

# Don't Judge Too Soon - The Blind Men & the Elephant

Foundation House / Elementary (Classes 5-7)



## A Non-Judgemental Approach (A Pestalozzi Approach)

The teacher puts a large outline drawing of an elephant on the wall and, pointing to a certain part of its body, asks the students what it is and what it is like. For example: The side of the elephant's body is like a wall. The elephant's ear is like a fan. The elephant's trunk is like a snake. The elephant's tusk is like a spear. The elephant's tail is like a rope. The elephant's leg is like a tree trunk.

The students copy the outline elephant in pencil and add, in colour, pictures of the similes used, for example by making the elephant's tusk like a spear.

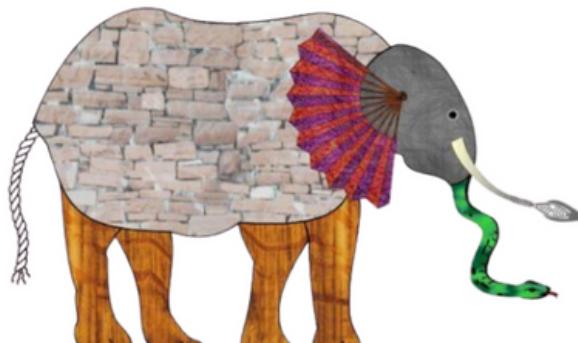
### Materials Needed

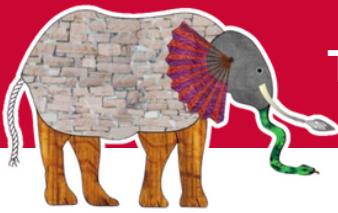
- Large Drawing of Elephant
- Poem

The teacher explains that a fable is a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral, and that this fable originated in India and is about six blind men who are asked to touch different parts of the elephant. After touching it, they each think the elephant is different things. They argue over what the elephant is like.

The teacher asks the students what point they think the fable is supposed to make. For example: All the blind men are both right and wrong. The truth is many sided. It is important not to make judgements until you know everything about something. It is important to be open to the opinions of others and to be willing to see things from all sides. The teacher asks students if they know of similar fables and mentions Gandhi (the major political and spiritual leader of the Indian Independence Movement), explaining that he used this elephant fable to illustrate the point that all religions reveal some truths, that no-one can understand the whole truth, that different religions should share each other's experiences and that we should respect all religions if we want to live peacefully.

The teacher points out that Gandhi and Pestalozzi had much in common, including their non-judgemental, peaceful search for the truth. (NB: Detail given depends on the age, ability and knowledge of the students.)





## The Blind Men and the Elephant

It was six men of Hindustan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see the Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind)  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy the mind. The first approached the Elephant  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side  
At once began to bawl:  
"Bless me, it seems the Elephant  
Is very like a wall". The second, feeling of his tusk,  
Cried, "Ho! What have we here  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me 'tis mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a spear". The third approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,  
Then boldly up and spake:  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a snake." The Fourth reached out an eager hand,  
And felt about the knee.  
"What most this wondrous beast is like  
Is mighty plain," quoth he;  
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant  
Is very like a tree!" The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,  
Said: "E'en the blindest man  
Can tell what this resembles most;  
Deny the fact who can,  
This marvel of an Elephant  
Is very like a fan!" The Sixth no sooner had begun  
About the beast to grope,  
Than, seizing on the swinging tail  
That fell within his scope,  
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
Is very like a rope!" And so these men of Hindustan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right  
And all were in the wrong. So oft in theologic wars,  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean,  
And prate about an Elephant  
Not one of them has seen!

**This poem illustrates Pestalozzi's thinking. It is by the American John Godfrey Saxe, based on a concept said to have originated from an ancient Jain parable which Mahatma Gandhi - another innovative thinker of course who, like Pestalozzi, strove for equality and peace - used to illustrate his ideas about different religions' differing but equally valid understanding of god.**

# Don't Judge Too Soon (2)

## 'A Simpleton's Judgement'

Advanced (Classes 11-12)

Intermediate (Classes 7-10)



### Overview ( A Pestalozzi Approach)

The teacher explains what a fable is (a fable is a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral) and reads Pestalozzi's fable about Simple Simon, 'A Simpleton's Judgement', to the students. (NB: This can be read in the mother tongue if necessary.)

A Simpleton's Judgement:

**Some magnificent poplars and a few scrubby, undersized oaks grew by the side of the same stream. Simple Simon therefore concluded that the poplar makes good wood, and the oak bad.**

**I know teachers who judge their scholars, pastors who judge their flocks, and rulers who judge those they govern, with no more reason than Simple Simon used to judge the merits of the oak and the poplar-tree.**

The students now discuss the moral behind this fable. The teacher elicits the ideas that we should not make judgements based on appearances – in fact the wood of the oak tree is much better than the wood of the poplar tree. We should not judge anything until we know more about it and so we should not assume that someone is good because that person seems good when we first meet him or her. Likewise, we should give people a chance even if at first they seem to not be good in some way.

The teacher asks each student to make a cartoon strip based on this moral truth from Pestalozzi.

#### Instructions to students

Decide how you would like to illustrate this moral truth.

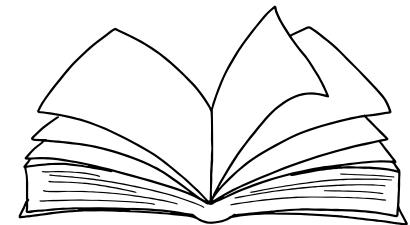
You can use Pestalozzi's illustration of the oaks and the poplars but try to make up your own one.

Decide on the number of pictures you need to illustrate it

Decide on the dialogue and text you need to go with each picture

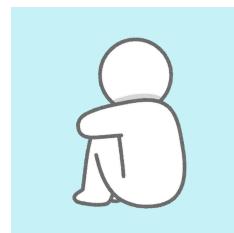
Make a title for your cartoon strip

Draw and colour your cartoon strip, writing its moral truth at the end



#### Materials Needed

- Sheets of paper
- Colouring pens for each student



**Students share their fables with each other.**



## Don't Judge Too Soon (2) 'A Simpleton's Judgement'

Continued

**Pestalozzi provided education for disabled children, who were usually discriminated against. In Pestalozzi's time, many people would decide that a disabled child is incapable of doing anything and that therefore there is no point in educating a disabled child. Fridolin Mind was a disabled child who was taught by Pestalozzi. This boy was able to draw brilliantly, especially cats, so Pestalozzi encouraged him to draw as much as possible. He became famous for his art and in Switzerland he is known as the Cat-Raphael.**

**Pestalozzi wrote 239 fables. Most of them are very short and tell an important truth about morality, education, society or politics. More of Pestalozzi fables can be found in the section 'Publishing and Life Crisis' of 'The Life of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi'.**

**Pestalozzi believed that each of us should learn to judge for ourselves and not be led by others. We should not talk about things we do not properly know about and we should only make judgements when we know as much as we can about whatever we are judging.**