

Babar Encyclopedia Article

Babar

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Contents

Babar Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
Babar.....	3

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Perhaps the best known elephant in the world, Babar was born in France in 1931. He was first seen in a children's book titled *Histoire de Babar*, written and illustrated by painter and first-time author Jean de Brunhoff. It told the story of a young elephant, orphaned when a hunter killed his mother, who traveled to Paris. Babar became a well-dressed gentleman and took to walking on his hind legs, wearing a green suit and a bowler hat. By the end of the book he had married Celeste and was king of an imaginary African country. Jean de Brunhoff died in 1937 and after the Second World War his eldest son, Laurent, resumed the series. He drew and wrote in a manner close to that of his father. In addition to Babar and his queen, the books feature the couple's four children as well as the Old Lady and Zephir the monkey. The books feature a solid family structure, strong female characters, and lessons on the choices children must make to become decent people.

Published in America as *The Story of Babar*, the story became a hit and served as a foundation for an impressive quantity of books, toys, and merchandise. Beginning in the 1980s, the creation of several Babar children's videos bolstered the character's popularity. The Canadian animation studio, Nelvana, produced a popular television cartoon show that continued to be popular into the 1990s. Kent State University in Ohio houses an large archive of Babar materials.

Further Reading:

De Brunhoff, Jean and Laurent. *Babar's Anniversary Album*. New York, Random House, 1981.

Hildebrand, Ann Meinzen. *Jean and Laurent de Brunhoff: The Legacy of Babar*. New York, Twayne, 1991.