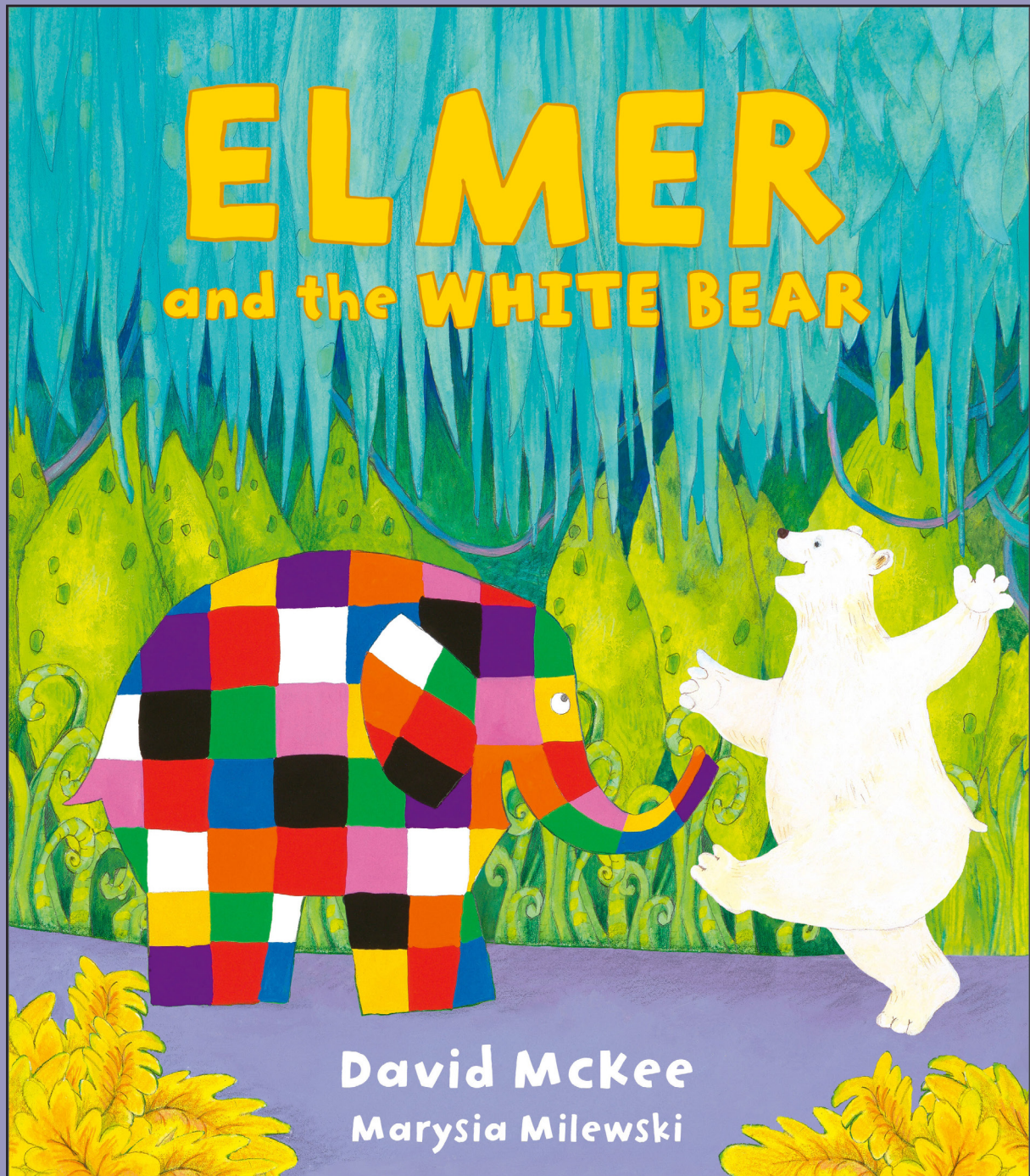


# ELMER

## and the WHITE BEAR

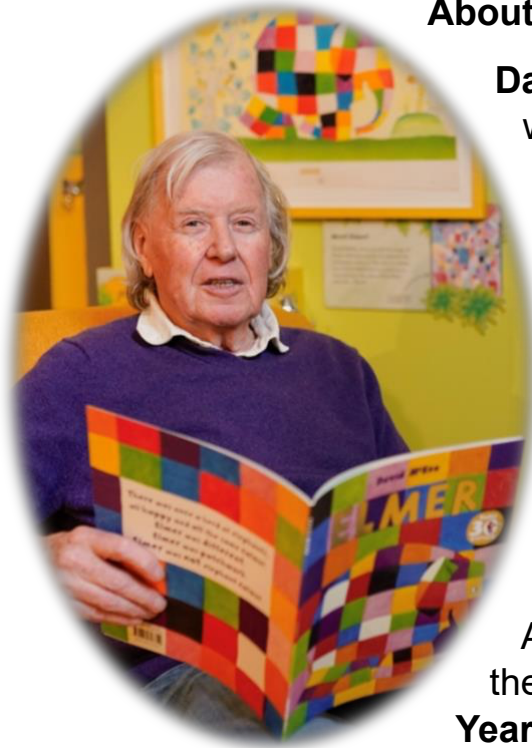
By David McKee & Marysia Milewski



## Discussion Guide and Scheme of Work

**This scheme of work is designed for children aged 5-8, and follows the National Curriculum across all subjects.**

**About the author:**



**David McKee** (1935 - 2022) was the creator of well-known characters including King Rollo, Mr Benn and Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, which is now published in more than 60 languages and has its own successful global merchandise programme. David was born in Devon and went to Plymouth Art College, where he had a traditional training. On leaving college he drew regularly for *Punch*, *Reader's Digest*, and *The Times Educational Supplement*. His drawings were influenced especially by Saul Steinberg and Andre Francois. In 2020, David won the **British Book Awards Illustrator of the Year Award** and **BookTrust's Lifetime Achievement Award**.

**About the illustrator:**

**Marysia Milewski** is a painter and illustrator of polish descent, born in London. She studied at L'Ecole Freinet in Vence, and went on to work with many renowned artists including Cecily Sash at the Granary Painting School in Mountford, UK. She now illustrates children's books and magazines and participates in workshops for youth creativity. Her friendship with David McKee and a shared love of intuitive and engaging art makes her the perfect illustrator to continue the legacy of Elmer's world. Marysia lives and works at her gallery in Vence, France.





## Before sharing

Before sharing, if you are working with a class of children, it is really important that you consider the children's own lived experiences, maturity levels and emotional responses to the themes in the story.

The title of this book is ELMER AND THE WHITE BEAR.

What do you think the story will be about?

Can you think of any words, themes and ideas linked to the word 'HOME'?

Is it unusual for an elephant and a polar bear to be in the same habitat?  
Where do you think the bear has come from?

## Cover image

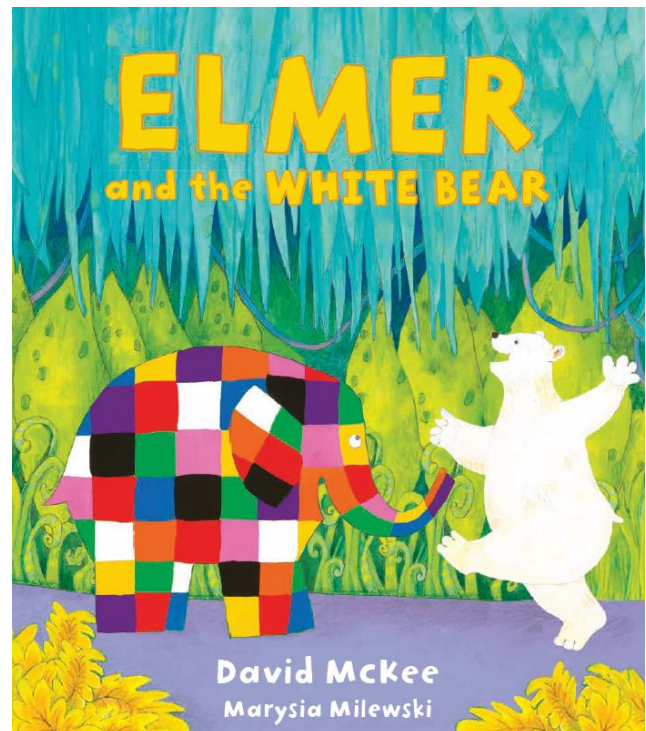
Based on the cover, what do you think ELMER AND THE WHITE BEAR is about? Now read the blurb on the back of the book. Has your prediction changed?

Who is the author? Who is the illustrator?

What colours can you see on the front cover? What do these colours usually symbolise?

How do you think the bear and Elmer are feeling? How do you know this?

Where and when do you think the story might be set?



You'll find helpful examples of worksheets in the appendix at the end of this education pack.

## **About the story**

***When the ice starts to melt at the North Pole, a polar bear sets off on an adventure that takes him all the way to Elmer's jungle!***

When a mysterious white bear appears in the jungle, Elmer and Wilbur are keen to hear his story. He has come all the way from the north pole on a floating scrap of ice, and now he can't find his way home. Luckily, Elmer and Wilbur have an idea! But what caused the white bear's icy home to melt in the first place? That's a much more puzzling question...

With a gentle introduction to the themes of climate change, this is David McKee's (1935–2022) 31st Elmer story with artwork by his dear friend and fine artist, Marysia Milewski.



## Pages 1 and 2

Before starting the story, spend some time exploring the endpapers. What can you see? You could discuss the use of perspective and the bird's eye view. Where are the birds going? What role might they play in the story? Can you describe the setting?

What impression do you get of the white bear?

Why is the bear hurrying? How is the verb 'hurried' similar to the verb 'crept'? How is it different?

What might Elmer and Wilbur be thinking and feeling when they see the bear?

You may also notice the blue birds perched on the branches. Where have they come from? What might they symbolise?

### Cross-curricular activity:

**SCIENCE:** Where would you usually find a white bear like this? Can you describe its habitat? Perhaps you might like to write a non-chronological report about polar bears, including information about their diet, appearance, habitat and adaptations. You could then do the same for an elephant – how are they similar and different to polar bears?

The planning sheet in the appendix may help you! See worksheet 1.

## Pages 3 and 4

What do you notice about the bear and what it has in its paws?

The bear says that it is lost, and this is because the world is getting warmer. What does that mean?

### Cross-curricular activity:

**SCIENCE:** Create a diagram to explain why the world is getting warmer. Try and include words and phrases like *climate change*, *fossil fuels*, *ozone layer*, and *greenhouse gases*. You could also include a glossary to accompany your diagram and explain these technical terms.

See worksheet 2 in the appendix.

## Pages 5 and 6

Spend some time exploring the layout of the illustrations on these pages. How does the illustrator show what Elmer and Wilbur are imagining?

What do you notice about the colours on the left-hand side of the page? How do they compare with the colours used on the right-hand side of the page? Does one side of the illustration feel more inviting than another? Why might this be?

What other animals can you see in the illustration? What might they be doing?

Do you notice anything interesting about the bear's body language and positioning on the page? How is it feeling?

Why do you think the elephants shiver? Could there be more than one explanation?

### **Pages 7 and 8**

Why has the ice started to crack and break?

How does the illustrator create a sense of movement on these pages? How does your eye travel around the page?

How does the author use sound to bring the events to life?

What might the bear be thinking and feeling when it realises its on the broken ice?

### **Cross-curricular activity:**

**POETRY:** Spend some time exploring a range of poems about snow and cold settings. Are there any particularly effective words and phrases used to describe the snow and ice? Use these poems and the illustration on these pages to create a frosty, snowy poem about the bear's habitat.

### **Pages 9 and 10**

Why do you think the bear is positioned on the right-hand side of the page? Why not the left?

What do you notice about the types of lines used on these pages? What sort of energy and atmosphere do the jagged lines imbue the story with?

Why does the bear compare the ice to a boat?

Why isn't the bear scared or worried?

*The bear is curious.* Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?

What do you notice about the horizon line on this double page spread? Why might it be red? What does red usually symbolise?

How has the illustrator created a sense of excitement and adventure?

## Pages 11 and 12

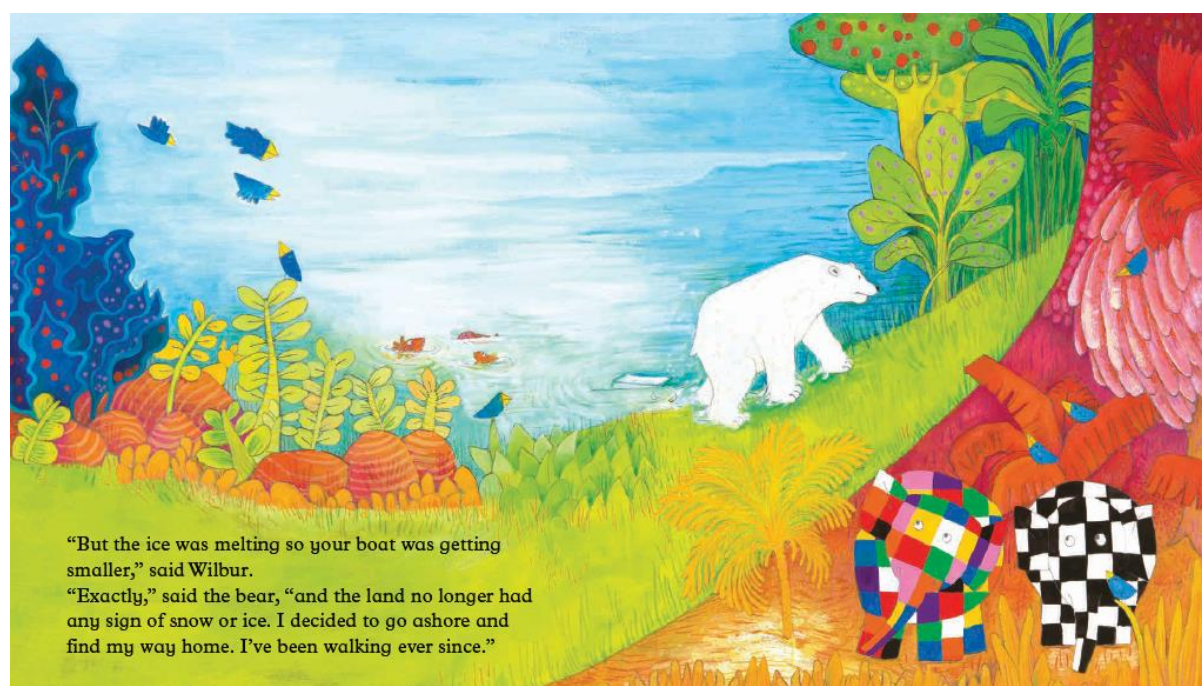
Use a table to record any adjectives and similes you could use to describe the two settings.

	Adjectives	Similes
Bear's home		
Elmer's home		

Draw another quick illustration inspired by these pages but place the bear on the left-hand side of the page. Does it make you feel differently about the bear and its journey? How would the feel of the book change if the bear was located in the centre of the double page spread?

### Cross-curricular activity:

**GEOGRAPHY:** Use a map or atlas to find the possible locations of the bear's home. Where might it have travelled to?





### **Pages 13 and 14**

The position of the bear on the page has changed now. Why might this be? How might the bear be feeling?

Who is leading the bear to a new home? How do you know?

How important is the theme of 'helping others' in this story?

Where else have you seen or heard about someone helping others?

### **Pages 15 and 16**

Does this double page spread remind you of any other illustrations you've seen so far?

How do you know that Elmer is helpful and kind?

What would you ask Elmer right now? What would you ask the bear right now? How do you think they'd answer?

Why might the writer have used the verb 'dip' instead of 'swim' or 'play'?

The bear says, "Those are the nicest words I've heard for a long time."

What does this imply about the bear's journey?

Do you think we are supposed to notice the birds on these pages? Why? Why not?

What do you predict will happen next? Why?

### **Pages 17 and 18**

What do you notice about the three other elephants on these pages?

How might Elmer and Wilbur feel about this?

How do the elephants treat Elmer, Wilbur and the bear?

How important is the theme of 'difference' in this story?

Do you think the other elephants are worried about the melting snow?

Why? Why not? *Should* they be worried?

How does your eye travel around this page? Why might this be? Do you think the journey is about to get easier or more difficult?

How might Elmer be feeling when he exclaims, "Oh!"?

How might someone reading Elmer's words sound when he says, "Oh!"? Shocked? Angry? Disbelieving? Give it a go!

## **Pages 19 and 20**

Why does Wilbur frown?

How does Elmer feel about the bear finding the snow?

The bear's position on the page has changed again! Why might this be?

## **Pages 21 and 22**

Were you surprised by anything on these pages?

Why can't Elmer and Wilbur take the bear all the way home?

Why do Elmer and Wilbur keep turning to wave goodbye? What might this imply about their feelings?

*It was unkind and foolish of Elmer to leave the bear.* Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?

## **Pages 23 and 24**

Why do you think this story hasn't shown the bear's entire journey home? Why might the creators of the story NOT show the rest of the bear's journey?

If you were going to have a 'serious' talk with someone about the world getting warmer, what might you want them to know?

When did you feel most sorry for the bear? Why?

## **Cross-curricular activity:**

**ENGLISH:** Write a thank you note from the bear to Elmer and Wilbur. What might you say about the rest of your travels?

**ART:** Use a variety of materials to create your own patchwork elephant. You could either do this in pairs or create a huge class display of Elmer! Each child could have their own rectangular patch to decorate with different patterns and materials – these could then be used to create a large, eye-catching piece of artwork!

**P.E and Dance:** Work in pairs or groups of four to create a dance based on the story. How might an elephant move? How might a polar bear move? Think about how you could either mirror each other's movements or work together to create your dance!

**After reading questions:**

Spend some time exploring the endpapers – how do they develop the story?

Do you think this story has a message? If so, what?

What was your favourite page? Why?

Who do you think the main character(s) in the story is? Why?

Can you describe Wilbur, Elmer and the bear in three words each and explain your word choices?

What do you think might happen next? Do you think Elmer will see the bear again?

Which character(s) do you think has changed the most over the course of the story?

Do you think this story is set in the past, present or future? Why?

Did you like the ending of the story? Would you change it in anyway? Is the bear's journey over? Why? Why not?

Which character are you most like and why?

When does the story show most clearly that the bear is anxious or worried?

Do you think you need to know a lot about the causes of climate change and global warming to enjoy and appreciate this book?

Could Elmer, Wilbur and the bear be symbolic of anything else?

Do you think Elmer feels any differently about the world warming up at the end of the story?

Is there anything we DON'T know at the end of the story?

How did you feel at the end of the story? Optimistic? Hopeless? How do you think we are meant to feel?

Do you think the creators of this story have explained climate change and global warming clearly to a young audience? Why? Why not?

Would you agree that this story is a 'gentle introduction' to climate change?

Summarise the story in six sentences, picking out the main events.



## After reading activities

Spend some time looking at and enjoying a range of animal-themed shape poems. Discuss what you like and dislike about them, what they remind you of, and if anything about the poems puzzle or confuse you. You could even perform the poems in groups! Next, look at some pictures of bears and elephants and create a word bank of descriptive and figurative language associated with these creatures. Now, create your own bear-themed or elephant-themed shape poem!

Spend time exploring the 'Polar Bears International' website, which can be found here: <https://polarbearsinternational.org/> How does the website try and persuade readers to help the polar bears? Are any words and phrases particularly effective? Can you create your own colourful and engaging leaflet about polar bears and the dangers that climate change poses for them?

Spend some time exploring *Tree of Extinction* and *The Bounty*, two beautiful pieces of art by Alexis Rockman, considering the use of colour and symbolism. Using your knowledge of climate change and pollution, create a piece of artwork to persuade people to take care of our planet.

Can you create a food chain or food web to explore a polar bear's diet? Can you use vocabulary like *producer*, *consumer*, *prey*, *predator*, *herbivore*, *carnivore* and *habitat*? You could do the same afterwards for an elephant! How might climate change affect a polar bear's diet?

See worksheet 3 in the appendix.

Re-tell the story from Wilbur's point of view. What might he say about the bear and their exciting journey?

Spend some time reading and enjoying *Elmer on Stilts* by David McKee. How are these stories similar and different?

There are lots of articles on the Newsround website which explore climate change. You could watch this video: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/videos/c5yexp5g401o> and discuss how global warming has impacted the polar bear population.

Explore a range of graphs, tables and charts which show the rising temperature of our earth or the changing sea levels.

## **Key themes and topics**

- Climate change
- Home
- Helping others
- Looking after the earth
- Bravery
- Teamwork
- Kindness

How important are these themes? Perhaps you could rank them from least to most important?

## **Discussion**

During a class reading of the story, use a Book Talk Grid (Aidan Chambers) to discuss what you like and dislike about it, anything that puzzles you and what the story reminds you of. It might remind you of a song, a film, a painting or even another book!

## Exploring the polar bear's emotions

The bear goes on a very long journey over the course of this story! Chart its changing emotions and feelings using this graph!

Calm							
Excited							
Happy							
Nervous							
Sad							
Angry							
	Beginning	Meeting Elmer	The ice breaking	Floating away	Arriving in Elmer's jungle	Playing in the snow	End



## Comparing stories

Read 'Elmer and the Hippos', also by David McKee. How does this book link to 'Elmer and the White Bear'? Use a table to compare and contrast the themes, settings and storylines!

	Story 1	Story 2
Storyline		
Setting		
Characters		
Themes		

## Thoughts and feelings

What might each character be thinking and feeling at these important parts of the story?



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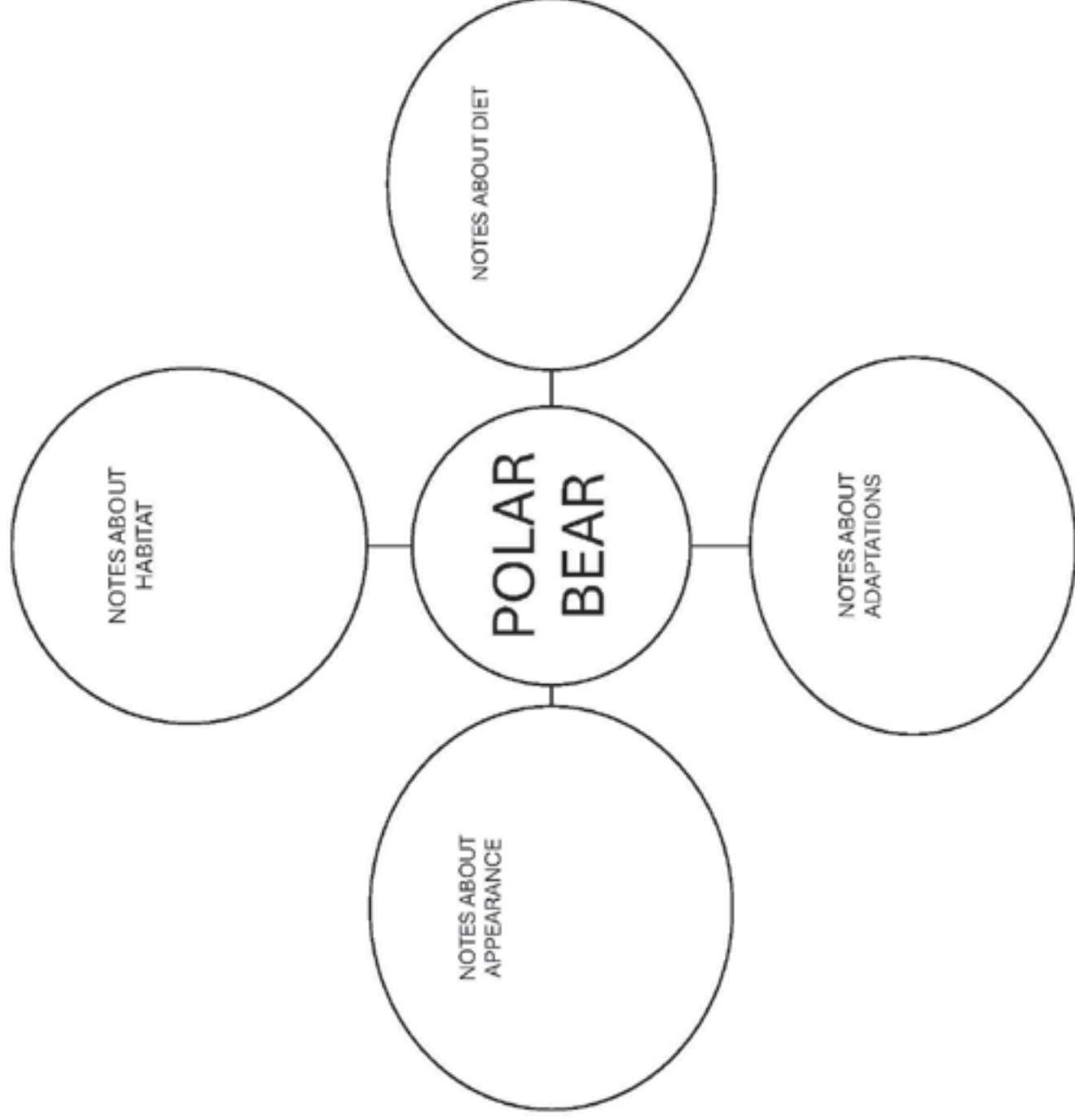




## Thoughts and feelings

What might each character be thinking and feeling at these important parts of the story?







## WORKSHEET 1b: POLAR BEARS

## ELMER and the WHITE BEAR



### APPEARANCE

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### INTRODUCTION

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### HABITAT

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### DIET

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### ADAPTATIONS

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### FUN FACTS!

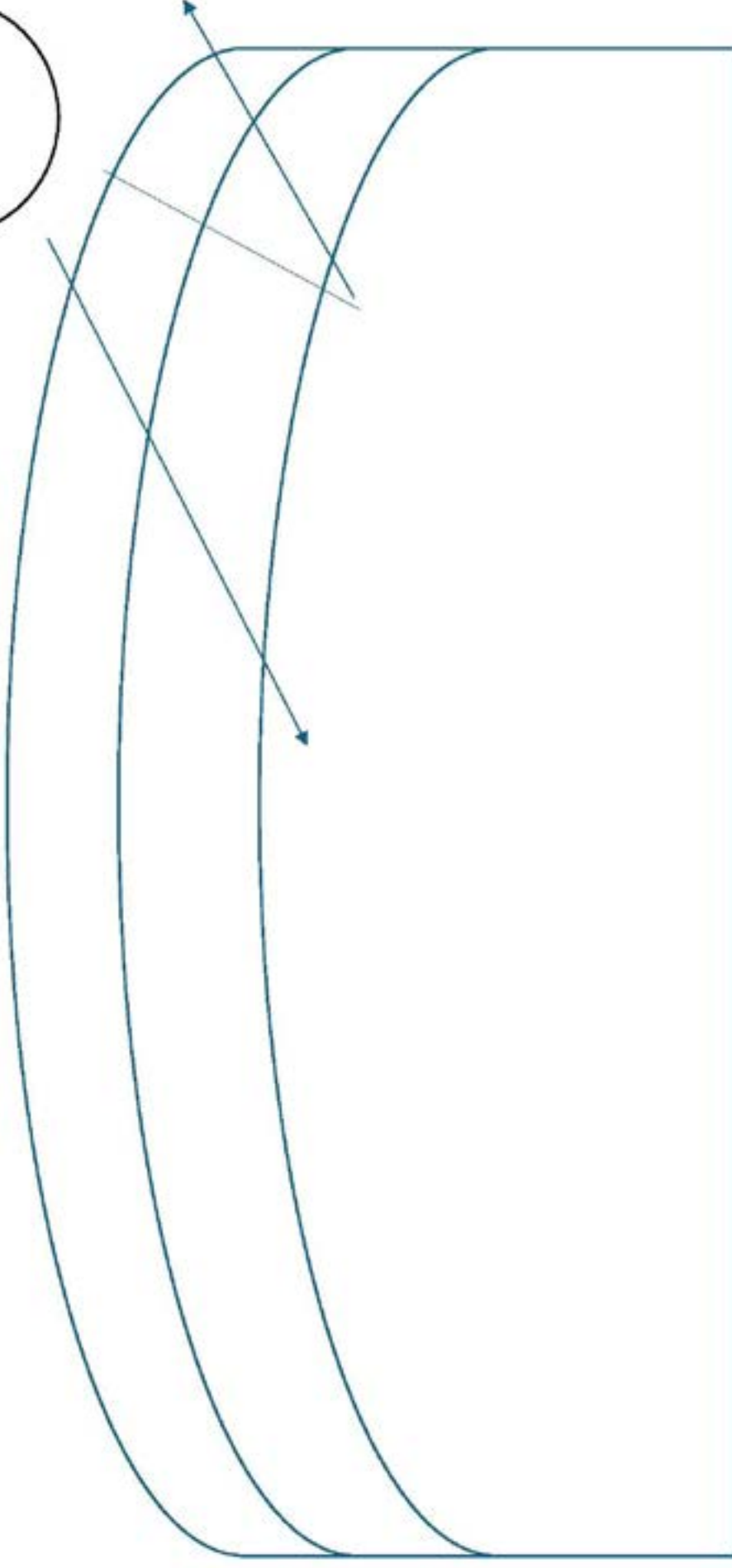
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Suggestion for blank diagram/template : 3 curved lines to show earth and atmosphere with vocabulary bank

Can you use the words in the box below to label this diagram to show the causes and impact of global warming?



Vocabulary:

greenhouse gases

atmosphere

sun

carbon dioxide

methane

CFCs

nitrous oxide

heat

energy

trap

absorbs Earth



## Can you label and complete this arctic food chain?

Can you create a food chain or food web to explore a polar bear's diet?  
Can you use vocabulary in the box below?

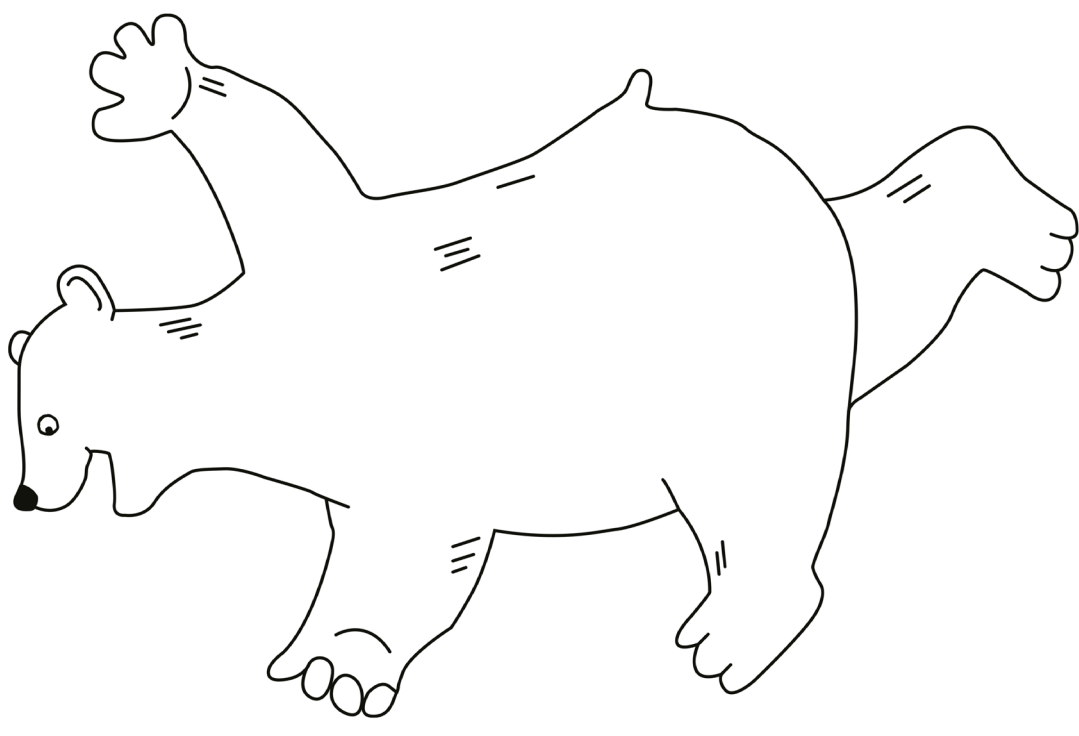
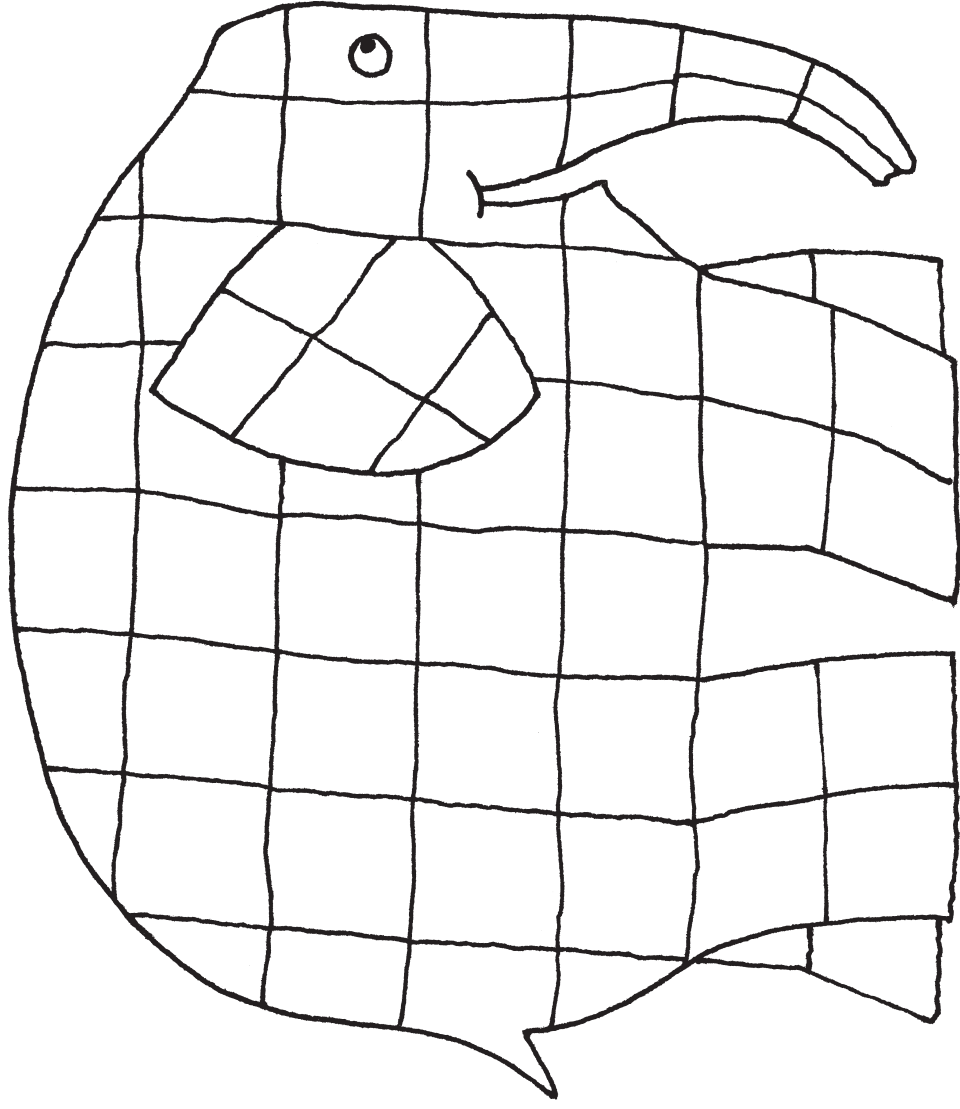
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Vocabulary:

Predator   prey   producer   consumer   carnivore   herbivore   algae   plankton   krill   leopard seal   polar bear



Colour in a scene from  
**ELMER and the WHITE BEAR**



Name ----- Age ----

# ELMER and the White Bear

## Word Search

E	W	T	E	S	N	O	W	B	A	L	L	C	Z	S	F
L	Y	I	O	A	S	I	F	H	L	X	S	F	H	K	Z
M	O	P	L	X	V	R	Y	M	P	N	Y	I	P	S	F
E	S	D	G	B	D	I	C	E	O	G	J	L	X	B	J
R	Z	C	B	Q	U	X	O	P	W	O	A	D	G	G	Q
Q	T	U	I	P	D	R	Y	X	B	Y	I	P	A	D	R
E	W	H	I	T	E	B	E	A	R	A	B	C	Z	S	F
T	G	J	K	Z	L	X	F	A	X	L	G	L	H	K	Z
U	C	B	M	Q	E	V	P	A	D	L	J	I	L	W	M
I	E	T	U	O	P	S	O	X	X	V	N	M	Q	E	O
B	I	R	D	K	H	K	L	Z	C	B	J	A	L	X	U
E	X	V	N	W	A	D	A	G	J	T	U	T	X	O	N
P	P	I	Y	R	N	Y	R	S	F	H	N	E	Q	E	T
A	T	U	O	S	T	X	U	O	S	F	G	C	B	N	A
D	G	J	L	X	V	N	W	R	Y	I	L	P	S	F	I
G	J	L	X	V	C	O	L	D	N	W	E	R	Y	I	N

Can you find the words in the wordsearch?

ELMER  
WHITE BEAR  
ICE  
WILBUR  
ELEPHANT  
CLIMATE

JUNGLE  
POLAR  
BIRD  
COLD  
SNOWBALL  
MOUNTAIN

# ELMER and the White Bear

## Word Search - ANSWERS

E	W	T	E	S	N	O	W	B	A	L	L	C	Z	S	F
L	Y	I	O	A	S	I	F	H	L	X	S	F	H	K	Z
M	O	P	L	X	V	R	Y	M	P	N	Y	I	P	S	F
E	S	D	G	B	D	I	C	E	O	G	J	L	X	B	J
R	Z	C	B	Q	U	X	O	P	W	O	A	D	G	G	Q
Q	T	U	I	P	D	R	Y	X	B	Y	I	P	A	D	R
E	W	H	I	T	E	B	E	A	R	A	B	C	Z	S	F
T	G	J	K	Z	L	X	F	A	X	L	G	L	H	K	Z
U	C	B	M	Q	E	V	P	A	D	L	J	I	L	W	M
I	E	T	U	O	P	S	O	X	X	V	N	M	Q	E	O
B	I	R	D	K	H	K	L	Z	C	B	J	A	L	X	U
E	X	V	N	W	A	D	A	G	J	T	U	T	X	O	N
P	P	I	Y	R	N	Y	R	S	F	H	N	E	Q	E	T
A	T	U	O	S	T	X	U	O	S	F	G	C	B	N	A
D	G	J	L	X	V	N	W	R	Y	I	L	P	S	F	I
G	J	L	X	V	C	O	L	D	N	W	E	R	Y	I	N

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JUNGLE  
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BIRD  
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