

Pictures are Worth 1000 Words

ROBERT MUNSCH

The Elephant's New Bicycle, Mark Thurman. Illus. Mark Thurman. New Canada Publications, 1980, 24 p. ISBN 0-919601-29-4.

I took this book to a nursery school along with several others and sat down to read to a group of children. The first book I picked up was not *The Elephant's New Bicycle*. It was a well written tale with fairly dull illustrations and a bland cover. "Not that one," yelled a child. "It's yucky. Read the one about the elephant!" The child was responding to Mark Thurman's vivid full colour cover standing out in a pile of more ordinary Canadian books. (See Figure 1).

Thurman's art has the colour, balance and simple form of a Toulouse-Lautrec poster. It also has a wild zany humour children are immediately attracted to (for that matter, so are adults. I would love

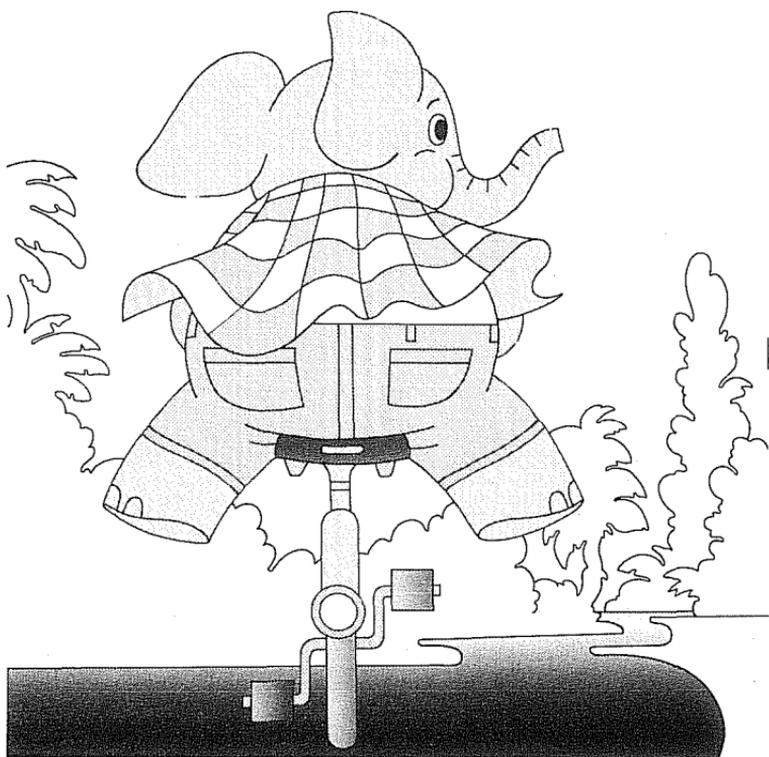


Figure 1.

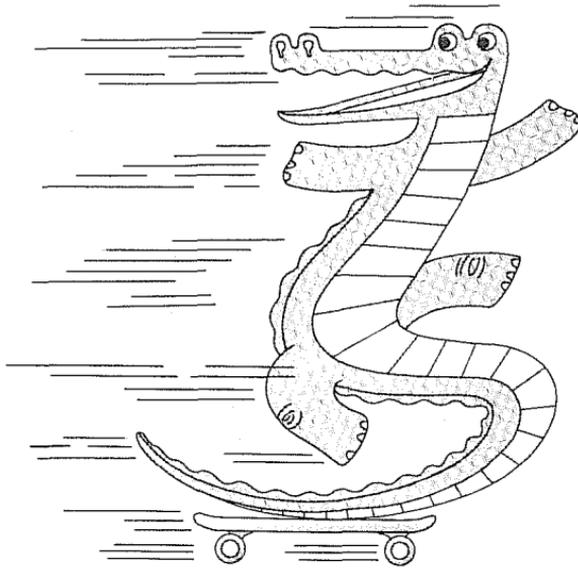


Figure 2.

to have an 8' by 12' blowup of Albert Alligator on a skateboard. See Figure 2). Thurman's apparent simplicity hides the careful use of colour and form; his pictures are set pieces for studies in colour and composition.

Happily, the story is also good. Basically, Douglas the Elephant gets tired of just having his own new bicycle to play with and decides to share it. This very simple plot is told in clear direct prose, and it includes sound effects that serve to enliven the reading style of even the most conservative of adults (see Figure 2 again).

In short, *The Elephant's New Bicycle* is both a textual and graphic success. I congratulate New Canada Publications for being willing to put out such a quality full colour product, and I hope they get back enough money to continue the "Douglas the Elephant" series.

Bob Munsch is a nursery school teacher, an Assistant Professor of Family Studies at the University of Guelph and the author of four children's books.