

Parable: The Blind People and the Elephant

A Story From the Buddha (RR)

Materials: Parable Box or basket

Underlay (square with cut outs like minarets at the top to look a bit like a palace)
King image
Elephant image
5 blind wise person images
Banana leaf image
Plow image
Tree image
Snake image
Paint brush image
Buddha statue (optional)

Presentation:

Watch where I go to get this lesson.

Walk to Sources shelves and take basket. Come back to circle and place on floor next to you.

Long, long ago there was a great teacher who told stories. The name we give this teacher is Buddha. It means enlightened one. We call him that because his stories can help us see things more clearly. It is as if these stories bring light into a dark room.

Unfold the underlay smoothing out the wrinkles. Place Buddha figure on upper curve nearest you.

One day the Buddha said “Truth! Truth is like this!”

Remove the king image and place it to the far left of the underlay so that he looks right side up to the children.

There was a king who decided one day that for his amusement he would set up a test. He ordered that an elephant be brought into the throne room.

Place the elephant image in the center of the underlay.

The elephant was brought to the palace and into the King's throne room and the king gave a second order. He ordered that the five wise people who taught at the gates of the city be brought to him.

One by one place the five wise people on the right hand side of the underlay, opposite the king.

Each of the wise people happened to have been born blind. The king had each of them placed so that he or she was able to feel a different part of the elephant's body. He had the first wise person stand so that she could feel the elephant's ear.

Place the first wise person by the elephant's ear.

He had the second wise person stand where he could hold the elephant's tail.

Place the second wise person by the elephant's tail.

The King had the third wise person stand holding the elephant's tusk.

Place the third wise person so that person is touching the elephant's tusk.

The king stood the fourth wise person right in front of the elephant so that he could hold onto the elephant's tusk.

Place the fourth wise person by the elephant's trunk.

The king then had the fifth and last wise person stand touching one of the creature's legs

Place the fifth wise person touching one of the elephant's legs.

Then the king issued the challenge. He said, "You are each holding what we call an elephant. Now tell me what an elephant is like."

Place one hand on the wise person holding the elephant's ear. With your other hand remove and hold onto the image of the banana leaf.

The first wise person who was holding one of the elephant's large ears said, "An elephant is like a banana leaf."

Place the Banana leaf image at the top right side of the under lay. Then place one hand on the wise person holding the elephant's tail, and with your other hand remove and hold onto the image of a paint brush.

The second wise person was holding the elephant's tail and said, "No. No. No. An elephant is like a paint brush."

Place the image of the paint brush on the top right of the underlay beside the image of the banana leaf. Place one hand on the wise person touching the elephant's tusk. With your second hand remove the image of the plow and keep it hidden in your hand.

The third wise person was holding onto the elephant's tusk exclaimed, "They're all wrong! An elephant is like a plow made of metal, and sharpened to cut through the earth."

Place the image of the plow beside that of the paint brush. Place one hand on the fourth wise person holding the elephant's trunk. With your other hand remove and hold onto the image of the snake.

The fourth wise person who was in front of the elephant holding its' trunk said, "Here my words. An elephant is like a great snake."

Place the image of the snake beside that of the plow. Then with one hand touch the wise person holding the elephant's leg. With your other hand remove and hold onto the image of a tree.

The fifth and final wise person who was holding one of the elephant's legs declared "I tell you an elephant is like the trunk of a giant tree." Before long the five blind wise people began arguing with each other calling one another "Fool" and "Crazy."

Point to the appropriate image as you say . . .

They fought and fought, crying "An elephant is like a tree." "No it is like a fan." "Any person with sense knows that an elephant is like a plow." "They are like paint brushes." "Elephants are like snakes."

"This," said the Buddha, "Is what truth is like."

Wondering Questions:

I wonder what part of the story you liked the best?

I wonder what part is most important?

I wonder where you are in the story?

I wonder if there is any part of the story that we can leave out and still have all the story we need?