

EDUCATION  
& COMMUNITY

London **Philharmonic** Orchestra

# ELEPHANTS IN THE CUSTARD

TEACHERS' RESOURCE PACK



KEY STAGE 1  
SPRING/SUMMER 2021

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Based on the book, *Elephants in the Custard* by Samuel Langley-Swain, illustrated by Jemma Banks (Owlet Press, 2018)

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This pack and additional online resources are available on  
[lpo.org.uk/elephants](http://lpo.org.uk/elephants)

## Rachel Leach

*Elephants in the Custard* is presented by composer and animator Rachel Leach. Rachel was born in Sheffield and studied composition with Simon Bainbridge, Robert Saxton and Louis Andriessen. She has won several awards including, with ETO, the RPS award for best education project 2009 for *One Day, Two Dawns*.



Rachel has worked within the education departments of most of the UK's orchestras and opera companies. The majority of her work is for the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra. Rachel has written well over twenty pieces for these orchestras and fifteen community operas, including seven for English Touring Opera.

Alongside this she is increasingly in demand as a concert presenter. She regularly presents family and schools' concerts as well as pre-concert events for the LPO, LSO, BBC Proms, RCM and Wigmore Hall.

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## Introduction

This pack is designed to help you and your class prepare for the London Philharmonic Orchestra's music and story film featuring the wonderful book 'Elephants in the Custard' by Samuel Langley-Swain and Jemma Banks. Our film features a quintet of brass instruments and a lively selection of music with pieces that are both instantly recognisable ('Match of the Day' theme, 'The Elephant') and perhaps new (*Music Hall Suite* by Joseph Horovitz).

There is also a new participation song for you and your children to learn and join in with. This song can be sung or spoken, and we've created some videos to help you learn it in various ways. See page 7 for more information.

The film is presented by Rachel Leach, who tells the story and leads all the audience participation. There are lots of opportunities to join in, so please encourage your children to copy Rachel throughout the film.

## The story

We are delighted to introduce you and your children to the book 'Elephants in the Custard' by Samuel Langley-Swain, illustrated by Jemma Banks. We strongly suggest you read this book with your children ahead of screening our film and take some time to explore its themes and look at the illustrations. It tells the story of Sol, a young boy who has a very unusual dinnertime with his family – he keeps seeing elephants in his custard! The elephants themselves are up to mischief – rollerskating, playing trombone, painting pictures... and Sol is upset that no one else seems to notice them. That is until he tells Granny, and she has an answer. The message of the book is to take time to talk through problems, and uses the 'elephant in the room' metaphor as a learning tool.

[The book is available to buy online and is published by Owlet Press](#)

## The music

Our film features an ensemble made up of **brass** instruments. Ensemble just means 'group of musicians' and comes from the French word for 'together'.

Here are some facts to tell your children about brass instruments:

- Brass instruments are made of metal so are really shiny
- You need to blow a raspberry with your lips to make a sound on a brass instrument!
- Brass instruments can play quietly as well as very loud
- The larger the instrument, the deeper and lower the sound
- There are 100 players in the full orchestra, including usually: 3 trumpets, 4 French horns, 3 trombones and 1 tuba. As they can play so loudly, the brass section are most often seated towards the back of the orchestra

In *Elephants in the Custard*, you'll see two **trumpets** (played by Paul and Anne). Trumpets are among the oldest instruments in history (the oldest versions were invented over 3,000 years ago!) and have often been associated with carrying messages over long distances (for instance, on a battlefield) or announcing important things (like the arrival of royalty) because they sound impressive and can play very loudly!



You'll also hear a **French horn** (played by John). The French horn is made of lots of metal tubing all coiled up. If you stretched out all the tubing in a straight line, it would be over three metres long!



You'll see one **trombone** (played by Mark). Unlike other brass instruments which have three buttons (called valves) that help them change notes, the trombone changes its notes by moving a slide up and down, so it looks like the instrument is getting longer and shorter as it's played...



Finally, you'll see and hear a **tuba** (played by Sasha). The tuba is the biggest brass instrument in the orchestra and plays the lowest notes. In our film the tuba plays the melody to 'The Elephant' by Saint-Saëns – we think it sounds a lot like a dancing elephant, do you?





Here is a full list of the music you will hear in *Elephants in the Custard*:

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Joseph Horovitz                       | <i>Music Hall Suite for brass quintet</i> (extracts)                 |
| Camille Saint-Saëns arr. Roger Harvey | 'The Elephant' from <i>Carnival of the Animals</i>                   |
| Rachel Leach                          | 'Elephants in the Custard' – participation song                      |
| Eric Stoller arr. Gunnar Óskarsson    | 'Match Of The Day' Theme   |
| J.A. Greenwood                        | 'The Acrobat'  |
| J.S. Bach arr. Bowles                 | 'Air on the G string' <i>Orchestral Suite no.3</i> , second movement |
| Julius Fučík arr. Holcombe/Battles    | 'Entry of the Gladiators', Opus 68                                   |

While you listen to the music in the film, there will be lots of ways to join in with actions, activities or singing.

As well as playing the music in the *Elephants in the Custard* film, our five musicians also play characters in the story. The scene takes place around the dinner table, where Rachel can see elephants in her custard, but the players are all far too busy to notice as they are doing things like playing games, reading a newspaper or doing homework. Will anyone listen?



## The song: Elephants in the Custard!

Our film includes a brand new song by Rachel Leach, that children are invited to sing or speak along with and join in with the actions. We perform the song twice in the film. The song lyrics are on page 17. All video resources mentioned below can also be found at [lpo.org.uk/elephants](http://lpo.org.uk/elephants)

### Option 1 – sing along

Teach the song in full and join in during the film. You can find the sheet music from page 18.

The first section of the song (up to Figure C) is call and response – your singers simply copy the presenter on screen. Encourage your children to invent simple gestures to fit the lyrics especially in the faster section, when remembering the words becomes more important. At Figure D the song gets very fast and tricky – on purpose, as the character in the story is very stressed! If you are singing, try to keep up but if you can't, keep the gestures going instead. Join back in at the very end on 'Elephants... in the Custard' (bar 64).

[Watch this video](#) to help learn the fully sung version of the song.

### Option 2 – speak along

If you are not yet singing in school, speak the lyrics in rhythm. Again, the first section is call and response so there's no need to teach it, but do take some time inventing gestures and actions for the words, or copy the actions in our learning video. At Figure D just do the actions and gestures with no sound until the final 'Elephants... in the Custard' (bar 64).

[Watch this video](#) to help learn the spoken-word version of the song.

### Option 3 – actions only

If it is not possible to sing along (for instance if singing is not recommended for Covid reasons), simply encourage your children to make actions and gestures for the lyrics. During the first section they can copy our gestures on screen but as the song gets more complicated (Figure D onwards) it might be more fun for your children to make up their own!

[Watch this video](#) to see a version of the song with actions only.

## The catchphrase: “Shh... in the custard”

During the story we say 'Elephants in the Custard' many, many times so we've turned it into a catchphrase! Encourage your children to join in with the following tiny bit of text, every time they hear it:

Rachel: Can you see elephants?  
Players: Where?  
Rachel: In the custard  
Audience **Shh! In the custard!**



This will happen a lot! [Watch this video](#) for a demonstration of the catchphrase.



## Music activities

We have included two creative musical projects that you can try with your class below. To get warmed up for any music activities, here are some simple games and warm-ups that don't require any resources to deliver. You can use these elsewhere in your teaching too, to bring focus, to energise or calm a class, and to start getting your children thinking musically.

### Pass the clap

- Stand in a large circle (in the hall, an empty classroom, outside or even just behind desks)
- Pass a clap around the circle. Try it fast, slow, double claps, back and forth
- Pass sounds/gestures invented by the children
- Build up a short piece by passing a series or sequence of different sounds/gestures

This is simple and accessible for all. It can be used for focus or just for fun. Every idea is tried out and nothing is rejected. The game practises turn-taking and listening.

### Numbers and gestures

- Teach this to the children:
  - Tap head x8, shoulders x8, knees x8, toes x8 (miss out toes if sitting at desks)
  - Repeat x7, repeat x6 etc. until x1
- Repeat the activity with the children choosing which body parts to tap, what order and how many times for each

You can experiment with number sequences, times tables etc. If numbers increase it takes more concentration, if the numbers decrease the energy required increases too. This game energises the group so you may wish to follow it with something calmer if you are about to do a more focused activity.

### Five Facts

This simple warm up can be adapted to fit any five facts, so can be used in many cross-curricular ways.

- Tap your fingers on the top of your head, stop and say your first fact. Ask the children to copy. Ask for a gesture to go with the fact and choose an appropriate one suggested by a child
- Tap your shoulders and say your second fact. Ask for a gesture for this and choose a fitting one
- Tap your tummy and introduce the third fact. Choose a gesture for this
- Tap your knees and introduce your fourth fact. Again, find a gesture for this
- Finally, tap your feet and add your final fact. Find one more gesture for this

Now try performing all of this at the same time as your children, like this:

|                |        |         |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Tap head:      | fact 1 | gesture |
| Tap shoulders: | fact 2 | gesture |
| Tap tummy:     | fact 3 | gesture |
| Tap knees:     | fact 4 | gesture |
| Tap feet:      | fact 5 | gesture |

If your children are struggling to remember, simply prompt them with questions.



## The Phone Call

Make a short piece with the same structure as a phone call:

- Ringtone
- Person 1 speaks
- Person 2 speaks
- Person 1 & 2 alternate but never talk at the same time
- Hang-up sound



Demonstrate this structure and then invite pairs of children to copy it. Decide on how many ‘exchanges’ back and forth and perhaps appoint a third child to make the ringtone and hang-up sounds. Move from using speech to vocal sounds to body percussion and perhaps even ‘found sounds’ (like tapping pencils together, or a homemade instrument) or instruments. In this way, you are practising listening and turn-taking, and starting to think about sound in a structured way – just like a piece of music.

## Creative projects

There are several opportunities in the Elephants in the Custard story for musical composition, using whatever instruments you have available. However, if using instruments isn’t possible, both projects can be done using just body percussion.

If you are using instruments, encourage your children to stick with the same instrument for the whole duration of the project. No swapping means that you don’t have to worry about cleaning after every session. Also keep an eye on beaters, avoid these swapping around as well. These activities can be run as a full class, or in smaller bubbles.

A few rules before beginning work with instruments:

- Take time to demonstrate each instrument. Encourage your children to use its name and hold it in the correct way. Your children will then be able to make informed choices when they make their pieces. Which instrument sounds like an elephant? Which instrument can be loud, quiet, scary?
- Encourage your class to respect and care for the instruments from the start. This will help manage volume levels and will preserve the instruments in a good state of repair
- Children should know to put the instruments gently down on the floor when not playing
- Put in place a signal for silence. This could be simply putting your hand in the air or clapping a pattern. When children hear or see the signal they stop, put their instrument down and listen. You will need to practise this to perfect it
- Finally, when working creatively with instruments it is important to try out the children’s ideas as they suggest them. Nothing is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ with this type of creative work

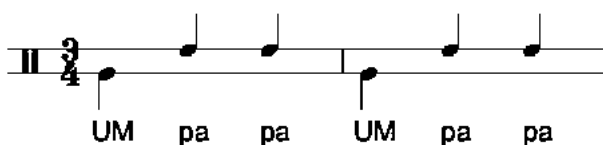


## Composing project 1 – Waltzing Elephants!

When we first encounter elephants in our story we will hear an arrangement of Camille Saint-Saëns' 'The Elephant' from *Carnival of the Animals*. This very famous piece depicts elephants dancing a waltz. Here's how to make a waltz with your children.

You can [watch a video demonstration](#) of this activity or find it on [lpo.org.uk/elephants](http://lpo.org.uk/elephants).

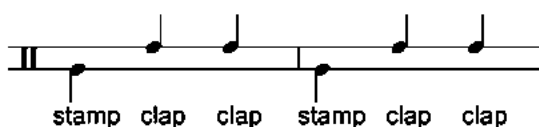
1. Explain to your class that you are going to make waltz music for the elephants to dance to. A waltz is a type of dance made up of three beats, one strong and two weak:



The 'UM' is a strong, loud beat. The 'pa pa' is weaker or quieter.

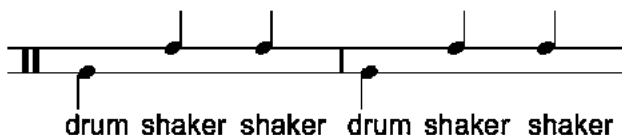
2. Try out this pattern with your class. Begin by simply asking them to say 'Um-pa-pa, Um-pa-pa' over and over. You may like to tap out the strong 'Um' beat on a woodblock or drum to keep everyone together, and make a clear stop sign at the end.

Try performing the rhythm like this (if you are sitting down replace the stamp with a knee-tap):



3. If you are able to use instruments, explore these and incorporate them into the 'Um-pa-pa' pattern. Ask the children if they can spot the difference between the various types of percussion instruments. See if together you can sort them into types i.e. drums, shakers, metal instruments, wooden instruments. Ask them which instruments are strong and loud and should play the **UM** beat (they might say drums). Ask them which should play the weaker **pa** beat. Let's say that they say shakers.
4. Divide your class into two groups. Name the groups 'um' and 'pa' and allocate the instruments accordingly. You might want to start by just giving out one instrument to each group and trying to create a waltz with two soloists whilst everyone else sticks to body percussion. Create the waltz rhythm again with each group (or soloist) playing only on their beat. The 'Um' group only plays 'Um', and the 'pa' group only plays the 'pa-pa'.

Your waltz will go like this:



5. When this is achieved appoint a conductor. Ask him or her to stand in the middle of the room and to count a loud, steady 1, 2, 3 (or um, pa, pa) and to signal to the groups to start. When your conductor raises his/her hand the waltz must stop.

6. You can practise your waltzes using different conductors or adding in more instruments. Always aim for a steady, constant rhythm.
7. When your waltz pattern is confident, see if you can vary how you play it. Your original waltz may be for elephants, but how would you play it if it was a waltz of cats? What about butterflies? Or a blue whale? Ask your children how they might alter the speed, volume or even choice of instruments for different animals (not everyone has to play each time).

### Taking it further

**Harmony** – if you have lots of xylophones or chime bars, split the class into two groups and try creating two waltzes using the following notes:

Group 1: C G G x4  
um - pa - pa

Group 2: G D D x4  
um - pa - pa

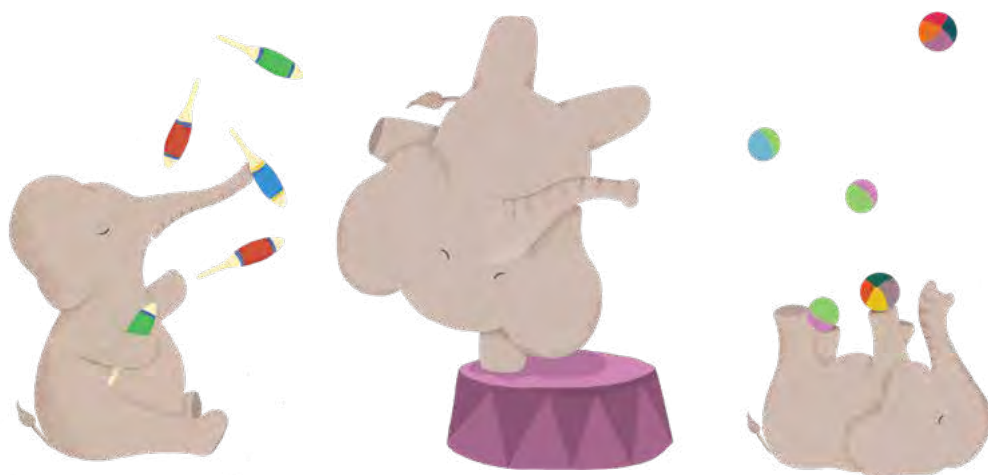
Practise alternating between groups and listen to the waltz changing from one chord to the next. Encourage each group to play at least **four** Um-pa-pas before you switch to the next group and try to switch without adding in a gap.

**Add some dramatic percussion** – for example crashing cymbals, drum rumbles and tingling triangles at different points. Could you add a dramatic percussion introduction before the main waltz starts? If any of your children are struggling with the um-pa-pa pattern, getting them to add dramatic percussion punctuation is a good way to keep them involved. For example, if a child has a crashing cymbal, ask them how many times they will play (perhaps limit to a sensible number). Tell that child they can play whenever they like in the piece, but they **must** stick to the number agreed.

**Dance!** The true test of a waltz is whether or not it can be danced to. Why not play your piece for another class and challenge them to dance to it, pretending to be elephants!

**Add words** – you could add your own elephant poems, chants or raps over your waltz.

This project encourages **teamwork and listening**. It is also about following a pattern and keeping a pulse. Performing a confident waltz is very hard so don't despair if yours ends up a little bit wonky! Encourage your children to keep 'um-pa-pa' going in their head and to watch the conductor carefully.

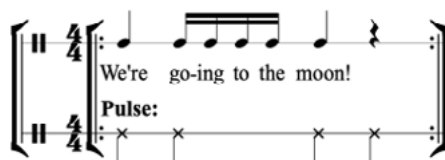


## Composing project 2 – Mischievous Elephants!

In this story we see and hear elephants doing some very unusual things including roller-skating, painting, swimming and playing football. This project explains how to bring ideas to life musically and is perhaps better suited to children who are new to using instruments or struggling with rhythm. Again, it can be done without instruments using just body percussion and voice.

You can [watch a video demonstration](#) of this activity or find it on [lpo.org.uk/elephants](http://lpo.org.uk/elephants).

1. Have a class discussion about other unusual things the elephants might do and make a long list of suggestions on the board.
2. Choose one of the suggestions from the list, for example 'Elephants fly to the moon' and demonstrate how to turn it into music using the following method:
  - Ask the class to invent a sentence the elephants might say e.g. 'We're going to the moon'. Say this against a pulse, in rhythm like this:



- Invent a musical sound effect to describe the event, for example 'Shoooo-Whizz' as they take off. This could be vocal or played on instruments.
  - What happens? Invent the ending to this adventure. For example, the elephants land back on Earth with a bump. Create a sound effect for this, perhaps a big bang on the drum.
  - Put these ideas into an order to describe 'Elephants flying to the moon'. For example:
    - Shooo-Whizz sound effect
    - 'We're going to the moon' rhythm x4
    - Bang sound effect
3. Split your class into small groups and give each group one event from the list on the board. Challenge each group to make their own short piece using the method above. Each group must include a **rhythmic sentence**, a **sound effect** and an **ending**.
- Splitting into small groups means that everyone in the group will get to contribute fully. It will also help with distancing especially if you are in a large space like the hall. This is a big challenge for your children so limit their choice of instruments and keep the lesson moving along quickly. Limiting the time for each activity will encourage speedy decisions and less time to chat, argue and over-complicate things.
4. Hear each group in turn and give gentle feedback. Then put the groups into an order and challenge your children to play their pieces back-to-back without any pausing in between – each group simply nods to the next one. Or add the Elephants in the Custard catchphrase in between each group (see page 7)
  5. You could perform your piece to another class, or film each group and put it together in your own class 'Elephants' film, including any artwork you make.

## Listen and draw

At one point in the story, Sol sees a baby elephant painting a picture with custard. In our film version we become inspired to paint whilst listening to a very famous piece of music by Johann Sebastian Bach.

1. Listen to Air on a G String by J.S. Bach (you can find it [on YouTube](#)). This is a short piece that lasts just under four minutes. Listen to the first minute or so, and ask your children to simply close their eyes and see what images come into their head. Discuss this afterwards and make sure to tell them that whatever they thought of is correct – there's no wrong answer!
2. Listen again and this time, encourage your children to create a picture inspired by the music. The elephants in the story create a painting of the sun but your children can draw or paint whatever they like, whatever the music inspires.

As this piece is quite short, you may like to listen several times until everyone has created something or challenge them to create a fully realised picture in just one hearing!

3. Have a look at the pictures and have another class discussion. If you want to be really adventurous, get out the paints and listen again as your children finish their pictures adding lots of colour to them. If you want to replicate the story, encourage your children to use a lot of custard yellow in their pictures.
4. Finally, display the pictures on the wall, invite another class in to your 'gallery' and encourage them to wander around as Bach's music plays once more.

You can do this task during our film. The Bach piece comes around 14 minutes in. Feel free to pause, rewind and watch it as many times as you need. You can also ask your children for their opinions on the artwork we created in the film.

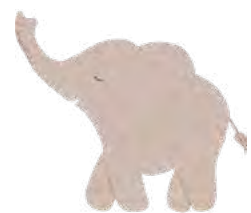
## Other activities

Here are some other cross-curricular activities you can try in preparation for, or in response to Elephants in the Custard.

### Discussion

The Elephants in the Custard story explores how it feels to have a worry, and how important it is for people to listen to each other and be available to talk about problems. Read the story with your class and discuss its themes. In the story, Sol keeps seeing elephants in his custard, but none of his family notice – they all seem too busy. Here are some questions you can ask your children to explore the story and how they feel about their own worries:

- Why did Sol find it difficult to tell his family he felt flustered or worried?
- Why did Sol feel better at the end of the story?
- Who listened?
- How did Sol feel after telling Granny?
- Have a think about who you could talk to about your worries. Who will you talk to? Who will listen?
- What kind of words might you use to talk about being worried?



## Act it out

Acting out stories can help children engage with the text, empathise with the characters and develop literacy skills through absorbing the story and generating their own language to re-tell it.

Invite the children to re-enact the story in their own words. Someone could play Sol, others could be his busy family members around the dinner table, someone could play Granny, and of course we need plenty of mischievous elephants!

## Intergenerational interview

In the story, Sol feels much better after talking to his Granny, who listens to him and reveals her ability to make the elephants behave due to her earlier life as a circus trainer! Invite your children to interview an older person in their lives to find out more about them. This activity could be done via video call, or over the phone if children can't see their older person in person.

Here are some ideas for questions to ask, but your children can also think of their own:

- Where and when were you born?
- Who was in your family when you were growing up?
- What kinds of things did you do to help around the house when you were a child?
- What did you like best about school?
- What did you use to play when you were my age?
- Who were your friends when you were at school?
- What was your favourite book?
- What do you remember about when you met me?



After the interview, children can draw a picture of their older person, and write some things they found out about them around the picture.

## Drawing, colouring and crafting

We have included some printable drawing and colouring sheets courtesy of Owlet Press on page 15–16 which your children can use to enjoy the book illustrations, and create their own unusual elephants in the custard!

There are also lots of free resources online if you want to make elephant masks to liven up your music performances, re-enactments of the story, or just for fun. Why not make your elephant masks and wear them for the screening of our film? [You can find a handy template on this website.](#)

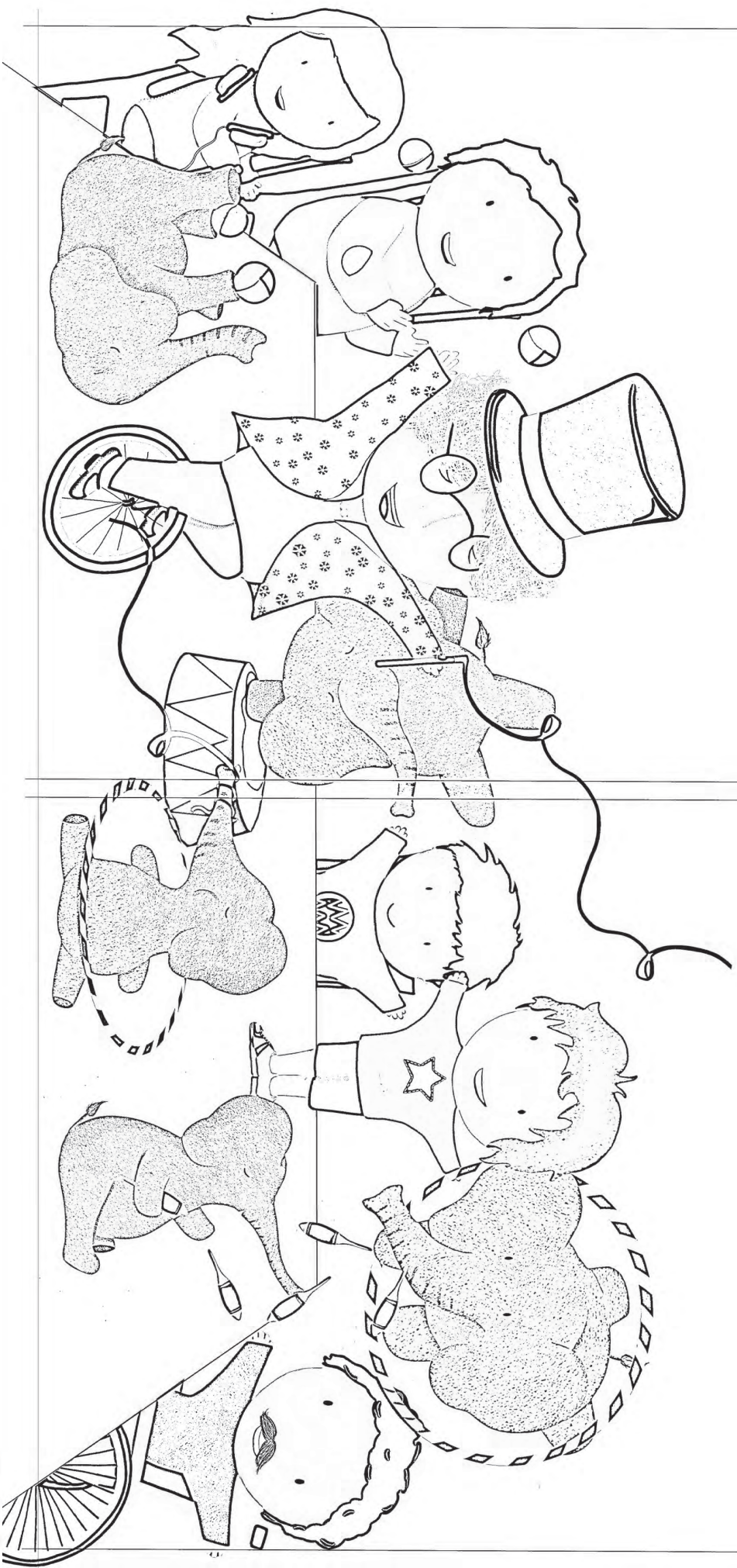
## Get in touch

We would love to hear from you with any artwork or music you create, or any pictures of your class enjoying Elephants in the Custard. You can email us at [education@lpo.org.uk](mailto:education@lpo.org.uk) or connect with us on social media.

Website: [lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)  
Facebook: [londonphilharmonicorchestra](https://www.facebook.com/londonphilharmonicorchestra)

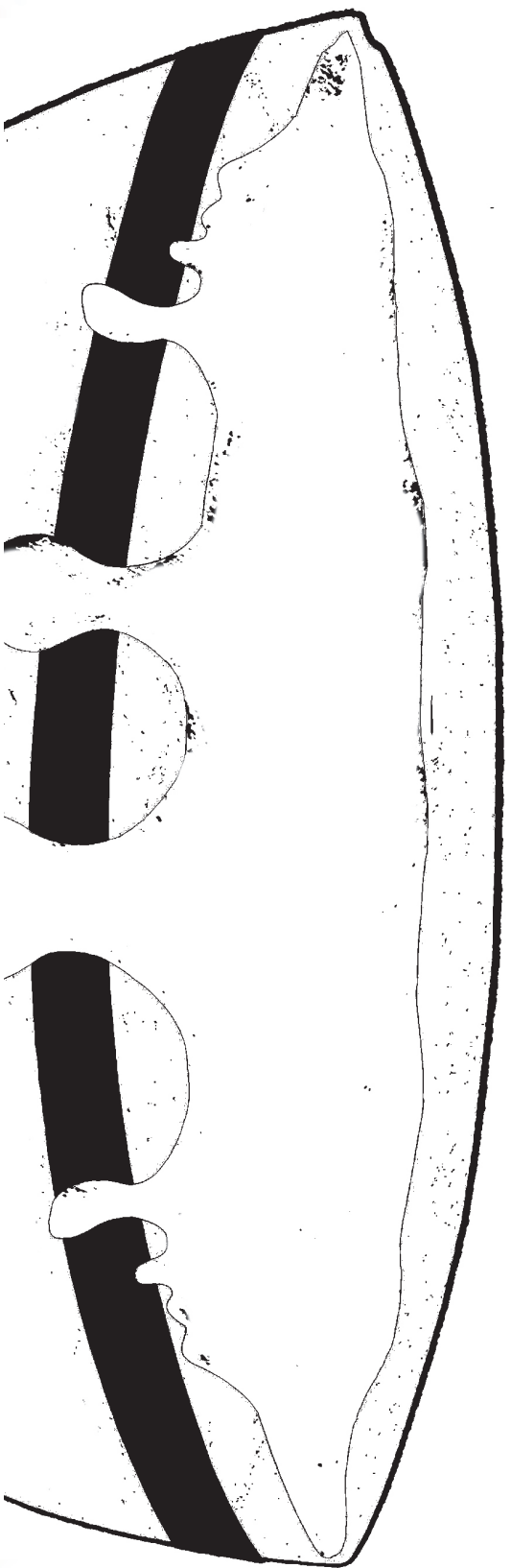
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# ELEPHANTS IN THE CUSTARD



 How colourful can you make the elephant show?

# ELEPHANTS IN THE CUSTARD



 What will your elephants do in the custard?



# Elephants in the Custard Song

## by Rachel Leach

Sitting having dinner *(children copy)*

Feeling like a winner *(copy)*

I see something grey and yellow *(copy)*

Out the corner of my eye *(copy)*

I've eaten all by food *(copy)*

What's wrong with my mood? *(copy)*

No longer feeling mellow *(copy)*

I sort of want to cry *(copy)*

I feel it bubbling up inside *(copy)*

Nowhere to go no time to hide *(copy)*

I hear it when I'm on my own *(copy)*

Even when I'm safe at home *(copy)*

My toes start to tingle

My mind can't be trusted

My fingers start to wriggle

There's a strong smell of mustard

My tummy's all aflutter

My face looks disgusted

My hands are getting hotter

And I'm feeling really flustered

There are elephants!

*(2nd time: Elephants, elephants!)*

In the custard!

Shh... in the custard!

*Repeat from the beginning much faster  
and no call and response!*



# Elephants in the Custard!

RACHEL LEACH

**A** Allegro ♩ = 120

Singing Voice *mf*  
Sit-ting hav-ing din-ner

Piano *p* *mf* *mf* *mf*

6 **Children copy:**

Sit-ting hav-ing din-ner Feel-ing like a win-ner Feel-ing like a win-ner I see some-thing grey and yel-low I see some-thing grey and yel-low Out the

11

cor-ner of my eye Out the cor-ner of my eye I've ea-ten all my food I've ea-ten all my food What's wrong with my mood? What's wrong with my mood? No

17 **B** *p*

lon-ger fee-ling mel-low No lon-ger fee-ling mel-low I sort of want to cry I sort of want to cry I feel it bubb-ling up in-side I

22 *cresc.*

feel it bubb-ling up in-side No-where to go no time to hide No-where to go no time to hide I hear it when I'm on my own I hear it when I'm on my own

27 *f* **C**

E-ven when I'm safe at home *E-ven when I'm safe at home* My toes start to tin-gle My mind can't be trus-ted My fin-gers start to wrig-gle There's a

32 *cresc.*

strong smell of mus-tard My tum-my's all a-flut-ter My face looks dis-gus-ted My hands are get-ting hot-ter and I'm

36 *ff* *pp*

feel-ing rea-lly flus-tered There are el-e-phants in the cus-tard! Shh! In the cus-tard!

40 **D** *Vivace* ♩ = 152

44 *mf*

Sit-ting hav-ing din-ner Feel-ing like a win-ner I see some-thing grey and yel-low Out the

47

cor-ner of my eye I've ea-ten all my food What's wrong with my mood? No

50 *p* **E** *cresc.*

lon - ger fee - ling mel - low I sort of want to cry I feel it bubb - ling up in - side No - where to go no time to hide I

54 *f*

hear it when I'm on my own E - ven when I'm safe at home My toes start to tin - gle My mind can't be trus - ted My

58 *cresc.*

fin - gers start to wrig - gle There's a strong smell of mus - tard My tum - my's all a - flut - ter My face looks dis - gus - ted My

62 *ff*

hands are get - ting hot - ter and I'm feel - ing rea - lly flus - tered There are el - e - phants... el - e - phants...

65 *pp*

el - e - phants... in the cus - tard! Shh! In the cus - tard!