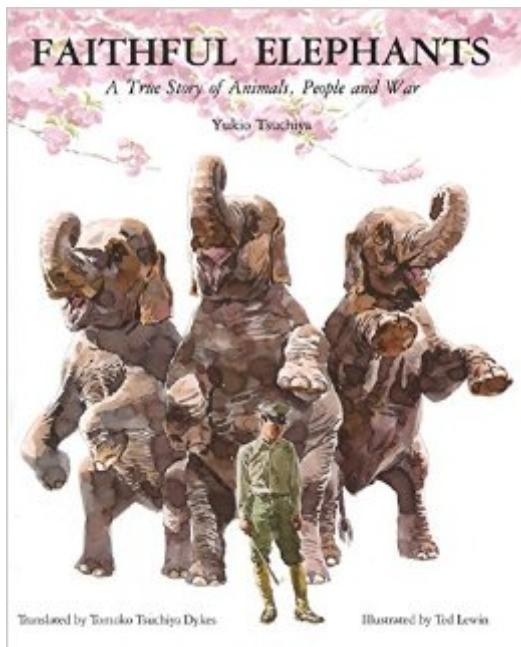


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# Faithful Elephants: A True Story Of Animals, People, And War



## **Synopsis**

A zookeeper recounts the story of John, Tonky, and Wanly, three performing elephants at the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo, whose turn it is to die, and of their keepers, who weep and pray that World War II will end so their beloved elephants might be saved.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: AD640L (What's this?)

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Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ (82 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #40,373 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Military & Wars #57 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Animals > Elephants

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

## **Customer Reviews**

I have just read the French version of this book (Fideles Elephants) which won a Governor General's Award in Canada, and was checking to see about buying the English version. I just read all the reviews here and must agree with all of them... even the one stating it is propaganda. It is propaganda: anti-war and anti-cruelty propaganda. And I also have no idea why they did not just shoot those poor elephants... illogical and very humanly cruel behaviour. As a result of people's fears (we never do learn if indeed the zoo was ever damaged) that damaged cages would result in rampaging wild animals, all the "dangerous" ones are killed, and the elephants end up being starved to death, while they faithfully attempt to extract food from their keepers (captors? torturers?) by repeating the entertaining routines they have been trained to do. I would not recommend this book for small children and am astonished to see this in the picture book sections... I would have had nightmares for years as a child. As an adult, I find the image of these elephants attempting to carry out their routines when they are too weak to stand absolutely indelible and horrific. I cried reading

the book, I cried in a coffeeshop trying to tell a friend about it, and thinking about it now makes me want to lock my arms around my torso and cry. I don't know if it is an indictment of war, or perhaps of zoos, or of human inaction ("easier" to let something die of neglect than actively shoot it... so many of our tragedies in life result from this sort of inaction). A book I want to recommend to everyone, and at the same time protect them from. And then I think, no, that is just protecting them from a true story, reality. And reality even this poetic is just appallingly sad. Read and weep.

I've read this book in English and recently in Japanese with the help of a Japanese friend. The Japanese version I read was the same story, but written and illustrated by different people (a man named Mamoru Tanabe was the author of the version I read). At any rate, the Japanese version made mention of something that I don't think is included in this English translation. The official reason from Tokyo for killing the elephants was that in the event that Tokyo was bombed, the cages could be destroyed and the animals might be let loose upon the city. But the book also says that although that was the official reason, the underlying reason that government officials probably had in mind was to show the people of Japan that in this war, they would have to be ready to sacrifice anything for their country. If it was necessary, the lives of animals or even other people would have to be given up for the good of Japan. A previous reviewer mentioned the same thing, but as far as I remember the English version of the story doesn't address that idea at all. So for all those people wondering why the elephants had to die in such a cruel way, there's your answer: to show the Japanese people the true horrors of war, and make them feel ready to sacrifice anything in order to bring that war to an end.

Faithful Elephants by Yukio Tsuchiya, translated by Tomoko Tsuchiya Dykes and illustrated by Ted Lewin, is a very moving picture book story. It describes how during World War II three elephants at the Tokyo Zoo were euthanized by starvation, because of concerns that they might escape during an air raid and become dangerous. I plan to use the story with my 4th and 5th grade reading group as part of a unit about WWII, but one thing that troubles me about using such an emotional story, is that I do not understand where fact and fiction meet here. The subtitle reads "A True Story of Animals, People and War", and the introduction also describes it as a true story. I can't help wondering though why the animals had to be killed in such an inhumane way. Did the army forbid the use of an elephant gun because they did not want to "waste" ammunition? Aren't there ways to drug even animals as large as elephants? How do veterinarians treat elephants? And what happened at zoos in other parts of the world where there were air raid attacks, and similar risks that

wild animals might escape and cause problems? After writing this review two weeks ago, I discussed the book with other teachers in my school and decided that to use it with 4th and 5th graders would be committing a kind of emotional highjacking. We read a number of books together during our WWII unit and I plan to finish up with another zoo story - *Hannah's Winter of Hope* by Jean vna Leewen, which tells how the people of Budapest saved their hippo from starvation during the occupation.

I also am a 22 year old college student who read this book in my adolescent reading and writing class and I am responding to the negative remarks left by the 21 year old college student. Not only is this book a great read, it teaches a lesson and does not portray America as the enemy, but rather war in general. There is no mention of the US in the entire book. Yes, it will bring a tear to your eye and it should. This book does not graphically illustrate the death of these elephants, rather it tells of the tremendous pain felt by the zookeepers. These elephants loved the zookeepers and they loved them and this book shows how war not only effects soldiers but the lives of many, including elephants. I highly recommend sharing this book to your kids, classroom or to read for yourself, you will not be disappointed.

As an educator, this book is a real lesson on the impact that a war can have, even on animals! As you read this fantastic book you will be moved to tears as I was when reading it to my class. All adults and children will gain knowledge on the impact of war has on all of us!

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