

How Elephant Got His Trunk

By Monica Marshall

--- SAMPLE ---

This play was inspired by a tale by Rudyard Kipling. The staging is simple. Colorful blankets or cloths are spread on the ground to one side of the stage area. The students playing the animals act out the story in front and to the side of the seated students. All the children are in African print cloths tied over one shoulder, although some of the cloths are in prints that match their animal character's patterns and coloring. The students who will be playing various animals have their costumes on the blankets where they will be sitting.

Characters - The number of children playing each character can easily increase or decrease to accommodate larger or smaller classes. The groups of students playing the children or playing the elders can be designated to speak as various animals, especially if a class is small and only one student is acting as an individual animal.

Elephants
Little Elephant
Elders
Children
Zebras
Giraffes
Baboons
Hippos
Kolokolo Bird
Python
Crocodile

As the play begins a group of Elders are sitting on cloths around a fire. Some of them are playing softly on percussion instruments, others are using marimbas. Some elders are pretending to be grinding grains. A group of students playing the children are toward the back of the stage, pretending to be picking fruit or gardening. A soft song is heard and some children begin to walk back to the Elders. Before they get too close we hear individual children speaking, "Elephant, move back. Move back. Elephant, stop it, stop it and leave us alone!"

CHILDREN:

Why is Elephant's trunk always in our way!
He grabs us and pushes us every day!
Sawubono, Elders, sawubono.
(Children raise their right hands from a bent elbow).

We see you and we greet you.
But tell us Elders, why does Elephant's trunk reach for us from the trees?
He pulls our hair and tickles our knees.
He is always blocking our way on the trail,
We beg him to stop, to no avail.

ELDERS:
Little Ones, why do you speak so?
Elephant is just proud of his trunk, you know,
His reach wasn't always so long,
Luckily, though, for him, he was always headstrong!

CHILDREN:
Elder Ones, it sounds like you have a story to tell
Please, please tell us quickly; we promise not to quarrel!

ELDERS:
Grind the mealies, Little Ones, while we wait for all,
Listen carefully for the snowy egret's call,
Her farewell to Old Lord Sun,
Lets us know our evening has begun.

(More children begin to arrive from the back of the stage area. They say "Sawubono", and all sing Tue' Tue'. Then they sit and sing again, adding the hand motions.)

CHILDREN:
Now we are all here together; the mealies are ground,
The cattle are safe. Listen to their contented sounds.
Even the mosquitoes fly away.
Please, please, tell us a story without delay!

ELDERS:
Calm down, Little Ones, and warm your hands by the fire,
Listen to the sounds of the night as the moon grows higher,
There.... can you hear the leopard's cough from the acacia tree.

CHILDREN:
Yes, yes, we can! He coughs with glee!

ELDERS:
And listen, the hippopotami come to rest for the night,
They gently crush the grass with their bulky might.
Ah, now it is time to relax and say goodbye to the light,
As the bush settles down to a peaceful night.

CHILDREN:

Elders, please... tell us a story before the first morning light.

(Little Elephant and the zebras put on their costumes and move out to the side of the stage)

ELDERS:

Young Ones, you hurry so,

Look in the sky; the stars are still low.

The Southern Cross has barely begun to shine,

Heel of the Day, the evening star, has just appeared over the skyline.

Now settle down and listen well,

For our story begins in a sunny dell...

A long time ago Elephant's trunk was very small,

It was blackish, and bulgy, and hardly there at all.

But one day a little elephant was born under the hot savannah sun,

And he was very curious; he asked questions of everyone.

ELEPHANT:

Auntie Zebra, why are your stripes just so?

(Giraffes put on their costumes and move to the side of the stage).

AUNTIE ZEBRA(S):

Don't be rude, rounded one, be gone; it is not for you to know!

Little elephant, you have no sense!

Your curiosity is simply immense!

(She chases him away)

EVERYONE:

Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo!

ELEPHANT:

Oh, Uncle Giraffe, your beautiful neck is so long,

But your skin is so wrong!

Why is it covered with spots?

They look uncomfortable and hot!

(Baboons put on their costumes).

GIRAFFES:

Little One, don't ask your silly questions here!

Not everything is for you to know - now move over there!

Little Elephant, you look quite silly, shaking your stumpy nose,

As your endless questions you do impose.

Giraffes chases Little Elephant away. Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo!