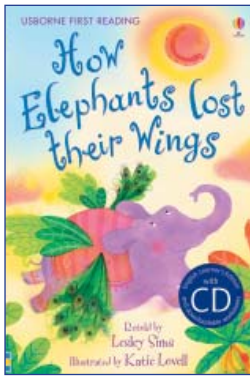


How Elephants Lost their Wings • Teacher's notes



Author: traditional, retold by Lesley Sims

Reader level: Elementary

Word count: 165

Lexile level: 280L

Text type: Fable/folk tale from India

About the story

This delightful Indian fable tells of the far-off days when elephants had wings, and the gods would go for rides on their backs. However, flying elephants prove a terrible liability, yelling and crowing and crash-landing on trees and houses. The gods decide they must do something, and invite the elephants to a feast; the elephants eat until they fall asleep, and the gods quietly remove their wings and give them to the peacocks and banana trees. The elephants are furious to discover their loss, but they never do get their wings back.

The story comes from the state of Orissa, in north-eastern India. Orissa is one of the largest states in modern India, bordering the Bay of Bengal. Most of the population lives near the coast, but inland the country is wild and mountainous. It is famous for the richness of its wildlife, including wild elephants.

According to the story, the gods rode on the elephants' backs when they were busy creating the world. However, once the world was filled with people, the elephants' usefulness was over, and they clearly had no idea of their size, strength and clumsiness. After the gods played their trick, the elephants were so enraged that they ran off into the forests, where they have remained ever since.

About the author

Lesley Sims always wanted to be a writer. She has written a range of stories, including funny history books and books for beginner readers. In her spare time, she likes going to plays and concerts, playing the saxophone and reading.



Key words

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words, which are important in the story.

p3 peacocks	p14 broken
p10 yelled	p15 trick
crowed	p16 invited
roosters	feast
p11 shook	p17 tummies
below	p21 shouted
p12 smashed	stomped
p13 landed	

Key phrases

p4	Once upon a time
p7	to loop the loop
p14	there were no [...] left
p18	to take [something] away
p22	to get [something] back



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Before reading

Find photos of a banana leaf and a peacock feather (if you can find a real banana leaf or peacock feather, even better). Set them to one side.

Write two headings on the board: Animals that can fly and Animals that can't fly. Ask the students to call out animal names, and to tell you under which heading you should write them. If one heading doesn't have many entries, suggest some yourself (remember that "can fly" can include insects as well as birds). When someone calls out "elephant", write it under the "can fly" heading. The students are likely to protest. Tell them that according to an Indian fable, elephants did fly once upon a time.

Show the banana leaf and peacock feather and see if the students know what they are. Then tell them that actually these used to be elephant wings, and bring out the book to show its cover.

Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

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| p4 | Does this picture look like anywhere you know? Can you see any clues in the picture? [tiger, elephant] | p12 | What words would you use to describe the elephants? [clumsy, careless, rude, etc.] |
| p7 | How do you loop the loop? Can you draw a loop-the-loop with your finger in the air? | p15 | How do the gods feel? |
| p8 | Why do you think the gods like riding on the elephants? Would you like to ride on one? | p18 | Can you see the peacocks and banana trees before they get the elephants' wings? [top left and middle right of picture] |
| p10 | Do elephants still go 'Cock-a-doodle-do'? What noise do they make? [You may be able to find a sound clip.] | p21 | What do you do when you're cross? Do you shout and stomp? |
| | | p22 | What are the elephants trying to do to the peacocks? |

Puzzles (pages 24-29)

You might like students to work on these in pairs or small groups. If so, ask the "After reading" questions before doing the puzzles.

After reading

Ask the students if they liked the story. They may feel sorry for the elephants, or think that it was right for the gods to make them less dangerous. Do students think it's a true story? What kind of story is it? [A myth or fable.]

The students may be intrigued by the role of the gods. They may be more used to the idea of one God, or no gods at all. It might be useful to mention that Hindus believe in one God who takes on many different forms. The gods in our story are different forms of the Hindu god of creation, and it was their job to make the world.

Why is it funny to think that elephants might once have flown? See if students can think of similar ideas for animal stories, e.g. How polar bears lost their skins or Why parrots have bright feathers. You could ask them to develop any promising ideas as an extended writing task.

