

Teacher Notes and Classroom Resources

Bandoola

By Beverley McWilliams

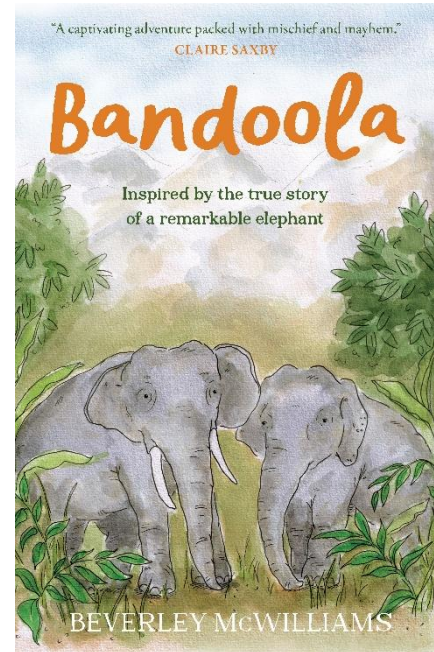
About the book

Deep in the forests of Burma, an elephant calf named Bandoola is in trouble – again.

Curious and headstrong, Bandoola can't seem to avoid mischief. Po Toke, the man who raised him, believes he will become a great logging elephant one day. But Bandoola doesn't want to spend his life hauling logs. He dreams of freedom and adventure.

When war sweeps across Burma and the Japanese advance into the forests, Bandoola must become the elephant Po Toke always believed in. With hope almost gone, he leads a group of elephants and refugees on a treacherous journey across the mountains to safety.

Inspired by true events, *Bandoola* is a story of courage, friendship, and the extraordinary bond between people and animals.



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Recommended for readers 8 – 14 years.

About the author

Beverley McWilliams is a multiple award-winning author from South Australia with a passion for historical fiction and stories about animals. Beverley's middle-grade novel, *Spies in the Sky*, won the ARA Historical Novel Prize 2024, was shortlisted for the Readings Prize and longlisted for the Booklinks Award for Historical Fiction. Beverley's published picture books include *Willow's Gumboots* which was the Speech Pathology Book of the Year 2025 and a CBCA notable.

Beverley is joint regional coordinator of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (South Australia). She lives near the beach with her family and menagerie of pets, who provide endless inspiration.

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Themes

- Courage/facing fears
- Friendship
- Freedom
- Loyalty

Courage/facing fears

Courage isn't about not being afraid but acting in spite of it. (p. 275)

Discuss

- We all have different things that we find difficult or that scare us. In the story, Bandoola is afraid of swamps, and Pya is afraid of people. How do their fears affect them? How do they overcome these fears?
- Can you think of a time when you had to do something that scared you? How did you feel before? How did you feel after?
- Bandoola shows great bravery when he leads the elephants and people over the mountain. But bravery isn't just about big acts of courage. There are many small, everyday acts that show bravery. Discuss some of the other occasions when Bandoola showed courage in the story. How can we show courage in our everyday lives?
- When Bandoola is afraid to cross the swamp, Pya encourages him. Can you think of a time when a friend helped you to be brave, or you helped a friend find courage?

Activities

- Everyone has fears, but courage is about being brave enough to do something even if it frightens you. Write down things that worry or scare you. For each example, note some courageous thoughts or actions that could help you face your fear.
- Being brave means doing things outside our comfort zone. This might be answering a question in class, making a new friend or trying a new activity. Small, brave actions can help build our confidence. Set yourself a personal courage challenge for the week. At the end of the week, reflect on your challenge: Did you complete your challenge? How did you feel? What did you learn?
- List the qualities you associate with a hero. Design your own superhero and write a short story or description about them.

Friendship

We made a great team and those long, hard days didn't seem so bad with a friend at my side. (p. 227)

Discuss

- What qualities do you think make a good friend?
- In the story, Pya is upset when she discovers Bandoola has lied to her. Sometimes we might let a friend down or hurt them, even when we don't mean to. Why is it important to forgive a friend? Do you think forgiveness can make a friendship stronger?
- The story explores the friendship between people and animals. Do you think animals can make good friends? In what ways can people show friendship to animals?
- How is the friendship between animals similar to the friendship between people? How is it different?

Activities

- Make or draw a friendship flower. In the middle of the flower, write your friend's name. On each petal, note a quality that makes them a good friend. Give your friendship flower to your friend.
- Although we often share things in common with our friends, they don't have to be exactly like us. Our friends might have different hobbies, different interests and different strengths. In what ways do you think differences can make friendships stronger?
- Sometimes we hear stories about unlikely friendships between different animals. For example, a gorilla and a kitten, an elephant and a dog, and a horse and a chicken have formed deep friendships. Research a story about an unusual animal friendship. What made this friendship special?

Freedom

When I was a calf, I used to dream of my freedom. Living as a wild tusker. Doing what I wanted. Going where I desired. (p. 198)

Discuss

- What do you think freedom means? Is this different for people and animals?
- How was Bandoola's life different in the logging camp compared to the life he would have lived in the wild?
- Working animals, like Bandoola, help people by doing jobs. Can you think of other animals that are used by people for work? Do you think it is fair for animals to work for people?
- In what way did Pya give up her freedom to care for her mother?
- At the time of the story, Burma was a colony of Britain. What effect do you think this had on the freedom of the Burmese people?

Activities

- Find the word 'freedom' in the dictionary. Rewrite a definition in your own words.
- Sometimes we take everyday freedoms for granted. Make a list of freedoms that you enjoy that not all children in the world may have. Think about everyday freedoms like choosing what clothes you wear or what music you listen to. Come together as a class and use these ideas to create a class 'Freedom Wall' showing the different freedoms we enjoy (you can write, draw, or cut out ideas from magazines).

Loyalty

I hesitated. I couldn't walk away and leave my friends. Not when they had been so kind to me. Not when they needed help. (p. 126)

Discuss

- Loyalty means standing by someone or something you care about. Can you think of some examples in the story where different characters demonstrated loyalty?
- Why do you think it is important to be loyal?
- Sometimes loyalty can be difficult. In the story, Bandoola gives up his chance of freedom because of his loyalty to Po Toke. Think about a circumstance where it may be hard to remain loyal. What would you do?

Activities

- Think about someone who has been loyal to you, such as a friend, family member or teacher. Write them a letter thanking them for their loyalty.
 - On strips of paper, write ideas on how you can show loyalty to your classmates and your school. As a class, use these strips to create a loyalty paper chain.
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English - Literature

Point of View

I could see the tiger's feet padding closer and closer. His pungent odour drifted through the air. He didn't smell like the other animals I had met in the forest. He smelled sour, like rotten meat. (p. 8)

Discuss

- *Bandoola* is written in first person and told from the point of view of an elephant. What is the difference between first person, second person and third person narrative? How can you recognise the point of view in a story?
- Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from the elephant's point of view?
- Can you think of any other books told from an animal's point of view?
- What are the potential challenges when writing from an animal's perspective?

Activities

- Choose a scene from the book where *Bandoola* is with another character. Write the scene from the other character's point of view. Now re-write the scene in third person.
- Visit your school library and choose a book written in first-person and one written in third person. Read a scene from each book and consider how the different narratives impact the story and how the reader connects with it.
- Choose an animal. Think about the physical characteristics and behaviours of your animal. Use this to write a story from your animal's point of view.

Literary techniques

Literary techniques are used by writers to help convey ideas and bring stories to life. Common literary techniques include simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, personification, symbolism, hyperbole and imagery.

Discuss

- As a class, discuss different literary techniques and what they mean.
- In what ways can literary techniques improve a story?
- Are there any literary techniques you prefer to use in your writing? Why?

Activities

- Imagery is using words to create pictures in the reader's mind by appealing to the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste). Imagery helps the reader experience a scene and connect with it emotionally. Find some examples of imagery in the story.
- Consider the following extracts from the story. Complete the table to note which literary techniques have been used.

	Literary technique(s)
<i>The first rays of sun filtered through the canopy, bathing the forest in a hazy pink glow. (p. 15)</i>	
<i>I was pulled clear of my trap, like a cork from a popgun. (p. 43)</i>	
<i>The cheerful chatter of babbler birds rippled through the undergrowth. The gentle breeze carried the honey-sweet scent of shower tree blooms. (p. 114)</i>	
<i>Spots of fat rain fell, pattering against my skin like fingers on a drum, trickling down my trunk, and bouncing softly off the sun-baked earth. (p. 115)</i>	
<i>a tension lingered over the forest like a dark cloud. It penetrated deep into the ground. It crept to the tops of the trees. (p. 189)</i>	
<i>A few moments later, there was a crackle... then a pop ... then a bang as the bamboo exploded, flashing like fireflies and cracking like twigs beneath our feet. (p. 225)</i>	
<i>The pearly morning mist settles on the dew-soaked ground. Bushes jewelled with delicate spider webs glisten and the air is filled with the promise of rain. (p. 288)</i>	

Vocabulary

The story contains language that you may not be familiar with, including Burmese words and words specific to elephants.

Discuss

- How does the choice of vocabulary enrich a story and setting?
- Why do you think the author included so many unfamiliar words in the story?
- Do you think technical and foreign words can add to the authenticity of a story, or do you think they make a story harder to follow?

Activities

- In *Bandoola*, the author defines some of the unfamiliar words in the text, but sometimes the reader needs to deduce the meaning of these words from the context. Consider the following words: tusker (p. 5), matriarch (p. 18), longyi (p. 28), kah (p. 169), dah (p. 193), fetter (p. 193). Can you work out what these words mean? Check your definition against the glossary.
- Glossaries feature regularly in non-fiction books, as these often include technical words and terms. Find some books with glossaries in your school library. Compare the glossaries in fiction and non-fiction books. Do you think these serve different purposes?

Poetry

Discuss

- In a group, brainstorm ideas for a poem about an elephant. Consider what you know about elephants and create a mind-map of descriptive and sensory words.

Activity

- A shape poem uses the words of a poem to form the shape of what's being described. An acrostic poem is a poem where the first letter of each line spells out a word when read vertically. Use the attached templates at the end of this document to write a shape poem and an acrostic poem about an elephant. Your poem doesn't need to rhyme, but think about poetic devices such as rhythm, imagery, alliteration, onomatopoeia and simile.

Humanities and Social Science (HASS)

History

Genre - Historical fiction

Historical fiction stories are set in real places during a particular period, but characters and events may be fictionalised. Historical fiction combines both elements of non-fiction and fiction. *Bandoola* is set in Burma (now Myanmar) between 1897 – 1945.

Discuss

- How does historical fiction differ from non-fiction?
- Do you think you can still learn about the past from historical fiction?
- What can historical fiction teach us about history which non-fiction may not?

Animals in war

We're forming an army – the Elephant Company of the Royal Indian Engineers. Together, the people and elephants of the jungles of Burma are going to defend their home and fight for their freedom. (p. 208)

Discuss

- Before reading this story, did you know about The Elephant Company and the role elephants played in World War Two?
- Do you know of any other animals that served in World War Two? Why do you think animals were used in warfare?
- Do you think it is right to use animals in war?

Activity

- Design a memorial to commemorate the role elephants played in World War Two.

Geography

Within moments, the gentle trickle of raindrops had morphed into a raging torrent, tearing through the treetops and pouring down the palm leaves. Thunder clapped. Lightning flashed. The rain slid down my trunk and splashed off my back like a waterfall over boulders, pouring fast in sheets so thick I could barely see. (p. 115)

Discuss

- Myanmar has a tropical monsoon climate characterised by three seasons (hot/dry, cold/dry and wet season). How does the climate in Myanmar compare to the weather where you live?
- How does a monsoon climate impact the environment and the lives of the people and animals who live there?

Activities

- Locate Myanmar on the map. Which countries border Myanmar?
- Make a note of any plants and animals in the story which you are not familiar with. Learn more about one of these plants or animals. Consider how they may have adapted to survive in their environment.

Civics and Citizenship

Po Toke came from a Shan village north of the river, but most of the oozies were Karen. It was confusing sometimes as they spoke with different words, but at least they used the same commands to address us elephants. (p. 16)

Discuss

- Myanmar is a diverse country with many languages, religions and cultures. Identify some of the different cultures represented in the story.
- In the story, characters from different backgrounds work together to create the elephant stairway. What can this teach us about cooperation and respect?
- Consider other examples in the story where people and animals work together to achieve a goal.

Science

Ma always told me how important it was to look after our trunks. They were our arms, our noses, our weapons, our hoses. If Ma's trunk was damaged, how would she breathe properly or drink or smell out food? How would she cuddle me? (p. 12)

Discuss

- A trunk is an elephant's most defining feature. What are some of the many ways in which an elephant uses its trunk?
- Female elephants and calves live together in family groups, usually led by an older female called a matriarch. Why do many animals choose to live together in groups or herds? How does this help their survival?

Activities

- Bandoola is an Asian elephant. Research the differences between Asian and African elephants. How might these differences reflect the environments in which the elephants live?
- Elephants communicate using sounds, body language, scent and vibrations. Find examples of each of these in the story.

Design and Technology

Once the framework was complete, we laid the logs across horizontally. Each log had to be perfectly positioned. After placing a log with my trunk, I nudged it into place with my head. Then I stood back to check my work before moving onto the next one. (p. 216)

Discuss

- Why was it so important to build bridges in the forests of Burma during World War Two?
- Why were elephants more successful at this task than people and machines?

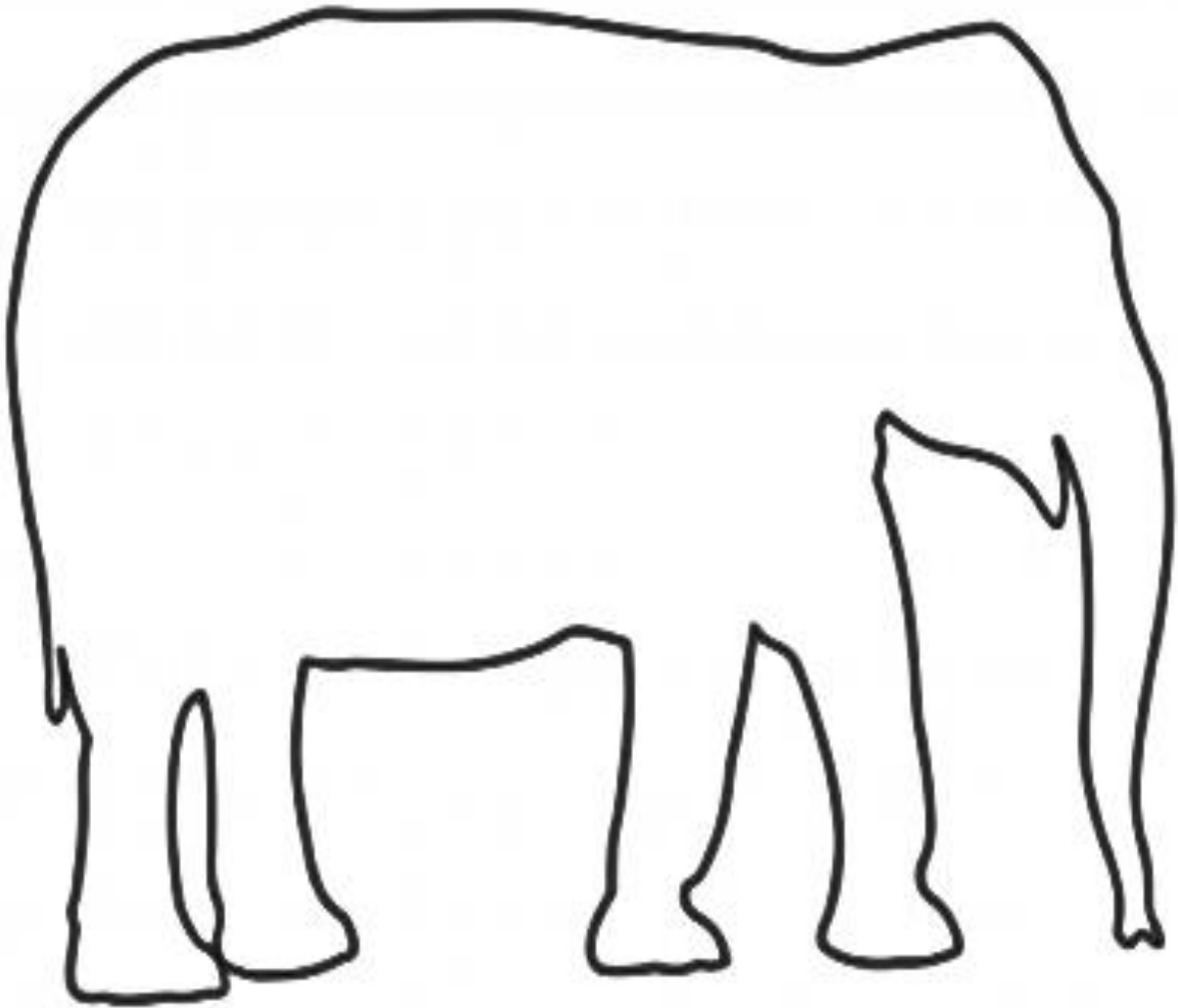
Activity

- Using resources available in your classroom, design and build a bridge. Test how much weight your bridge can hold. Consider what worked and any issues with your bridge. Make improvements and retest your bridge.

Shape Poem

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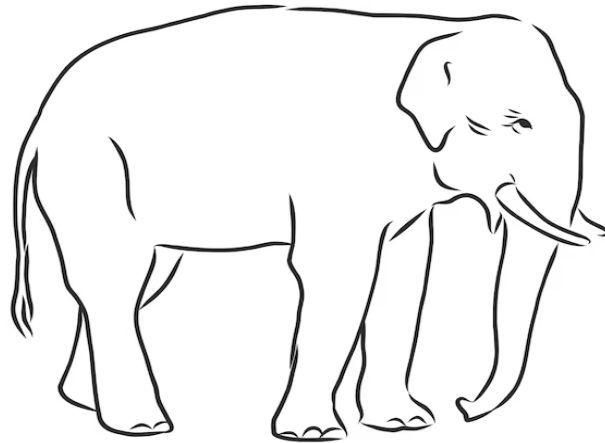
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Acrostic Poem

Name: _____

Date: _____



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