



African Elephant Overpopulation Problem

Goal

Students will form an opinion on how the problem of African elephant overpopulation should be solved through reading and discussion.

Objectives

Upon completion of these lessons, students will be able to:

1. Understand different viewpoints held by people in South Africa about elephants.
2. Write a persuasive letter about their proposed elephant solution.

Subject Areas

Environmental Education, Writing

WI Standards

Environmental Ed: A.4.3, A.4.4, B.4.4, B.4.6, C.4.1, C.4.2, C.4.3, C.4.4, C.4.5

Writing: B.4.1, B.4.2, B.4.3

Materials Needed

Pictures of Addo Elephant National Park, large outdoor area, watering hole representation, paper, pencils

Introduction

Students will have already seen pictures of South Africa, but this will be their first investigation into an environmental problem there.

Lesson Procedure

1. Make a Statement!

- a. Introduce students to five different groups connected to this issue – SANParks managers, elephants, animal rights activists, black rhinoceroses and nearby landowners.
- b. Divide students into five groups and give them each a written statement with a one of the opinions regarding the elephant population. (See attached) Ask groups to try to match their statement with one of the above players.
- c. Have a spokesperson for each group read the statement and tell which player matches the statement and why. Then discuss the player's opinions.

2. Imagine the Possibilities

- a. Have students take some time to think about how they would solve the problem of too many elephants. Discuss in small groups before sharing ideas with the class. Students should realize that some of the solutions involve death in some way. If needed, discuss this idea further with students.
- b. Introduce students to three different ideas that SANParks is proposing to help control the elephant population. Have students close their eyes and imagine the scene in South Africa as each idea is read. (See attached)
- c. Discuss each idea with students and answer questions as needed.

3. Pros and Cons

- a. Take students' ideas from the discussion and begin creating a chart of pros and cons for each solution on the board. For each solution, ask students to imagine that they were one of the players and discuss how they would feel about that solution.
- b. Identify how each of the players would feel about each of the solutions through discussion.

4. Give Your Opinion

- a. Review how to give an opinion statement using "I think...because...".

- b. In a whole group, write opinion statements for each of the players based on the list of pros and cons generated in class.
- c. Give students time to think about what they would do if they had to decide how to solve the elephant overpopulation problem.
- d. Have students write their opinion statements as a letter to the SANParks board with at least two supporting reasons and turn them in. Young students are often influenced by the ideas of more vocal classmates. For this reason, I have the students write their opinion before sharing their individual ideas.
- e. Read aloud the written statements and have the students discuss as needed. Hand back the opinion statements and have the students write how they feel after discussion – whether the same as before or different. Have them hand it in again.
- f. As a class, take a vote on what they would do. Discuss how this may be similar to how the decision is made with scientists and park officials.

Assessment Ideas

- 🌐 Review letters written to check for understanding and reasoning
- 🌐 Cooperative learning skills assessed throughout

Adaptations

- 🌐 Have students draw what might happen if the elephants were left without any management.
- 🌐 Have students write letters in partners if needed.

Groups' Statements

SANParks, Elephants, Rhinoceroses, Landowners, Animal Rights Activists

- 1) We are not happy with the amount of elephants in the park. They do not have enough food or water in the park, so they are going to the land outside of the park and eating the crops that we grow. They also trample the land and ruin our trees. And have you ever come face to face with an elephant? They're big! We're worried that they may become aggressive and harm our families.
- 2) We are not happy with the amount of elephants in the park. They are causing damage to the trees and grasses in the park because there are so many of them. They are also destroying the watering holes. We are worried about the other animals not having enough to eat or drink, and possibly even places to live. We need to do something to stop getting more elephants.
- 3) We are not happy with the number of elephants in the park. We are unable to find enough food or water to eat and drink, and it is getting very crowded. The elephants are bigger than us and can hurt us as well. They are destroying our habitat and we are having a hard time trying to survive.
- 4) We are not happy with the number of elephants in the park. There are too many elephants for them to be healthy. We do not believe that any of the animals should be harmed, but that something needs to be done to make sure that all of them are healthy and safe.
- 5) We are not happy with the number of elephants in the park. There is not enough room for all of us to graze or get water. It's getting harder to find food and enough space for our herd. We have started to look for food in other places, where we see a lot more people.

Ways to Control the Elephant Populations

- 1) **Culling** – There is one way to help control the elephant population immediately. Elephants contain a lot of meat that can be shared with the community, and their skin can be used to make leather. One way to get these things and help keep the elephant numbers down is by hunting them. Park rangers are trained with guns and the bodies of the elephants can be used responsibly. While it isn't the prettiest thing to do, it will solve the problem and help the community at the same time.

- 2) **Contraceptives** – One way to help control the elephant population is by preventing the female elephants from having babies. A mother elephant is followed by a helicopter. When the helicopter gets close enough, a needle is shot at the elephant. It contains a chemical that will not allow the elephant to have any more babies. Two weeks later, the same elephant has to get another shot, or the chemical will not work. It's hard work trying to find the same elephants at the right time, but it will help control the elephant population in the future. There are thousands of elephants to find, and treating each elephant costs about \$100. But the elephants are not harmed.

- 3) **Closing Watering Holes** – One way that SANParks has gotten tourists to see elephants is by creating man-made watering holes for the animals. If these watering holes were closed, the elephants would not have enough water to drink. Eventually, some of them would die. It would take some time, and other animals might also be affected. But this would be a way for nature to control the population instead of people.