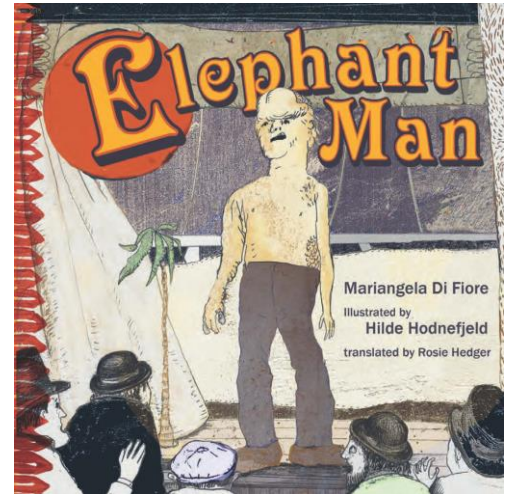


# Elephant Man

by Mariangela Di Fiore and Hilda Hadnefeld

February 2016 ISBN 978 1 76029 220 1 pb



## Summary

*Gather round – prepare to be amazed! A sight so very gruesome that you simply won't believe it. Ladies and gentlemen ... THE ELEPHANT MAN!*

Joseph doesn't look like other people. His skin is thick and lumpy, his limbs are oddly shaped, and his head has a big bony bump. People call him Elephant Man and scream in terror when they see him. But inside, Joseph longs for a friend to understand him.

As Joseph is bullied and rejected at every turn, his situation grows more and more desperate. But a meeting with a kind doctor holds the hope to change his life ...

Based on the famous true story of Joseph Merrick, *Elephant Man* is a powerful tale about being different, finding happiness in even the hardest circumstances, and discovering beauty inside everyone.

There have been a number of books and memoirs, a play and a film produced about Joseph Merrick but not all of them stick to the true facts that are known about his life. In this first book for children, Mariangela Di Fiore and Hilda Hadnefeld have been scrupulous in including only established facts.

## Use in the curriculum

A classroom study of *Elephant Man* is relevant to the following Australian Curriculum Learning Areas covering, in general, Year Levels 4-8 (roughly age levels 8-12):

- English
- Humanities and Social Sciences (History and Geography)
- Science
- The Arts (Visual Arts)

It is also relevant to the following Australian Curriculum General Capabilities:

- Literacy
- ICT (Graphic Design, research)
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Ethical Understanding

## Themes

- history – technological progress and changes in attitudes over time
- medicine
- disease
- empathy, respect and tolerance

## Language and literature

- biography – true stories
- visual literacy – graphic storytelling

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## Author's and illustrator's inspiration and comments

**Mariangela Di Fiore** is a Norwegian author of several novels for children, young adults and adults. She says:

*I've always loved the story about Joseph Merrick and wanted to write about it for children. These days, even children are so concerned with how they look. Elephant Man is a good occasion to reflect and talk about human values and inner beauty versus outer beauty.*

**Hilde Hodnefjeld** graduated in graphic design and illustration from the Norwegian Crafts And Decorative Arts College, majoring in drawing, in 1994. She has been working as an illustrator since she graduated. Nowadays, in addition to illustration, she works as a freelance picture editor.

Hilde draws mostly on paper, using collage elements from graphics and photos, drawing with colored pencil, ink, watercolor and acrylic. She processes this raw data considerably, preferably in Photoshop. She says:

*Mariangela asked her publisher if I could illustrate this story because she liked the graphic collage approach I had used in another book.*

*I remembered the 1980 Elephant Man film that David Lynch created: black/white; fog; dark; gloomy. A monster? But our book was to be a story about otherness, about how we treat each other, a humanistic story. I needed a photo of Joseph Merrick. I began to search for information about Joseph Merrick – there was so much online. I bought and borrowed books, not just about Joseph, but about the time he lived in, the places he lived. There were the clothes, all the buildings, all the furniture, lunchbox, bed, carts, boat, harbor, train station and the train compartment. Police uniforms, mantelpiece, chairs and hats, which should all be accurate for the time period!*

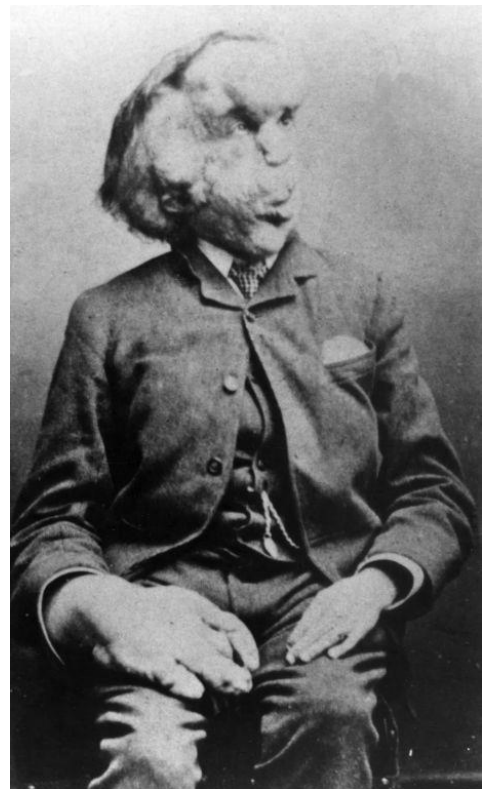
*I toned down color usage to create a specific mood and manipulated the images so that it looks like there is a layer of coal dust over everything, just as there was at the time.*

*It was important to look closely at the few photographs, drawings and etchings that exist of Joseph Merrick. With such a deformed head, it was difficult to know how he looked from behind and from other angles. I avoided drawing him from angles which could not be supported by photos.*

*But I had to put myself more into the story of Joseph Merrick. Which hand was it that was deformed? Was it the right or the left? This detail was not in Mariangela's text, but had to be shown properly in the illustrations. What was it like in a cigar factory in the late 1800s? The text mentioned Joseph standing when he worked, but I found out they sat when they worked, so we had to change the text. In one of the pictures I have used a photo of the exact boat Joseph Merrick traveled in.*

*Much of what I read was not strictly necessary at all to illustrate the book for Mariangela, but, nevertheless, it was necessary for me to know the Elephant Man's history on several levels. I was much better acquainted with Joseph Merrick that way.*

*He proved to be a sensitive man in a deformed body. A monster's body that people detested and feared but which made it all the more important when they could see past that to the nice man on the inside.*



In the classroom...

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## Activities

1. The Elephant Man (Joseph Merrick) visits many places in England and Europe during the story. Make a note of all the cities and countries mentioned in the book, then draw a map and label them, showing the route that he took in his travels in order to arrive back in London.
2. Some pages of the story, involving young Joseph's relationship with his father's second wife, might remind us of the "wicked stepmother" character in fairy tales. Discuss whether you agree with this view, drawing comparisons to any fairy tales you've read, heard or viewed.
3. Is it possible to understand and even sympathise with the behaviour and actions of Joseph's stepmother? Write a description about her situation as seen from her viewpoint.
4. Joseph may seem to be a "monster" to many people, but who, in your opinion, might be the real monsters in the story, and why? Who were his friends and helpers, and what do you think motivated them?
5. Look at the illustrations on pages 10-11, also pages 18-19, and 34-35. Discuss why you think the illustrator has included a dog in each of the first two scenes depicted. Comment on their posture and behaviour. Have they been placed there for a purpose? Do they add any further meaning to Joseph's story? Why do you think they appear together in the third scene?
6. You might like to make up a little story about how the two dogs seemed to find their way, like Joseph, from Europe to London at the same time. Write the story. Alternatively, work with a friend in class to create the story as an illustrated comic strip tale.
7. Joseph's ugly physical appearance contrasts with the beauty of his inner imagination, his stories and poems. (Pages 12 & 40 are examples.) Compose another little story, poem, or poster image, that captures what he might have imagined and written himself. Present it in the same style of collage illustration used by Hilde Hodnefjeld, the artist who illustrated *Elephant Man*.
8. Carry out some historical research about Joseph Merrick to find out three or four true things about him that are not mentioned in the book. You could present these as a poster display.
9. In the Afterword of the book, we are told what diseases might have caused Joseph's illness. Carry out some research on these medical conditions. Write a report about them so that other people can have more understanding of the conditions. Could modern medical science have helped Joseph?
10. Plan and write your own review of the book in at least 150 words, not only to tell others about the story, but to express your opinions about it and the book. Remember that the story isn't only made up of written words, but also various types of pictures, which are also important to discuss.

## Related texts and resources

### Resources recommended by the author and illustrator

Howell, Michael, and Peter Ford. *The True History of the Elephant Man: The Definitive Account of the Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Joseph Carey Merrick*. 2010, Skyhorse, NY

Montagu, Ashley. *The Elephant Man: A study in Human Dignity*, 2001 (1971), Acadian House, Lafayette, Louisiana.

Treves, Sir Frederick. *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences*. 2008 Open Library. [openlibrary.org/books/OL6660332M/The-elephant\\_man\\_and-other\\_reminiscences](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL6660332M/The-elephant_man_and-other_reminiscences)

Vicary, Tim. *The Elephant Man*, 2006, OUP, Oxford UK.

FILM: *The Elephant Man*, dir. David Lynch, 2003 (released 1980), Paramount Home Video (124 mins)

### Stories about outsiders

*The Iron Giant* (animated film) 1999, released in Australia 2000.

Animated adaptation of a Ted Hughes Cold War story. In Maine, 1957, boy befriends giant alien robot

Selznick, Brian. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, 2007, Scholastic US (also a film version)

Hugo lives in the walls of a busy Paris train station, where his survival depends on secrets and anonymity. Combines elements of picture book, graphic novel and film.

### List of Australian fiction and picture books for primary level students on a range of themes including empathy, respect, tolerance

[http://www.australed.iinet.net.au/PYP\\_Attitudes.html](http://www.australed.iinet.net.au/PYP_Attitudes.html)

### US lists of novels with themes of disability, disease and difference

<http://themighty.com/2015/02/10-captivating-books-that-portray-disease-and-disability-through-fiction/>

<https://www.teachervision.com/learning-disabilities/reading/5316.html> . See also

Palacio, R.J. *Wonder*, 2013, Random House Children's Publishers UK.

Born with a terrible facial deformity, 10-year-old Auggie is being sent to a "normal" school for the first time – but can he convince his new classmates that he's just like them, underneath it all?

Marshall, Alan. *I Can Jump Puddles*, 2004, Puffin Books/Penguin Group Australia.

Australian classic about a normal and happy childhood despite polio disability.

### For teacher research

'Using Historical Stories to Teach Tolerance: the Experiences of Turkish Eighth-Grade Students'

[http://www.lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/binaries/navigation/1241/file\\_using\\_historical\\_stories\\_to\\_teach\\_tolerance.pdf?t=1284416535](http://www.lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/binaries/navigation/1241/file_using_historical_stories_to_teach_tolerance.pdf?t=1284416535)

These curriculum notes and discussion questions were prepared by Roger Stitson.

Roger is a journalist and educational writer, especially in the area of Media Studies. He has written the "Text Talk" articles for the Education section of *The Age* newspaper since 2000 and many film study guides for Screen Australia, the Australian Teachers of Media organisation (ATOM) and individual film producers. He has produced many educational materials based on the Australian Curriculum addressing the history, social studies and Indigenous Studies curriculum. Roger is a former English, Literature and Film teacher at secondary level and a published writer of short fiction and non-fiction.