

# A Good Heart

AUTHOR

**LUCY MELO**

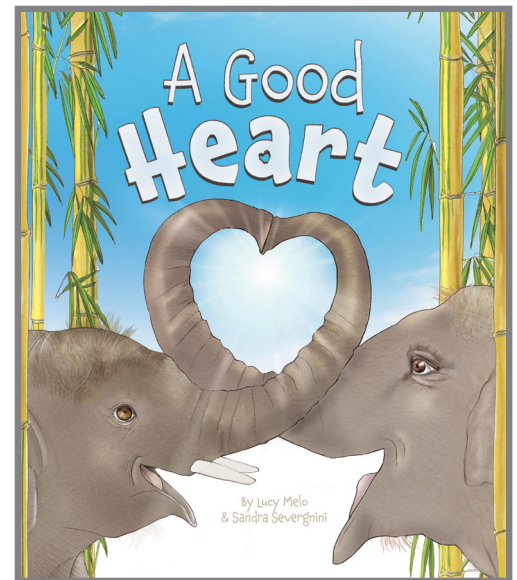
ILLUSTRATOR

**SANDRA SEVERGNINI**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Lower Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Join Tukta and her little brother, Jai Dee, as they make their emotional journey through the Asian rainforest on Jai Dee's first day of school. Inspired by the special bond shared between a real-life brother and sister pachyderm pair, *A Good Heart* is a powerful story that is equally as educational as it is entertaining. Learn about Asian elephants, and discover the many other fascinating animals that can be found living throughout the South East Asian jungle.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For Lucy Melo, having a master's degree in zoology led her to having a career in zoo environments, helping to care for and conserve animals. As a zookeeper, elephants have been the main focus and passion of her professional life. She famously had a near-fatal accident involving one of the young elephants in her care while working in Sydney.

Lucy was recruited by Taronga Zoo in 2004 to help with the importation of five Asian elephants from Thailand. Packing up her belongings, she said goodbye to Disney's Animal Kingdom, and 'G'day' to Taronga Zoo in Sydney, Australia. The elephants drew record crowds to Taronga Zoo, where they both delighted guests and educated them on the plight of endangered Asian elephants. Acting as ambassadors for their wild counterparts, the elephants helped create awareness of habitat loss, human-elephant conflict, and illegal ivory poaching. The elephants thrived at Taronga Zoo, and it wasn't long before there was the pitter patter of big feet! As a result of being in the care of Taronga Zoo, these elephants helped generate significant funding for wildlife conservation. Taronga Zoo in Sydney has a strong history and reputation for its leading role in the protection of wildlife in their natural habitats, across Australia and around the world.

After working at Taronga Zoo with two very special elephants, named Tukta and Jai Dee, Lucy realised that their story had to be told. The remarkable bond between a protective sister and her exceptionally good-hearted little brother is the foundation of her story for *A Good Heart*.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sandra Severgnini is an illustrator of award winning books. She has a background in botanical illustration, and ran a botanical art gallery in Melbourne for ten years. Her passion now is for picture book illustration, especially dealing with environmental and nature subjects. A fascination for the amazing world around us inspires her words and brings sensitivity and humour to her illustrations.

## THEMES

- **Family**—Little Jai Dee has a big sister, Tukta, who looks after him and gives him advice. Jai Dee thinks about what she has said to him, and remembering her words helps him decide how to behave when she is not there.
- **Starting School**—The first day of school is overwhelming for most children, and Jai Dee is no different. He is in a new place, and he has to quickly learn social skills he has never needed to use before.
- **Habitat**—The habitat is a feature on every page of *A Good Heart*. Children can pore over the fine details, and discover tiny creatures peeking out from every hidden spot.
- **Feeling Different**—Jai Dee is challenged by the other animals in the jungle over all the ways that he looks different from them. Using his sister's advice, he responds in ways that make him feel good about himself.
- **Conservation**—An underlying theme of *A Good Heart* is conservation, nature and the beauty of wild animals and wild places. The book concludes with an Animal Facts page that gives readers information about the animals, as well as their conservation status.

## WRITING STYLE

Lucy Melo writes about elephants with the confidence and expert knowledge that comes from working with them at Taronga Zoo in Sydney. We see her love of elephants as she tells the charming and poignant story of elephants living a wild life, supported by the sort of family ties that humans often think no other animal could experience.

Young children feeling anxious about starting school will identify with Jai Dee as he passes through all the emotions involved in that first day. Lucy includes all the words that children will need so they can name their own feelings. Jai Dee is feeling them too, and his ways of overcoming his initial reluctance will help give children the tips they need to believe in themselves as well.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Sandra Severgnini is a master of animal artwork. Her creatures of the forest pop in and out of each page, seeming to look straight at us as we look back at them.

Her finely detailed drawing manages to present accurate representations of unusual animals, while still allowing them to have personalities. The jungle plants are also expertly drawn. Look out for the largest and stinkiest flower in the world—you can almost smell it!

## STUDY NOTES

- There is a heart hidden on each page. Each of these hearts is based on something that exists in the elephant's environment. As students find each heart, ask them to think about how this tiny part of the surroundings makes its contribution to the overall environment.
  - Carrying this idea forward, children can take a look at the tiny things in their own environment. Make a list of ten very small things they can find, and then decide whether each of these makes the environment better, or harms it instead.
- As with many children's picture books, the animals in *A Good Heart* are anthropomorphised. Discuss the reasons that the author might have had for using this way to tell a story about relationships.
  - Does giving animals human feelings and behaviours make us feel a closer bond with wildlife?
  - What would be the effect of the story if the animals had not talked to each other in the same way that people interact?
- On the following pages complete the activities:
  - Help Jai Dee find his way through the maze to Tukta.
  - Colour in Jai Dee (portrait)
  - Colour in Jai Dee (landscape)



