

ELEPHANTS ON THE SAVANNAH

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

- ☀ NARRATOR
- ☀ JUDITH: KENYAN RANGER/GUIDE
- ☀ MAYA
- ☀ ANTONIO
- ☀ JORDAN

Narrator: In Kenya, East Africa, it's just before dawn in Amboseli National Park. This famous park is a great place to watch African elephants. Maya, Antonio, and Jordan have traveled here from the United States. Now they are ready for their first day on the savannah.

Judith: Good morning! How was your first night in Amboseli?

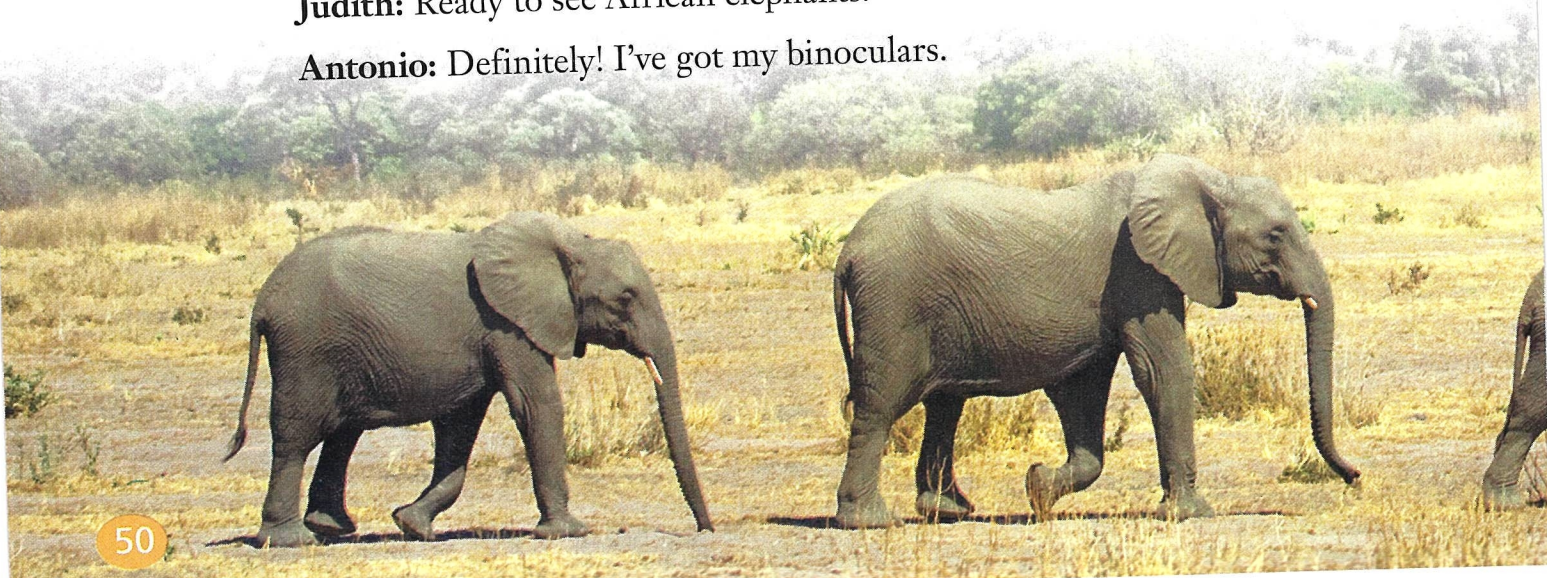
Jordan: I'm still tired!

Judith: Don't worry. You'll have a chance to rest after our morning drive. Does everyone have sunscreen and a water bottle?

Maya: It's hard to remember sunscreen when it's still dark out.

Judith: Ready to see African elephants?

Antonio: Definitely! I've got my binoculars.



Judith: This time of day the elephants are usually heading towards the swamps. So we'll go in that direction too.

Narrator: Jordan, Maya, and Antonio follow Judith to her jeep and climb in. It gets lighter as they go.

Maya: Wow, there's Mount Kilimanjaro! That is one big mountain.

Antonio: Hey, I see elephants!

Narrator: Eleven elephants are slowly walking near the road. The herd includes two babies. One elephant trumpets loudly.

Jordan: Okay! I'm awake!

Antonio: Wow. That first elephant is one big dude! He must be ten feet tall. And look at those tusks.

Judith: Actually, that "dude" is a female. Herds are family groups led by the oldest female. She is called the matriarch.

Maya: I like that!

Judith: And by the way, African elephants have tusks whether they are male or female.

Jordan: Do the herds always stay together?

Judith: The females and young elephants do. All the females in a herd help teach and protect the calves. They're like "extra moms."

Antonio: Which ones are the dads?

Judith: No dads here. Grown-up males are called bulls. They can weigh six tons or more. Bulls leave their herds when they are about fourteen. After that they live mostly alone.



Antonio: The elephants have stopped walking. It seems like they're listening to something.

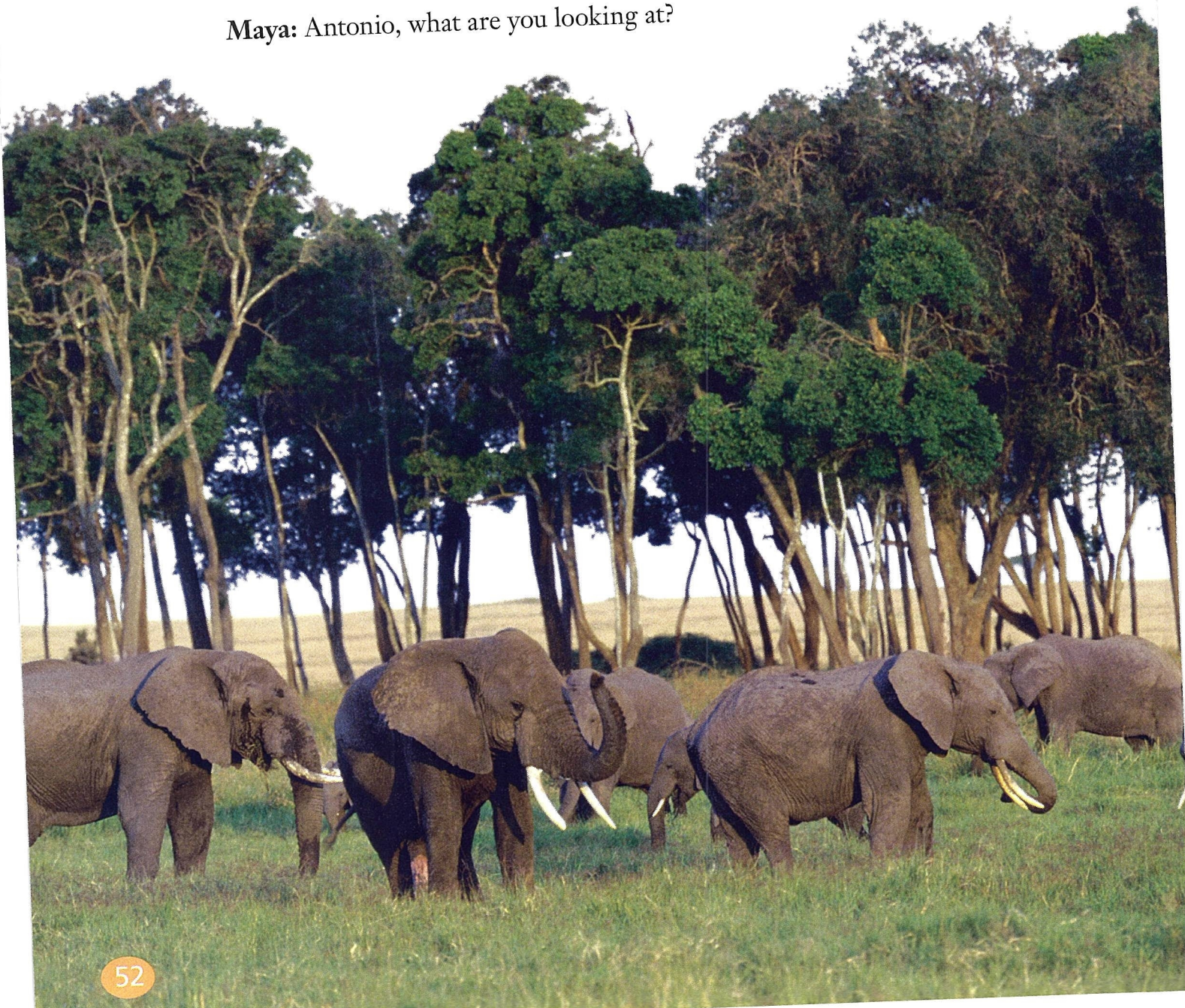
Jordan: Want to hear a cool thing I read about elephants?

Maya: I'm all ears.

Jordan: Elephants listen through their feet. Right, Judith?

Judith: Their feet have special vibration sensors. Elephants detect rumbles through the ground. That way they can communicate with other elephants miles away. Elephants make all sorts of other noises. They can scream, grunt, or trumpet. Each sound means something different.

Maya: Antonio, what are you looking at?





Antonio: Check it out. There's another family group way down in the valley. Maybe this herd is talking to that one.

Maya: And now these elephants are walking in that direction. Can we go that way too?

Narrator: The four get in the jeep and head toward the swamp, across open savannah. They park near the elephants.

Maya: Yikes. Aren't we close enough? These are big guys. I mean, big *gals*.

Judith: Don't worry. The females are usually pretty gentle. The ones here in Amboseli are used to jeeps. Let's watch for a while.

Jordan: They sure flap their ears a lot.

Maya: I read about that. The ears have lots of blood veins in them. Flapping cools the blood off in hot weather.

Jordan: Now they're wading in the swamp.

Antonio: Looks like bath time. Look at them spray their own backs with their trunks.

Maya: Those elephants are smart. It's getting hot out here!

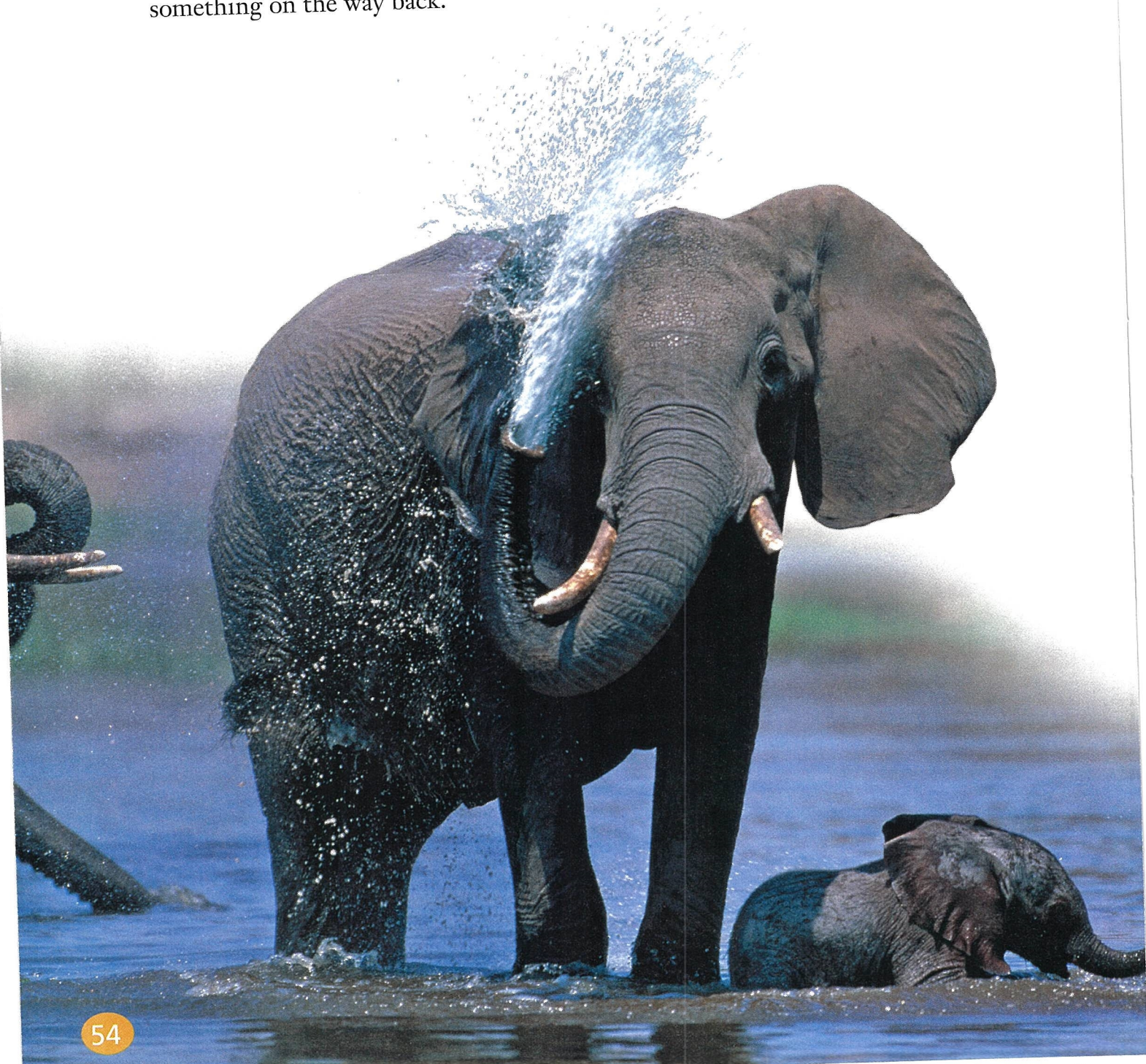
Judith: Hey gang, it's almost 9:30. Let's head back to camp. We'll have breakfast. Then later, we can cool off in the camp pool.

Jordan: Yes!

Maya: Sort of like the elephants.

Antonio: Won't we miss some action?

Judith: Not really. During the hottest part of the day, elephants mostly rest in the shade. I want to show you something on the way back.



Narrator: They drive for a few minutes. Judith parks near a pile of big bones.

Jordan: Wow. Did an elephant die here?

Judith: Yes. About two years ago one of the matriarchs died.

Maya: Why are all the bones scattered?

Judith: Elephants mourn their dead. They still stop by here to gently pick up the bones with their trunks. That's why the bones are spread around.

Antonio: I guess they must remember the matriarch.

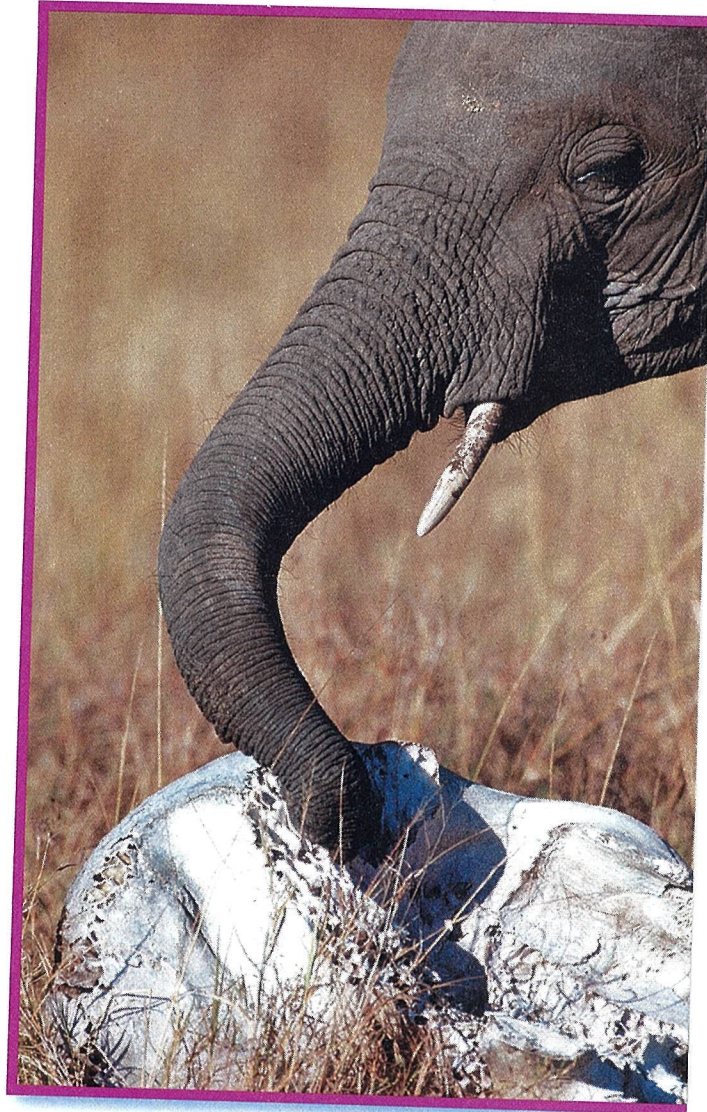
Judith: They seem to. They also remember people. For example, they will sometimes approach familiar humans, such as researchers they've seen before.

Narrator: The group heads back to camp. Soon, all four are in the pool. The African heat is intense. But by late afternoon it begins to cool off. Shadows become longer as evening approaches.

Judith: Okay, it's four o'clock. Everyone ready to continue our safari?

Maya: Let's go! Do you think we'll get to see elephants eating?

Antonio: I've heard they need at least three hundred pounds of food a day.



Narrator: The four climb back in the jeep. They drive for a few minutes. Then they park in the shade of an acacia tree.

Jordan: There they are. Are those the same elephants we saw before?

Judith: Yes. See the two calves? They are hiding between their mother's legs.

Maya: Did you see that? That elephant picked up a single blade of grass with her trunk! How could she do that?

Judith: There are at least 40,000 muscles in an elephant's trunk. All those muscles mean they can move their trunks very precisely.

Jordan: Those trunks can really multi-task.

Judith: They sure can. Elephants use their trunks to express emotion, eat, smell, drink, touch, make noise, and move things.

Antonio: Check it out. That big elephant is trying to tear out that tree with her trunk. Wow. She did it! She knocked over the whole tree.

Maya: Now she's eating the leaves off the top. So is that calf. How cute.

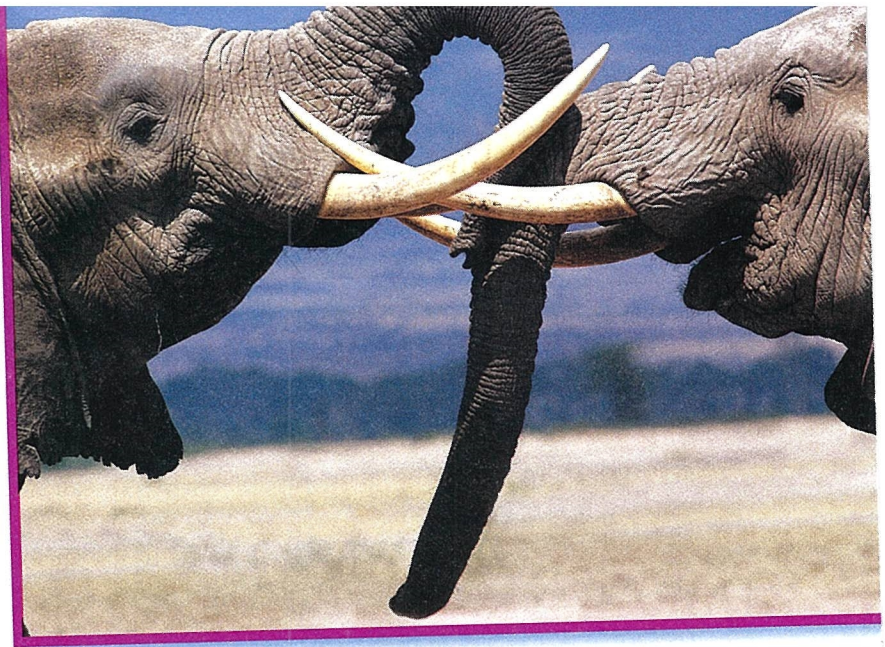
Jordan: I hear buzzing. Do elephants buzz, too?

Narrator: Suddenly the matriarch begins to run away. The other elephants follow in a hurry.

Judith: Oh no! The trunk of that tree contained a bees' nest! See the bees swarming into that one elephant's eyes?

Antonio: I had no idea elephants could run that fast.

Judith: They can run twenty-four miles per hour. We don't want to get stung either. Let's follow the elephants' lead and get out of here.



Narrator: Everyone piles into the jeep and they zoom away fast.

Maya: Whew. That was close. I'm glad no one was stung.

Jordan: Why is such a big animal afraid of bees?

Antonio: Yeah, isn't their skin too thick to sting through?

Judith: Bees can sting the tender skin behind their ears. Bees can even go up an elephant's trunk.

Jordan: Ouch!

Judith: Let's head back to camp. We'll see more elephants tomorrow. How did you like your first day on the savannah?

Maya: It was fantastic.

Antonio: It sure was! Thank you, Judith.

Jordan: I can't wait to get up tomorrow morning!



A Colossal Catch

Imagine being in a fishing boat when an enormous creature begins to rise from beneath the water! How would you feel? In February 2007, the crew of a New Zealand fishing boat was fishing in the Ross Sea near Antarctica when one of the giants of the deep came to the surface. It was the rarely seen colossal squid.

A hooked fish in its mouth, the squid was almost dead. Still, it took nine people two hours to haul the huge creature onto the boat.

The crew had caught something special. It was the largest colossal squid ever found. From tentacle tip to fin, the squid measured thirty-three feet long and weighed 1,091 pounds. This was an exciting moment for scientists. It was a rare chance to learn more about the colossal squid, believed to be the largest squid in the world.

MYSTERIOUS AND FRIGHTENING

People have long found large squid frightening. For years, sailors told terrifying tales of sea monsters with tangles of arms attacking ships. In Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, first published in 1870, a ferocious large squid strikes Captain Nemo's submarine. Could these stories have any truth in them? People knew so little about large squid that they weren't sure.

Scientists first identified the colossal squid in 1925 from two arms found in a sperm whale's stomach. Since then, colossal squid have been seen only a few times, and no one has ever studied one in its habitat. These squid live in the icy waters around Antarctica at a depth of more than 3,280 feet. The waters are so dark that it is difficult for scientists to explore.



For years scientists were unable to verify any facts about the colossal squid because there was so little information about it. Most scientists now believe the colossal squid reaches lengths of up to forty-six feet. That's as long as a city bus!

Squid have large eyes for the size of their bodies. The eyes of the colossal squid, as big as dinner plates, are believed to be the largest eyes of any animal. Can you imagine looking into the eye of a colossal squid? Its large eyes help it see prey in the dark ocean depths.



Part of a twenty-foot squid tentacle found off the coast of Japan

A twenty-four foot giant squid, nearly as large as its colossal cousin, attacks a bait squid south of Tokyo, Japan.



The colossal squid is one of the most frightening predators in the ocean. Like other squid, it has eight arms and two longer tentacles. Two rows of sharp, swiveling hooks line the ends of the tentacles. The squid uses these hooks to snag prey.

AWAITING ANSWERS

Today, the colossal squid caught in 2007 is at the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington. It is frozen, but it will be thawed and studied. Scientists want to know many things. How large do colossal squid get? How long do they live? How do they reproduce? Perhaps these and other questions will soon be answered.

The Elephant

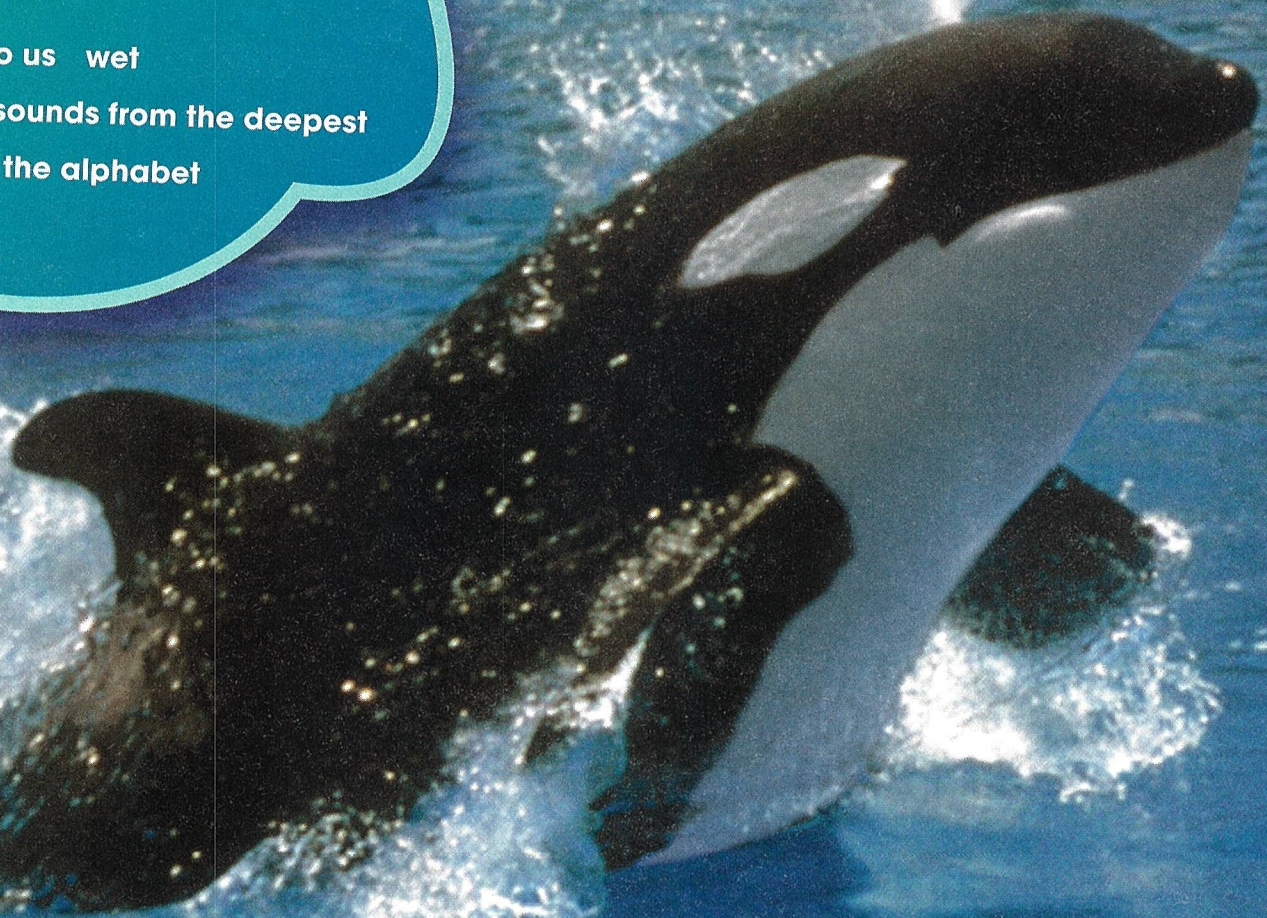
By Hilaire Belloc



When people call this beast to mind,
They marvel more and more
At such a little tail behind,
So large a trunk before.

By Barbara Juster Esbensen

An evenly balanced
word **WHALE**
it floats
lazily on the page
or dives straight down
to the bottom and beyond
all breath held held
held then whoooosh!
The **A** blows its top
into the sun! **WHALE**
serene
sings to us wet
green sounds from the deepest
part of the alphabet



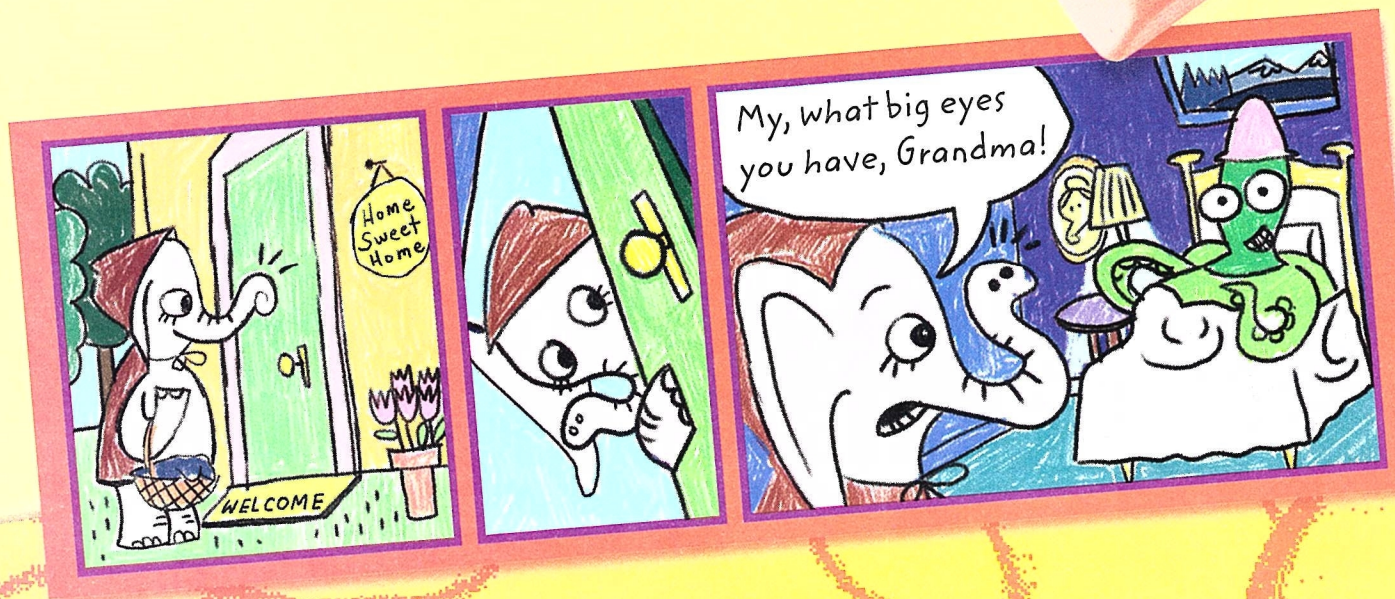
Comic Creativity

Writers of comic strips and graphic novels use both pictures and words to tell a story. The pictures help show the setting, action, and emotions of the characters.

This week you read stories about two enormous animals—the elephant and the colossal squid. Create a comic strip that features these animals, or two other animals of your choice. Use both pictures and words to tell a story in four to eight panels.

As you create your comic strip, remember these tips:

1. Keep your story simple.
2. Give your story a beginning, middle, and end.
3. Use exact details.
4. Exaggerate the characteristics of your characters to make them humorous.

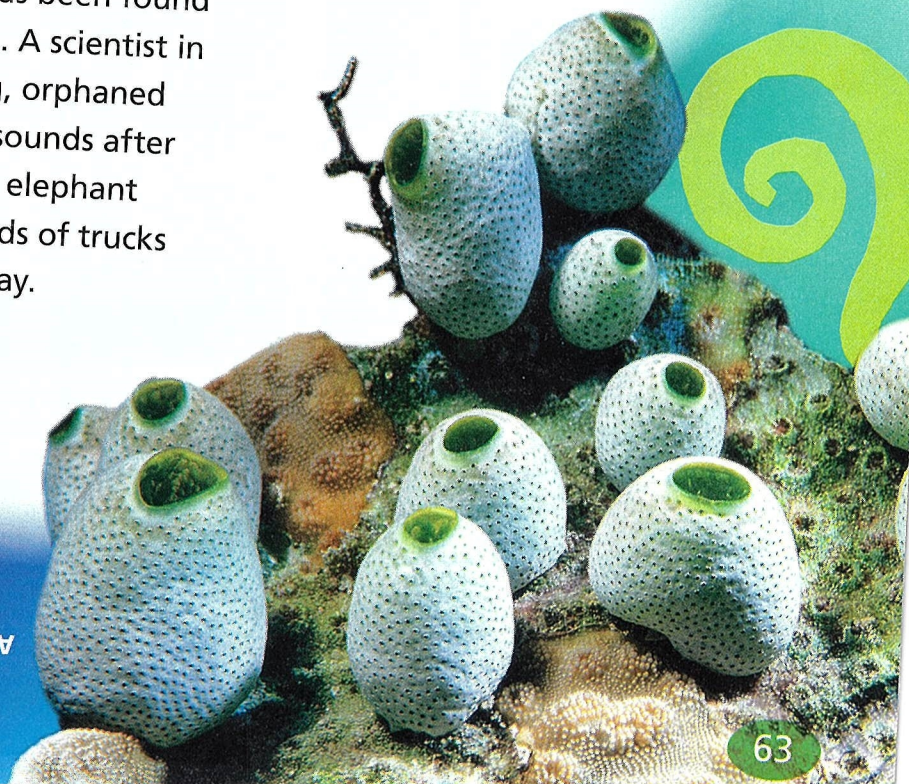


True or False?

Read the four bizarre animal stories below. Pick the story that just happens to be false. The other three are strange but true.

- 1 Scientists were thrilled to discover a plump, **purple frog** in western India. The colorful amphibian gives them clues about a frog ancestor that lived 130 million years ago. One scientist called the purple frog "a once-in-a-century find."
TRUE OR FALSE?
- 2 A creature called a **sea squirt** is famous for eating its own brain. It uses its simple brain only to find a place to settle for life. Once the sea squirt has found a home, it no longer needs its brain, so it eats it!
TRUE OR FALSE?
- 3 A young amphibian called a **walking stick** can stroll on land before it grows legs, as long as it has a willing partner. The two amphibians twist together right below their heads. Then they use their snake-shaped bodies as legs to walk along sandy shores.
TRUE OR FALSE?
- 4 An **African elephant** has been found imitating traffic noises. A scientist in Kenya noticed a young, orphaned elephant making odd sounds after sunset. It turns out the elephant was imitating the sounds of trucks going down the highway.
TRUE OR FALSE?

Answer key: 1. true; 2. true; 3. false; 4. true





SPEAKING UP FOR THE ANIMALS

In "Elephants on the Savannah" and "A Colossal Catch" you read about two of Earth's amazing creatures. Harmful human activities have endangered many others.

Think about an animal that you would like to see protected. It can be as big as a blue whale or as small as a monarch butterfly. It can be as exotic as a Siberian tiger or as American as a bald eagle. It can be a mammal or bird; reptile or amphibian; fish or insect. It should be an animal you like and feel strongly about.

Got your animal? Now write a persuasive speech to convince others to protect this animal and its habitat.



SPEECH POINTERS

1. Start your speech by telling why the animal you chose is special. Use interesting facts or tell a personal story about it.
2. Describe problems that this animal faces, such as loss of habitat or the danger of hunters.
3. Explain why you think it is important to protect this animal.
4. Suggest solutions to the problems this animal faces.
5. State how you want listeners to help.

