

Book review

Don't Think About Purple Elephants

Category: Book Reviews / Children & Youth

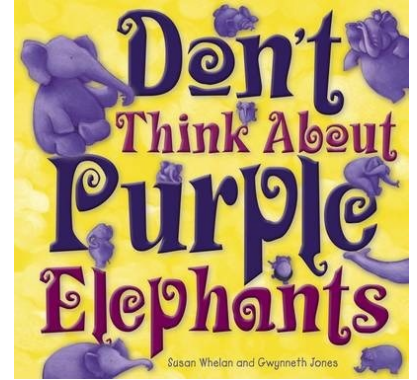
Author: Susan Whelan, Illustrated by Gwynneth Jones

Year: 2015

Publisher: Exisle Publishing, AUS

ISBN: 9781921966699

Audience: For Youth



Summary: A whimsical story about finding a way to ease an anxious child's worry

Don't Think About Purple Elephants is a lovely picture book about a young girl called Sophie, whose night-time anxieties overwhelm her imagination, keeping her awake for hours and leaving her tired the next day.

I leapt at the chance to review this book because I've known a few anxious children. Recently I sat down with an eight-year-old and discussed the things that were on his mind. "What if there's a tsunami," he asked me, "and all my friends get swept away?"

"What if," he said, with big, fearful eyes, "my mum gets busy at work and forgets to pick me up? What if I wear my uniform on a mufti-day? What if my friends don't want to play with me tomorrow?"

Capturing the worries, big and small

Authors Susan Whelan and Gwynneth Jones do a beautiful job of capturing these worries – big and small – that play on children's minds. With clever use of colour and black-and-white illustrations, they show that when you're little, not having enough milk for cereal in the morning can be very troubling, and needs to be taken just as seriously as bigger concerns.

Like many of us who know anxious children, Sophie's family try lots of ways to help her, and nothing works until her mother comes up with a cunning plan – worry as much as you like, but don't think about purple elephants!

I really enjoyed this book. It's simple, engaging and wonderfully illustrated. I felt that it showed adults the effect anxiety can have on children (and the need for us to do what we can to address it) without scare-mongering or ever actually using the word "anxious"! It's a small book with a bigger message – when we work together and care for each other, our troubles will often subside.

Reviewed by Sophia Graham, Senior Communications Officer, Mental Health Foundation

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