



An Emotional Journey

Use this activity to introduce your students to the story of *The Vanishing Elephant* and to prepare students for elements of a story that may evoke strong emotional responses.*

Materials Needed: *The Vanishing Elephant* synopsis (p. 8), chart paper, markers

1. Gather students in a circle and tell them that they are about to embark on an emotional journey by exploring the synopsis or summary of *The Vanishing Elephant*.
2. Divide the synopsis of *The Vanishing Elephant* (p. 8) into bite-sized sections and read each section aloud. After each section, have a brief discussion about the action of the story and ask students what emotions they're experiencing as they listen.
3. Next, ask students to find their own space in the room. Then, as you re-read the synopsis, invite them to activate their emotions by becoming living statues, striking a pose representative of a unique feeling, emotion or range of emotions inspired by the synopsis. For example, if the story's tone sounds or feels mysterious, they might strike an inquisitive pose or perhaps cower in fear. Hold space for their imaginations to run free as they become a gallery of emotion-inspired sculptures.
4. Ask volunteers to share their chosen pose or sequence of poses with the group, explaining which part of the synopsis inspired their pose and why.
5. Next, point students to chart paper located in four different parts of the room, each labeled with different emotions (e.g., Sadness, Curiosity, Fear, Amazement).
6. Ask students to walk to the emotion that most accurately matches the pose they created.
Note: *If students created more than one pose, you might choose to move through this step more than once.*
7. Finally, invite them to stand near the chart paper that represents the emotion they expect to feel while watching *The Vanishing Elephant*. As before, if students feel pulled to more than one emotion, hold space for them to move within that spectrum and facilitate a conversation about that range of emotions.
8. Gather the students back in a circle and give them a standing ovation for their incredible emotional exploration!

Reflection Questions:

What were some of your favorite moments from today's activity?

What was it like to explore emotions through gestures and poses?

How do you think the emotions you felt while reading the synopsis might evolve during the actual show?



NOTE FOR TEACHERS:

***This activity can be adapted to any text or performing art-viewing experience to honor and safely explore strong emotions that may be evoked.**

The Vanishing Elephant Synopsis: Jenny's Journey

The *Vanishing Elephant* tells the story of an Asian Elephant called **Janu**.

Janu is born in Bengal, India, and lives among a large herd of elephants, exploring the jungle. She plays amongst the endless trees and deep, dark pools in which she can clearly see her image reflected. One day, Janu hears the sound of an elephant hunt, and she is captured and taken to a village. Her life changes dramatically—Janu will never see her family again.

Once in the village, Janu must learn the ways of humans. She is trained through cruel, inhumane means to clear the jungle so that railways can be built, turning India into a modern nation. Janu befriends an Indian boy named Opu. Opu is an orphan, just like Janu now, who dreams of becoming a **mahout**, or elephant trainer.

Unfortunately, their worlds are turned upside down when Janu is sold to a circus in America and renamed Jenny. She makes the strange and arduous journey across the sea until she reaches her new home. She does not know if she will ever see Opu again, but she carries his memory deep within her. Her new trainer Jarrett forces Jenny to learn and perform difficult, and often painful, tricks. Jarrett frequently uses a bullhook, or **ankus**, and violent methods to control Jenny, much to the dismay of Carole, the circus manager.

Jenny has many adventures as the circus travels across the United States, escaping to the great prairie, saving Carole from an angry tiger and, in 1918, meeting a famous escapologist named Harry Houdini. Houdini wants to be known not only as an escape artist, but a great magician, and to this end he plans to make an elephant magically disappear live on stage in New York City. He chooses Jenny for the great vanishing elephant trick.

Meanwhile, far away in India, Opu is now a grown man who has made a life for himself studying these great and mysterious creatures. He reads in a newspaper about the exploits of Jenny the Elephant, who is now famous in her own right, and concludes that this elephant is indeed his old friend. Despite ill health, he makes the same difficult boat journey to New York that Jenny once made. There, on stage, Jenny and Opu meet again, and together are part of an amazing and moving theatrical vanishing.

Words to Know:

Janu: Hindi name for soul or life force

Mahout: Elephant keeper, trainer or rider

Ankus: A metal rod with a sharp spike and hook used as an elephant goad

Koomkie: Trained female elephant used as decoy in capturing other wild elephants

