

Reader's Report: Peanut

Distracted by the beauty of a gorgeous butterfly, Peanut the elephant suddenly finds himself all alone, separated from his Mamma in the bewildering jungle. What follows is an amusing and heart-warming account of a young elephant's bravery and determination to reunite with his family. Written by Kathy Creamer and illustrated by Amy Calautti, *Peanut* is a children's picture book of fiction and is comprised of four hundred and sixty-six words (466).

At the beginning of the story, the reader is introduced to the central protagonist, Peanut: an adventurous baby elephant with an eye for detail. Captivated by a passing butterfly, he decides to take a closer look and strays from the elephant herd. In doing so, he ignores his mother's advice to stay close by at all times. It is only when the butterfly is out of reach that the protagonist realises his predicament. He calls out to the herd but receives no answer. He looks through the tall grasses and rummages throughout the forest but still he cannot find his family. In his distress, Peanut begins to cry, causing a family of monkeys to climb down from the trees to see what all the noise is about. After hearing his story, the monkeys decide to help the young elephant by climbing the tallest tree to scan the horizon for his mother.

Determined that he should take a look for himself, Peanut decides to climb the tree. With the help of the monkeys he eventually makes his way to the top, only to come crashing back down to the forest floor. When he realises that once again he is all alone, Peanut begins to cry even louder than before. This time, he attracts the attention of the antagonist, Crunch the crocodile. Emerging from the muddy river, Crunch tells Peanut that he had been sent by the elephants to retrieve their missing baby. Being such a young and naïve elephant, Peanut believes Crunch wholeheartedly and is about to climb inside the crocodile's jaws when a herd of angry elephants come crashing through the jungle. In the commotion, Crunch scuttles away and finds himself perched on top of a tree while Peanut is finally reunited with his mother.

This beautifully illustrated children's book is sure to delight young readers and adults alike with its imaginative and colourful rendering of Kathy Creamer's well composed story. The vibrant hand-drawn illustrations that accompany the written text add depth and interest to the story while enhancing the pathos of the narrative. Moreover, Calautti's illustrations strengthen the atmospheric qualities of the story. This is particularly evident in the transition from the introduction to the initial complication in which Peanut is separated from the herd. Here, Calautti emphasises the meaning of the text with subtle, yet highly effective drawings of indistinct eyes and silhouettes of ominous-looking hands that extend inward towards the central protagonist. These illustrations not only contribute to a growing sense of fear and isolation in the narrative, but they also share an important role in communicating the underlying moral of the story, that is, to always stay close to our guardians and to avoid strangers.

Peanut is an engaging and enjoyable work that would be ideally suited for children aged 4-9, depending on their literacy levels and developmental needs. It would be an invaluable addition to both private and public collections and for use in the classroom.