

The Six Blind People and the Ecosystem

Essential Question:

What is an ecosystem?

At a Glance:

Learners are introduced to the interconnectedness of the living and non-living components of an ecosystem by participating in an interactive story

Background Information:

The story “the Six Blind People and the Ecosystem” is based on a story called “**The Blind Men and the Elephant**” which is printed below. (Retold by Donelle Blubaugh.)

“Long ago six old men lived in a village in India. Each was born blind. The other villagers loved the old men and kept them away from harm. Since the blind men could not see the world for themselves, they had to imagine many of its wonders. They listened carefully to the stories told by travelers to learn what they could about life outside the village.

The men were curious about many of the stories they heard, but they were most curious about elephants. They were told that elephants could trample forests, carry huge burdens, and frighten young and old with their loud trumpet calls. But they also knew that the Rajah's daughter rode an elephant when she traveled in her father's kingdom. Would the Rajah let his daughter get near such a dangerous creature?

The old men argued day and night about elephants. "An elephant must be a powerful giant," claimed the first blind man. He had heard stories about elephants being used to clear forests and build roads.

"No, you must be wrong," argued the second blind man. "An elephant must be graceful and gentle if a princess is to ride on its back."

"You're wrong! I have heard that an elephant can pierce a man's heart with its terrible horn," said the third blind man.

"Please," said the fourth blind man. "You are all mistaken. An elephant is nothing more than a large sort of cow. You know how people exaggerate."

"I am sure that an elephant is something magical," said the fifth blind man. "That would explain why the Rajah's daughter can travel safely throughout the kingdom."

"I don't believe elephants exist at all," declared the sixth blind man. "I think we are the victims of a cruel joke."

Location: classroom

Objectives: *Learners will*

- 1) define the term, ecosystem.
- 2) Explain that an ecosystem is made up of many parts, living and non-living.

Skills: communication, listening, comprehension

Supplies:

- Six Blind People and the Ecosystem Story

Subjects: language arts, science

Time: 20 minutes

Finally, the villagers grew tired of all the arguments, and they arranged for the curious men to visit the palace of the Rajah to learn the truth about elephants. A young boy from their village was selected to guide the blind men on their journey. The smallest man put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The second blind man put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to walk safely behind the boy who would lead them to the Rajah's magnificent palace.

When the blind men reached the palace, they were greeted by an old friend from their village who worked as a gardener on the palace grounds. Their friend led them to the courtyard. There stood an elephant. The blind men stepped forward to touch the creature that was the subject of so many arguments.

The first blind man reached out and touched the side of the huge animal. "An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall!" he declared. "It must be very powerful."

The second blind man put his hand on the elephant's limber trunk. "An elephant is like a giant snake," he announced.

The third blind man felt the elephant's pointed tusk. "I was right," he decided. "This creature is as sharp and deadly as a spear."

The fourth blind man touched one of the elephant's four legs. "What we have here," he said, "is an extremely large cow."

The fifth blind man felt the elephant's giant ear. "I believe an elephant is like a huge fan or maybe a magic carpet that can fly over mountains and treetops," he said.

The sixth blind man gave a tug on the elephant's fuzzy tail. "Why, this is nothing more than a piece of old rope. Dangerous, indeed," he scoffed.

The gardener led his friends to the shade of a tree. "Sit here and rest for the long journey home," he said. "I will bring you some water to drink."

While they waited, the six blind men talked about the elephant.

"An elephant is like a wall," said the first blind man. "Surely we can finally agree on that."

"A wall? An elephant is a giant snake!" answered the second blind man.

"It's a spear, I tell you," insisted the third blind man.

"I'm certain it's a giant cow," said the fourth blind man.

"Magic carpet. There's no doubt," said the fifth blind man.

"Don't you see?" pleaded the sixth blind man. "Someone used a rope to trick us."

Their argument continued and their shouts grew louder and louder.

"Wall!" "Snake!" "Spear!" "Cow!" "Carpet!" "Rope!"

"STOP SHOUTING!" called a very angry voice.

It was the Rajah, awakened from his nap by the noisy argument.

"How can each of you be so certain you are right?" asked the ruler.

The six blind men considered the question. And then, knowing the Rajah to be a very wise man, they decided to say nothing at all.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the Rajah kindly. "Each man touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth. Now, let me finish my nap in peace."

When their friend returned to the garden with the cool water, the six men rested quietly in the shade, thinking about the Rajah's advice.

"He is right," said the first blind man. "To learn the truth, we must put all the parts together. Let's discuss this on the journey home."

The first blind man put his hand on the shoulder of the young boy who would guide them home. The second blind man put a hand on his friend's shoulder, and so on until all six men were ready to travel together."

Procedure:

1. Before reading "The Six Blind People and the Ecosystem" ask learners if they have ever visited a forest? Tell them to think for just a moment on their visit. Ask them if they had to describe one thing about a forest to someone that has never seen one, what would they say? Have them write their description on a piece of paper.
2. Read the story "The Six Blind People and the Ecosystem".
3. Discuss with the learners the meaning of the story. There are several topics you could cover: communication, the big picture, ecosystems.
4. Have learners read aloud their description. Compare their responses (those that can see to whole forest) to those of the blind men (those that cannot see the whole forest).

OR

1. Read the story "The Blind Men and the Elephant"
2. Discuss the story and define the term ecosystem with the learners. Relate the parts of the ecosystem to the parts of the elephant.

Discussion/Assessment:

What is the moral of this story?

What is an ecosystem?

How can this message be applied to an ecosystem?

The Six Blind People and the Ecosystem

(Based on the story “The Blind men and the Elephant”)

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/misc/eco/The_Blind_Men_and_the_Ecosystem.pdf

Narrator: Once upon a time six blind people lived together on a very rocky island. They were happy on the island. One day a bottle washed up on to the shore. Inside the bottle was a Braille postcard from their friends who lived in a forest. Their friends seemed to be having a lot of fun in the forest and the six blind people had never seen a forest, so that evening, they sat down to dinner and planned a visit to a forest.

The next day, they got out their inflatable rings and drifted over to the mainland. They got out and walked along one behind the other so that they wouldn't fall down. Soon they came to the forest. They knew this because the first person banged into a Braille sign that said “Forest up ahead”. They walked on into the forest and everyone let go and explored.

Person 1: The first person bent down to the forest floor and smelled the brown soil. He dug his fingers through the soil and found insects and worms.

Person 2: The second person followed the sounds of birds calling and eventually she located a bird's nest with little hatchlings inside. She carefully felt the nest and the tree branches that were supporting it. She heard the desperate calling of the birds for food and sat down to listen to them.

Person 3: The third person stumbled into a very sunny patch where lots of wonderful smelling flowers were growing. He bent down to smell their sweet smell and discovered the busy bees buzzing around his head.

Person 4: The fourth person, being the adventurous sort, climbed a tree; she felt the rough bark against her skin and the leaves brushing against her face. As she got close to the top she felt the wind blowing gently on her face.

Person 5: The fifth person followed the sound of running water and found a stream. He bent down and bathed his face in the cool water. He could hear the frogs croaking and could feel the little fishes brush past his hands in the water.

Person 6: The last person followed the sounds of squirrels rustling in the leaves. She walked over to where the squirrel was and sat down on a large mossy stone. The stone was cool and she sat very still. She pulled out a piece of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich and held it out in front of her. The trusting squirrel came over and sniffed the sandwich; she shook her bushy tail and brushed the blind person's leg. The squirrel then climbed up onto the lady's shoulder and she was so close the lady could feel her soft fur on her skin. Just as soon as she had jumped up she was off again running into the forest to look for more seeds and nuts.

Narrator: The blind people were getting hungry and gathered together to have lunch. As they ate they talked over what they had experienced in the forest.

Person 1: “The forest is like a carpet of moist soil wriggling with worms and beetles” said the first person.

Person 2: “You are mistaken, my friend, the forest is a home for birds that live in woody plants that are as tall as me” said the second person.

Person 3: “Well, I’m certain that you are both wrong” said the third person. “The forest has a dry surface that has wonderful smelling flowers coming from it with lots of bees buzzing around busily.

Person 4: “Let me put you all right, said the fourth person. “The forest is full of tall woody plants that have many branches and reach into the sky where you can feel the breeze on your face.”

Person 5: “I think you all must have been dreaming” said the fifth person. “The forest has is made up of streams full with frogs and fish.”

Person 6: “No” said the sixth person. “The forest is cold and stony with furry creatures that eat nuts hidden in the soil”.

Narrator: The six blind people could not agree as to what a forest was like and they argued and argued, each trying to shout over the next person. Just then a swirling mist arose from the forest floor and a female form appeared.

Foreco: “Do not argue” she said. “My name is Forceo and I care for the Forest Ecosystem. You are all right about the forest, but you are all looking at small parts of it. Share what you have found and put all the parts together to fully understand the forest ecosystem.

Narrator: So the six blind people shared what they knew about the forest and they each went away that evening with a much better understanding as to what the forest ecosystem was really like. They managed to see the big picture by putting all the small parts together. They understood that a forest ecosystem is made up of many different parts. Some parts are non-living (abiotic) like air, water and rocks and some parts are living (biotic) like animals, trees and fungi. The living (biotic) components interact with the non-living (abiotic) environment to form an ecosystem.