

What an elephant is really like

A script in eight parts based on a traditional story by Michelle Whitworth

Parts
Narrator
One
Two
Three
Four
Five
Six
Village Elder

[The narrator is often played by the teacher. Characters can be played by boys or girls. In the script, 's/he' should be changed to fit the person reading the part.]

Narrator: Just imagine that you had never seen something before – not even in a picture or photo? Do you think you would know how to recognise it in real life? Long ago, in an Indian village, there lived six people who had all been blind from birth. They liked to sit for hours under the shade of a large banyan tree and talk about many things. One day, the subject of elephants came under discussion.

One: I've heard that the elephant is a strange animal.

Two: Yes, it's too bad we won't have the good fortune to see this wondrous beast.

Three: See it? Forget that! Just to feel it would be wonderful.

Four: Well, that's true. If only there were some way of touching the elephant, we'd be able to know what it was really like.

Narrator: It so happened that the owner of herd of elephants was passing by the banyan tree. He overheard the conversation.

Merchant: Hey, there, you fellows, do you really want to feel what an elephant is really like? I am a merchant and I have some elephants here. Wait a moment and I can oblige.

Narrator: The six people were surprised and happy. The merchant brought one of his elephants forward and commanded it to stand still. Then he led the blind people by the hand in turn to feel the elephant, starting with One.

One tripped over a stone and fell against the elephant's side, putting a hand out for support. S/he felt its thick rough skin as far as s/he could reach.

One: Ha! Truly a strange animal!

Narrator: Two went forward with arms outstretched. The elephant had turned its head to the side. Two touched the elephant's tusk.

Two: So that's what an elephant is like.

Narrator: Three was led to the rear of the elephant. S/he touched the tail which gave a flick.

Three: I must say it's not quite what I imagined.

Narrator: Four reached out and touched the elephant's trunk which twisted and then wrapped itself round four's waist.

Four: How very odd!

Narrator: Five walked up and felt the animal's ear as it flapped about.

Five: I've never known anything like it.

Narrator: Finally, the merchant led Six forward. S/he touched the elephant's huge legs ... up, down and around ... first one, then the other.

Six: Now I know what an elephant feels like.

All six people: Thank you so much, Mr. Merchant.

Merchant: It was a pleasure. Good day to you all.

Narrator: When the merchant had gone, the six people sat down under the banyan tree again. They were all very excited about their experience.

Five: So, what did you all think? Wasn't that amazing?

One: Yes, I've never come across an animal that felt so much like a great rough wall.

Two: What are you talking about? The elephant was sharp and smooth – exactly like a long spear.

Three: Smooth? It wasn't smooth. The elephant was coarse and flexible – like a thick rope.

Four: Well, I'll agree it was flexible but it certainly wasn't coarse. The elephant was smooth and it wriggled and flicked like a snake.

Five: What rubbish. It was like our straw fans swinging back and forth to give us a breeze.

Six: No, no! You're all wrong. It resembled two big trees with no branches.

Narrator: Then they all started quarrelling. Each one insisted that they alone were correct and the others were all wrong. Words turned to actions started to

jab each other with their fingers to emphasise just how right they were. It seemed a fight was inevitable when one of the village elders came over to see what all the jabbing and quarrelling was all about.

Village Elder: What is the matter? Why are you all fighting like this?

Six: We can't agree what the elephant is really like.

Village Elder: And what do you all think it's like?

Narrator: And they all said at once:

One: a wall

Two: a spear

Three: a rope

Four: a snake.

Five: a fan

Six: two big trees

Narrator: At this point, the wise woman said ... Well what do you think she said? What would you have said to the people who could agree what an elephant was *really* like?