

ELA Grade 6 Unit 2 - Print

1

An Elephant's 'Aha!' Moment

by Stephen Ornes

A young elephant named Kandula passes a tricky test.

Kandula is a young Asian elephant that lives at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. He's a clever pachyderm. Scientists recently watched Kandula solve a problem in a way never before seen in elephants.

This test may have looked unusual. Scientists attached pieces of fruit to a branch and then hung the branch out of reach of the elephant's trunk. Unlike other elephants, this didn't stop Kandula: He used his trunk to roll a plastic box so that it sat underneath the branch. He then stood on the box, lifted his trunk and easily pulled down the branch. And ate the treat.

Elephants are smart. They have magnificent memories, they recognize themselves in mirrors and they can use simple tools. Until recently, scientists didn't know if the giant animals also could come up with a solution to a problem on the spot, called using insight. You use insight when you study a difficult puzzle for a while, leave to do something else and then suddenly see a solution. Insight is the ability to solve a problem in a flash.

"It's the lightbulb going on," said Preston Foerder, a comparative psychologist at the City University of New York. Comparative psychologists study animal behavior to understand how they think.

In previous tests, elephants haven't shown evidence of insight. Foerder was part of a team of scientists who went looking for elephant insight anyway. He designed tricky problems for Kandula and two other elephants at the zoo in Washington.

These elephants usually live in tropical forests, and Foerder told *Science News* that they regularly solve problems in their lives. The challenge for scientists was distinguishing whether the animals complete tasks by trial and error, by watching other animals or by quickly realizing the solution on their own (insight). The only way to know was to present an elephant with a problem and watch.

"If you're not there for the first time they do it, you don't know if it was insight," Foerder told *Science News*.

To probe how elephants solve problems, the researcher and his colleagues tested Kandula and two other National Zoo elephants—Kandula's mother, 33, and a 61-year-old elephant neighbor—in a series of experiments.

First, the scientists placed trays of fruit outside the animals' enclosure. The food was just out of reach. They also placed some sticks nearby. The elephants tried but failed to get the treat; they never used the sticks to draw the food closer.

They did use the sticks in other ways. "They would beat the wall, they would beat the floor, they would beat their toys," Foerder told *Science News*.

Next, the experiment moved outside. The scientists hung bamboo branches decorated with fruit high overhead. They also provided the elephants with sticks and a plastic box that could serve as a stepping stool. After six tries, Kandula wasn't able to get the food (though he did reach for it). In the seventh try, Kandula seemed to have been struck by the right idea and used insight to solve the puzzle. Foerder explained that in one smooth motion, the clever elephant rolled the box directly to the branch and stood on the box to get the food.

The other elephants didn't make the same connection.

Diana Reiss, a psychologist who tries to understand how animals think, also worked on the study. Reiss, who teaches psychology at Hunter College in New York, told *Science News* that maybe it's time to think differently about how elephants solve problems. Perhaps their brains do allow them to make easy connections among bits of information.

On the other hand, some scientists say elephants' brains have different strengths. Benjamin Hart is a veterinary science professor at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. He has studied elephant behavior and he told *Science News* that elephants' brains are built for long-lasting memory and social skills, but not so much for connecting the dots among different pieces of information.

Which statement **best** summarizes "An Elephant's 'Aha!' Moment"?

A)Kandula is unlike other elephants since his brain uniquely resembles a human brain.

- B)The scientists who studied Kandula the elephant's behavior used questionable methods that produced unreliable results.
- C)Thorough observations of elephant behavior have proven that elephants are smarter than most other animals.
- D)Results from a series of experiments suggest that elephant brain processes may be different than scientists originally thought.

2

Which sentence from “An Elephant’s ‘Aha!’ Moment” **best** shows that some scientists disagree with Foerder's conclusion that elephants can have “aha!” moments?

- A)Until recently, scientists didn't know if the giant animals also could come up with a solution to a problem on the spot, called using insight.
- B)Foerder was part of a team of scientists who went looking for elephant insight anyway.
- C)Reiss, who teaches psychology at Hunter College in New York, told *Science News* that maybe it's time to think differently about how elephants solve problems.
- D)On the other hand, some scientists say elephants' brains have different strengths.

3

Which statement **best** describes how the author explains the idea of "insight" in the passage?

- A)He uses a metaphor to help readers understand how insight in elephants resembles other abilities in humans.
- B)He provides different scientific opinions about what defines insight, giving readers a complete understanding of the issue.
- C)He discusses results from different experiments to show that each individual elephant uses insight in a distinct way.
- D)He describes a common situation in which humans use insight, which serves as a concrete example that readers can relate to.

4

Read the excerpt from the article “An Elephant’s ‘Aha!’ Moment.”

To probe how elephants solve problems, the researcher and his colleagues tested Kandula and two other National Zoo elephants—Kandula’s mother, 33, and a 61-year-old elephant neighbor—in a series of experiments.

What does the word “probe” mean in this excerpt?

- A)adjust
- B)challenge
- C)examine
- D)shift

5

Part A:

In “An Elephant’s ‘Aha!’ Moment,” the author’s purpose is to

- A)describe the common procedure of trial and error that elephants use to solve problems.
- B)convince readers that elephant brains and human brains have the same capacity for insight.
- C)inform readers of a unique instance in which an elephant apparently used insight to solve a problem.
- D)argue that elephant brains lack the ability to make connections among different pieces of information.

Part B:

Which sentence from “An Elephant’s ‘Aha!’ Moment” **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- A) They have magnificent memories, they recognize themselves in mirrors and they can use simple tools.
- B) The challenge for scientists was distinguishing whether the animals complete tasks by trial and error, by watching other animals or by quickly realizing the solution on their own (insight).
- C) In the seventh try, Kandula seemed to have been struck by the right idea and used insight to solve the puzzle.
- D) He has studied elephant behavior and he told *Science News* that elephants' brains are built for long-lasting memory and social skills, but not so much for connecting the dots among different pieces of information.

Fish Just Wanna Have Fun

by Sharon Oosthoek

New evidence suggests fish—like dogs, horses, and people—are capable of play.

If your teacher catches you goofing around in class, she might tell you to quit acting like a monkey. Or tell you to stop horsing around. But it would probably surprise you to hear her say: "Stop acting like a fish." Yet a new study suggests the comparison might be apt.

Most people recognize play when they see monkeys, horses, dogs or people doing it. But fish?

"It's an animal we don't expect to play," says Gordon Burghardt. He is a scientist who studies animal behavior at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

His team now has evidence suggesting that a type of small fish called **cichlids**^[1] (SIK-lids) clearly play. These scientists are not the first to witness fish at play. But the behavior they saw—and recorded for hours on video—seems new. The researchers published their findings online September 30 in *Ethology*.

Aquatic movies

The scientists started videotaping the fish after **herpetologist**^[2] James saw a male cichlid behaving strangely in one of his home aquariums. These small fish had been born in captivity. Their parents or grandparents, however, had been brought over from Lake Tanganyika in Zambia, a country in south-central Africa.

Murphy works at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. There, he studies amphibians and reptiles. But at home, he keeps pet fish.

Murphy had removed a male cichlid from an aquarium in which it had been attacking other cichlids. The bully shared his new home with other small species of fish. But he didn't attack them.

This second aquarium contained a thermometer. It would have floated except that a heavy weight in its base anchored it in place. The weight also allowed the thermometer to bounce upright if it got knocked over.

Soon after moving into his new tank, the cichlid began striking the thermometer over and over. Each time, the thermometer bounced back. Again and again, the fish swam by to strike it.

When Burghardt heard about this behavior from Murphy, he urged the fish hobbyist to set up a video camera outside the aquarium. Over the next two years, the research team videotaped three male cichlids repeatedly bat at the thermometer.

Each fish had been removed from another aquarium because of aggressive behavior. Their new tank sometimes had other fish in it, but never any cichlids. And like the first male cichlid to be moved, the other transferred bullies showed no aggression towards their new tank-mates.

All three cichlids repeatedly struck the thermometer. Each, however, did it somewhat differently. This suggested they had individual personalities.

One fish sometimes struck the bottom of the thermometer, gradually moving the device around the bottom of the tank. The other two attacked only the top of the thermometer. One of these two fish also swirled around the thermometer while striking it.

How to test if this was playing

The researchers wanted to make sure the fish were truly playing. After all, they reasoned, the fish might just be aggressors letting off some steam, or hungry guys angry at not having enough food—or even lonely guys frustrated by not having a mate.

Male cichlids vibrate their whole bodies when looking for a mate, Burghardt says. But these fish were not doing that. Their thermometer-bashing also didn't seem to have anything to do with being hungry. These guys did it before and after eating.

Finally, the videos showed no link between thermometer batting and aggression toward other fish. Former bullies who could sometimes see others of their species in a neighboring tank might race at the glass wall, as if they were trying to attack. But even when they could see these other cichlids, the sequestered males still played with their tank's thermometer.

In the end, what the fish were doing looked a lot like Burghardt's definition of play. He defines that as repeated behavior that has little to do with finding food, finding a mate or fighting off predators. Animals do it when they're relaxed or bored, he says.

The role of this play is still unexplained

Burghardt suspects it was important that the thermometer bounced back after each strike. "A lot of kids and dogs like a toy that is responsive," he explains.

It's hard to know what role this type of play might serve. But social play, such as the wrestling like rats will do, seems to help them react appropriately to other members of their group. Through mock-fighting, "they learn how to inhibit their behavior when things don't go right," Burghardt says. In a sense, he says, it teaches them how to behave "so they are not killed by a bigger animal."

Sergio Pellis is a neuroscientist, someone who studies the brain. At the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, he probes how play helps animals learn to modify their behavior with others.

He says Burghardt's study is important. "When you look carefully, as Burghardt's study did, examples of play can be found in other types of animals," not just obvious ones, says Pellis. Indeed, he notes, Burghardt and others have been assembling some "pretty convincing" data on play in a range of critters—from turtles and wasps to octopuses.

[1] **cichlid:** a freshwater fish that has become popular in the aquarium trade.

[2] **herpetologist:** scientists who study reptiles and amphibians

Which statement **best** summarizes "Fish Just Wanna Have Fun"?

- A) Cichlids are more aggressive than other fish species.
- B) Individual cichlids react to thermometers in different ways.
- C) Scientific studies have suggested that cichlids are capable of playing.
- D) Play is essential to the mental development of cichlids and humans alike.

7

Which detail from "Fish Just Wanna Have Fun" supports the idea that the cichlids were playing?

- A) the cichlids hitting the thermometer did not have anything to do with hunger or mating
- B) the thermometer bounced back after each time it was hit by the cichlids
- C) scientists were able to observe the cichlids by setting up a video camera
- D) scientists observed the cichlids acting strangely in their aquariums

8

Read the excerpt from the article "Fish Just Wanna Have Fun."

If your teacher catches you goofing around in class, she might tell you to quit acting like a monkey. Or tell you to stop horsing around. But it would probably surprise you to hear her say: "Stop acting like a fish." Yet a new study suggests the comparison might be apt.

In the context of the excerpt, the word "apt" most nearly means

- A) careless.
- B) educational.
- C) fitting.
- D) unexpected.

9

The section entitled "How to test if this was playing" contributes to the main idea of the passage by

- A) using figurative language to introduce an unexpected detail about cichlid behavior.
- B) quoting individual scientists explaining why the experience of play is significant for cichlid development.
- C) defining one type of cichlid behavior and distinguishing it from behavior that has other purposes.
- D) it describes results obtained from video recordings that show how thermometers encourage aggression in cichlids.

10

Which excerpt from “Fish Just Wanna Have Fun” **best** supports the idea that cichlids have individual personalities?

- A)The bully shared his new home with other small species of fish. But he didn't attack them.
- B)Over the next two years, the research team videotaped three male cichlids repeatedly bat at the thermometer.
- C)All three cichlids repeatedly struck the thermometer. Each, however, did it somewhat differently.
- D)After all, they reasoned, the fish might just be aggressors letting off some steam, or hungry guys angry at not having enough food—or even lonely guys frustrated by not having a mate.

11

Read the excerpt from the article "Fish Just Wanna Have Fun."

This second aquarium contained a thermometer. It would have floated except that a heavy weight in its base anchored it in place. The weight also allowed the thermometer to bounce upright if it got knocked over.

Soon after moving into his new tank, the cichlid began striking the thermometer over and over. Each time, the thermometer bounced back. Again and again, the fish swam by to strike it.

When Burghardt heard about this behavior from Murphy, he urged the fish hobbyist to set up a video camera outside the aquarium. Over the next two years, the research team videotaped three male cichlids repeatedly bat at the thermometer.

Which statement **best** explains how this excerpt contributes to the author’s main message in the article?

- A)It proves that cichlids participate in play when they are moved to a new location.
- B)It provides evidence to support the claim that only male cichlids are interested in play.
- C)It explains how scientists first became interested in examining the play-like behavior of cichlids.
- D)It suggests that something was wrong with the thermometer in the new tank.

12

Excerpt from *The Call of the Wild*

by Jack London

That night Buck faced the great problem of sleeping. The tent, illumined by a candle, glowed warmly in the midst of the white plain; and when he, as a matter of course, entered it, both Perrault and Francois bombarded him with curses and cooking utensils, till he recovered from his consternation and fled ignominiously into the outer cold. A chill wind was blowing that nipped him sharply and bit with especial venom into his wounded shoulder. He lay down on the snow and attempted to sleep, but the frost soon drove him shivering to his feet. Miserable and disconsolate, he wandered about among the many tents, only to find that one place was as cold as another. Here and there savage dogs rushed upon him, but he bristled his neck-hair and snarled (for he was learning fast), and they let him go his way unmolested.

Finally an idea came to him. He would return and see how his own teammates were making out. To his astonishment, they had disappeared. Again he wandered about through the great camp, looking for them, and again he returned. Were they in the tent? No, that could not be, else he would not have been driven out. Then where could they possibly be? With drooping tail and shivering body, very forlorn indeed, he aimlessly circled the tent. Suddenly the snow gave way beneath his fore legs and he sank down. Something wriggled under his feet. He sprang back, bristling and snarling, fearful of the unseen and unknown. But a friendly little yelp reassured him, and he

went back to investigate. A whiff of warm air ascended to his nostrils, and there, curled up under the snow in a snug ball, lay Billee. He whined placatingly, squirmed and wriggled to show his good will and intentions, and even ventured, as a bribe for peace, to lick Buck’s face with his warm wet tongue.

Another lesson. So that was the way they did it, eh? Buck confidently selected a spot, and with much fuss and waste effort proceeded to dig a hole for himself. In a trice the heat from his body filled the confined space and he was asleep. The day had been long and arduous, and he slept soundly and comfortably, though he growled and barked and wrestled with bad dreams.

Nor did he open his eyes till roused by the noises of the waking camp. At first he did not know where he was. It had snowed during the night and he was completely buried. The snow walls pressed him on every side, and a great surge of fear swept through him—the fear of the wild thing for the trap. It was a token that he was harking back through his own life to the lives of his forebears; for he was a civilized dog, an unduly civilized dog, and of his own experience knew no trap and so could not of himself fear it. The muscles of his whole body contracted spasmodically and instinctively, the hair on his neck and shoulders stood on end, and with a ferocious snarl he bounded straight up into the blinding day, the snow flying about him in a flashing cloud. Ere he landed on his feet, he saw the white camp spread out before him and knew

where he was and remembered all that had passed from the time he went for a stroll with Manuel to the hole he had dug for himself the night before.

A shout from Francois hailed his appearance. "Wot I say?" the dog-driver cried to Perrault. "Dat Buck for sure learn queek as anyt'ing."

Perrault nodded gravely. As courier for the Canadian Government, bearing important dispatches, he was anxious to secure the best dogs, and he was particularly gladdened by the possession of Buck.

Part A:

Which theme directly relates to Buck's situation in the excerpt from *The Call of the Wild*?

- A)the value of family
- B)the power of nature
- C)the loss of innocence
- D)the importance of sacrifice

Part B:

Which sentence from the passage **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- A)He lay down on the snow and attempted to sleep, but the frost soon drove him shivering to his feet.
- B)A whiff of warm air ascended to his nostrils, and there, curled up under the snow in a snug ball, lay Billee.
- C)The day had been long and arduous, and he slept soundly and comfortably, though he growled and barked and wrestled with bad dreams.
- D)Ere he landed on his feet, he saw the white camp spread out before him and knew where he was and remembered all that had passed.

13

Which statement **best** explains how Buck's attempt to enter the tent in the first paragraph influences his behavior throughout the rest of the passage?

- A)Exposure to other dogs teaches him how to be more civilized.
- B)Brutal weather forces him to rely on his animal instincts for survival.
- C)His fear of being alone leads him to develop an unexpected friendship.
- D)His owner's harsh actions scare him into running away from the camp.

14

Read the sentence from the excerpt from *The Call of the Wild*.

The muscles of his whole body contracted spasmodically and instinctively, the hair on his neck and shoulders stood on end, and with a ferocious snarl he bounded straight up into the blinding day, the snow flying about him in a flashing cloud.

Which statement **best** explains how the underlined words in this excerpt contribute to the meaning of the story?

- A)They establish an urgent tone that reflects Buck's quick, fierce movements.
- B)They build suspense as Buck begins to panic, realizing that he is helpless.
- C)They create a contrast between Buck's civilized conduct and the untamed natural environment.
- D)They illustrate a vivid scene, emphasizing the threat that Buck represents to the other dogs.

15

Excerpt from *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*
by Hugh Lofting

Once upon a time, many years ago when our grandfathers were little children—there was a doctor; and his name was Dolittle—John Dolittle, M.D. "M.D." means that he was a

proper doctor and knew a whole lot.

He lived in a little town called, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. All the folks, young and old, knew him well by sight. And whenever he walked down the street in his high hat everyone would say, "There goes the Doctor!—He's a

clever man." And the dogs and the children would all run up and follow behind him; and even the crows that lived in the church-tower would caw and nod their heads.

The house he lived in, on the edge of the town, was quite small; but his garden was very large and had a wide lawn and stone seats and weeping-willows hanging over. His sister, Sarah Dolittle, was housekeeper for him; but the Doctor looked after the garden himself.

He was very fond of animals and kept many kinds of pets. Besides the gold-fish in the pond at the bottom of his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet and a hedgehog in the cellar. He had a cow with a calf too, and an old lame horse—twenty-five years of age—and chickens, and pigeons, and two lambs, and many other animals. But his favorite pets were Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the baby pig, Polynesia the parrot, and the owl Too-Too.

His sister used to grumble about all these animals and said they made the house untidy. And one day when an old lady with rheumatism came to see the Doctor, she sat on the hedgehog who was sleeping on the sofa and never came to see him anymore, but drove every Saturday all the way to Oxenthorpe, another town ten miles off, to see a different doctor.

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said, "John, how can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It's a fine doctor would have his parlor full of hedgehogs and

mice! That's the fourth personage these animals have driven away. We are getting poorer every day. If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor."

"But I like the animals better than the 'best people'," said the Doctor.

"You are ridiculous," said his sister, and walked out of the room.

So, as time went on, the Doctor got more and more animals; and the people who came to see him got less and less. Till at last he had no one left.

The money he had saved up grew littler and littler. Then he sold his piano, and let the mice live in a bureaudrawer. But the money he got for that too began to go, so he sold the brown suit he wore on Sundays and went on becoming poorer and poorer.

And now, when he walked down the street in his high hat, people would say to one another, "There goes John Dolittle, M.D.! There was a time when he was the best known doctor in the West Country—Look at him now—He hasn't any money and his stockings are full of holes!"

But the dogs and the cats and the children still ran up and followed him through the town—the same as they had done when he was rich.

Read the sixth paragraph from *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*.

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said, "John, how can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It's a fine doctor would have his parlor full of hedgehogs and mice! That's the fourth personage these animals have driven away. We are getting poorer every day. If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor."

Which statement **best** describes the purpose of this paragraph?

- A) It introduces tension as Sarah encourages Dr. Dolittle to change his lifestyle.
- B) It provides a resolution as Sarah teaches Dr. Dolittle how to save his reputation.
- C) It uses vivid imagery to establish the setting in which John and Sarah Dolittle live.
- D) It highlights some of the personality traits that make Dr. Dolittle different from other people.

16

Which sentence from the story **best** shows how Dr. Dolittle's life changes over the course of the passage?

- A) He was very fond of animals and kept many kinds of pets.
- B) "But I like the animals better than the 'best people'," said the Doctor.
- C) There was a time when he was the best known doctor in the West Country—Look at him now—He hasn't any money and his stockings are full of holes!"
- D) But the dogs and the cats and the children still ran up and followed him through the town—the same as they had done when he was rich.

17

Which statement **best** explains how the author develops Dr. Dolittle's character in the excerpt?

- A) He describes Dr. Dolittle in terms of how other people see him.
- B) He includes dialogue to prove that Dr. Dolittle has lost his professional skills.
- C) He reveals Dr. Dolittle's inner thoughts to show how his values have changed over time.
- D) He builds suspense to stress the importance of the relationship between Dr. Dolittle and his sister.

18

What message does the conclusion of *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* convey?

- A) People who listen to Dr. Dolittle's advice end up leading happy lives.
- B) Dr. Dolittle lacks the medical knowledge that people once believed he had.
- C) Love is a distraction that prevents Dr. Dolittle from becoming successful in life.
- D) Animals and children appreciate Dr. Dolittle regardless of his wealth or social standing.

19

Excerpt from *The Call of the Wild*

by Jack London

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proper doctor and knew a whole lot.

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Part A:

Which statement **best** explains how the excerpt from *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* compares to the excerpt from *The Call of the Wild*?

- A)The narrators of both passages are animals.
- B)Nature threatens humans in both passages.
- C)Both passages describe the downfall of the main character.
- D)People appreciate the main characters' skills at some point in both passages.

Part B:

Which sentence from *The Call of the Wild* and which sentence from *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* support the answer to Part A?

- "And when he, as a matter of course, entered it, both Perrault and Francois bombarded him with curses and cooking utensils, till he recovered from his consternation and fled ignominiously into the outer cold." (*The Call of the Wild*)
- "'Wot I say?' the dog-driver cried to Perrault. 'Dat Buck for sure learn queek as anyt'ing.'" (*The Call of the Wild*)
- "And whenever he walked down the street in his high hat everyone would say, 'There goes the Doctor!—He's a clever man.'" (*The Story of Doctor Dolittle*)
- "The house he lived in, on the edge of the town, was quite small; but his garden was very large and had a wide lawn and stone seats and weeping-willows hanging over." (*The Story of Doctor Dolittle*)
- "But the money he got for that too began to go, so he sold the brown suit he wore on Sundays and went on becoming poorer and poorer." (*The Story of Doctor Dolittle*)

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said, "John, how can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It's a fine doctor would have his parlor full of hedgehogs and mice! That's the fourth personage these animals have driven away. We are getting poorer every day. If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor."

"But I like the animals better than the 'best people'," said the Doctor.

"You are ridiculous," said his sister, and walked out of the room.

So, as time went on, the Doctor got more and more animals; and the people who came to see him got less and less. Till at last he had no one left.

The money he had saved up grew littler and littler. Then he sold his piano, and let the mice live in a bureaudrawer. But the money he got for that too began to go, so he sold the brown suit he wore on Sundays and went on becoming poorer and poorer.

And now, when he walked down the street in his high hat, people would say to one another, "There goes John Dolittle, M.D.! There was a time when he was the best known doctor in the West Country—Look at him now—He hasn't any money and his stockings are full of holes!"

But the dogs and the cats and the children still ran up and followed him through the town—the same as they had done when he was rich.

