Elephant Parade
An Education Resource for teachers about Asian elephants

Photo credit
@Sreedhar.vijayakrishan/Elephant Family
Introduction

The question is, are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book?’

Sir David Attenborough

Elephants are the earth’s largest land animals, but these amazing creatures, are an endangered species. The numbers of Asian elephants in particular are far fewer than their African cousins – there are currently at least 10 African elephants for every 1 Asian elephant in the wild. The main reason that has caused Asian elephant numbers to drop by 50% in the last 100 years is a massive loss of habitat, and they are disappearing from areas where they once thrived. In Vietnam the number of wild elephants has declined from approximately 1,000 in 1990, to fewer than 100 in 2002.

Although there are many dangers to both African and Asian elephants, the focus of this resource is on Asian elephants. It includes background information, discussion points and activities to inspire learning across the curriculum and a call to action to help protect this endangered species. The resources can be used as starting points in individual lessons or as part of a joint cross-curricular project to develop knowledge, transferable skills and reflections in your classrooms or with a partner school in your country or overseas.
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What do we know about elephants?

Start your project with a large drawing of an elephant for your classroom working wall. Ask your pupils to write everything they think they already know about elephants on sticky notes in one colour and use another colour for any questions they have or things they would like to find out about these amazing animals. You can use a third colour for any new learning they discover in the course of the project.

Curriculum Links:
English, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Art and design.

Sustainable Development Goals:
SDG 15 Life on Land - sustainably manage forests, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.

Core and transferable skills and competencies: Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, digital literacy, creativity and imagination.

Learning objectives: To introduce some key features about elephants and their habitats and learn about the differences between African and Asian elephants. To collect information from secondary sources and develop atlas and non-fiction writing skills.

Resources: Large pieces of paper, sticky notes, scissors, glue sticks, copies of activity sheet 2, atlases, access to the Internet, chalk, fabrics.
Activity sheet 1
Elephant quiz

Divide your class into teams to answer true or false to the following statements.

- **Male and female elephants live in herds with their young.** False. Female elephants called cows live in herds but males (bulls) tend to roam on their own.
- **Elephants are the only mammals apart from humans to have chins.** True
- **Baby elephants are blind when they are born and some suck their trunks for comfort like human infants suck their thumbs.** True
- **Elephants are afraid of water.** False. They love water and bathe often. They are good swimmers despite their size, and can use their trunks as snorkels.
- **An elephant’s trunk is actually a long nose with many functions.** True. It is used for smelling, breathing, trumpeting, drinking and grabbing things and snorkelling.
- **Elephants have a longer pregnancy than any other mammal.** True. An elephant’s pregnancy lasts almost 22 months.
- **As we can be right handed or left handed, an elephant can be right or left tusked.** True. Their dominant tusk will get more worn down than the other one.
- **Elephants remember and mourn loved ones, even many years after their death.** True. When an elephant walks past a place where a loved one died he or she will stop and pause for several minutes.
- **Elephants can communicate with sounds that we can’t hear.** True. They can communicate with very low frequency sounds, which can travel over several kilometres.

**Two species: African and Asian Elephants**

Most people know that Asian elephants have smaller ears than their African relatives but there are other differences too. Show your pupils photographs of an African and Asian elephant and explain the differences between the two using the following information. Then ask your pupils to add the correct labels to the photographs of the African and Asian elephants on the activity sheet.

- **Elephants have bigger brains than humans.** True. Elephants have the largest and heaviest brains of all land mammals weighing about 4.5 kg. An average adult human brain weighs only 1.4 kg (Reference - All you need to know about elephants K Dudley A and C Black)
Activity sheet 2

African and Asian elephants

Cut out the following labels and add them to the correct part of the elephants on Activity Sheet 3.

**African Elephant**
(Loxodonta africana)

- Bigger ears that reach over neck
- Concave shaped back
- Male and females have tusks
- Weight: 4000 - 7000 kg
- Mainly eats grass

**Asian Elephant**
(Elephas maximus)

- Smaller ears that don’t reach over neck
- Convex or straight back
- Male and females have tusks
- Height: 2 - 3.5 metres
- Weight: 3000 - 6000 kg
- Mainly eats leaves
Why are Asian elephants so important?

Factual information to share with your pupils

Asian elephants are the engineers, gardeners and architects of their environment. During the 16 to 20 hours they spend every day walking and eating, they clear old vegetation, make space for new growth and allow sunlight to reach forest floors to fuel new life.

As they travel, they scatter seeds of the plants they eat through their dung - seeding and composting as they go, nourishing plants and insects on which other species depend. Even an elephant’s footprints are important. A scientific study has shown that when they fill with water, elephant footprints become an important breeding ground for all sorts of insects and plants.

The importance of elephant dung

After seeds are dispersed, the elephant dung also provides a suitable environment in which they can grow. These become a source of food for other species such as ground hornbills, banded mongooses, velvet monkeys, baboons and insects. Many invertebrates including beetles, ants, centipedes, millipedes, scorpions, crickets, spiders and termites are also found living in dung. Three species of frogs were also recently discovered living in elephant dung in Sri Lanka.

Elephants as water providers

Elephants also provide water for other species. They will travel miles in search of water and remember underground water locations where they will dig wells. This is then opened up for other animals to drink.

Elephants as engineers

Elephants are like engineers who change habitats by pushing over trees, stripping bark and stomping around. They transform woodlands into open areas, creating grazing habitats for dozens of grassland species. When they move on, the area grows into scrubland for other browsing animals and then once more becomes woodland. They also open up dense woodlands by creating forest gaps allowing species into the light gaps, which are created. These help to diversify tropical forests.
Activity sheet 3

African Elephant
(Loxodonta africana)
Asian Elephant
(Elephas maximus)
Activities

Try out some of the following elephant activities with your pupils.

According to the World Wildlife Foundation, more than half of all wild Asian elephants live in India, but they are also found in 12 other countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and the southern tip of China. Ask your pupils to find these countries on a map of Asia and label them and their capital cities. Invite them to choose one country and carry out research about it and the climate and ecosystem in the area where wild elephants live. Can they find out what dangers this environment and the elephants are currently facing? Ask them to choose 3 facts about the country they have researched and ask the rest of the class to work out the name of the country from their clues. For example they might use the following clues to identify Thailand:

1. The country’s national symbol is the elephant.
2. The currency is called The Baht.
3. The climate is tropical with a rainy monsoon season from November through to March.

Activity 2
Asian elephants can travel up to 30 km a day in search of food and water. Invite your pupils to use maps or the Internet to discover the places they could reach from their school if they travelled the same distance in one day, one week and one month.

Activity 3
Ask your pupils to use all the information they have found out to create a piece of non-fiction writing about Asian elephants to share with others. They could make reference books in the shape of elephants for younger children or prepare a museum display including recording sounds and information on electronic sound buttons. Alternatively they could create a web page using free software such as Adobe Spark or a podcast for the school website.

Activity 4
Asian elephants can reach 6.4 metres in length and 3 metres at the shoulder and weigh as much as 5 tonnes. Encourage your pupils to work together in small groups to create life size drawings of Asian elephants on the playground floor in chalk. Then use PE equipment, recycled fabric and items from lost property to then turn these into colourful patchwork elephant collages like Elmer the Elephant in the stories by David McGee. They could photograph their colourful elephants and use software such as Photoshop to provide interesting backgrounds.

Partner School activities:
If you are working with a partner school you could:

• Exchange examples of your elephant questions, country clues and non-fiction writing formats.
• Share photographs of your life size elephant collages.
Factual information to share with pupils

Asian elephants are herbivores and need to eat about 10% of their body weight and drink up to 200 litres of water every day. As a result they may spend up to 18 hours a day feeding on grasses, leaves, fruits, vines and bark.

The main threat to Asian elephants is habitat loss. In the last 100 years over 90% of its habitat has been lost to human development including farming, building towns, roads and railways, industry and mining. These developments leave elephant groups marooned in ever decreasing pockets of forest, and relationships between elephants and people are breaking down, as elephants are driven into areas of human activity and raid crops on their migration paths. This can drive elephants and people into daily conflict and on occasions this can be potentially fatal.

There is also a threat posed by poaching and the theft of elephant calves from the wild for the tourist and entertainment industry. This means that the endangered Asian elephant needs our help if it is to survive and thrive.

Elephant Family is a UK-based charity that specialises in the protection of the Asian elephant and its habitat. They fund solutions that prevent conflict between people and elephants, showing how humans and elephants can co-exist. They create safe homes for both elephants and people by securing traditional migration routes between feeding sites creating wildlife corridors between protected areas, and helping farmers protect their crops and homes. This includes creating physical barriers to keep elephants away, and early warning systems such as text messages and information boards along key stretches of road to warn people when elephants are in the area so they can take appropriate action.

They also work with local communities so they can live side by side with elephants. Teaching people to value them is a step towards protecting them. For further information go to: http://elephant-family.org/

Curriculum Links:
English, Geography, Science, Art and design, Citizenship, Personal, social and health Education.

Sustainable Development Goals:
SDG15 Life on Land - sustainably manage forests, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.

Core and transferable skills and competencies:
Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, digital literacy, creativity and imagination, citizenship, student leadership and personal development.

Learning objectives:
To raise awareness of the dangers faced by Asian elephants and the steps being take to protect them and the habitats where they live.

Resources:
Copies of activity sheet 2, art materials, large card, dice, counters.

Living close to wild elephants

The Valparai Plateau in the Anamalai hill range in India is home to 70,000 humans and about 120 wild elephants. The elephants in the photograph above are wandering through land that for centuries was their home, but are now tea plantations and human settlements.

For children living in this area, these encounters can be both enriching and frightening. They are taught to be cautious around the elephants, and understand that taking the right precautions can help to ensure the safety to both people and wildlife.

Nandu (centre) “It is scary to step out at night when elephants are there, but is fun to watch them during the day” Bhoopalan (right) “if we don’t trouble elephants they will not trouble us”
Activity Sheet 4
Living close to wild elephants

Activity 1
Copy and share activity sheet 5 which contains the responses of children who live close to wild elephants in Thailand. Ask your pupils to discuss the following questions with a partner and then share their responses with the rest of the class.

- How do the Thai children feel about the wild elephants?
- What do they say has changed recently about the elephants’ behaviour?
- What other questions would you like to ask the children?
- As numbers of Asian elephants diminish in wild, do you think elephants should be kept in zoos in your country? What are the arguments for and against this?

Ask your pupils to create a poster or short film that draws attention to the plight of Asian elephants in the wild. Alternatively they could work together to design and create elephant board games which include statement cards allowing players to move forwards and backwards around the board. For example, if you land on a square with a positive statement card, it might state ‘A wildlife corridor is built to allow the elephants to move from one area of forest to another - move forward 3 spaces.’ A space with a negative statement might be ‘An elephant destroys a farmer’s crops, miss your turn.’

Partner School activities:
If you are working with a partner school you could:

- Exchange your responses to the threats to elephants in the wild and perhaps hold a joint debate via Skype or social media about keeping elephants in captivity.
- Share photographs of your posters or board games via an online gallery or padlet.
Panida and Kunakorn live in Thailand and seeing elephants in their village is becoming an everyday event.

Panida aged 14

1. What is it like living near elephants?
   Because it’s usual for wild animals to come into the village it always felt fine. But after the news that someone was killed by a wild elephant my family started to be afraid.

2. Do elephants come onto your land?
   No, but they walk by to get to other fields.

3. Do elephants scare you?
   They used to be afraid of us – especially my father’s car when he starts it – but now they aren’t, they are used to it and just watch him. This is a bit worrying.

4. Do you like elephants?
   I love elephants – as long as they don’t hurt people.

5. How do you feel when you hear of people hurting elephants?
   I feel bad. I do not want to hear that someone has hurt elephants.

Kunakorn aged 13

1. What is it like living near elephants?
   Before the elephants never came to the village. But now they come close to my house every week. At first it was really exciting to see elephants come to my village and I really liked it. But now I’m afraid of them.

2. Do elephants come onto your land?
   Yes, they walk past my field and sometimes they stay in my field.

3. Do elephants scare you?
   We use firecrackers to scare them away but now they’re used to it and aren’t scared which is worrying.

4. Do you like elephants?
   I love elephants because the elephant is the national animal. In ancient times, elephants helped soldiers fight.

5. How do you feel when you hear of people hurting elephants?
   I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want anyone to hurt elephants. Now in my village the headman helps push the elephants away. But they don’t hurt the elephants. I think it is very good if the elephant does not hurt people and people do not hurt elephants.
Elephants as cultural icons

Factual information to share with your pupils

Elephants are very important cultural and religious icons in Asia. They are found in myths and legends and popular culture, and symbolise qualities of royal power and wisdom. One of the most popular Hindu gods Lord Ganesh has an elephant’s head on a human body and elephants are represented in tribal art, as symbols of political parties, on flags and as emblems that represent a group or a region.

Elephants in Literature

Many stories from different countries and periods of history also feature elephants. Notable examples in the UK include picture books like David McGee’s Elmer and the Babar the Elephant series by Jean de Brunhoff. Children’s fiction include The Elephant’s Child by Rudyard Kipling, and more recently Running Wild by Michael Morpurgo which was inspired by the real life story of a child who was saved by an elephant in the south east Asian tsunami in 2004.

Curriculum Links:
English, Art and Design, Religious Education, Personal, Social and Health Education.

Sustainable Development Goals:
SDG 15 Life on Land - sustainably manage forests, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.

Core and transferable skills and competencies:
Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, digital literacy, creativity and imagination, citizenship, student leadership and personal development.

Learning objectives:
To learn about the cultural significance of elephants in Asia, share a Malaysian story about a herd of elephants and design and create your own elephant parade.

Resources:
Copies of the Malaysian story The Messenger and the Moon on activity sheet 3.
Activity 1
Read with your class the Malaysian story *The Messenger of the Moon* retold by Mervyn Skipper on activity sheet 7. The story is from *A River of Stories: Tales and Poems from across the Commonwealth*.

In this story, the elephants discover that fresh water is not evenly shared in their land. When the elephants find the river, they probably feel there is enough water for everyone, but the monkeys see the situation in a different way. Invite your pupils to discuss with a partner the reaction of the monkeys when they hear the elephants are coming. Why might they feel that way? What do they think is the moral of this story?

Divide a sheet of paper in half. On one side write the heading ‘Elephants’ view: why the monkeys should share’, and on the other side write ‘Monkeys’ view: why we should not share.’ Half the class could draft a letter from the baby elephant to the Monkey king, using the ideas from the elephants’ perspective and the other half could write a letter from the baby monkey to the Elephant King, using ideas from the monkeys’ perspective. Perhaps organise a role-play debate with speakers from the two opposing sides. Who has the most convincing argument? How might they come to an agreement? Discuss with your pupils their own views about how the earth’s resources can be shared fairly.

Activity 2
Your pupils could also plan and write their own stories with an elephant as a major character. To help them with their ideas use the top tips from Anne Fine, the former Children’s Laureate at:

https://literature.britishcouncil.org/blog/2016/anne-fines-writing-tips/
There was a drought in the Elephant country. There hadn’t been a drop of rain for weeks. All the pools and the lakes had dried up, and instead of a beautiful broad river to bathe in, all the elephants had was a little muddy trickle of water which was hardly enough to give them each a drink, not to speak of a bath.

So the King of the Elephants sent a messenger out to see if, in another part of the country, there was any water to be found. The messenger travelled for many days over the hills and through the jungle, and everywhere he found the lakes had all dried up and the pools were all gone and the rivers were just little muddy trickles of water.

But at last, after many days of travelling, he came to a river where the grass was still green and the water was lovely and deep, and after drinking a little and giving himself a shower-bath, he hurried back to the King to tell him the good news. As soon as the King of the Elephants heard it, he told all his people to follow him, and set off to find the wonderful river.

Now the river belonged to a tribe of monkeys, and when some of the monkey people saw the elephants coming they went to their King and said, “What shall we do, O King? The elephant people are coming, like mountains walking, to take our river from us.”

The Monkey King called all his people together and asked the oldest and wisest monkeys to tell him how he could stop the elephant people coming and drinking up their river. Some said one thing and some said another, but none of them could tell him how the elephant people could be stopped from drinking up their river.

At last a little baby monkey jumped up and said, “I will stop these elephants from stealing our beautiful river and drinking it all up.”

The monkey people all laughed at him and cried, “How will you, a little whipper-snapper that a baby elephant could crush under one foot, stop a whole tribe of elephants?”

“That is my business,” said the little monkey, “just you wait and see!”

So the little monkey went off and climbed a tree that leaned over the river and waited for the elephants. Soon they came along, hundreds of big old-man elephants and hundreds of big old-mother elephants and lots of little baby elephants who could have crushed the little monkey with one foot; and the ground shook under their tread, and the trees bent as if a strong wind were blowing, and all the leaves trembled. The little monkey did not tremble. He said in his squeaky voice, “Stop! Stop, all you elephant people! If you go another step further you will be sorry for it!”
The elephants all stopped and looked up, and when they saw a little monkey on a tree branch they laughed, and their King said, “Who are you, small hairy thing, that tells the elephant tribe to stop?”

“I am the messenger of the Moon, and the Moon owns all this river,” said the little monkey. “There she is, bathing in it at this moment, and if you dare disturb her she will be very angry, and will certainly eat you all up!”

The elephants all looked at the river, and there, sure enough, was the Moon bathing in it.

So they all gathered at the bank of the river and talked about what was the best thing to do; some said one thing and some said another, but before they had made up their minds, a little baby elephant, trying to push his way to the front so that he could hear what his elders were talking about, fell, flop! into the river.

At once the Moon stopped bathing and began to rush up and down and round and round, as if she was terribly angry. The Elephant King, thinking he was going to be eaten, gave a wild scream and rushed away; and all the elephant tribe, the big old-man elephants and the big old-mother elephants and all the little baby elephants, rushed after him, falling over each other in their hurry.

The baby elephant who had fallen into the river pulled himself out as fast as he was able, and ran too. But after a while, noticing that the Moon wasn’t following him, he stopped, and as he was very thirsty, he came tiptoeing back to the river, and there was

the Moon, bathing herself quietly again. So he gently put his trunk into the water and took a little sip; and then, as the Moon did not seem to mind, he took a long gulp, and then he slipped down the bank, splish! into the water and gave himself a shower-bath.

When he had had enough, he ran after the rest of the elephants to tell them that it was all right and that there was nothing to be afraid of. He had not gone very far when he met his mother, looking very pale and anxious. “You young rascal,” she said, “wherever have you been? I was quite sure the Moon had caught and eaten you!”

“Caught and eaten me?” said the baby elephant, “No way! That Moon you were all so afraid of was only a reflection. I’ve just had a lovely shower-bath in her river, and if you all come back you can have one too!”

“Hold your tongue, you cheeky little thing, and come along,” said the mother elephant, cuffing him over the head with her trunk, and hurrying to catch up with the rest.

So the elephant tribe went back to their own country and the monkey tribe kept their beautiful river.
Elephant Parade

Art can be a very powerful way of telling a story and elephants often feature in artworks from different cultures. Elephant Parade is an open-air exhibition dedicated to saving the Asian elephant from extinction.

This is Me and My Million Voices by Veer Munshi. His inspiration links to elephants as engineers who help create the forests and all that live there. This design shows millions of tiny animals and birds on a giant elephant who takes pride in carrying the animal world. He shares responsibility of others too who are also endangered like deer, leopard, tigers and bears.

This is Aranya by the Indian artist Suhasini Kejriwal. She’s more than a beautifully painted elephant - the artist was inspired by the loss of habitat on the survival of Asia’s elephants. The leaves on the elephant’s body suggest a forest and wherever there is no forest, you can see the skeleton of the elephant is visible suggesting extinction.

Hundreds of painted elephant sculptures especially created by artists are placed in the streets of host cities for a period of time to increase public awareness of the plight of the elephant and gain support for Asian elephant conservation. They are then auctioned off, with the proceeds going to the Elephant Family charity.

The elephants in the 2018 Elephant parade in London were all designed by Indian artists and included the following:

18 - Elephant Parade Resource
Activities

Show your students the four images of elephant parade sculptures on the appendices. Ask them to look very closely at each design and describe what they can see to a partner. Discuss why the artist may have chosen this particular design and which is their favourite painted elephant sculpture, giving their reasons.

Why don’t you make your own elephant parade and help raise awareness of the plight of endangered Asian elephants? Copy the elephant template on the activity sheet for your pupils to plan their designs and then encourage them to make elephants from recycled materials and decorate them with conservation messages. You could also:

- Display the elephants around the school and surround them with a conservation message. Invite your local newspaper or radio station to come and see your elephants and tell them why you were inspired to create an elephant parade.
- Make each elephant into a money box (you can use a balloon, papier mache and card cylinders for the legs for a basic body) and collect donations to help fund Elephant Family’s work to protect endangered elephants.
- Make one HUGE elephant and get all the children in your school or group to add their own conservation messages.
Activity sheet 8
Elephant template
Pupils from Loughton Manor First School created their own life-sized baby Asian elephant sculpture when they explored Rubens’ painting A Roman Triumph as part of the Take One Picture project at the National Gallery in London. They investigated the dimensions of a real elephant and calculated how many two-litre drink bottles were needed to make the legs. Two classes made the legs while another class made the elephant’s body shell from chicken wire. Children dyed fabric to create the elephant skin and explored Indian colours symbols and patterns to design and make the saddle cover or jhool.

(Photograph from Loughton Manor First School)

Call to Action:
What can you do to help?

Encouraging your pupils to share the story of Asia’s elephants with friends and family is a great way to start helping to protect the species. It is only when the threats are understood – and what we will all lose if they are gone, that people will begin to care about protecting elephants.

To conclude your project, why not invite parents and friends to a special event where your pupils can celebrate and demonstrate all that they have learnt about elephants and share their elephant parade. Your guests could decide which is their favourite and award prizes for the winning design.

You could hold your own assembly or dedicate a day, like World Elephant Day to share your learning about Asian elephants with other classes. Whatever you choose to do don’t forget to tell your school newspaper, your local newspaper and TV and radio station and everyone you know – including Elephant Family because they could add your story to their website too!

Together we can save the Asian elephant.

Partner School activities:
If you are working with a partner school you could:

• Find out about the cultural significance of elephants in your partners’ country and writers and artists who have celebrated them in their work.

• Exchange photographs of your celebration events and elephant parades.
Appendix 1
Aranya by Suhasini Kejriwal
Appendix 2
Me and My Million Voices by Veer Munshi
Appendix 3
Jodhpur Royal Family
Find Out More

You can find out more about Elephant Family at www.elephant-family.org and about Elephant Parade (the company that makes the elephants used in the parades around the world) at http://www.elephantparade.com/

Additional information about Asian elephants can be found at: http://elephantcare.org/

Children’s books where elephants play a starring role include:

- The Elephant’s Child by Rudyard Kipling
- Running Wild by Michael Morpurgo
- Elmer by David McGee
- Babar the Elephant series by Jean de Brunhoff
- Peace at Last by Jill Murphy
- Akimbo and the Elephants by Alexander McCall Smith
- The Firework Makers Daughter by Philip Pullman
- A River of Stories: Tales and Poems from across the Commonwealth compiled by Alice Curry http://www.ariverofstories.com/

You can find lots of inspiration on the Internet about how to make elephants of all shapes and sizes in a variety of materials including clay and fabric.

To help your pupils to become confident, effective communicators when they participate in discussions and debates, visit the Time to Talk resource at: https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/resource/downloads/oracy_lessons_resource.pdf

Education Pack collated by Alison Willmot.