



# Curriculum Connections

## ***Saving H'non: Chang and the Elephant***

by Trang Nyugên & Jeet Zdũng  
Illustrated by Jeet Zdũng

**Dial Books, 2023**

**Fiction, set in Vietnam**

**2023 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle & High  
School Graphic Novels Literature**

*All elephants should be wild and free.*  
—*Saving H'non: Chang and the Elephant*

**Appropriate for Grades: 3–10**

**Best for Grades: 4–8**

### **Introduction to the Book**

*Saving H'non: Chang and the Elephant*

is a visual masterwork, many pages so rich with images and so dense with information that the book could be daunting to use in the classroom. A naturalist might argue that observation rather than control might be the ideal manner of engagement with this book; that is, this book might best be learned through a more inductive approach with students, allowing the learners an opportunity to freely interact with the images and information according to their natural curiosities and interests.



### **Best Matched Curricular Units**

- Ecological Impacts (Natural Sciences)
- Conservation (Natural Sciences)
- Emotional Colors (Art)
- Human-Animal Connections (Humanities)

### **Essential Questions**

- What roles should humans play with wildlife?
- How valuable is careful observation?
- Can one individual make a meaningful impact on the world?



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### **Read-Along Curiosity Guide**

*To encourage an inductive learning-while-reading experience, the following are curiosity-sparking questions or comments that could be considered during a class read-aloud or pre-printed for students to think about during individual reading time.*

**Book Cover.** How might the book in the girl's lap fit in with the story?

**Inside Cover** (gray pages). What is illustrated here?

**Trang Nguyen Letter.** Should *all* elephants be free?

**pp. 8–9.** What are the first three things that catch your eye?

**pp. 10–11.** Two-season or four-season climates: Does either type have an advantage over the other?

**pp. 12–13.** How complex can an elephant's emotions be?

**pp. 18–19.** How do close-ups (elephant eye, ankus prod, and so on) affect your attention?

**pp. 20–21.** Observation or action: Which is best and when?

**p. 22.** Black and white: For what purpose?

**p. 28.** What observations can you make about the elephant in the grass?

**pp. 30–31.** Speech bubble shapes have meaning.

**p. 34.** How many close-ups of elephant eyes have we seen? How many more will we see?

**p. 36.** Chang sleeps inside of a thin fabric? Why?

**pp. 38–39.** Looking at these two pages, what feelings do you experience?

**pp. 42–43.** Twice the sky has shone. What makes it special?

**p. 44.** What are the effects of nighttime on nature?

**p. 53.** With so many "don'ts," do we lose all the fun of elephants with an elephant-friendly tour?

**p. 54.** How "natural" are the 5 Freedoms for Elephants?



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**pp. 62–63.** What does Wat have in him that causes H'non to embrace him? Do you think you have that same “thing” in you with any animal species?

**p. 67.** Is *trust* a human-only gift?

**pp. 70–71.** What is this big illustration trying to reveal?

**p. 73.** How does layout reveal relationships?

**p. 74.** Can any animal's well-being bring *you* to tears?

**p. 94.** Did you realize that the COVID-19 pandemic had hurt elephants, too? What other species of animals do you think might have been adversely affected by the world's lockdown in 2020?

**pp. 98–99.** Who is most responsible for H'non's healing?

**pp. 108–109.** Is language exclusive to humans?

**End.** How important is the work of a wildlife conservationist?

### **Suggested After-Reading Activities**

**Field Book.** Create a class field book. The class goes on a nature walk, and each student brings two blank pages. Using Chang's field book entries as a model (see pp. 6, 7, 16, 37, 75), students observe natural flora or fauna and complete a page for a class field book about the local ecology of the school.

**Scavenger Hunt.** The prologue (pp. 6–9) works especially well for this, but many of the more complex page layouts would be a great place to send students on a scavenger hunt, searching for words or pictures or facts. Rather than the teacher making the scavenger hunt and presenting it to the class, students could each be responsible for choosing something others should search for. Then these ideas could be compiled into a class scavenger hunt.

For another variation, use the flora and fauna depicted in the prologue as the basis for a scavenger hunt.



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**Yok Don National Park Animal Research (pp. 8–9).** Select an animal from Chang's illustrations in the prologue. Research facts about the animal, especially how that animal impacts other plants and animals in its own ecosystem.

**Contrast Illustration (p. 16).** Use as a model Chang's field book page contrasting different types of elephants. Select two species that belong to the same order and create a field book page describing their most noteworthy differences, which might not be obvious to the average person.

**Ecological Collage (pp. 72, 100–101).** We see ecological collages with an elephant at the center, demonstrating how many flora and fauna are impacted by elephants. Have students choose an animal or plant they consider essential to their local ecosystems and create a collage of the impacted species. This could be drawn, painted, or cut and pasted, and collages could be made individually, in groups, or as a class.

**Elephant Facts Wall.** Throughout the book, Chang provides many detailed facts about elephants, from their diets to their emotional states. As students learn different facts from the book, they can write them on Post-its and then attach them to a giant elephant outline affixed to the classroom wall.

**Elephant Eyes.** Scan all the close-up illustrations of elephant eyes into the computer and then print them out (or share them digitally), all in a row. Explore what the author is trying to show us with these repeated (but always slightly different) illustrations—is there a clear and meaningful progression?

**Elephants as Humans.** Although this story is specifically about the elephant experience, it works well as an analogue for many kinds of similar human experiences. Students in older grades can explore and write about such analogous human experiences.



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**Conserve an Animal.** Find an “unpopular” animal on the endangered species list. Research and build a field book on the chosen species. Draw up a plan to help conserve that species (consider using the Elephant Tours as a model if it suits the species).

**Author:** Josh Foster, Educator and Learner  
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