



Inspiration

The Blind Men and the Elephant ~ A Picture of Relativism and Tolerance

The Blind Men and the Elephant is a famous Indian fable of six blind sojourners that come across different parts of an elephant in their life journeys. In turn, each blind man creates his own version of reality from that limited experience and perspective. In philosophy departments throughout the world, the Blind Men and the Elephant has become the poster child for moral relativism and religious tolerance.

Holi ~ The Indian Festival of Colours

In Indian Mythology, devas (gods) and asuras (demons) stirred the ocean in the hopes that it would bring about their immortality. Lo and behold, this stirring caused nine jewels, also known as the navratnas, to surface from the ocean. One of these jewels was an elephant. Since then, the elephant has been regarded as a sacred and precious animal. The Elephant Festival is a unique event held annually in Jaipur, the capital of the north Indian state of Rajasthan. Groomed to perfection, glittering in gold, row upon row of elephants catwalk before an enthralled audience. The elephants move gracefully in procession, run races, play the regal game of polo, and finally participate in the spring festival of Holi. It is festival time for the elephants.

The Ivory Trade and Elephant Endangerment

Ivory comes from varied species of animals including elephants. The **ivory trade is illegal** on an international scale. It is illegal to poach the ivory from the elephant tusks (this results in the death of the elephant) and it is illegal to buy and sell the trinkets and jewellery made from the ivory. It is even illegal to own crafts made from ivory unless these are decades old. And yet, this practice continues today. China is the biggest consumer market of ivory.

Demand for ivory, combined with habitat loss from human settlement, has led to a dramatic decline in elephant populations in the last few decades. In 1930, there were between 5 and 10 million African elephants. By 1979, there were 1.3 million. In 1989, when they were added to the international list of the most endangered species, there were about 600,000 remaining, less than one percent of their original number. Today, there are an estimated 450,000 -

700,000 African elephants left in the wild and probably no more than 35,000 to 40,000 Asian elephants left in the wild.

Program Objectives

The Royal Elephant of India is an integrated visual arts, social justice, eco-justice and cultural competency project.

This project teaches us that the inclusion of different perspectives can reveal the totality of truths, fostered by harmonized communication and respect for contrasting opinions. Our subjective beliefs limit our information and experience, leading us to overlook the real picture.

The inspiring Folklore of The Blind Men and The Elephant, teaches students that empathy, active listening, tolerance, compromise and collective agreement can help us build cultural and social competency.

Students learn about the Indian Elephant (*Elephas Maximus Indicus*, one of the sub-species of the Asian Elephant) and their impact on society and the environment, and vice versa. Students learn about the majesty of the elephant, its habitat, intelligence and how it has become a **keystone species**, i.e., if the elephant is no longer through extinction or removal, the entire eco-system would change drastically. They learn of their **matriarchal social structure**. Moreover, students are informed of the recent resurgence of the illegal trade, leading the elephants on the road to extinction. Describing ways in which humans can protect the Indian Elephant, being an endangered species, inculcates the sense of inclusiveness and empathy amongst the students.

The famous traditional Elephant Festival in India, inspires students to create their beautiful Royal elephants in mixed media. Results are beautiful and an elephant parade is encouraged.

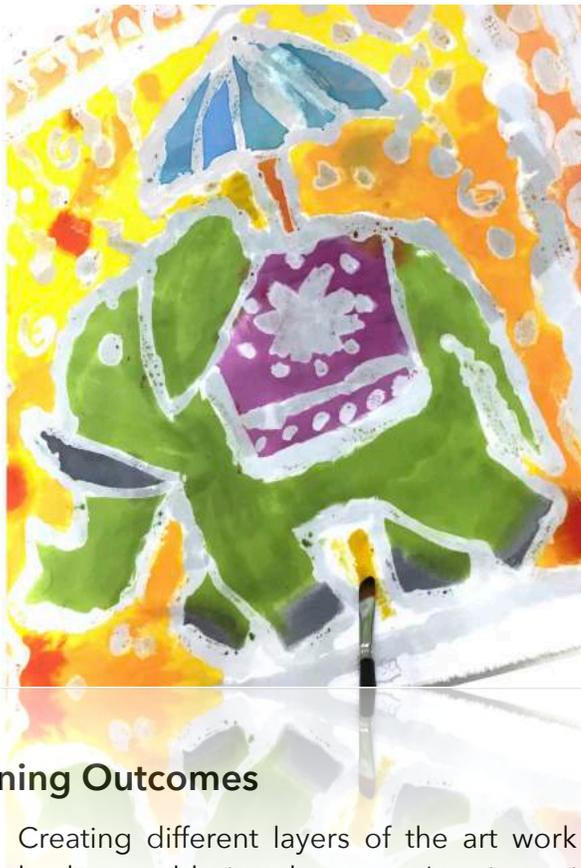
Artistic Process

Artist begins with a video of the folklore, **The Blind Men and the Elephant** and follows with a slide presentation on the process, introducing and reinforcing concepts that instil inclusion, empathy, respect, balance and harmony, contextualized in visual arts, science and math. The majestic elephant is the muse not only for the art but also for understanding the beauty of our differences and respect for all life.

Students ~

- Create a sunrise or sunset as the background layer, by mixing primary colours red/yellow to make hues of orange as a secondary colour, blue/red to make hues of violet as a secondary colour, etc., using acrylic paints with sponges.
- Make patterns, using shape and colour as attributes with shape stickers, to create a decorative border.

- Trace and cut out their Royal Elephant as the foreground layer with the help of stencils. They add texture to the elephant's skin by rubbing/shading with crayons on the elephant cut-outs.
- Embellish the elephants with rhinestone stickers, building unique patterns.
- Incorporate jute fabric for their elephant's back and add a decorate miniature umbrella.
- Layer pieces together using Styrofoam to give a pop-out effect to attach the elephant in a 3-D art piece.



The Royal Elephant may also be created in Batik. Process is a paint on method with Indian dyes, hot wax and paint brushes. Fabric is pre-washed. Wax is pre-mixed and melts in an old electric frying pan (220-230 F). The paint brush becomes your artist tool. Use the dyes to colour in the art work around the wax. You then iron the wax out by sandwiching the fabric between layers of newsprint. Wash and dry.

Learning Outcomes

- Creating different layers of the art work is based on the principle of perspective, background being the sunset/sunrise; mid-ground being the decorative border and foreground being the elephant and umbrella.
- Using a variety of media, yet seeing one's art work complete, we experience the technique of mixed media.
- Mixing primary colours to create secondary colours for the background can represent sunset/sunrise.

- Crayons are rubbed on to the construction paper to create the rough texture of the elephant's skin, as a texture seen in nature.
- Stickers create the decorative border using shape and colour as attributes.
- Elements like the fabric and the umbrellas, enhance the elephants to look grand.

Greater Learning Outcomes (recommended but not prescribed)

Wellbeing is a very personal thing and can developed over time. If we view that we are in charge of (accountable for) our own wellbeing we are half way on our path to our own happiness. Life is challenging. There will be times when things don't go right for us. Perspective is key. Learned optimism is a remarkable gift.

All living things have great value, not because of our accomplishments, but simply for being.

Inclusion ~ in social justice inclusion gives equal importance to all living things including humans, animals, plants and even the oceans, places where we work, school, live and play. When we are included and include others this adds to our own personal sense of wellbeing.

Empathy ~ in psychology is that genuine understanding of another's feelings. To be empathic is to be human...and yet we find today that even animals have empathy. Empathy may hurt for the moment but it is never a burden.

Mindfulness ~ in psychology is when we live consciously in a positive way. True mindfulness is when we live in the present, in the moment, not concerned with the past or future while we focus on what we call presence. It is also a calm acceptance of our thoughts and feelings in that given moment. Mindfulness contributes to our wellbeing because it calms us and reduces stress. It is often used as a therapeutic technique in yoga and meditation...or simply staying still conscious of our breath.

Resilience ~ in psychology resilience is that ineffable (i.e., too great to be expressed in words) quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Even after misfortune, resilient people are blessed with such an outlook that they can change course and soldier on. Think of your favourite athletes who sometimes lose at the most critical times and yet continue to return to the game to keep trying. Psychologists have identified some of the factors that make us resilient. They include a positive attitude, optimism, the ability to regulate our emotions, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback. We can build our resilience through yoga and meditation and by practicing mindfulness.

Balance and Harmony ~ Harmony is a condition that comes about when all the parts of our life are balanced with each other and with the world around you. But not everything is under our control, and to be in perfect balance and thus harmony may mean that we are not experiencing a lot of challenges in our life. To live a full life, we need to experience the tension of being out of balance. Enjoying balance and harmony does not mean eliminating all our problems. It means the ability to distribute our energy appropriately to the inevitable

conflicts of life. Harmony ensues when this is done in proportions that fit within our personal comfort zone, that will also broaden as we take on new problems of our own making.

Extensions

The Holi Festival has become internationally renowned. The **Colour Run** takes place every year in Toronto at the Woodbine Racetrack and at Downsview Park. For more on elephants please visit <https://www.elephants.com>.

Please visit our website or youtube account to see our short film on **The Royal Elephant Parade at Adam Beck PS in Toronto**.

<https://youtu.be/WDDf14b31Hw?list=UUkdFPL2CDKw2CZO67fUCVGg>

Materials

Provided by school

- Laptop/Cables/Adapters for Slide Show
- Projector/Cables/Extension Cords
- Speakers/Cables

Provided by artist

- Camera or ipad - to take photographs of the creative process
- Paper, pencils, erasers, scissors, sharpies (fine and extra fine) of various colours
- Black thick construction/cardstock paper, black foam board, white bristol board
- Coloured construction paper, elephant stencils, acrylic paints, crayons, miniature umbrellas
- Glitter glue, liquid glue/masking tape, double-sided tape, styrofoam pieces/blocks
- Sponges, water containers, plastic plates, shape stickers, rhinestone stickers, jute ribbon.

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