

Weighing the Elephant (Folktale)

By Ting-xing Ye


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In a small Chinese village lives a baby elephant, Huan-huan. The evil Emperor issues an impossible puzzle: the villagers can save Huan-huan only if they can deduce how much it weighs. A child comes up with an ingenious, scientifically sound answer.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

K-Gr 3-Villagers in a remote part of China live in peace and prosperity, thanks to their own hard work and help from a family of elephants. Baby elephant Huan-huan endears himself to everyone by entertaining the local children. His fame spreads to the imperial palace, where a cruel emperor decides to add him to his stable of 50 elephants. Abused by the royal family and separated from his parents and his closest human friend, a boy named Hei-dou, the little elephant languishes. The emperor, famous for posing cruel riddles, threatens to banish Huan-huan unless a villager can tell his correct weight. Scholars are brought, scales are collected, but no one can figure out how to weigh the elephant until Hei-dou comes up with a method. The problem and its ingenious solution are intriguing, but the story is flawed by its far-fetched plot and predictable characters, especially the stock villain who echoes Puccini's riddling princess, Turandot. The art further undermines the tale. The superficially pretty illustrations confuse the context of the story, purposely making time and place vague. Some of the men wear queues or pigtails, a hairstyle specific to the last imperial dynasty, which ruled between 1644 and 1911, although the events are said to take place in an unspecific "long ago." This muddled setting contributes to the sense of watching an operetta dreamed up to entertain Westerners, and not an evocation of Chinese life.-Margaret A. Chang, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams

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About the Author

Ting-xing Ye was born in Shanghai, China and moved to Toronto in 1987 as a visiting scholar to York University. Her other books include *Three Monks, No Water* and *Share the Sky*. Ting-xing now lives in Orillia with author William Bell.

Suzane Langlois is a freelance painter and illustrator whose art has appeared in several children's books, on book and record covers, and on posters in Montreal, Toronto, New York, Hamburg and Tokyo. She currently lives with her husband in Montreal.

Users Review

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