

NOMKHUBULWANE AND YOU:

How **You** Can Help Care for **Mother Earth**

An Activity Booklet Created by
The Civic Knowledge Project
for The Human Elephant Foundation

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"The elephant is a metaphor that awakens the yearning for forgotten conversations between humans, the Earth and all living things."

- Andries Botha, South African artist and creator of Nomkhubulwane

Introduction

What thoughts come to mind as this awe-inspiring mother elephant stands before you? Do you ask yourself, “*Why is Nomkhubulwane here? What is she trying to say to me?*” With her trunk raised and her mouth open, Nomkhubulwane sends a message out to those around her. She asks us to **stop and think**: about conservation and environmental awareness, about how our actions can threaten the survival of elephants and other species, about how we can live more in harmony with the natural world. This booklet is designed to prompt these thoughts and also provide information about why these questions matter and how you can **transform thought into conversation and action!**

Biodiversity & Me

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, describes the *variety of living things* on Earth. Our planet is so rich with life that scientists are not sure how many different kinds of organisms are still undiscovered. So far, there have been more than 1.7 million species identified, including:

- 950,000 species of insects
- 270,000 species of plants
- 19,000 species of fish
- 10,500 species of reptiles & amphibians
- 9,000 species of birds
- 4,000 species of mammals

But biodiversity isn't just limited to the numbers and kinds of organisms. Biodiversity also includes Earth's *ecosystems*: its savannas, rain forests, oceans, marshes, deserts, and all the other environments where species evolve and live. Biodiversity also includes *genetic diversity*, which is the variety of genes within a species.

Biodiversity 911: What's Been Happening to Earth's Biodiversity?



Scientists think we're on the brink of the greatest global loss of biodiversity since the extinction of the dinosaurs and many other species more than 65 million years ago. Thousands of species are at risk now and in the future. Why? *Human actions are the biggest cause.* The loss of habitats—the places where organisms live and get the nutrients, water, and living space they need to survive—is the biggest reason biodiversity is declining.

What Kinds of Human Actions Are Causing a Loss of Biodiversity?

Some loss of biodiversity can be explained by the fact that the *human population is still growing.* The more people that live on the Earth, the more space they need. This need for space means that we often move into natural habitats. When people cut down a forest, fill in a wetland, or plow a prairie, they disrupt the delicate interactions among the species that live there. They can also force out and even kill many organisms. But population growth alone doesn't explain all the loss of natural habitats around the globe. We also use too many of the Earth's *natural resources*, like forests, soil, water, and fossil fuels (coal and oil), and we do not replace what we use quickly enough. Fossil fuels are burned to release energy that can be used to drive our cars and bring heat and light to our homes, but burning fossil fuels also releases damaging chemicals into the air and has caused serious changes to the Earth's climate. Our *use of pesticides*, like bug spray and fertilizers for lawns, has contaminated our soil and water. Our *need for wood and paper* has caused much of the Earth's forests to be cut down. **The bottom line is that we have been irresponsible with our use of natural resources and destruction of natural habitats.**



I'm Just One Kid - What Can I Do To Help?



The most important thing to keep in mind is that conservation is possible through small actions. Humans are just one species among millions on the Earth, and we must be aware of how our actions impact the environment. Making smarter, more environmentally conscious decisions will help protect biodiversity and conserve the Earth's resources. Here are just a few ideas!

1. **Recycle** - Bring home your reusable containers and water bottle from school and separate cans, plastic, paper, and glass bottles that you use at home for recycling. All these items can be reused.
2. **Hang your clothes outside to dry** – Ask your parents to get a clothes line or rack to dry your clothes.

You will save a lot of energy by not using the dryer.

3. **Turn off your computer at night.**
4. **Use both sides of paper** - You will save half of the amount of paper you would have normally used!
5. **Don't get bottled water** - Instead of bottled water, get a reusable container to carry water.
6. **Turn the water off when you brush your teeth** – Water that is not being used shouldn't just run down the drain. Water is one of those natural resources we need to conserve much better than we have in the past.
7. **Shorten your shower** - Every minute you cut from your shower is roughly 5 gallons of water. The less time your shower takes, the lower your impact on the environment.
8. **Turn off the lights when you're not using them.** Unplug chargers not in use.
9. **Eat more organic foods** – Organic fruits and vegetables are grown without spraying pesticides on them, so they don't add more toxic chemicals to the soil.
10. **Walk or ride your bike when you can** - If you have to go somewhere close, consider riding your bike or walking there instead of using your car. It is better for the environment because no oil is burned, and it's also healthier for you!

Your turn:

What other ideas do you have about helping conserve resources?

What change in how you live might you try to help the earth?

Elephants and Emotion

People have always respected and revered elephants. Why is that? For one thing, they are the largest land mammal on Earth and lead a peaceful existence. They are extremely intelligent and are even capable of painting self-portraits! They have many traits and behaviors similar to ours, including a similar life span (70+ years), a strong sense of family and community, and the ability to store long-term memories. But they are also the most emotionally similar to us, feeling and displaying a range of complex emotions. Elephants experience sadness, love, and joy; they can be jealous of each other and throw tantrums; they grieve for lost family members and help each other during times of struggle; mothers, aunts, and grandmother elephants all help raise the young calves. Many zoologists and ethologists (scientists who study animal behavior) have spent their lives observing elephants and have come to know these animals on a personal level. One of these scientists is Daphne Sheldrick, who has



spent more than thirty years observing elephants in the wild. She has cared for baby elephants that were orphaned and re-introduced them into the wild once they were healthy adults. In her book *Elephant Emotion*, she tells many tales of these incredible mammals. One elephant in particular, Olmeg, seemed to behave just like you or your little brother or sister may have as toddlers:

“Olmeg was just two weeks old when he was flown in 1987, having been discovered by tribesmen trapped in the mud of a deep washaway, sunburnt to a frazzle and more dead than alive from dehydration...Olmeg is a complex character, deeply sensitive and easily wounded. During his Nursery period, being the first and oldest, he basked in the admiration of all those younger, including the next in line, Taru, who was orphaned in Tsavo and is 6 months younger. It is very normal for little bull elephants to indulge in a "hero-worship" of those older, because in childhood rank begins with age and rank is all-important in elephant male society. Olmeg was unquestionably the boss in the Nursery...Tantrums from Olmeg first became a daily occurrence when it was time to begin his weaning period. Suddenly his milk ration was cut to 3 bottles at a sitting, whereas Taru and the others still needed 4. The Keepers were puzzled when Olmeg behaved like a spoilt brat at every feed... The reason was, of course, that he could count, and that he felt the others were being given preferential treatment at his expense. A fourth bottle containing just water was added to the three so that the line-up was the same for all, and thereafter the matter was resolved to everyone's satisfaction. It is very important always to treat each elephant exactly the same; never to give one something another cannot have, because it will be noticed and remembered.”



But there are other orphan elephants described by Daphne that have survived traumatic experiences – the death of family members, abandonment, and near-death themselves. The effects of these experiences can be seen in their behavior:

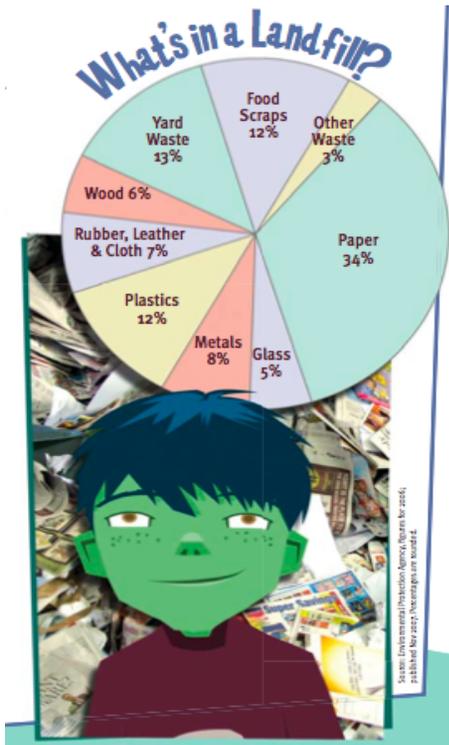
“Dika was the orphan that demonstrated despair and heartbreak so graphically. Some of his family were gunned down en masse, others fled, wounded amidst a hail of gunfire, and Dika had obviously raced through a dense thorn thicket, because when he arrived, he had hundreds of long acacia thorns protruding from almost every square inch of his body. For four long months we could get no sparkle from him and there were times when we wondered whether he was, in fact, mentally normal. Even the other elephants could get no response from him as he stood by himself dejectedly brooding on the loss of those he loved, tears staining his cheeks, reluctant to feed, refusing to play and unable to sleep- so obviously and tragically distraught.”

The fact that elephants can reflect on their experiences, feel pain and love, and reveal these emotions to others should be the biggest reminder that we share this Earth with other intelligent and sensitive species. They can emotionally respond to things we do, and because of that, we ought to be more conscious of how our actions affect them.

Your turn:

How do you feel about elephants?

The Three R's: Recycle, Reduce, and Reuse



Nomkhubulwane was made from the offcuts of recycled truck tires— materials considered redundant to the planet. Waste, and how we choose to handle it, has a huge impact on the environment. After you throw out your cereal box or food scraps from dinner, where does that trash go? It is carted off to a landfill, which is a huge dump designed to collect trash and keep it separated from the surrounding environment. A plastic liner keeps dirty liquids in the landfill and stops them from spreading to neighboring land and into streams or groundwater. It takes trash a long time for trash to decay in a landfill because there's very little sunlight, air, or moisture to help materials break down. Non-biodegradable waste is waste that cannot be broken down by living organisms (like bacteria and fungi). This includes plastic bottles and bags, glass jars, and metal, all of which can stay in the landfill for decades or even centuries compared to biodegradable waste. For example, it takes an apple core about 2 months to break down in a landfill, but it takes a plastic bag 10-20 years and a glass bottle 1 million years! That's why recycling items like plastic, glass, and metal is so important – it reduces the amount of non-biodegradable material in landfills.

Recycling and reducing are not the only “R’s” you can do: reusing materials is also easy! Do you know how many plastic bags are used worldwide in one year? Four to five trillion! And even though paper bags seem like they're better for the environment, it takes a lot of energy and trees to make them, and they are not always recycled. So what can you do? Say “no” to paper or plastic bags and make your own reusable canvas bag. Many grocery stores nowadays are encouraging shoppers to be more environmentally friendly and bring their own bags, and you can join that movement by designing your own! Here's what you need to do:

Suggested Materials:

- One plain canvas shopping bag
- Paper and pencil
- Permanent fabric markers
- Fabric or acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Cloth rags

1. Use the piece of paper to sketch out your design – remember that people will see your bag when you walk around, so make sure it has a powerful message about the environment.
2. Decorate your bag using whatever art materials you like and wear it proud!

Making Better Food Decisions

How Does the Food Industry Impact the Environment?

Did you know that the food industry is one of the major causes of damage to the environment? To raise animals for food, we have to use land, energy, and water. Farmed animals need land to roam on. *Enormous tracts of land* are needed to grow the grains used to feed them. Overgrazing animals has caused deforestation of rain forests and pine forests, has eroded fertile soil, and has led to the extinction of many plant and animal species.

What about all the *energy-consuming* steps that must be taken before the chicken on a farm becomes chicken on your plate? Powering the machines that till the grains fed to farm animals, transporting those grains to farms, operating the factory farms themselves, trucking animals to slaughterhouses and meat-processing factories, providing electricity to those factories, and transporting the meat to grocery stores require HUGE amounts of fossil fuels. In addition, providing water for the animals to drink, watering the crops that they eat, and cleaning up the mess at factory farms and slaughterhouses places a high demand on our water supplies. Just think: it takes 5,000 gallons of water to produce 1 pound of meat!

In addition to destroying land and using energy and natural resources, raising animals for food also *pollutes the environment*. All animals produce feces, and the bacteria and chemical contaminants in animal excrements can be absorbed by the soil. They can also enter the groundwater and run-off into larger bodies of water, where they can harm the fish and plant species living there. Ecosystems surrounding these farms can be damaged, and those communities living near them can also become sick from polluted water and soil. Running factory farms on fossil fuels and raising animals also release damaging toxins into the air, including methane and nitrous oxide. These gases are involved in the climate changes we have seen, namely global warming. To put this into perspective, eating 1 pound of meat emits the same amount of greenhouse gasses as driving an SUV 40 miles!



How Can I Make Better Food Decisions?



One of the easiest ways you can help the environment is by changing what's on your plate at dinnertime. Reducing the amount of meat you eat means contributing less to water and air pollution, ecological destruction, and wasteful use of resources. Meat is important for our diet because it provides several nutrients that our bodies need, including protein, iron, and vitamin B12, but there are many other foods that you can substitute for meat to get those nutrients. Eggs, beans, tofu, nuts, and seeds all have high protein content. Many grains like rice, cereal, and oatmeal and vegetables like broccoli, green beans, beans, and spinach are filled with iron. Some foods high in vitamin B include tuna, chili peppers, lentils, bananas, potatoes, and molasses. You can also help lower your impact on the environment by eating more organic fruits and vegetables, which are grown without pesticides so they reduce the amount of toxic chemicals added to the soil. You can learn more about making careful and

environmentally-conscious food decisions in Dr. Jane Goodall's book, *Harvest for Hope: a Guide to Mindful Eating*. In it, Dr. Goodall encourages us to think about the importance of our daily food choices and discusses a range of ethical issues relating to food, resources, health, and the well-being of animals.

Your turn:

Make a list of foods you usually eat now...

What is one change in your diet that you might try to live more sustainably? What might encourage you to make it?

Painting with Soil

Soil is an important foundation for the landscapes that surround us, whether we live in cities or rural areas. Soil is composed of gases, water, and humus (partially broken down organic matter), and rock that's been worn down by natural elements like water and wind. It is a biologically active zone that supports many communities of living things. Without it, the Earth's surface would be barren rock and sand and could not support life. Different types of soils make up the beautiful colors we see in nature every day. Andries Botha has used natural materials that grow in the soil (like trees) to create some of his elephants as well as recycled waste materials. Other artists have used soil to express themselves! You can use the natural pigments found in soil, bricks, and clay to make paint and creatively explore what harmony between man and nature means to you. The two pictures below are examples of paintings made using soil.

Materials Needed:



1. A variety of soil samples with different colors and textures (dried in the air). You can even use the soil from your backyard! About 2/3 cup of each color of soil is needed.
2. Re-sealable plastic freezer bags
3. Rolling pin
4. Sifters/wire mesh - three mesh sizes are needed. The smallest mesh should be close to the size of a tea leaf strainer.
5. Paper plates
6. Plastic cups
7. Popsicle sticks or other sticks for stirring
8. Water
9. Clear acrylic medium - about one to three teaspoons of medium will be mixed into each soil paint mixture.
10. Paper to paint on - watercolor art paper works best
11. Paint brushes

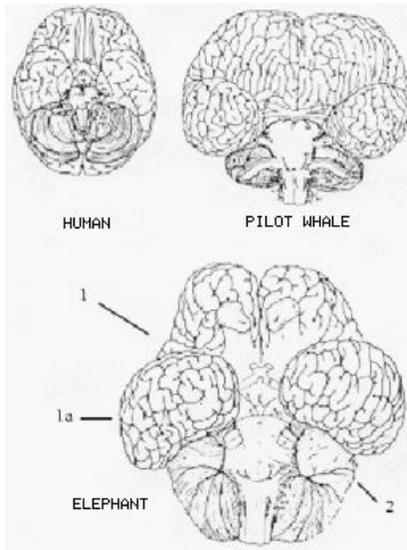


What to do:

1. Collect samples of soils with different colors and textures (about 2/3 cup).
2. Remove “trash” from the samples you collected. This includes grass, rocks, roots, bugs, etc.
3. Air dry the soil samples.
4. Once they are dry, place the soil samples in re-sealable freezer bags - one for each type of soil.
5. Use the rolling pin to break down the large soil clumps in each sample.
6. Pour the contents of one bag into the sifter with the largest mesh.
7. Sift the soil through onto a paper plate. Throw out the large particles that separate out during sifting.
8. Pour the contents from the paper plate into the sifter with the medium mesh.
9. Sift the soil through onto a paper plate and once again throw out the large particles.
10. Pour the contents from the paper plate into the sifter with the smallest mesh.
11. Sift the soil through onto a paper plate and through out the large particles.
12. Repeat steps 6-11 for each bag of soil, keeping the colors separated until you end up with several plates full of fine soil particles that are now ready to be made into paint.
13. For each soil color, pour the finely sifted soil into the plastic cups, filling them approximately two-thirds full.
14. Add enough water to each cup to make a batter the consistency of a “mud brownie.” Stir until combined.
15. Add about one teaspoon of acrylic medium to each cup. Stir until combined and smooth.
16. Now you can use your soil as paint!



Elephants and Trauma



A strange phenomenon has recently puzzled scientists: elephants, which are normally peaceful creatures, have become more aggressive toward the land and people in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. What is causing this increase in the number of attacks? The long history of human-elephant relations does include moments when elephants behaved violently toward people, but humans have also behaved aggressively toward elephants. In addition to destroying their habitats, people have hunted elephants for their tusks (which are made of ivory, an expensive commodity), have captured them for circus performances, and have even killed elephants because they trampled farmers' crops. Ethologists have suggested that elephants are exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a type of severe anxiety that can develop after exposure to any event that results in physical or mental trauma. We usually speak of PTSD when referring to humans, but we now know that elephants have highly developed emotional and memory abilities that can make stress-related behavior possible. This article, printed in the *New York Times* in 2006, outlines past and current issues relating to the human-elephant conflict and how elephants have responded to it. We have pulled out the fragments that we think best convey this message, but you can access the entire article at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/magazine/08elephant.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print.> If you are interested in reading more about elephants and moral issues, we suggest Christen Wemmer and Catherine Christen's book, *Elephants and Ethics: Toward a Morality of Coexistence*.

An Elephant Crackup?

By CHARLES SIEBERT

“All across Africa, India and parts of Southeast Asia, from within and around whatever patches and corridors of their natural habitat remain, elephants have been striking out, destroying villages and crops, attacking and killing human beings. In fact, these attacks have become so commonplace that a new statistical category, known as Human-Elephant Conflict, or H.E.C., was created by elephant researchers in the mid-1990's to monitor the problem. In the past 12 years, elephants have killed 605 people in Assam, a state in northeastern India, 239 of them since 2001. In Africa, reports of human-elephant conflicts appear almost daily, from Zambia to Tanzania, from Uganda to Sierra Leone, where 300 villagers evacuated their homes last year because of unprovoked elephant attacks...

For a number of biologists and ethologists who have spent their careers studying elephant behavior, the attacks have become so abnormal in both number and kind that they can no longer be attributed entirely to the customary factors...In "Elephant Breakdown," a 2005 essay in the journal Nature, [the author] Bradshaw and several colleagues argued that today's elephant populations are suffering from a form of chronic stress, a kind of species-wide trauma. Decades of poaching and culling and habitat loss, they claim, have so disrupted the intricate web of familial and societal relations by which young elephants have traditionally been raised in the wild, and by which established elephant herds are governed, that what we are now witnessing is nothing less than a precipitous collapse of elephant culture.

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Elephants, when left to their own devices, are profoundly social creatures...Young elephants are raised within an extended, multitiered network of doting female caregivers that includes the birth mother, grandmothers, aunts and friends. These relations are maintained over a life span as long as 70 years. Studies of established herds have shown that young elephants stay within 15 feet of their mothers for nearly all of their first eight years of life, after which young females are socialized into the matriarchal network, while young males go off for a time into an all-male social group before coming back into the fold as mature adults.

When an elephant dies, its family members engage in intense mourning and burial rituals, conducting weeklong vigils over the body, carefully covering it with earth and brush, revisiting the bones for years afterward, caressing the bones with their trunks, often taking turns rubbing their trunks along the teeth of a skull's lower jaw, the way living elephants do in greeting. If harm comes to a member of an elephant group, all the other elephants are aware of it. This sense of cohesion is further enforced by the elaborate communication system that elephants use. In close proximity they employ a range of vocalizations, from low-frequency rumbles to higher-pitched screams and trumpets, along with a variety of visual signals, from the waving of their trunks to subtle anglings of the head, body, feet and tail.

This fabric of elephant society, Bradshaw and her colleagues concluded, had effectively been frayed by years of habitat loss and poaching, along with systematic culling by government agencies to control elephant numbers and translocations of herds to different habitats. The number of older matriarchs and female caregivers (or "allomothers") had drastically fallen, as had the number of elder bulls, who play a significant role in keeping younger males in line. In parts of Zambia and Tanzania, a number of the elephant groups studied contained no adult females whatsoever...

As a result of such social upheaval, calves are now being born to and raised by ever younger and inexperienced mothers. Young orphaned elephants, meanwhile, that have witnessed the death of a parent at the hands of poachers are coming of age in the absence of the support system that defines traditional elephant life. "The loss of elephant elders," Bradshaw told me, "and the traumatic experience of witnessing the massacres of their family, impairs normal brain and behavior development in young elephants."

“Elephants are suffering and behaving in the same ways that we recognize in ourselves as a result of violence,” she told me. “It is entirely congruent with what we know about humans and other mammals. Except perhaps for a few specific features, brain organization and early development of elephants and humans are extremely similar. That’s not news. What is news is when you start asking, What does this mean beyond the science? How do we respond to the fact that we are causing other species like elephants to psychologically break down? In a way, it’s not so much a cognitive or imaginative leap anymore as it is a political one.”

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*There exists an **Elephant Sanctuary** in Tennessee, a 2,700-acre rehabilitation center and retirement facility situated in the state’s verdant, low-rolling southern hill country. The sanctuary is a kind of asylum for some of the more emotionally and psychologically disturbed former zoo and circus elephants in the United States — cases so bad that the people who profited from them were eager to let them go. Given that elephants in the wild are now exhibiting aberrant behaviors that were long observed in captive elephants, it perhaps follows that a positive working model for how to ameliorate the effects of elephant breakdown can be found in captivity...*

They have no future without us. The question we are now forced to grapple with is whether we would mind a future without them, among the more mindful creatures on this earth and, in many ways, the most devoted. Indeed, the manner of the elephants’ continued keeping, their restoration and conservation, both in civil confines and what’s left of wild ones, is now drawing the attention of everyone from naturalists to neuroscientists. Too much about elephants, in the end — their desires and devotions, their vulnerability and tremendous resilience — reminds us of ourselves to dismiss out of hand this revolt they’re currently staging against their own dismissal. And while our concern may ultimately be rooted in that most human of impulses — the preservation of our own self-image — the great paradox about this particular moment in our history with elephants is that saving them will require finally getting past ourselves; it will demand the ultimate act of deep, interspecies empathy.

Your turn.

Please share your thoughts:

What are the consequences if we imagine a human future without elephants?

Do you believe humans can live without the elephant?

Key Environmental Terms and Crossword Puzzle

There are some key terms that can help you share your thoughts about ecosystems, the environment, and conservation. Once you familiarize yourself with them, test your memory by filling out the soil and water crossword puzzle on the next page.

Glossary of soil and water terms

conservation - wise use of our natural resources

ecology - science of the relationships between plants, animals and their environments

environment - everything that surrounds us

erosion - loosening and movement of soil by wind, water, ice and landslides

geology - science of the history of Earth

habitat - an area in which plants and animals live, grow and reproduce

mineral - (a natural resource) an inorganic substance with definite chemical and physical properties and crystalline structure

natural resources - found in nature: soil, minerals, forests, water, fish, wildlife

nutrient - something that provides nourishment for an organism
(it can be food or chemicals)

organic matter - plant and animal materials in different stages of decay
(decomposition) that may be part of the soil

organism - a living being (people, animals, plants and insects are all organisms)

particle - a very small piece or part of something bigger

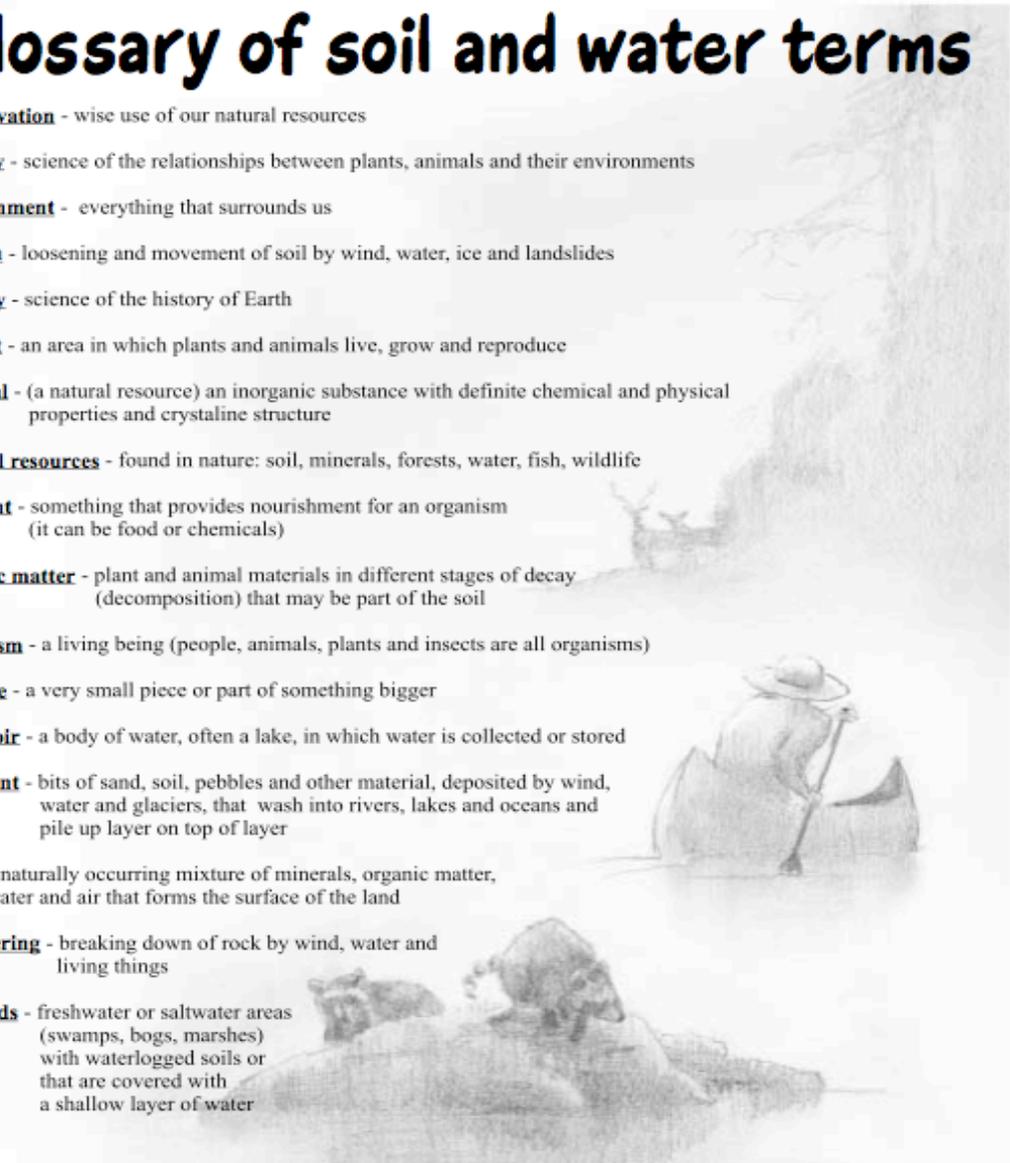
reservoir - a body of water, often a lake, in which water is collected or stored

sediment - bits of sand, soil, pebbles and other material, deposited by wind, water and glaciers, that wash into rivers, lakes and oceans and pile up layer on top of layer

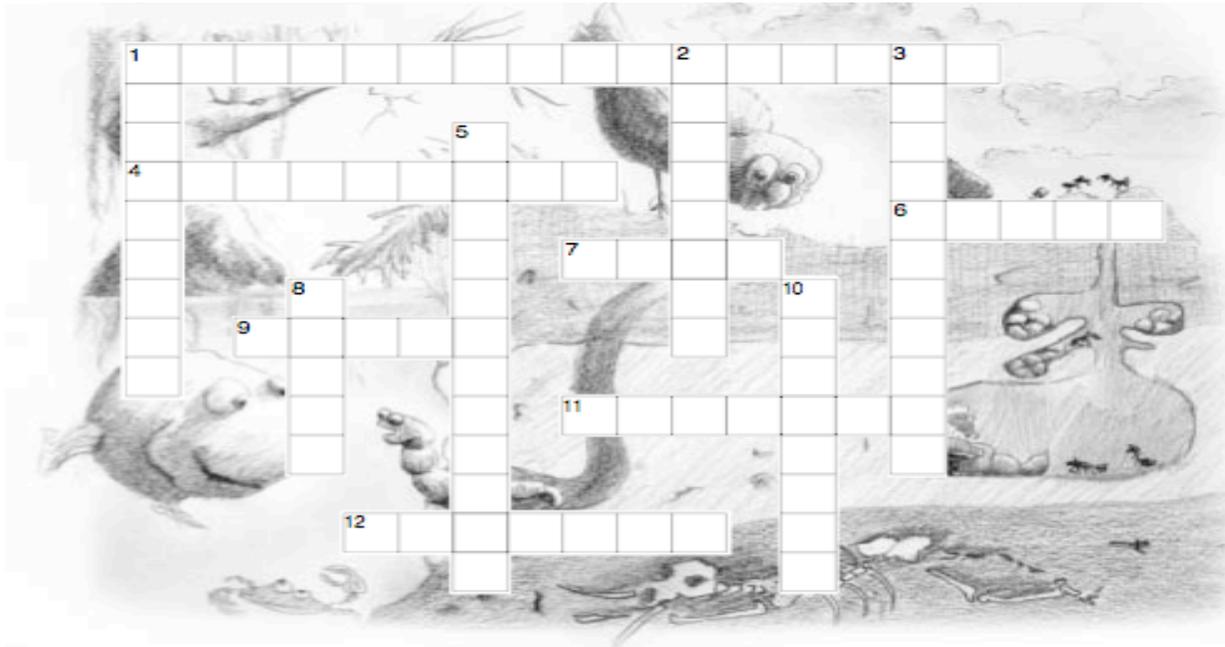
soil - a naturally occurring mixture of minerals, organic matter, water and air that forms the surface of the land

weathering - breaking down of rock by wind, water and living things

wetlands - freshwater or saltwater areas (swamps, bogs, marshes) with waterlogged soils or that are covered with a shallow layer of water



Soil and Water Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. soil, water, forests, minerals, wildlife, fish-things found in nature (two words)
4. man-made lake where water is stored
6. weathered objects that contribute to soil
7. natural mixture of minerals, organic matter, water and air that forms land surface
9. liquid we need to live that covers most of Earth
11. loosening and movement of soil by water, ice, landslides and wind
12. science of the history of Earth

DOWN

1. "food" that helps soil grow plants
2. any living being (people, animals or insects)
3. everything that surrounds us
5. wise use and protection of soil and water
8. planet we live on
10. material deposited by water, glaciers and wind

How We Perceive the World

The tale below is a retelling of a traditional story from India about an encounter between six blind men and an elephant. It illustrates how different people can have different perceptions of the same thing. It is also a good warning about how our senses, when used on their own, do not always tell the whole story. Each of the blind men have some faulty thinking in their arguments, and even when a real elephant stands before them, each man can "see" only what he already believes to be true.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

as told by Donelle Blubaugh

Long ago six old men lived in a village in India. Each was born blind. The other villagers loved the old men and kept them away from harm. Since the blind men could not see the world for themselves, they had to imagine many of its wonders. They listened carefully to the stories told by travelers to learn what they could about life outside the village. The men were curious about many of the stories they heard, but they were most curious about elephants. They were told that elephants could trample forests, carry huge burdens, and frighten young and old with their loud trumpet calls. But they also knew that the Rajah's daughter rode an elephant when she traveled in her father's kingdom. Would the Rajah let his daughter get near such a dangerous creature?

The old men argued day and night about elephants. "An elephant must be a powerful giant," claimed the first blind man. He had heard stories about elephants being used to clear forests and build roads.

"No, you must be wrong," argued the second blind man. "An elephant must be graceful and gentle if a princess is to ride on its back."

"You're wrong! I have heard that an elephant can pierce a man's heart with its terrible horn," said the third blind man.

"Please," said the fourth blind man. "You are all mistaken. An elephant is nothing more than a large sort of cow. You know how people exaggerate."

"I am sure that an elephant is something magical," said the fifth blind man. "That would explain why the Rajah's daughter can travel safely throughout the kingdom."

"I don't believe elephants exist at all," declared the sixth blind man. "I think we are the victims of a cruel joke."

Finally, the villagers grew tired of all the arguments, and they arranged for the curious men to visit the palace of the Rajah to learn the truth about elephants. A young boy from their village was selected to guide the blind men on their journey. The smallest man put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The second blind man put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to walk safely behind the boy who would lead them to the Rajah's magnificent palace. When the blind men reached the palace, they were greeted by an old friend from their village who worked as a gardener on the palace grounds. Their friend led them to the courtyard. There stood an elephant. The blind men stepped forward to touch the creature that was the subject of so many arguments.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."

The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's coarse tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The gardener led his friends to the shade of a tree. "Sit here and rest for the long journey home," he said. "I will bring you some water to drink."

While they waited, the six blind men talked about the elephant.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.

"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument continued and their shouts grew louder and louder.

"Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!" "Carpet!" "Rope!"

"Stop shouting!" called a very angry voice.

It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler.

The six blind men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they decided to say nothing at all.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah kindly. "Each man touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

When their friend returned to the garden with the cool water, the six men rested quietly in the shade, thinking about the Rajah's advice.

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

The first blind man put his hand on the shoulder of the young boy who would guide them home. The second blind man put a hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to travel together.

Take-Away Points

We had two goals in sharing this story. The first is to help you develop your perspective awareness—awareness that each of us creates a unique view of the world based on personal experience, language, and culture. Sometimes differences in perspective can make it hard for people to communicate and understand each others' views. The second goal is to remind you that when we lead our lives as individuals and not as members of a larger community, we risk overlooking things that matter.

There are many questions you can ask yourself about this story. Why were there six different ideas about the elephant? Were any of the men right about the elephant? Were any of them completely wrong? What did the blind men learn from the Rajah? Can you apply the moral of the tale to anything *you* ever experienced - have you ever been in a situation where you felt like someone did not “see” your point of view? Does the story give you any ideas about how these problems can be solved? What are some steps you can take to understand why another person doesn't see things the way you do?

Your turn:

1. Try to write an extension of the story that includes the conversation the six men might have had as they journeyed home.
2. Gather some friends together to write and perform a skit based on the tale.
3. Try a visual approach! Create some illustrations of the story or use recycled materials to create a sculpture of the elephant combining the perspectives of the six blind men.



the human elephant foundation

www.humanelephant.org

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