

# The Elephant Girl

JAMES PATTERSON & ELLEN BANDA-AAKU  
with SOPHIA KREVOY

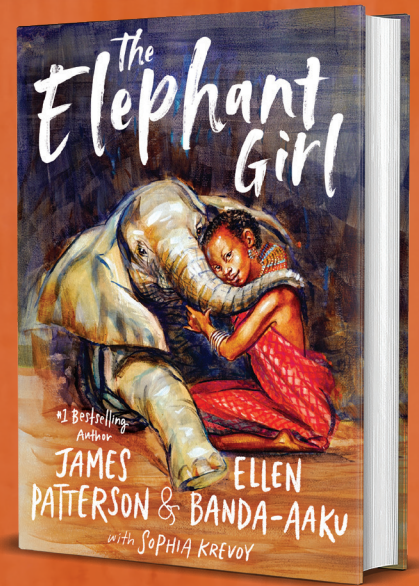
## BOOK CLUB GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Clever, sensitive Jama likes elephants better than people. While her classmates gossip—especially about the new boy, Leku—twelve-year-old Jama takes refuge at the watering hole outside her village. There she befriends a baby elephant she names Mbegu, Swahili for seed.

When Mbegu's mother, frightened by poachers, stampedes, Jama and Mbegu are blamed for two deaths—one elephant and one human. Now Leku, whose mysterious and imposing father is head ranger at the conservancy, may be their only lifeline.

Inspired by true events, *The Elephant Girl* is a moving exploration of the bonds between creatures and the power of belonging.



1. What is the most surprising fact you learned about elephants? Did the story inspire you to research more about endangered species? What other facts can you discover?
2. When describing the Eunoto ceremony, Jama explains how Maasai traditions have had to change over the years (p. 8). Why might this cause tension in the community? Do you think it's important for traditions to evolve if necessary?
3. In chapter one, Jama speaks about conflicting emotions and her mother looking as though, "two feelings were fighting within her" (p. 4). How does this idea remain a consistent theme throughout the novel? In what other instances do characters face contrasting feelings?
4. The authors often describe the humans using animal comparisons such as, "delicate as a hummingbird", "just like a lion", "aggressive as a hippo", and "look like a spider" (pp. 13, 19, 24-25). Does this highlight the similarities between species? As much as it gives humans animalistic qualities, does it also help humanize the animals?
5. What does Kokoo Naserian's proverb, "coal laughs at ashes not knowing the same fate will befall it" mean? (pp. 72-73) What do the proverbs symbolize, especially coming from an elder like Kokoo Naserian? Why are they important?
6. Describe Jama's connection with Mbegu. How does it grow when they both experience loss? How do their journeys continue to mirror each other, all the way to the end of the novel?
7. Why is Jama so insistent that the tragic death in her community is, "not the elephants' fault" (p. 117)? How does this moment illustrate Jama's strength, and her compassion for all creatures?
8. In the airplane, Matthew's doubt in Jama's skills jeopardizes Mbegu's health. Why? How does Jama's confidence grow throughout the story? What has the biggest impact on her self-esteem?
9. How does Jama and Leku's relationship change over the course of the novel? Did you predict where they would end up? Why or why not?
10. The author's note speaks to the real-life threats to elephants that inspired the novel. What real-life lessons or messages did you take away from this fictional story?



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#TheElephantGirl

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