

Elephanatics.Org  
**ELEPHANTS MATTER TOO!**

**Grades:** 3rd-6th

**Objectives:** By the end of this lesson students will-

- Be able to empathize with elephants
- Be able to recognize similar characteristics between humans and elephants
- Be able to identify emotions that humans and elephants have in common
- Be able to name at least one reason elephants are an endangered species
- Suggest ways that humans can help protect African elephants from poaching
- Actively engage in an action that helps African elephants

**Materials:**

- ✓ Videos- all links found in lesson plan
- ✓ Copies of the article “**Emotional Characteristics of the Elephant**” (younger students) or “**Unforgettable Elephants, Elephant Emotions**” (older students) both are located at the end of this lesson. “*Emotional Characteristics of the Elephant*” by Cate Rushton. Retrieved August 18, 2017 from <http://animals.mom.me/emotional-characteristics-elephant-10845.html>
- ✓ “*Unforgettable Elephants- Elephant Emotions*” from PBS Nature (2008) Retrieved August 16, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/unforgettable-elephants-elephant-emotions/5886/>
- ✓ Flipchart paper and markers
- ✓ Sticky notes (enough for each student)

**Background Information for Teachers:** Poachers kill, on average, an African elephant every 15 minutes. From 2010 to 2012, over 100,000 elephants died from poaching. African elephants are killed primarily for their ivory tusks, but are also killed for bush meat (meat from non-domesticated animals), or in human/elephant conflicts. Ivory is often used to make jewelry, chopsticks, trinkets, ornaments, and many other items. Elephant memory is a tool elephant herds use to survive. The matriarchs, the rely on their memories to lead the herd to food and water especially when these resources are scarce. The matriarchs who hold these memories tend to be the most wanted by poachers as they often have the larger tusks. When these matriarchs are killed, not only are family members often subject to terror, grief, and stress, but they lose the memory of the generations before them which puts the rest of the surviving herd at risk of starvation and dehydration. For a brief history of poaching and the ivory trade visit <https://elephanatics.org/african-elephants/conservation/> For more information on Elephants and emotions read the article “**It’s Time to Accept that Elephants, Like Us, Are Empathetic Beings**” by Virginia Morell for National Geographic which can be found at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140221-elephants-poaching-empathy-grief-extinction-science/>

**Activities:**

**Activity 1- Introduction**

1. Communicate to your students that they will be watching a video called **Elephants Never Forget** (19:27 minutes) by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) that can be

## ELEPHANTS MATTER TOO!

found on our webpage at <https://elephanatics.org/education/> or <https://vimeo.com/23640203>

2. Let them know they will be using what they learn from the video in a variety of activities. You may wish for them to take notes.
3. After the video, divide your students into small groups and give each group a piece of flip chart paper and markers. Ask each group to answer the question- *In which ways are elephants like us?*
4. Have one person from the group share the groups answers with the class. Record the answers on the whiteboard or additional flipchart paper.

### **Activity 2- Elephant Emotions**

1. Communicate to your students that we will be learning about elephant emotions.
2. Watch the video of the baby elephant chasing birds. Ask your students what emotions that baby elephant may be feeling? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kly5aiRdtrc> If you can't view Youtube you can watch this video <https://weather.com/news/trending/video/birds-elusive-for-baby-elephant> from the Weather Channel.
3. Pass out the article that is age appropriate for your students, either “**Emotional Characteristics of the Elephant**” or “**Unforgettable Elephants, Elephant Emotions**”
4. After they have read the article, individually, in groups, or as a class, make a list of the emotions researchers have documented elephants having. Ask your students if they have ever experienced any of the same emotions. Ask your students if they express them in the same way or differently than elephants do?

### **Activity 3- Poaching**

1. Remind your students of the video they watched earlier. Ask your students what it means to be an endangered species (animal that has a high risk of becoming extinct in the near future). Ask your students what are the reasons that elephants are an endangered species (poaching, habitat loss, human/elephant conflicts)?
2. Explain that an African elephant is killed by poachers approximately every 15 minutes for their tusks. You may wish to have the class figure out how many are killed during a class period. Remind your students that ivory tusks are used to make a variety of jewelry, trinkets, chopsticks, and decorations that are often sold to tourists. Ask your students which elephants are most at risk of poaching (those with the largest tusks)? Explain that because of poachers wanting the largest tusks the matriarchs of the herd are often killed.
3. Working back in their groups, ask the students “what might be some impacts on an elephant herd due to poaching”? Some examples of impacts include:
  - a. Herds are smaller in size
  - b. Baby elephants become orphaned
  - c. Baby elephants die from losing their mother
  - d. Emotional trauma of remaining herd members
  - e. Juvenile elephants are forced to take on leadership roles within herds they are not trained for (after matriarchs are killed). This means they may not know the navigation routes, the locations of food and water, and even how to socialize.
4. Have the groups share their answers.

Elephanatics.Org  
**ELEPHANTS MATTER TOO!**

5. Ask students how they would feel if they were and elephant that had a family member killed by poachers.

**Activity 4- Taking Action**

1. Communicate with students that now that they know why elephants are being killed by poachers they are going to focus on how to help protect elephants.
2. Pass out sticky notes to each student. Let your students know that you are going to brainstorm ways that the class can help African elephants.
3. Ask your students to write down on a sticky note one way that the class could help the elephants (it could be through raising awareness, fundraising, or writing letters to government officials). Students can right down more than one idea.
4. Have the students stick their sticky notes on the board or flipchart paper. Read each suggestion and have the class vote on one or more of the suggested actions that the class can take.
5. Have the class complete the action they voted on to help protect African elephants! *(If needed the teacher can provide a list of possible activities and have the students vote on those choices).*

**Possible actions-**

- Create posters to raise awareness that “Ivory Belongs to Elephants” to be placed around the school or in a local community center or library
- Raise funds and foster an elephant from a wildlife organization group (see resources below for some possible organizations)
- Have the class develop a presentation for younger students in the school
- Start a letter writing campaign or a petition in support of ivory bans

**Additional Activities:**

- Watch the video “Wild Elephants “Mourn” Their Dead (1:38 minutes) by National Geographic which can be found here- <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/a/african-elephant/> This video fits well with activity 3
- Watch a herd respond when it thinks a baby elephant is stuck in the mud (2:33 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbjpxYmst1s>
- Watch as a mother protects her baby from a pack of wild dogs (2:00 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eU3JZSEq2yg>
- Visit <https://www.helloinelephant.com/#translate> a website created by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and ElephantVoices that translates your voice, text or emoji into Elephant.
- Fundraise for the elephants! Elephanatics has developed a fundraising kit that you can order from <https://elephanatics.org/action/volunteer-fundraising-kits/>

**Resources:** The following organizations are helping to protect elephants for future generations. You can learn more about the issues facing elephants and how you can help by visiting their websites.

Elephanatics.Org  
**ELEPHANTS MATTER TOO!**

The Nature Conservancy: [nature.org/elephants](https://www.nature.org/elephants)

The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust: [sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/](https://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/)

The Northern Rangeland Trust: [nrt-kenya.org/](https://www.nrt-kenya.org/)

Tsavo Trust: [tsavotrust.org/](https://www.tsavotrust.org/)

World Wildlife Federation: <https://gifts.worldwildlife.org/>

Save the Elephants: <http://www.savetheelephants.org/>

International Elephant Foundation: <https://elephantconservation.org/>

Amboseli Trust for Elephants: <https://www.elephanttrust.org/>

International Fund for Animal Welfare: [ifaw.org/united-states](https://www.ifaw.org/united-states)

*Unforgettable Elephants- Elephant Emotions from PBS Nature (2008) Retrieved August 16, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/unforgettable-elephants-elephant-emotions/5886/>*

## Unforgettable Elephants

# Elephant Emotions

Elephants, the largest land animals on the planet, are among the most exuberantly expressive of creatures. Joy, anger, grief, compassion, love; the finest emotions reside within these hulking masses. Through years of research, scientists have found that elephants are capable of complex thought and deep feeling. In fact, the emotional attachment elephants form toward family members may rival our own.

### **Joy**

In the wild, joy is an emotion that elephants have no shame in showing. They express their happiness and joy when they are amongst their loved ones-family and friends. Playing games and greeting friends or family members all elicit displays of joy.

But the one event that stirs a level of elephant happiness beyond compare is the birth of a baby elephant. In *Unforgettable Elephants*, the birth of Ebony is one such occasion. The excitement of several of the females in Echo's family can't be contained as they are heard bellowing and blaring during the birth of the new baby.

Another highly emotional occasion in an elephant's life is an elephant reunion. This joyful meeting between related, but separated, elephants is one of exuberance and drama. The greeting ceremony marks the incredible welcoming of a formerly absent family member. During the extraordinary event, the elephants about to be united begin calling each other from a quarter a mile away. As they get closer, their pace quickens. Their excitement visibly flows as fluid from their temporal glands streams down the sides of their faces. Eventually, the elephants make a run towards each other, screaming and trumpeting the whole time. When they finally make contact, they form a loud, rumbling mass of flapping ears, clicked tusks and entwined trunks. The two leaning on each other, rubbing each other, spinning around, even defecating, and urinating (for this is what elephants do when they are experiencing sheer delight). With heads held high, the reunited pair fill the air with a symphony of trumpets, rumbles, screams, and roars. Bliss.

### **Love**

There is no greater love in elephant society than the maternal kind. Nobody who observes a mother with her calf could doubt this. It is one of the most touching aspects of elephant social customs. The calf is so small compared to the adult that it walks under its mother, who, incredibly, does not step on it or trip over it. Mother and child remain in constant touch. If a calf strays too far from its mother, she will fetch it. The mother often touches her child with trunk and legs, helping it to its feet with one foot and her trunk. She carries it over obstacles and hauls it out of pits or ravines. She pushes it under her to

## ELEPHANTS MATTER TOO!

protect it from predators or hot sun. She bathes it, using her trunk to spray water over it and then to scrub it gently. The mother steers her calf by grasping its tail with her trunk, and the calf follows, holding its mother's tail. When the calf squeals in distress, its mother and others rush to its protection immediately. It is easy to see why the bond between mother and daughter lasts 50 years or more.

### **Grief**

One of the most moving displays of elephant emotion is the grieving process. Elephants remember and mourn loved ones, even many years after their death. When an elephant walks past a place that a loved one died he or she will stop and take a silent pause that can last several minutes. While standing over the remains, the elephant may touch the bones of the dead elephant (not the bones of any other species), smelling them, turning them over and caressing the bones with their trunk. Researchers don't quite understand the reason for this behavior. They guess the elephants could be grieving. Or they could they be reliving memories. Or perhaps the elephant is trying to recognize the deceased. Whatever the reason, researchers suspect that the sheer interest in the dead elephant is evidence that elephants have a concept of death.

Researchers have described mother elephants who appear to go through a period of despondency after the death of a calf, dragging behind the herd for days. They've also witnessed an elephant herd circling a dead companion disconsolately. After some time, and likely when they realized the elephant was dead, the family members broke off branches, tore grass clumps and dropped these on the carcass. Another researcher noted a family of African elephants surrounding a dying matriarch. The family stood around her and tried to get her up with their tusks and put food in her mouth. When the rest of the herd finally moved on, one female and one calf stayed with her, touching her with their feet.

### **Rage and Stress**

Terror, rage and stress, unfortunately, are also commonplace in the elephant repertoire of emotions. Terror afflicts baby African elephants who wake up screaming in the middle of the night after they have witnessed their families murdered and poached — a type of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Some researchers suggest a species-wide trauma is taking place in wild elephant populations. They say that elephants are suffering from a form of chronic stress after sustaining decades of killings and habitat loss. The recent surge in cases of wild elephant rage reported by the media is a sad indicator of the kind of stress that wild elephants are undergoing. Nearly 300 persons are killed every year by wild elephants in India. But the increasing numbers of deaths are closely correlated to the ever-increasing human presence in traditional wild elephant habitats, as well as the the effects of climate change, and loss of territory and resources. The ongoing competition between elephants and humans for available land and resources is leading to ever more unfortunate and often deadly consequences.

Human activity does more than put a stress on elephants to find resources. It can often disrupt the complex and delicate web of familial and societal relations that are so important in elephant society. Calves are carefully protected and guarded by members of the matriarchal elephant family. Any perception of danger triggers a violent reaction from the matriarch and, subsequently, the entire family. The extremes a family will go to protect a vulnerable new calf are reported in the news stories as fits of unprovoked "elephant rage." Charging a village, storming into huts where harvested crop is stored, plundering fields and, if disturbed, turning violent are some of the instances reported by the media.

### **Compassion and Altruism**

Compassion is not reserved for offspring alone in elephant society. Elephants appear to make allowances for other members of their herd. Observers noted that one African herd always traveled slowly because one of its members had never recovered from a broken leg. And in another case, a park warden reported a herd that traveled slowly because one female was carrying around a dead calf. One perplexing report was of an adult elephant making repeated attempt to help a baby rhinoceros stuck in the mud. She continued to try to save the baby rhino despite the fact that its mother charged her each time. Risking her life for the sake of an animal that is not her own, not related to her, or even her own species is remarkably altruistic in nature.

While there is a great deal more to learn about what elephants feel, such accounts are astonishing. They reveal a creature that weeps, revels, rages and grieves. They lead us to believe that the depth of elephant emotional capacity knows no limit. They are striking for they suggest that elephants act on feelings and not solely for survival.

*“Emotional Characteristics of the Elephant” by Cate Rushton. Retrieved August 18, 20017 from <http://animals.mom.me/emotional-characteristics-elephant-10845.html>*

## EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELEPHANT



Photo by Heather Wall. Kenya, Africa

Elephant herds live in a group as a family, with one matriarch in charge and other matriarchs as valued role models. Elephants are role models even for humanity; African tribes, recognizing and honoring the emotional characteristics of elephants pass legends of mythical elephants with special powers from generation to generation. Observations of elephants' intelligence and compassion are part of tribal life. Elephants have been observed exhibiting love, compassion, grief and trauma.

### Love Begins at Birth

A baby elephant receives love from the moment he's born. Female members of the herd attend the laboring mother and immediately start bonding with the calf. The young calf is considered the responsibility of the whole group. He spends his first few years being snuggled, caressed and guided by the cows. If the calf is in danger, the mother will risk her own life to save her baby. Elephant cows have been observed by field scientists risking their lives to save a calf that isn't their own. If a mother dies, another cow adopts and nurtures the baby. Elderly female elephants are closely involved with babies until they reach their teen years, when they no longer need supervision. Matriarch elephants have even been observed babysitting while mothers graze.

### Compassion Is Commonplace

In an elephant herd, some members may not be as strong or as healthy as others, but everyone is part of the family, without exception. Sick or injured elephants are surrounded by the others and encouraged to stand, for instance. Elephants use their trunks to massage the weak

elephant's shoulders and head. They also use their trunks to prod sick elephants to their feet, and will attempt to use their bodies to support that of an injured or sick elephant. When traveling, healthy elephants often turn and look back at their slower herd mates, stopping and waiting for those elephants to catch up before continuing to move forward.

### **Grief Accompanies Death**

Field scientists have long observed that elephants undertake grief and mourning rituals when a herd member dies. Mother elephants will stay with the corpse of a dead calf for days; the death of a matriarch is cause for long-term mourning. Scientists Cynthia Moss and Harvey Croze, while studying a group of elephants for several years, observed the herd during several mourning rituals after one of the matriarchs in the herd died. Then, years later, the herd revisited the matriarch's bones. The elephants gathered around the bones, stroking them with their trunks. The elephants parted to allow the daughters of the dead elephant to approach the bones. The two female elephants spent hours with the bones of their mother, putting their trunks on her jawbone and caressing her skull.

### **Trauma Is Devastating**

Elephants suffer from trauma not unlike humans do. Poaching episodes are violent; they often separate young elephants from their herds. The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Nairobi works with baby elephants who are found wandering alone, starving and dehydrated. The young rescued elephants exhibit symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, refusing to play or eat and unresponsive to other elephants' attempts at socialization. Even after arriving at the sanctuary, they may spend days looking for their family members and are often observed crying. Keepers must work carefully with new charges to ensure their psychological needs are met so that later they can be integrated into a wild herd.