



Finding Elmo

Monique Polak

Reading level: 3.9

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AR Quiz # 114172

Book Summary

Fifteen-year-old Tim loves his job at his dad's pet store, partly because he gets to spend time with his best friend, a black cockatoo named Elmo. But things at work have been tense since the store moved to a larger, more expensive location. To make extra money his father rents out the store's exotic birds for parties, and Tim is furious at this exploitation of his friend. When Elmo is stolen from one of the parties, the police are unconcerned about the theft. Tim and his new friend, Sapna, set out to find Elmo, and they discover that Elmo is more valuable than they'd ever imagined.

Author Biography

Monique Polak lives in Montreal, where she spends her days doing her two favorite things: writing and teaching. Monique says she gets ideas for her novels from her work as a reporter and teacher. Monique got the idea for *Finding Elmo* when she wrote a feature story for *The Gazette* about kids who like hanging out in pet stores. If she could give aspiring writers one tip, Monique says it would be, "Never give up! If writing makes you happy, keep at it!"

Connecting to the Text

Character

1. Choose a character from the novel and write a paragraph which draws a comparison to you or someone you know. Find things that you, or someone you know, have in common with one of the characters in *Finding Elmo* and write a paragraph describing them. For example:
 - ◆ I have a baby sister/brother, like Tim. I know just how Tim feels...
 - ◆ Like Tim, I have a pet I'm really close to. My pet...
 - ◆ My cousin's family owns a business too. Like Tim, they have to...
 - ◆ My friend once lost something that was really important to her, like Tim did...
 - ◆ Like Tim and Sapna, I have a part-time job...
 - ◆ My little brother has allergies like Adrienne does...
 - ◆ Like Sapna, my family came from another country to live in Canada/America...
 - ◆ Our mall has a food court too. I hang out there sometimes like Tim does...
2. Challenge students to perform a skit using the model of a talk show or book club. Divide the class into three groups. One third will be the talk-show interviewers, and the other two thirds will be the talk-show guests.
 - ◆ Ask the interviewers to read the novel carefully and write three questions based on characters or key scenes. Remind the interviewers that they will have to be prepared to answer their own questions. If their guests don't know the answer, it will be up to the interviewers to prompt them by giving them hints. Example questions could be:
 - Why was Tim's dad always in his office looking at spreadsheets?
 - What did Tim's dad say was the first rule of owning a pet store?
 - Why didn't the birdnappers take the Winifred or Hubert, instead of Elmo?
 - Was there cake served at Mr. Morgan's party?
 - ◆ Students should be prepared to perform their skits in front of the class. Each interviewer should talk to a group of guests, rather than one-on-one. You may wish to prompt for follow-up questions. After each skit, encourage students to discuss key scenes in terms of how they impacted the rest of the story, why the scenes were important, or how the characters developed.
3. Tim was very upset when he learned that his dad was going to rent out Elmo to help pay for the rent on *Four Feet and Feathers*. Have students reflect upon the point of view of both characters, Tim and Tim's dad, and their conflicting views. Then, as a group, discuss the following:
 - ◆ Is Tim's dad exploiting Elmo? Why, or why not?
 - ◆ Was it Tim's dad's fault that Elmo was birdnapped?
 - ◆ What would have happened if Tim's dad hadn't rented out Elmo?

- ◆ Would he have lost his store?
- ◆ Is there a way to solve this conflict with a win-win outcome? What could Tim's dad do to save the store without renting out Elmo or any of the other animals?

Vocabulary

The following words or terms are used in *Finding Elmo* in the context of the business side of Four Feet and Feathers. Based on their reading of the novel, invite students to use four or more of the words below in a paragraph in which they describe their experience as the imaginary owner of a business of their choice (ideas could include: a sporting goods store, music store, spa/salon, flower shop, clothing store, disco, convenience store, restaurant, movie theater, etc.).

accountant	computer	insurance	payments
balance the books	expensive	ledger book	rent
budget	incentive	office	spreadsheet

Option: Ask students to create business cards or promotional materials such as brochures, flyers or posters for their businesses.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Four Feet and Feathers inherited Elmo from a sailor who'd brought Elmo home from one of his trips around the world.
 - ◆ Imagine you are the sailor. Write a diary or journal entry, describing the day Elmo came into your life. Did you find him or rescue him? Or did Elmo find you?
 - ◆ Imagine that you and Elmo had an adventure together where Elmo first learned to open latches and pick locks. What happened? Write a short story describing this adventure.
2. Tim knows a lot about taking care of animals: "Animals are easy. All you have to do is feed them and pet them and clean their cages and they'll be friends with you forever. Human beings are another story. Human beings are way more complicated."
 - ◆ In this quotation, Tim has listed the things to do so that animals will be friends with you. Write a paragraph describing the things to do so that humans will be friends with you. Provide examples for at least three methods. You may wish to make separate lists: for example, how do your methods change if you're trying to be friends with babies, toddlers, parents, teachers, etc.
3. Tim's dad has good advice for Tim: "Don't get too attached to any of the animals, Tim. Remember, they're all for sale. Each and every one of them. As long as they wind up in good homes, we're doing our jobs" (ch. 1).

- ◆ Why is this good advice? Imagine that you are writing a training manual for a pet store and you need to include advice for new workers on not getting too attached to the animals. Write a paragraph outlining this advice.
 - ◆ Can you think of other professions where this advice might be useful? Make a list of four other professions, providing a brief explanation for each. For example: *It's important that nurses don't get too attached to their patients, because...* Ideas might include farmers, counselors, social workers, veterinarians, etc.
 - ◆ Tim's dad likes to interview everyone who buys a dog from Four Feet and Feathers. Imagine that you are the owner of a pet store and you interview potential dog owners. Make a list of four questions you would ask, and then make an answer key. What would be the right answers? And the wrong ones?
 - ◆ Choosing an appropriate pet can depend on where one lives. Make a list of four different kinds of homes (apartment, townhouse, farm, motor home, trailer, houseboat, etc.) and describe which kinds of pets would be suitable for each. For example: *If you live in an apartment, the best kinds of pets would be...because...*
4. Tim hadn't made any new friends in Lasalle. As well as having no friends in his new neighborhood, Tim also has twin baby siblings, and his parents are too busy and distracted to spend time with him. Can you think of a time when you felt all alone like Tim does? When you feel this way, what do you do to feel better? Write a journal entry, reflecting on Tim's or your experience.

Science

1. Four Feet and Feathers sells many different kinds of birds, including cockatoos, gray parrots, lovebirds and macaws. As a research project, find out more about one of these exotic pet birds.
 - ◆ What part of the world does this bird come from originally?
 - ◆ In the wild, what does this bird eat? Where does it sleep?
 - ◆ What is its average life span?
 - ◆ Are there outside forces which threaten this bird's survival? What are they?
 - ◆ Find out three interesting facts about this bird (history, name, song, migration, reproduction, intelligence, etc.).
 - ◆ Draw a colorful picture of this bird, pointing to at least six parts of its anatomy.
2. As a research project, find out more about extinct birds and birds on the Endangered Species List, such as the bald eagle, California condor or whooping crane.
 - ◆ What factors contribute to a bird's endangerment or extinction?
 - ◆ What happens when a bird, plant or animal becomes extinct? How does this affect the food chain?
 - ◆ What does it take for an endangered species to be removed from the Endangered Species List?

Geography

1. Ask students to research the official emblems of your state, province or country. As well as official flags, flowers, trees and gemstones, is there an official bird?
 - ◆ Invite students to design a “Greetings from...” postcard with a picture of your state/province/country’s official bird. Then, in partnership with a school in another state, province or country, exchange postcards with greeting messages.
2. Using a map of the world, have students point out the cities identified in *Finding Elmo*. Have students list three interesting things about each city. Prompts could include climate, language, food, etc. The cities mentioned in *Finding Elmo* are:
 - ◆ Kangaroo Island, South Australia
 - ◆ Montreal, Canada (and Lasalle, Canada)
 - ◆ New Delhi, India
 - ◆ Paris, France
3. On a map or globe, have students chart Sapna’s journey from New Delhi to Montreal, the birdnappers’ route from Montreal to Paris, and Tim’s journey to Kangaroo Island from Montreal.

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Amy, the bird girl, is studying to be a vet tech (veterinary technician). This role is part of a veterinary team, and can provide nursing and laboratory functions. Ask students to research jobs in the veterinary field. Positions could include: veterinarian’s assistant, pet groomer, veterinary office worker or receptionist, veterinary technician, veterinary technologist and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM).
 - ◆ Do you think you’d like to work in this field? Why, or why not?
 - ◆ What kind of personality would be best suited to working with animals in a veterinary practice or hospital?
 - ◆ Make a list of at least six patients who might visit a vet’s office (for example, dogs, cats, exotic animals, birds, reptiles, rabbits, etc.). What kind of animals would you like to work with? What kinds would you not like to work with? Why?
 - ◆ If you were interested in pursuing this career path, how could you find out more?
 - ◆ Is there anything you could do now, in anticipation of this future career?

2. Invite a volunteer or worker from your local Humane Society or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) to visit your class and give a presentation on pet care and responsible pet ownership. If possible, allow time for student questions.
 - ♦ For a fun and meaningful community service project, ask the Humane Society/SPCA if they are in need of particular donation items, such as old blankets or towels for the animal cages, cat toys, dog food, etc., and then challenge students to organize a campaign in your school to gather these donations. Students can then present their donations when the visiting Humane Society/SPCA representative visits your class.
3. Mr. Singh's restaurant, the Tandoori Palace, serves many delicious Indian foods, including basmati rice, butter chicken, chutney, naan bread, pakora, samosas and chicken and vegetable curry. Sapna tells Tim about a sweet treat in India called gulab jamun, which is made from condensed milk.
 - ♦ Typically, recipes are written in a particular way, using this order: the name of dish, then a list ingredients with measurements, followed by step-by-step procedures. Based on their reading of the novel, invite students to research one of the dishes from India that is mentioned in *Finding Elmo* and write out a recipe, using the order above. Encourage the students to decorate their recipe sheets with pictures of the dishes, or of other images related to India. You may wish to bind the class' recipes together, photocopy one for each student, and distribute them as a keepsake.

Option: If possible, have students prepare a few of the recipes in class and enjoy them together. If this is not possible, you may wish to have students sample Chai tea.

Web Resources

www.rspb.org.uk
www.audubon.org
www.fws.gov/endangered/kids/index.html
www.hsus.org
www.aspca.org
www.rspca.org.uk