

## ***“Elephants and Farmers:” Negotiating a Community Concern***

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**Grade Level:** Suitable for grade three (nine-year-olds) through adults, although the lesson will need adjusting according to the maturity of the learners.  
**Subject:** Geography or social studies  
**Strategies:** *Think/Pair/Share, Readers’ Theater, and Dramatic Roles*  
**Time needed:** Two class periods as written, but may be lengthened

**Introduction:** The lesson asks students to do a close reading of an article to gather evidence to support a case that they will later argue. The case has to do with the conservation of an endangered species—a matter that may at first appear settled, but which turns out to have surprising complexities.

**Motivation:** Reading comprehension is more active when it is directed toward a purpose. Close reading is a desirable skill for students to develop. Critical thinking ability is enhanced when students participate in debates, and debates are more substantive when students have evidence from which to build their cases.

**Objectives:** Students will develop skill in—

- Reading a text closely to find certain information;
- Marshaling evidence to support a position;
- Debating constructively and politely;
- Practicing arriving at a consensus that brings together seemingly conflicting interests.
- Argumentative writing.

**Prerequisites:** It will be helpful, but not necessary, if students have some prior experience debating controversial issues.

**Resources and Time Management:** This lesson requires that students have access to the text, “Elephants and Farmers.” A map of Africa would help. It will take at least one class period and part of another.

**Grouping:** The lesson will require that students work in pairs and in groups of four. If mobility within the class is limited, the teacher may skip the meetings of students with the same roles, and have the four-role discussions happen with students seated near each other.

### **The Lesson Proper:**

**Evocation:** The teacher begins with an **Advance Organizer**, in this case a short talk about the topic—just enough to frame the students’ thinking about the topic and to raise their curiosity. The talk might go like this:

**Teacher:** *Today we will be talking about the problems of protecting endangered species. We will focus on elephants, and consider efforts to save them from dying out. We will also look at the question a different way: We will also think about problems that are caused by conservation.*

*Some elephants live in Asia, but the most plentiful and largest elephants live in Africa, mostly in the eastern countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. (The teacher points to these countries on a map). Elephants live on grassy plains and in forests.*

The teacher next poses a question for a **think/pair/share**: “Take a minute and think about what life would be like for you if you lived on a farm in the area where elephants lived. Then turn to a partner and share your answers with each other.”

After a minute, the teacher invites answers from three or four of the pairs.

### **First Reading: Paired Reading/Paired Summarizing**

The Teacher now prepares the students to read the text for the first time. The students will use the method of **Paired Reading/Paired Summarizing** to help them think about the material they are reading. If this method is new to the students, the teacher should take time to thoroughly introduce it.

To introduce the method, the teacher reads a paragraph aloud, and then provides a **summary** of it. The teacher then explains that the summary shares the the important ideas but not all of the details.

The teacher next demonstrates **questions** that could be asked about the paragraph. For the first paragraph in the article, for instance, the teacher asks, “What might be some of the ‘conservation measures’ the passage mentioned?” and “The article says the elephant population is larger in some places than ever before. Do you think that is a good thing or a bad thing? What is good about it? What might be bad about it?”

After demonstrating how to summarize and how to ask questions, the teacher instructs the students to pair up. One will go first, and read the first paragraph. Then that same person will summarize it. The other student will ask two or three good questions about the paragraph. Both of the students should try to answer each question.

Note that if the students are new to this procedure, the teacher may stop them after the first paragraph, ask for some of their summaries, and evaluate and correct them as necessary. The teacher then does the same for their questions.

### **Second Reading: Text Coding.**

The teacher now assigns one of four roles to each pair of students. The roles are:

- Conservationist
- Police
- Farmer
- Hunter

The teacher instructs pairs of students to read through the passage again, and find information that would be especially important to them if they were a **conservationist**, a **hunter**, a **police worker** in charge of policing a game preserve, or a **farmer** who lived near elephants. With a pencil, they may lightly mark a letter in the margin beside each relevant paragraph: C, H, P, or F.

After the students have read and marked the text, the teacher invites pairs who had the same roles to join with all other pairs who had the same roles. Each of the groups is instructed to come up with a position on the question:

**In areas where they are destroying farms, what should be done about the elephants?**

After they have prepared their positions, one member from each group joins with three others and they debate the issue, each arguing her or his own assigned position: conservationist, police, hunter, or farmer.

After the debate has gone on for some time, students are instructed to quickly write on the question, "What do you think should be done about the elephants, and why?"

That much should conclude the day's lesson.

For the next day's lesson, students are placed back in the same groups. The students are invited to drop the role they were assigned previously, and together as a group to reach a compromise solution that all can agree with.

Finally, students may be asked to write a formal essay on the question, with this format:

1. What is the question?
2. What is my answer?
3. What is a reason that supports my answer?
4. What is the evidence that supports that reason? (There may be three reasons with supporting evidence).
5. What is my conclusion? What should people believe, or what action should they take?

**Assessment:** Formative assessment may be done while students are debating the issue in small groups. Summative assessment may be done by evaluating the final essay.

**Extension:** If students have access to the Internet, they may be directed to investigate the question of the protection of elephants and the damage done to farms on sites such as the International Fund for Animal Welfare or the African Elephant Specialist Group, or the World Wildlife Fund.

### The Text:

#### Elephants and Farmers

The elephant population continues to dwindle in many African countries. In others, however, long-standing conservation measures have been so successful that elephants are more numerous than at any time in recorded history.

Wildlife experts are calling this a victory, but to the struggling African farmer, it is yet one more example of how the forces of nature threaten her precarious livelihood. Elephants foraging for food that their expanding population has made scarce can destroy an entire plantation in a matter of hours. Profits on the larger farms, already under threat from rocketing seed and fertilizer prices and the effects of globalization, are plummeting. For the subsistence farmer and her family, a single act of trespass by an elephant herd can mean the loss of a season's work, the destruction of house and home, and possible destitution.

It is these facts which have led many farmers to call for a revival of the right to shoot elephants and to trade their meat, hides and ivory. The price of a single tusk can be equivalent to many years' income for an impoverished farmer. In a world where the livelihoods of poor people are more at risk than those of elephants, this is an increasingly persuasive argument. In addition to this, legalization would reduce the need for the expensive, military style policing currently used to control the violent behavior of ivory smugglers.

However, many conservationists have reacted with horror to this proposal. Legalizing the shooting of elephants, even on a controlled basis, will, they argue, lead to a free for all which will drive the elephant back to the brink of extinction. The corruption and exploitation linked to the trade in ivory will return. And to many, the very idea of killing an animal as majestic, noble and intelligent as the elephant is every bit as abhorrent as killing a whale.