

The Elephant Diaries

Story Reference: *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Humane Heroes Volume III, Story 2, “Rescuing Elephants Is a BIG Job”*

Lesson Description: Students trace the journey of three orphaned elephants from their early lives in Africa, where their survival was in peril, to their eventual home in the International Conservation Center operated by the American Humane Conservation-certified Pittsburgh Zoo. The elephants’ story spans several decades and involves the support of multinational agencies/organizations and several key individuals who were determined to save the elephants’ lives. Readers see evidence of kindness and compassion for animals on an international scale. Students assemble the events of the elephants’ rescue as imaginary diary entries from various points of view, including from the elephants themselves.

ELA Alignment:

- Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

Lesson Objectives:

- Retell the narrative of Thandi, Seeni, and Sukiri to highlight the cooperation and kindness of individuals and organizations involved in the elephants’ rescue.

Vocabulary:

- Culling
- Mahout

Materials:

- Notebook paper for taking notes
- Story diagram template (see example)
- Sticky notes (six to eight per student) or blank paper

Introduction: Think-Pair-Share about stories (8 minutes)

- Organize students into pairs to conduct a Think-Pair-Share exercise. Give the pairs the following prompts:
 - *Have you ever adopted an animal from a rescue organization?*
 - *Have you ever wondered how these animals’ lives began and what lives they led before you adopted them?*

- *What about animals you see at the zoo or in an aquarium? Have you ever wondered about their stories?*
- Explain to students that they will be learning about life-altering events that affected the fate of three elephants.

Read and Analyze: Create a diagram of the narrative. (15 minutes)

- Introduce students to the story, “Rescuing Elephants Is a BIG Job.” Tell them that they should pay attention to each event that occurs and take notes on a timeline about the details of those events. Students should try to list the event, the year, the location, and the characters involved. If the story does not provide an exact date or location, students should list what they know or just use general terms. Students may choose to create intersecting timelines from different points of view as the narrative evolves.
- When finished reading, students complete a diagram of the story using the story diagram template included in the lesson. The following terms are used in the diagram:
 - **Exposition:** How does the text introduce the characters? What is the initial setting? What is the inciting event that sets the story in motion?
 - **Rising action:** How does the story build? What complications and obstacles impact the characters in the text? How do the characters respond?
 - **Climax:** What is the turning point that ultimately determines the characters’ fates?
 - **Falling action:** How does the narrative steer toward resolution?
 - **Resolution:** What brings final closure to the story?
- Organize students into pairs to review each other’s story diagrams. Direct the students to embellish their diagrams with additional details based on the feedback they receive.

Guided Practice: Practice storytelling to engage others in animal kindness (15 minutes)

- Share with students that storytelling is an important way to involve others in the cause of animal kindness and compassion.
- Direct students to retell the story to highlight the themes of cooperation and kindness of the individuals involved in the animal rescue.
- Students may depict their story in six frames as drawings, dialogue, or written notes. They may wish to imagine their story in the form of a diary, a graphic novel, a screenplay, or a blog post. Students may use sticky notes or a folded sheet of notebook paper to organize key moments of cooperation described in the narrative into six frames.
- Guide students to highlight the themes of the story by considering the following questions:
 - *What are the qualities of the people and organizations who came together to make the rescue happen? Responses may include: persistence, courage, initiative, or compassion.*
 - *What motivated them, why did they participate, and how did they proceed?*
- When students are finished with their frames, ask them to return to their story diagram partner and share their retelling of the elephants’ story with each other. Coach students to give feedback on ways to make their stories compelling.

Closing: Reflect on cooperation (7 minutes)

- Ask students to reflect on the concept of cooperation. Direct them to think about whether the outcome of the elephants' story could have been achieved without so many people and groups working together. Discuss what role zoos and aquariums can play to provide lifelong care for displaced animals.
- Brainstorm the factors that influence cooperation among individuals and organizations. Some possible responses may include the following:
 - Communicating effectively
 - Sharing goals and values
 - Agreeing on what's important
 - Listening to each other
 - Being supportive
 - Being adaptable

STORY DIAGRAM

Plot Diagram for Rescuing Elephants is a Big Job

9. _____

8. _____

7. _____

6. _____

5. _____

5. _____

4. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

Rising Action ↩

Falling Action ➡

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

Climax:

Resolution:

Exposition

Characters:

Setting:

Inciting Action (problem):

Theme:

Symbolism:

Foreshadowing:

Irony:

Name _____

Sample Responses To Story Diagram

Inciting Action	<p>Thandi, Seeni, and Sukiri</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orphaned in Kruger National Park in South Africa - survival not likely Identified for culling
<p>Rising Action</p> <p>(complications and many examples of kindness and people going above and beyond)</p>	<p>Uttum and Dinky Corea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted elephants and moved to Botswana <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handler fatal tragedy in Okavango Delta (complication) Struck compromise with wildlife authorities Sent plea to zoos in U.S. <p>Botswana Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended the deadline for the elephants' departure to the Pittsburgh Zoo International Conservation Center Coordinated transportation of 3 elephants on Boeing 747 cargo plane <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtained variance to make a direct flight from Botswana to Pittsburgh Cooperation with Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Customs, federal, state, and local veterinarians, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture <p>Wildlife veterinarians in Botswana and South Africa:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct veterinary tests and obtained permits Supervised crate building
Climax	<p>Cooperation among multinational team of veterinarians, handlers, and elephant managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked together on the transportation logistics by ground and air Trained elephants to acclimate to the travel crates Accompanied on road trip from Botswana to South Africa <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tire caught fire, truck driver quick thinking to drive into sand
Falling Action	19-hour flight to Pittsburgh - team accompanied elephants on flight
Resolution	<p>Arrival at Pittsburgh Zoo International Conservation Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed quarantine period Introduced to bull elephant, Jackson