

## Amazing Elephants: Lesson Plan



**Objective:** To educate children about elephants and the differences between elephants' lives in the wild and in captivity and to teach children empathy for other sentient beings.

**Grades:** 2-6

**Time Required:** 45 minutes

**Materials Needed:** "Amazing Elephants: An Introduction" and note cards listing topics for student pairs to present.

**Step 1:** Prepare a set of note cards. List one of the following topics on each one:

Mothers	Walking	Water
Friends	Dying	Enemies
Eating	Health	Traveling
Playing	Learning	Grieving
Sleeping	Family	Communicating

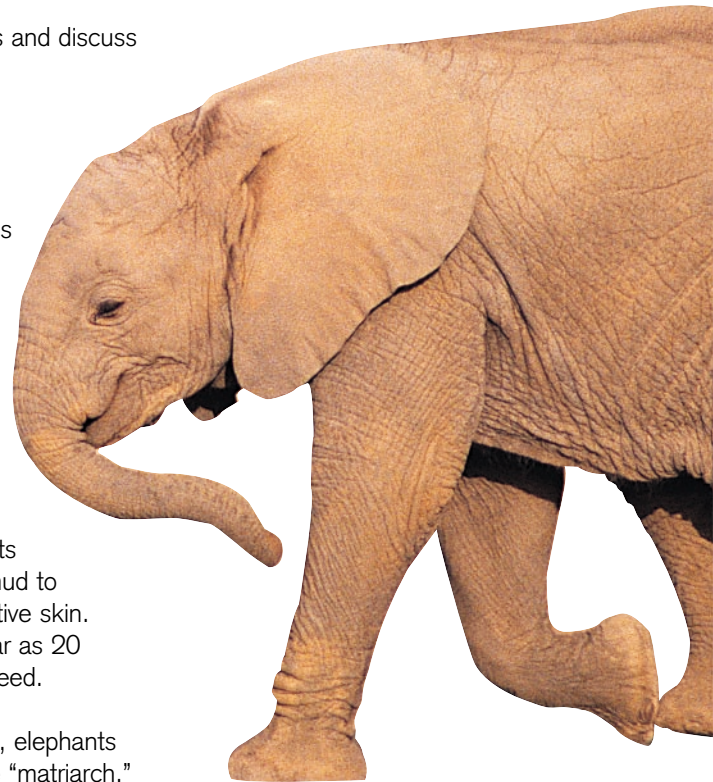
**Step 2:** Read "Amazing Elephants: An Introduction" to the students and discuss it with them.

### Amazing Elephants: An Introduction

Today there are two species of elephants: the African elephant—the largest animal living on land today—and the slightly smaller Asian elephant. As their names suggest, wild elephants live in the grasslands of Africa or in the forests of Asia. Besides their enormous size—a newborn elephant weighs as much as an adult man—perhaps their most amazing physical feature is their trunk, made up of 100,000 muscles and no bone. An elephant's trunk is sensitive enough to pick up a seed and strong enough to pull down a tree.

Elephants are, in fact, very sensitive and intelligent creatures. They communicate with each other through gesture, touch, and sound, using trumpeting, squeaks, rumbles, and a deep "ultrasound" that humans can't hear. They are vegetarians and are skilled at using plants and minerals to keep themselves healthy. They also use leaves and mud to keep their bodies cool and prevent sunburn on their surprisingly sensitive skin. Wild elephants love to go swimming and roam widely. They walk as far as 20 miles every day for exercise and to find the foods that they like and need.

Elephants are very social and develop strong family bonds. In the wild, elephants live in family groups called "herds" led by the oldest female, called the "matriarch," who knows where the water holes are and the best places to find food. Elephants have almost no natural enemies, though they closely guard their young calves from potential predators. Elephants help each other when in trouble, and they work together to care for baby elephants. They also care for sick or injured family



members. When an elephant dies, family members mourn and linger at the site. They may even return much later and touch the bones of their kin.

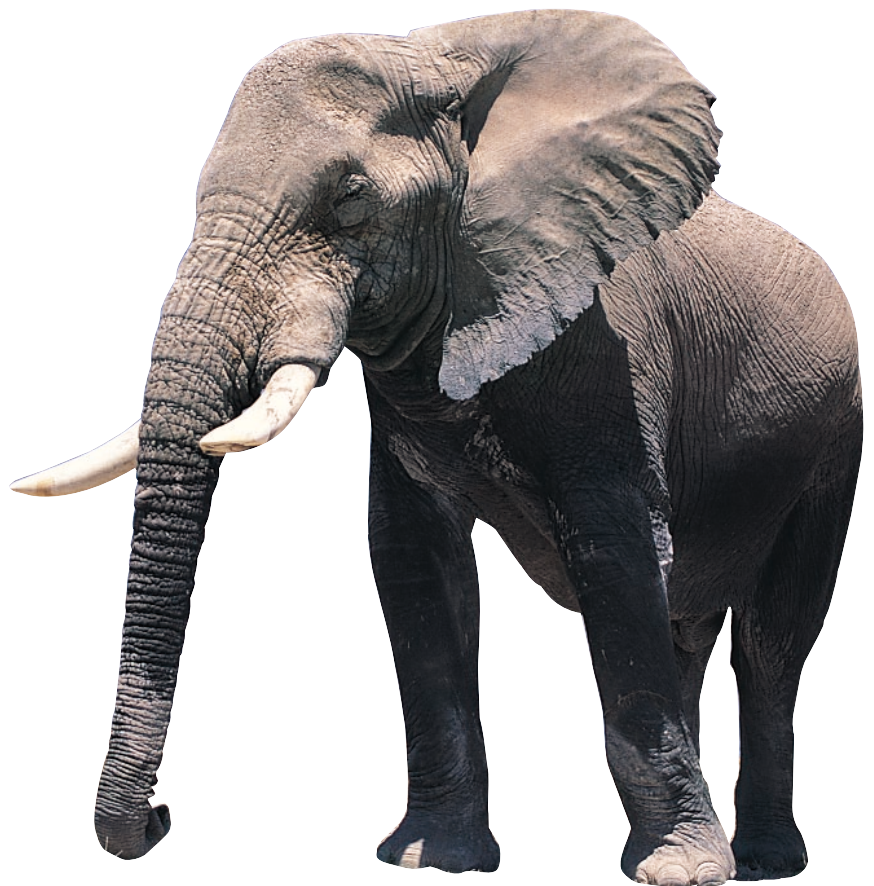
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Nearly all elephants in captivity were captured in the wild and taken from their families when they were babies. In captivity, elephant friends are separated when they are sent to different circuses and zoos. They are chained when they are not performing so that they cannot move around freely or easily touch each other. A large portion of their lives is spent traveling in tiny train cars and trailers. They are usually fed only dried hay and grains instead of the fresh grasses, leaves, fruit, bark, and water plants that they would eat in the wild. They are forced to learn tricks by being hit and jabbed with a bullhook—a pole with a sharp metal point and a hook on one end. Whips and chains are also used. Sometimes they even have to perform when they are sick or injured. In the wild, elephants can live up to 70 years. In captivity, they die much younger, usually from foot problems because they have to stand on hard surfaces all day, which hurts and damages their feet.

**Step 3:** Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a note card.

**Step 4:** Ask the pairs to put themselves in the place of the elephants and discuss with each other the topic on the note card, first from the perspective of an elephant in the wild and then as an elephant in captivity.

**Step 5:** Ask each pair of students to present to the class the topic on their note card as they imagine a wild elephant and a captive elephant would experience it.



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