

The MOST IMPORTANT ANIMAL of ALL

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It was the first day of term. The children walked into the classroom and everything was different. There was a jungle where the book corner used to be, an ocean instead of a mat, and huge butterflies on the ceiling.

"Children," the teacher said, "we are going to learn all about animals. Big ones, small ones, tiny ones. We will discover amazing things and, at the end of term, I'd like you to decide which animal is the most important of them all."

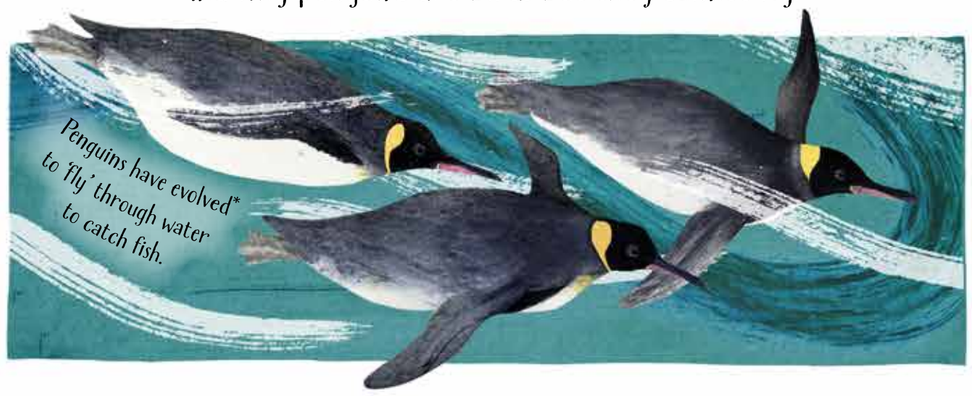
And their teacher was right. They did learn amazing things.
They learned how caterpillars turn into butterflies…



How fish breathe in water…



And why penguins are birds but they cannot fly.



* see glossary on page 39

At the end of term the teacher said, "So children,
who would like to share their ideas for
the most important animal of all?"



George's hand shot up, and this is what he said.
"I think the most important animal of all is…"

ELEPHANTS

"Do you know the main difference between an African and Asian elephant?" asked George. "African elephants are huge! They are the biggest land animals on Earth.

"Both have a trunk, which is a nose, a hose and a hand rolled into one. They use it to put food and water into their mouths. They suck up water for a shower and smell with it too."

African elephants have larger ears ...

...and they all grow tusks.

African elephant

Asian elephant

Only some Asian males have tusks.

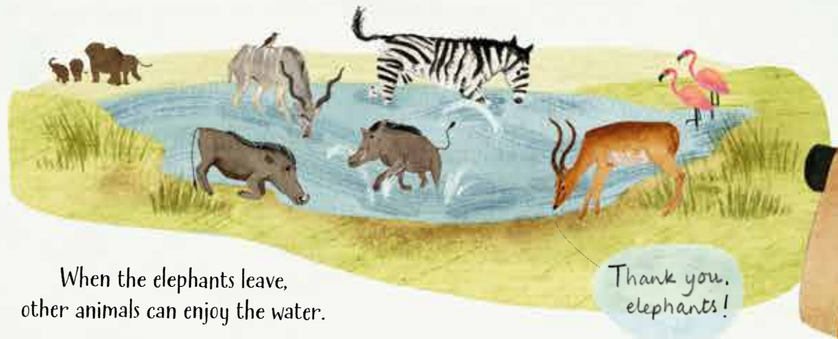
"But what makes elephants important is that they help all the other animals and plants around them to survive and thrive."



Elephants are smart and have amazing memories. When there is no rain, they remember where there is water and use their tusks, trunks and feet to dig for it.



They make these watering holes bigger when they bathe and cool themselves.



When the elephants leave, other animals can enjoy the water.

But George hadn't finished ...

He showed some photos.
"In the jungle," he said, "elephants create pathways that other animals and people use. They also help new plants to grow by pulling down branches and letting sunlight through to the forest floor."

"Even their poo is useful!" George explained.



People use it to keep mosquitoes away, to enrich the soil, to build homes and to burn like logs on a fire. They make paper out of it too.



The dung is full of seeds from the fruit the elephants eat. The seeds begin to grow, creating new plants.



Insects love elephant poo! Dung beetles eat it. Females lay their eggs in it so that when the babies hatch, they have a tasty poo breakfast. Some dung beetles roll balls of it away with an egg inside so no-one steals it!

George smiled. "You see, elephants are important to trees, plants, animals and people, so they must be the most important animal of all."
Nimmie's arm went up. She had another animal in mind ...