

## STELLARPHANT

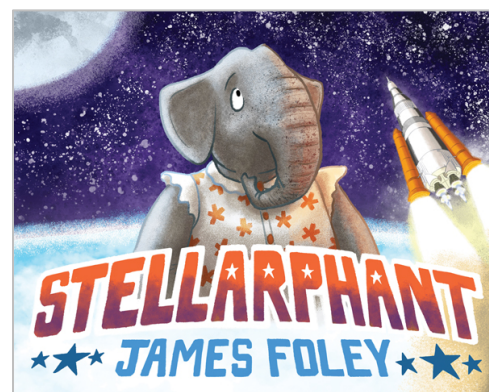
JAMES FOLEY

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Year level: K–3

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Heroes come in all shapes, sizes and species. Stella wants to be an astronaut. There is only one problem: Stella is an elephant. Every time she applies to Space Command, they come up with a new reason why she can't join. But where there's a will, there's a way – and Stella is determined to reach for the stars. Does she have the right stuff?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Foley makes picture books, middle grade novels and comics for kids. He's the author/illustrator of the S.Tinker Inc graphic novel series for middle primary: *Brobot* (2016), *Dungzilla* (2017), *Gastronauts* (2018) and *Chickensaurus* (2020). The series stars Sally Tinker, the world's foremost inventor under the age of twelve. James also the cult-favourite and CBCA-shortlisted *My Dead Bunny* (2015); and its follow-up, *There's Something Weird About Lena* (2020). His earlier books *In The Lion* (2012), *The Last Viking* (2011) and *The Last Viking Returns* (2014) have all scored several honours, including children's choice awards, shortlistings in the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year awards, and selection to the International Youth Library's White Raven list. His most recent book, *Bigfoot vs Yeti: A Love Story* (2025) was shortlisted for the 2025 Children's Peace Literature Award.



*Stellarphant* (2021) was named an Honour book for the 2022 Children's Book Council of Australia's (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year, shortlisted for the 2021 Aurealis Award for Best Children's Fiction, shortlisted for the 2022 WA Premier's Book Awards and the 2022 Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards. *Stellarphant* also won the 2002 CBCA Sun Project: Shadower's Choice Award for Picture Book of the Year and was named one of Better Reading's Top 50 Kids' Books in 2022.

### THEMES

- Space travel
- Courage
- Determination
- Perseverance
- Discrimination
- Diversity
- Equality
- Equity
- Feminism

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

K–3 English

K–3 Earth and Space Sciences

K–3 Visual Art

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author website: [jamesfoley.com.au](http://jamesfoley.com.au)
- Author YouTube: [youtube.com/jamesfoleybooks](https://youtube.com/jamesfoleybooks)
- [Cartooning Worksheet for Primary Students: jamesfoleyillustrations.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/faces\\_part\\_1.pdf](https://jamesfoleyillustrations.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/faces_part_1.pdf)

- *NASA for Students in Kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> Grade*: [nasa.gov/stem/forstudents/k-4/index](https://nasa.gov/stem/forstudents/k-4/index)
- *Astronaut Selection*: <https://www.nasa.gov/stem-content/how-to-be-an-astronaut/>
- NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory: [jpl.nasa.gov/edu/teach/tag/search/Rockets](http://jpl.nasa.gov/edu/teach/tag/search/Rockets)

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. Why do you think the author chose the name Stella for the lead character? Is it simply because it rhymes with 'ele' in 'elephant'? (Hint: What does this particular name mean?)
2. Why do you think the title of the book is 'Stellarphant'? (Hint: What are the two possible meanings of the word 'stellar'? How does each relate to the story?)
3. What does an astronaut do? What do you think would be the best thing about this job? What do you think would be the hardest part? Would you like to be an astronaut?
4. The managers at Space Command reject Stella's application several times. How would you feel if you were Stella? Why do you think she refuses to give up on her dream?
5. What does the word 'discrimination' mean? Stella faces discrimination because of her size and her species. Have you ever been discriminated against? How did this make you feel? Why is it important not to discriminate against others or judge someone based on their appearance?
6. What do the words 'perseverance', 'resourcefulness', 'determination' and 'resilience' mean? Can you find examples in the story where Stella demonstrates each of these qualities? Can you think of a time when you have showed each of these qualities?
7. Look closely at the titles of the books Stella studies for astronaut training (*Orbital Mechanics*, *Aerospace Engineering*, *Rocket Science*). Why would each of these be useful? Use an appropriate online dictionary to locate the meanings of any words you don't understand.
8. Why do you think scuba-diving is also part of Stella's training? How might this help astronauts prepare for life in space?
9. Why do you think the managers are still reluctant to approve Stella's application even after she has found creative ways to meet all their requests?
10. What does the word 'epiphany' mean? What epiphany does Stella reach?
11. What is an 'idiom'? How does the idiom 'the elephant in the room' add humour to the story?
12. Visit the final page of the book, entitled 'A True History of Animals in Space'. Can you list some of the different species that have visited space? Why were they chosen? What jobs did they perform in space? Choose one animal from the hall of fame to research and write a report using the following subheadings: name, age, species, nationality, date/duration of mission/s to space, research purpose, photograph.
13. What do you think might happen if a real elephant was sent to space?

### Visual literacy

1. Design your own picture book about Stellarphant Aerospace's next mission. Which animal astronauts will be part of the crew? Where will they travel in space? What is the purpose of their mission? What dangers will they face?
2. Look carefully at how the images on each page of *Stellarphant* are divided up and presented. Some scenes are in rectangular shapes, and some are in curvy shapes. What shapes does the illustrator generally use to frame the scenes that take place in Space Command? What shapes does the illustrator generally use for the illustrations that take place while Stella is training? Why do you think James used these shapes for certain scenes and not others?
3. Observe the colours that the illustrator used when illustrating *Stellarphant*. When an illustrator sticks to a certain group of colours it is called a 'colour scheme'. Compare the colour scheme used in the Space Command scenes with the colour scheme used in Stella's training scenes. How do the different colour schemes make you feel? Which makes you feel happier? Which colours feel 'warmer' and which feel 'colder'? Why do you think the illustrator used these colour schemes for certain scenes?
4. When Stella and her crew finally reach space, they go for a spacewalk and look down at the Earth below. This scene is the only one in the book that doesn't have any words. Why do you think the author chose to not have any words in this scene?
5. Compare the front endpapers (showing the Space Command Hall of the Hero) with the fold-out scene at the end of the book (showing Stellarphant Aerospace's Hall of Astronauts). Compare and contrast these two scenes: consider the colour schemes, wall texture, frame shapes, frame arrangement and

the types of characters that appear in the frames. How do these two spreads relate to the theme of discrimination and diversity in the book?

6. What style has the illustrator used to illustrate *Stellarphant* – realistic or cartoon? What do you like about his style? How does he convey the characters' thoughts and feelings? (i.e. find a page where one of the characters looks happy, determined, surprised, irritated, sad, confused or proud). Use the 'Cartooning Worksheet for Primary Students' available from the author's blog to help you draw facial expressions and body language for your own characters.
7. Stella dreams of becoming the first elephant astronaut. Design a recruitment poster advertising your own dream job. It should explain what the job involves and why you are passionate about it.

## Earth and space sciences

1. Visit the webpage [NASA for Students in Kindergarten to 4<sup>th</sup> Grade](#) to answer the following questions:
  - a. What is NASA?
  - b. When was the first human flight to space?
  - c. Who was the first ever animal in space?
  - d. What is the International Space Station? When did the first astronauts arrive on it? How many people can live on it at one time? What research is conducted there?
  - e. What is the Artemis Program?
  - f. What is Orion?
  - g. What is Juno?
2. Write a biography of one of Australia's three astronauts: Philip K. Chapman, Paul Scully-Power or Andy Thomas. What missions were they a part of? What research did they conduct?
3. Write an imaginative diary entry about 'A Day in the Life of an Astronaut' on the International Space Station. What do you think are some of the challenges of living in space?
4. How do you become an astronaut in real life? (Hint: visit webpage [Astronaut Selection](#).)
5. Name the planets in our solar system and the order they extend from the sun. Working in pairs, use this knowledge to create a scale model. Then select one planet and create a fact sheet, poster or PowerPoint with the following information: name, position in solar system, discovery, axis rotation, size, gravity, orbit, surface conditions, atmosphere, temperature, distance from Earth, interesting facts, image. Ensure to include a reference list.
6. Visit the [NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory's education link](#) to choose from a variety of primary-school activities where students can learn to design, build and launch paper rockets, observe how high they fly and improve their designs.



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