

Reading for Meaning

Welcome, story supporter!

**We hope that you and your child
have fun with this story.**

**Nurturing and supporting
your child is important for
their physical, emotional and
academic development.**

**ZERO
DROP/OUT**

**Part of the Zero Dropout campaign working towards
halving the rate of school dropout by 2030.**

An elephant is shown in profile, facing right, in a savanna setting. It is spraying a large amount of bright red mud or clay from its trunk, creating a wide, arching mist that fills the upper half of the frame. The elephant's trunk is curved upwards. The background consists of dry, yellowish-brown grass and sparse, leafless trees under a hazy sky. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, earthy tones of red, orange, and brown.

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The elephant whisperer

Do you know the wonderful true story about the man they call 'The Elephant Whisperer'? It's a story with some sadness, but also something very amazing happened in the end.

Some years ago, in Mpumalanga, there were seven elephants that were giving a big problem. They were very angry and aggressive. They had all come from herds that had been shot at. They had all seen their family members shot and killed by humans. Now they were afraid and wanted to attack any human they saw. The authorities said they were too dangerous and wanted to kill them all.

But then a man called Lawrence Anthony heard about them. He worked at a game reserve in KZN. He thought "If I move these unhappy elephants to the reserve, they will feel safe and settle down to a happier life." He wanted to give the elephants a second chance.

So Lawrence brought them to their new home,

a game reserve called Thula Thula in KwaZulu Natal.

But from the start there was trouble.

On the very first night at Thula Thula, the leader of the group, Nanna the matriarch, broke through the fence. She led the others out and the whole herd ran away. After a long search they were re-captured and brought back to Thula Thula.

The KZN Parks Board said if they got out again, they would shoot each one, as they were a danger to humans.

What could Lawrence do with seven huge, angry and aggressive elephants?

He put them in a boma, an enclosure with an electric fence. He watched while Nanna walked along the electric fence, testing it with her trunk as she went. She seemed to be checking for any weak spots in the electricity. But the fence was

well wired, and the elephants stayed inside.

Still, whenever the elephants saw a human, they would go wild, trumpeting their loud call, flapping their huge ears and charging right up to the fence.

Lawrence asked himself: "Why are they being so aggressive? Elephants have excellent memories; they must be remembering how humans shot their family members. They do not trust humans." Lawrence said: "I figured, somehow they had to learn to trust at least one human being."

So he made a brave decision. He would stay with the elephants, day and night, to get them used to him and show them that this human did not want to harm them.

So he and his helper David set up a camp nearby, where the elephants could see them. They stayed there night and day. And Lawrence talked to them. He talked non-stop, saying

whatever came into his head. Of course they could not understand a word he was saying, but that didn't matter. "I talked nonsense," he said. "Anything, as long as they could hear a human voice."

At first, the elephants would charge towards him, with only the fence between them.

Then one day, after three weeks, an amazing thing happened. The leader of the group, Nanna the matriarch, for the first time did not charge, but slowly walked towards the fence where Lawrence was standing. He was frightened, but he stayed very still.

Slowly, slowly, Nanna put her trunk through the fence, and reached out to gently touch his head. Lawrence stood completely still as he realised Nanna was sniffing him with her trunk.

That gentle touch showed that Nanna was no longer scared of him. Instead, she was curious. Then Lawrence knew that they would be okay.

The elephants would follow Nanna's lead and accept him.

"It's not a case of adopting the elephants. It's being patient enough until they adopt you," he said.

Early one morning a few weeks later, Lawrence had a surprise. By then he was back at his house, which was many kilometres away on the edge of the reserve. When he opened the door, there stood the herd. It seems they had come to visit. They were also helping themselves to the grass that his roof was made of. They were eating his roof for breakfast!

Over time, Lawrence rescued more orphan elephants and they settled into the new family group, with Nanna as their leader. They roamed wild in the reserve, but when they heard Lawrence calling, they would come to him.

Then after some years, something sad happened. Lawrence had a heart attack and

died. His family was shocked and sad.

But a few days later, they were amazed to see the elephants appearing at their house. The herd had walked for 12 hours through the bush.

They stood around for 2 days, as if they were holding a vigil, and then went off back into the wild. But every year, on the anniversary of his death, they come to the house, and hold their vigil.

No one knows why they do this. We do know that if any member of an elephant herd dies, the others mourn for them. So it seems that this is what the herd is doing; they are remembering the man who saved them, the man known as the Elephant Whisperer.

EXTEND THE STORY...

Facts about elephants



WRITING
ACTIVITIES

WHAT TO USE

Pen or pencil and a blank sheet of paper

WHAT TO DO

- After reading the story, encourage your child to think about what happened in the story and things that were said about elephants.
- Ask them to write at least five facts/things that are true about elephants. For example in the story, they say elephants “elephants have excellent memories” - meaning they

are good at remembering things.

- You can help by adding other facts about elephants that are not in the story.

Imagine how challenging and fun it will be to find out more information about elephants!

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