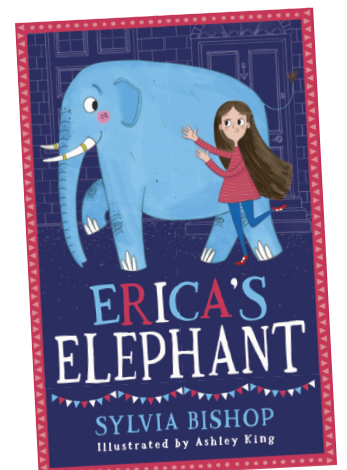
The Fifth Chapter: In which the truth comes out

Discussion questions

- Was Oliver's reveal a surprise to you? Why/why not?
- Erica says that it's people she can't get the hang of, and that the Elephant is more straightforward. How has she misunderstood people? Is this her fault? Does it happen often, do you think?

Comprehension questions

1. What happened to cause the aaahTROSHNSHK noise?
2. Look at the passage beginning 'They were going, it turned out, to the police station'. Which phrase tells you that Amy Avis is angry and determined?
3. Look at the way the Officer speaks to them. Is he feeling confident? How can you tell?
4. They are put into a cell. Is the cell large or small? How do you know?
5. The author describes Oliver as having 'spidery limbs'. What does this tell us about his appearance? And how does it make us feel about him?
6. Look at how Miss Pritchett responds to Oliver. Which phrase on this page tells us that she is cross?
7. Summarise what Oliver tells Erica.
8. Erica says 'It's people I can't seem to get the hang of.' Why does she say this?
9. Miss Pritchett tells Erica not to 'sit there moping'. What does 'moping' mean in this context?
10. Take a guess – what do you think Miss Pritchett's plan might be?



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The Fifth Chapter: In which the truth comes out

Writing exercise

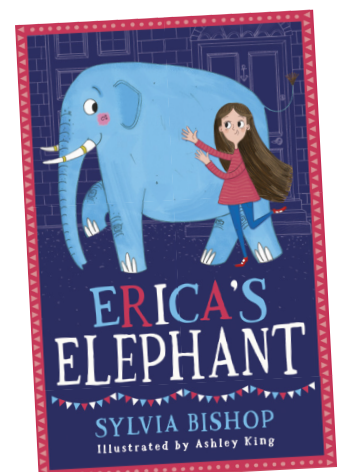
Write a letter to the police officer arguing that he should release Erica, Miss Pritchett and the Elephant.

Hints for planning:

- List the key arguments you will make
- Think about what arguments might be made against you. These are counter-arguments. If you can explain why these possible counter-arguments are wrong in your letter, it will be even stronger.

Hints for writing:

- It is helpful to use one paragraph for each key argument you want to make, and to write a sentence at the start of that paragraph that introduces your argument
- Remember the key features of a letter:
 - > Your address and the date should go in the top right hand corner
 - > Start with 'dear NAME'
 - > Write in the first person
 - > Sign off the letter at the end – you will need to choose a formal sign off in this case, as this is a formal letter.



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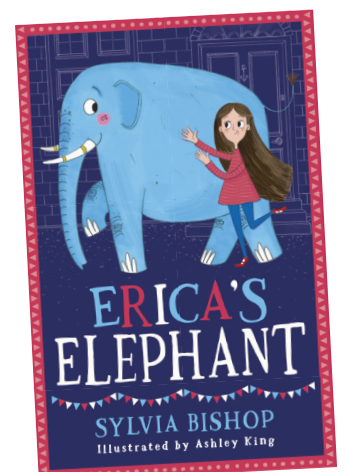
The Sixth Chapter: In which a whopping lie is told

Discussion questions

- Did you guess Miss Pritchett's plan?
- What do you think will happen now? Can Erica keep the Elephant?

Comprehension questions

1. While Erica sits in the cell talking to Amy Avis, Oliver and the police officer, she is nervous. Which phrase tells you this?
2. As they drive in the van, Erica finds it hard not to laugh at the 'oddball' collection. What does the word 'oddball' mean?
3. During the van ride, the author describes Oliver as a snake. What does this suggest about him? Think of as many different things as you can!
4. When they arrive at the zoo, Oliver's mood changes. How do you know? Why do you think this might be?
5. Name 5 types of animal that we know are in the zoo.
6. Erica says to Oliver, "Make some friends your own size. Children are complicated". Why does she use this phrasing? (Think back to the last chapter!)
7. Summarise the trick that the Elephant has played on Oliver.
8. When Oliver tells the journalist there is no story, the author says 'this was glaringly untrue'. Why? What evidence tells the journalists that Oliver is lying?
9. Why did Miss Pritchett and Erica invite the journalists – what might have happened, if they hadn't been there?
10. We know that, really, the Elephant has been asking animals to move and freeze. Oliver and Amy Avis don't know this. What do they think happened??



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The Sixth Chapter: In which a whopping lie is told

Writing exercise

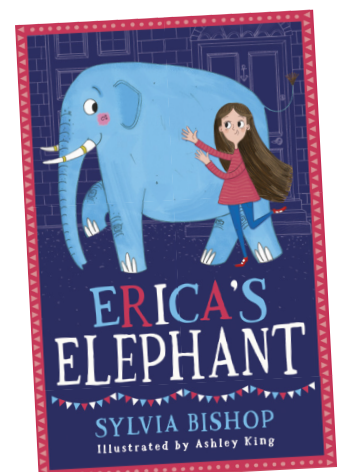
Use what you have learned about SeaBreeze Zoo to write an advert, persuading people to come and visit.

Hints for planning:

- Look back over the chapter and note down any features of the zoo
- Invent some more of your own. What would be attractive in a zoo?
- Don't forget to think about the information people need to know in order to be able to visit the zoo.

Hints for writing:

- You are aiming to persuade people, so use strong, emotive language
- Adverts use clear, punchy sentences
- You might want to use a blank page. Think about using pictures, and having letters of different sizes



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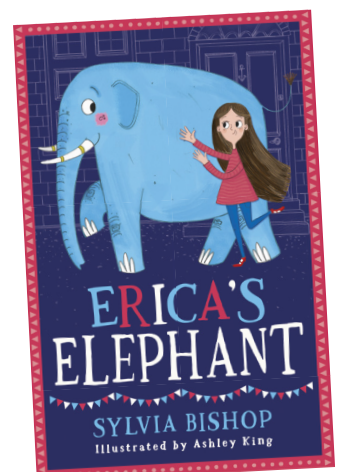
The Seventh Chapter: In which the question is taken to the top

Discussion questions

- Why do you think the Elephant's choice was so difficult for him?
- What makes somewhere 'home'?

Comprehension questions

1. The author says that 'no zoo in the country would take the Elephant after that'. Why not?
2. Do you think the Ministry for Exotic Animals and Hats is well organised?
Find three details to make your case.
3. When Bertram says that Erica's name rings a bell, she is 'baffled'.
What does 'baffled' mean?
4. Miss Pritchett wants to tell Bertram off – why? What has he done wrong?
And what was the consequence? (Think about the story so far.)
5. Which phrase tells us that Bertram hands the License over carelessly?
6. Erica says that Miss Pritchett's hat looks like it has 'measles'?
Why describe it this way – what does this make us feel about the hat?
7. When they go out to see the Elephant, he TRONKS 'breezily'.
What does 'breezily' mean? Do you think this is how the Elephant is really feeling?
8. Look at the adjectives the author uses to describe the picture on the poster, and the adjectives used to describe Erica's home. How are the two places different?
9. When Erica tells the Elephant that it is up to him whether he stays or goes, the author says that she says this 'as steadily as she could'.
What does this tell us about how Erica is feeling?



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The Seventh Chapter: In which the question is taken to the top

Writing exercise

10. We know that, really, the Elephant has been asking animals to move and freeze. Oliver and Amy Avis don't know this. What do they think happened?

Writing exercise

Write one of the newspaper articles about the frozen zoo.

Hints for planning:

- Skim the previous chapter again to note down key events. Remember that the reporters do not know the truth, so you need to think about how it would have seemed.
- Newspaper reports should answer the 5 Ws: What, when, where, who, why? Note down the answers to these five on your plan.

Hints for writing:

- When you're ready to start writing, remember the key features of a newspaper article:
 - > It will need a short, punchy headline
 - > It should be in the third person
 - > It should be in the past tense.
- You might want to include quotes from people you have interviewed, and a picture with a caption.



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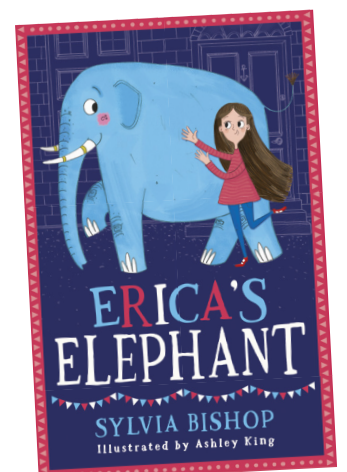
The Eighth Chapter: Farewells and Epilogue: A note from Erica

Discussion questions

- Do you feel that the ending was happy or sad? Why?
- How does knowing more about Erica's life change our feeling about the Elephant leaving?

Comprehension questions

1. Erica packs the unclejeffsroom curtains. Do you remember when have we seen the curtains from them before? How does mentioning them again now make the reader feel?
2. The Elephant struggled to make Erica lunch before, and now he has succeeded. How does he feel about this? Find the word which tells us.
3. The author says that Erica loved the Elephant 'too much to keep'. Explain why loving the Elephant means Erica must let him go.
4. At the opening of the epilogue, how do we know that time has passed? Find the phrase which tells us.
5. When Erica finishes the story, Miss Pritchett tells her off. What word here is closest in meaning to 'told off'?
6. What is Miss Pritchett's objection to the story told so far?
7. Erica studies zoology. What do you think 'zoology' means?
8. Why does Erica know about birds and ants as well as Elephants?
9. Erica says the story is about when 'a girl got an elephant – or he got her'. What is the difference between these two ways of phrasing their friendship?
10. How do you imagine the Elephant's life after he leaves Erica? Think about the details you learned in chapter 7.



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The Eighth Chapter: Farewells and Epilogue: A note from Erica

Writing exercise

Imagine that Erica has the chance to send the Elephant a letter about her life since they parted.

Hints for planning:

- List the key things Erica might want to tell the Elephant. You can use the epilogue to help you
- You can invent some details of your own, that aren't in the book. Think about:
 - > What has Erica enjoyed in her life since they parted?
 - > What might have made her sad?
 - > What hopes and dreams might she have for the future?
- Think about any questions she might have for him, too

Hints for writing:

- Remember the key features of a letter:
 - > **Your address and the date should go in the top right hand corner**
 - > **Start with 'dear NAME'**
 - > **Write in the first person**
 - > **Sign off the letter at the end – you will need to choose an informal sign off in this case, as this is a letter to a friend.**

