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## Review: What Elephants Know

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## *What Elephants Know*

By Eric Dinerstein

Disney Hyperion, 2016

### DESCRIPTION:

Left as a baby in the jungles of Nepal, Nandu is watched over by wild dogs until he is found and taken in by Subba-sahib, the one-armed head of the king's elephant stable. Raised by this wise man and Devi Kali, a female elephant, Nandu grows up wanting to become a mahout, or elephant driver. At the age of twelve, however, his dream is threatened when he learns that the king's government is considering closing the elephant stable. Sent to boarding school to learn skills that may help save the stable, Nandu is bullied by the other students and is lonely for his father. But Father Audry, one of his teachers, takes Nandu under his wing and teaches him much about nature and the jungle. This information becomes invaluable to the young boy as he attempts to find a bull elephant to take back with him to turn the stable into an elephant breeding station. In his quest, Nandu faces not only the dangers of the jungle, but dishonest government officials and cheating elephant traders.

### CRITIQUE:

While telling this story of a young man's bravery, Dinerstein vividly describes the life and the beauty of the Nepalese jungle. With a nod to Mowgli in Kipling's *Jungle Book*, his hero is an abandoned child partially raised by animals, but more fully based in reality, this story provides a window into the plants and animals of Nepal and its changing culture. Nandu is a worthy hero. Facing challenges with cunning and determination he comes into an understanding of who he can be.

### RELATED SUBJECTS:

Adoption, Elephants, India, Jungles, Nepal, Orphans

### CHARACTER THEMES:

Appreciation of nature, Courage, Cunning, Determination, Family love, Initiative, Knowledge, Loyalty, Resolve, Self-acceptance

### AWARDS:

Best Children's Book of the Year (Bank Street), Cybils Award, Georgia Children's Book Award, Golden Archer Award (WI), Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature, Maine Student Book Award, Massachusetts Children's Book Award, Notable Children's Books