

Level II Alternate 2016 LAL Nebraska

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Teacher: Nancy Svoboda, Book: *The Magician's Elephant* by Kate DiCamillo

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Dear Kate DiCamillo,

Through reading your book, *The Magician's Elephant*, I have learned that all kinds of people can become friends and that the strangest things bring people together. The friendships between the characters in your book fascinate me. While at first glance they look to have nothing in common, they do. Each one of them is a little bit out of the ordinary. Each one is not quite as happy as they could be. Each one has an unhappy place in their heart – small, medium, or large, and that is what drives them together. Whether they know it or not, they are searching for something that will heal their heart, and they find it in the friends that they make.

But – as you already know – they also came together because of an elephant that was summoned by a spell. Animals can do amazing things, even by simply existing. This is true, not only in the world, but in your books. In your books, you have used an elephant, a dog, a squirrel, a tiger, a mouse, and a china rabbit to bring people together. Each of the animals helped the other characters in your books heal the part of their heart that was unhappy. As writer Anatole France once said, “Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened. “So when someone starts loving an animal, the part of their soul that is aroused draws them to other people who also love that same animal. Then, even after that animal is gone, their friendship prospers through their love for the animal.

In my twelve years, I have known a few people who were friends, yet seemed as different as night and day. I’ve often wondered how they became friends, but it doesn’t seem as odd now that I’ve read your book. This is the same circumstance as in *The Magician's Elephant*. This part of your book taught me that you don’t have to find obvious similarities with someone else to become friends. However, it does seem that there’s almost always some small similarity among people. My family has a card game named “Spot It!”. In “Spot It!”, everyone gets a circular card with little drawings on it. Each card has a different collection of drawings, but if you compare one card with another, there’s always a similarity, no matter how small. In your book, I “spotted” in each of your characters, an “imperfection” in each of their lives, an unhappy place in their heart that needed to be acknowledged, and then healed.

One of my friends can be quiet when she’s not around people she knows very well, so, as a result, some people think she’s quiet all the time and therefore not interesting. However, she’s actually a very interesting person and I have found many similarities between her and myself.

I’m an ambivert, so I can be very shy at times. However, I can be quite extroverted when I’m around my very close friends. But I can be *very* introverted when I’m around people that I don’t know. This is just one of the examples of how your book helped me: I realized that I could be friends with a whole other group of people, not just the people that are exactly like me. Now that I’ve read *The Magician's Elephant*, I have tried to be less shy. Even if I’ve only made small advances, your book has not only taught me a lesson, but it also continues to challenge me. Since

I'm so bad at making friends, often times I don't even try. However, after reading about how two orphans, a gargoyle carver, a soldier, a policeman, a noblewoman, a street beggar, a magician, and an elephant become friends, I figure that I can make friends too.

I haven't had this knowledge, this...*wisdom* for very long, but I have considered it deeply, and I now realize my true potential.

Sincerely,

Janna Marley