DAVID SHEPHERD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

Activity Workbook

Living with Elephants



Image credit: Andrew White

The Art of Survival: FIGHT • PROTECT • ENGAGE

Q.1 How do you get to school?



Q.2 What dangers might you face on the way to school?

Q.3 Have you ever been unable to get into school due to one of these dangers? (e.g. extreme weather, car accident etc.)

Q.4 Write down 4 things you think of when you look at this picture of an elephant.



Image credit: Leon Molenaar

Annelia's story

I couldn't concentrate on maths that day because I was dreading the walk home. The teacher asked me a question, but I was staring out the window, exhausted. 90 minutes is a long time to walk when you're hungry and tired. It was so hot that day, nearly 40°c, and Dad said I needed to look after my shoes, so I had to take them off for the long walk home. I have all these cuts and hard patches on my feet from the stones and gravel, and I get more every day.

Last week, on our way home, my friend and I found animal tracks and practically sprinted for the last thirty minutes. Her brother saw a family of elephants once and they started heading in his direction. He was terrified of them after seeing what they did to his dad's hut; they had trampled it trying to get water during a drought and he had nightmares about being trampled for the next week.

Fortunately, that day was relatively simple: I walked the 90 minutes in somewhat of a daze, just looking forward to my dinner. Unfortunately, dinner had to wait. When I got home, I saw my dad sitting in his field with his gun in his arms and his shoulders slumped in defeat. "What happened, daddy?" I asked gently.

"The elephants," he said, "again."

I tugged on his shirt and he peered down at me, looking worn out with worry. "I hate the elephants, daddy."



He sighed. “I felt that way too — some people love them but I never understood the appeal. I thought they were just a nuisance.” I nodded enthusiastically, but he shook his head. “Honey, it’s taken me a long time to realise that we shouldn’t hate them. It’s not their fault. They’re running out of food, too.”

“I know, they taught us that at the Conservation Club last month.” Every Wednesday, I went to the Conservation Club where they taught us all about the local wildlife, and the ways we can protect them. Some of the animals looked really cute, but others just reminded me of difficult times. It was all really interesting, though, and they always made it really fun! I found out last week that some countries don’t even have elephants — even in Africa! There are only 23 countries here with elephants.

“Well…” he took a deep breath, “as sad as this is for right now, we have to remember that they’re struggling too. And they can’t grow food for themselves like we can, or earn money. Of course, we can’t earn money either without jobs, and there are no shops around here to buy food… but we still have ways of looking after ourselves that they don’t.” He said that, but Dad mostly grew maize, which we ate every night. If that was destroyed, I didn’t know what else we would be able to eat. We have this weird law where we can’t get any help if our crops or property are destroyed. Sometimes, Mum says it seems like the government cares more about the animals than they do about us.

“They also don’t know what a farm or a hut is,” he continued, “they don’t know they are destroying our crops and our homes, they just know they’re hungry and thirsty and desperate.”

“But what about Monde?” I squeaked. “Wasn’t he attacked by elephants while he was on the way to the hospital?” That news spread fast between my friends and we thought the elephants were so mean for attacking a man who was already really sick.

“Ahh, Monde. Yes, that was sad. But they were scared, darling. It was dark and the cart came towards them and they didn’t know why. Being scared is not a crime, just like being hungry isn’t a crime. It’s not their fault that they are heavy enough to hurt us so easily.”

“Daddy,” I pleaded, trying to make sense of this new way of thinking, “when this happened to our neighbours last year, you hated the elephants too!”

“I spoke to Billy earlier. Do you remember him?”

Billy had a motorbike. He was one of the men who turned up after events like this. He always tried to encourage farmers and their families to understand the elephants. Dad never listened before, but something had changed this time.

“What did he tell you, daddy?”

“Nothing I hadn’t heard him and the other rangers say before… I guess I just finally understood how the elephants felt: desperate and worried about their families.” He shrugged. “We have been really lucky so far, to have never faced this problem before. Really lucky. We’re still quite lucky, really. We at least have enough of our crops left to feed ourselves for a few weeks.” He put his gun down and put one hand on my shoulder while he pointed into the distance beyond the farm. “But the elephants… they have had their food and their homes stolen from them for decades, by humans who now want them dead for doing the same thing right back. Does that seem fair to you?”

"No... but they're dangerous –"

"So are we." he interrupted me sharply and solemnly, "I shot at one of the elephants, but she escaped with a graze on her back. It didn't kill her, but only because I missed. And it could still get infected, and she is still in pain right now because of me." He looked down at his feet.

Last month, an elephant had trampled a farm three miles from here. When that happens, the farmers are allowed to shoot and the meat is shared with the village. A quick death like that sounds okay, but I didn't want anyone or anything to be in pain, and I was still worried about our farm and the village.

"But how do we stop them from doing this again without killing them?"

Dad guided me into our hut without a word and took me to some boxes by the entrance. In the boxes, there was a collection of things Dad said would help to scare off the elephants before they get near the crops.

There were firecrackers, chilli bombs and chilli blocks to burn around the farm. Dad explained that you can't just use one method forever because the elephants get used to it and it stops bothering them so much. He also said they hate loud noises, and I chuckled thinking about how much my little brother would enjoy making a racket to scare them off.


Chilli plants

"Elephants really hate chilli, apparently!" Dad exclaimed cheerfully, "In fact, Billy recommended I start growing it to make some more money and keep the elephants away." He rubbed his hands together with a solemn grin. He was happy to have a solution, but obviously still sad about what had happened.

I knew he was worried about the crops we had lost, because that would mean he would have to sell some of our cattle to make enough for the family. Farming season only comes around once a year, and we only had enough food for the next few weeks. I realised I was still hungry. My feet burned and my stomach grumbled.

"Daddy," I pleaded, "do we have any food for tonight?"

"Yes, dear. Go help your mother by the fire."

Read back through Annelia's story and answer these questions

Q.1 Why was Annelia dreading the walk home?

Q.2 Why did her friend's brother have nightmares?

Q.3 Why does Annelia's father say elephants destroyed his farm?

Q.4 What does Annelia do at the Conservation Club?

Q.5 What happened to Monde? And how did Annelia and her friends feel about it?

Q.6 Who is Billy and what does he do in the community?

Q.7 Find the two reasons Annelia's dad says they are lucky.

1 _____

2 _____

Q.8 Which three items was her dad gifted to protect the farm?

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Q.9 Why did Billy recommend he start growing chillies?

Q.10 How will her dad make up the money lost by the crop damage?

Write a speech

Important information to include in your speech:

DSFW proudly protects eight main species of vulnerable and endangered animals, including snow leopards, chimpanzees and elephants. They have fact sheets on their website about all eight animals, but this is what they say about elephants:

Status Vulnerable (a step above endangered)

Lifespan Up to 70 years in the wild.

Human conflict because elephants have lost much of their habitat, they are now having to share it with humans, this means that sometimes they pass through villages and farms. Because of their size they can cause damage to buildings and may destroy crops by eating them or walking on them, elephants are sometimes shot because of this.

Grieving elephants are known to show a behaviour that looks like grief or mourning when one of them dies. They may pause over the body of an elephant and sometimes cover them with vegetation. They may stand over them silently and sometimes carry their bones or tusks with them when they move away. They also may repeatedly visit the body.

Rangers like Billy work for Game Rangers International (GRI), who are also responsible for running the Conservation Club Annelia attends. They are based in Zambia, helping the communities most affected by human-animal conflict.

When elephant calves are orphaned due to conflict with humans, they work to raise the calves and prepare them for life in the wild.

Through this work, they also work directly with the local communities to improve their lives. In 2022, they reported that they had:

Facilitated 3 youth football tournaments

Enrolled 2000 Conservation Club members

Donated 3 new wheelchairs to those in need

Donated 20 desks to the new Ngoma school

GRI are partly funded by David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF)

Write down some of your initial thoughts here before you write your speech

Express sympathy for what has happened to Monde.

Explain what support you could offer (e.g. wheelchair, rehabilitation from injuries etc.).

Explain that you understand why they are angry but that the elephants must be protected.

Include some facts about the elephants to encourage the family to empathise with them.

Final statement



Image credit: Leon Molenaar

Final thoughts

Would you want to live among elephants? Why/why not?

Image credit: Matt Armstrong-Ford

Game Rangers International
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DAVID SHEPHERD WILDLIFE FOUNDATION 2025

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This project was managed by Coastal schools partnership and generously funded by Garfield Weston and the Fonthill Foundation.

This project was developed and led by David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF), who collated and designed the resources in close collaboration with our field partners to ensure the activity books and teacher's guidance were rooted in real-life conservation challenges. Delivered with the support of the Coastal Schools Partnership and generously funded by the Garfield Weston and Fonthill Foundations, the project brings authentic conservation stories into the classroom in an engaging and accessible way.

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