My Bibi Always Remembers
by Toni Buzzeo; illustrated by Mike Wohnoutka
Hyperion Books for Children, 2014

Toni Buzzeo is the New York Times best selling children’s author of twenty picture books. She is also the author of the 2013 Caldecott Honor book, One Cool Friend. For sixteen years, she worked as a school librarian in Maine where she honed her knowledge of children’s literature. Combining this knowledge with her love of children, Toni writes about characters of all stripes (including elephants, lions, giraffes, dinosaurs, loons, kids, teachers, and librarians) who explore their worlds, their relationships, and themselves in settings that include East African savannahs, peaceful Maine lakes, rocky lighthouse islands, as well as aquariums and the interiors of fictional public and school libraries. Toni is well known for her lively spirit and her sense of humor.
INVESTIGATIONS: ELEPHANT FAMILIES

Not every animal family is organized around a matriarch (the oldest female in the family), but elephant families are. After reading *My Bibi Always Remembers* aloud to students, ask them to discuss the roles of the grandmother (matriarch), the mother, the aunties, and the babies as portrayed in the story. Ask: **What important job does the grandmother (matriarch) do?** **What important jobs do the other adult females do?**

Then, ask your students to undertake an investigation of elephant families. Read resources aloud to very young children or let older children explore on their own, asking them to be on the lookout for interesting facts about the roles of adult females in the family structure.


Another excellent source of information is the San Diego Zoo website at [http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/elephant](http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/elephant)

WHO LIVES ON THE SAVANNAH?

Tembo and her family live on the East African savannah in Kenya with many other animals, some of which we meet in *My Bibi Always Remembers* and its two companion books, *Just Like My Papa* and *Stay Close to Mama*. Beginning with elephants, ask students to make a list of all of the animals they see in *My Bibi Always Remembers*. Continue to add to the list by choosing animals from *Just Like My Papa* and *Stay Close to Mama* if you also have these books available. When the list is complete, choose one animal at a time to explore further. First, ask children what they know about the animal by carefully examining the illustrations and re-reading the text in which the animal appears. Now, using child-friendly websites (such as National Geographic Kids Creature Feature about the spotted hyena [http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/spotted-hyenas/](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/spotted-hyenas/) or the Fort Wayne Zoo about black storks [http://kidszoo.org/our-animals/african-journey/black-stork/](http://kidszoo.org/our-animals/african-journey/black-stork/) and nonfiction books from the library collection, explore further information about each of the animals in the three books.

If time allows, create a class book about the animals using child-created text and illustration.
WHAT TIME IS IT?

Time of day plays a role in the story, *My Bibi Always Remembers*. After reading the book, ask students to list each scene in the story and then determine the time of day it takes place. For each scene, ask: *How do you know what time of day it is? Does the text tell you or must you depend on the illustrations?*

Next, share the book WITHOUT reading the text, asking students to look for illustration clues about the time of day. Make a list, detailing what specific elements in each illustration offer clues about the time of day. Discuss the role of the illustrator, Mike Wohnoutka, in making the reader aware of the time of day in the story.

Ask students: *Why is time of day important to this story about Tembo being repeatedly separated from her family?*

If time and opportunity allow, read the companion book, *Just Like My Papa*. Ask students: *Is time of day more or less important in this story than in My Bibi Always Remembers? Why?*

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Author Toni Buzzeo chooses not to make the animals in her story speak, but she does use a technique that is similar to dialogue. Whenever Bibi or Tembo or any of the other elephants would speak in a scene, she uses italics to indicate their thoughts, or the language interpretation of their trumpets and rumbles. Make a list of these times.

Ask students: *Why do you think Toni Buzzeo chose not to have her elephants speak? Do you think it was a wise decision or would you have preferred speaking animals? Can you think of books in which the animal characters are living in the wild but also speak in words?*

Then, read one or more picture books in which the animal characters live in the wild but do use human speech such as:

- *Mouse & Lion* by Rand Burkert, illustrated by Nancy Ekholm Burkert
- *Brownie Groundhog and the February Fox* by Susan Blackaby, illustrated by Carmen Segovia

Ask students: *How does it change the story when the wild animals talk in human speech? What are the ways in which it makes the story better? What are the ways that it detracts from the story? Which do you prefer and why?*
ILLUSTRATION IN COMPANION BOOKS

All three of the books, *My Bibi Always Remembers*, *Stay Close to Mama*, and *Just Like My Papa* are written by author Toni Buzzeo and illustrated by artist Mike Wohnoutka, making them companion books. Take time to compare the illustrations in the three books.

Begin by talking about the artist’s palette. Introduce the definition of the word: “The range of colors used in a particular painting or by a particular artist.” ([http://www.thefreedictionary.com/palette](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/palette)) Then, ask students to compare Mike Wohnoutka’s palette in the three books. Ask: *How and when is Mike’s palette similar in the three books? How and when is it different? Why?*

Now compare Mike’s palette and illustration style in these three East African savannah books with his palette and illustration style in other animal books he has illustrated such as *Moo! or Mama’s Little Duckling*. Discuss how and why Mike used the palette he chose and a different style. Ask: *What demands does the story make of an illustrator?*

I REMEMBER . . .

The most important thing that Bibi does in *My Bibi Always Remembers* is to remember the way to a place where there is water, even during a long drought. She is able to do this because she has lived a very long time—from 60 to 70 years—in the wild and has lived through other droughts.

Then, initiate a conversation about a much older adult person each child knows, whether a grandparent or someone else of the generation older than their parents, or even one generation older than that one. Invite them to ask that person to tell them about a time or place they remember from the far distant past, perhaps when they were children themselves.

After sharing some of these stories in the class, ask: *Why is it important for older people to share stories they remember?*