

# STUDY QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELEPHANT LETTERS

The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence ([www.kerulos.org/ele-letters](http://www.kerulos.org/ele-letters))

## Chapter I. The Brown Parcel

---

- What do you think Umkhulu means when he says "we have lived in harmony with Humans and other Animals"?
- What does "living in harmony" mean to you in your home, family and community?
- Why and how do Humans capture Elephants? Does this happen with other Animals in the wild? Where do you think these captured Animals end up living?

**Activity:** Explore where the African Savanna is and how Elephant live there. What is their environment and everyday living like? What other Animals live there?

## Chapter II. Now We Are Seven

---

- Describe how Kani, living in the wild, and Billy, living in the zoo, experienced their birthdays.
- Do you like celebrating your birthday? What is your favorite part of the celebration?

**Activity:** Research in books or the internet how Billy's life in the zoo and Kani's life in the wild are different. You might make a table to compare how their two life experiences are different.

## Chapter III. Danger in the Air

---

- What does Kani mean when he says "good things can suddenly turn bad and bad things can suddenly turn good?" Has that ever happened to you?
- Kani talks about how the Animals at the river were enjoying each other even though they are different species. Describe how they were able to do this. How do they act with each other?

**Activity:** Research what the word "conservation" means and describe what Elephant conservation looks like. Is there a field of research called "Human conservation"? If there is not, what would "Human conservation" look like?



## Chapter IV. Remembering

---

- Describe what you think was happening to Billy when he remembered something from his past?. Have you ever experienced similar emotions and feelings?
- Look up Hornbills and see where they live and what their lives are like. Do they look like any Birds that live near you?

**Activity:** Research what are five things that are causing African Elephants to become extinct. How do you think Elephant extinction and suffering can be stopped?

## Chapter V. Peace on the Plain

---

- Describe Elephant society and families. Are their values and the ways they interact with each other similar to your family?
- What is the Great Wildebeest Migration? Is there a similar migration in North America?

**Activity:** Visit The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust website at <https://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org>. Describe five things they are doing there to help orphan Elephants.

## Chapter VI. Monkey Business

---

- You've been hearing about the Elephant "trunkline" and how Grandma hears through her feet. What are the other ways that Elephants talk to each other?. What are the ways you talk with your friends and family?
- Why don't you think that Jo-Jo escaped the zoo and went to live somewhere else?

**Activity:** Imagine that someone you love is living far away and you won't see them for a long while. Then write them a letter.

## Chapter VII. A Sad Day

---

- List all the emotions and feelings that the Elephants have expressed so far. Which of their emotions have you felt? Write down next to each what made you feel that way. For example, you might feel "sad" when a friend moves away.
- Why did Billy change his name back to Imenti?

**Activity:** Draw a picture and tell a short story about someone you've lost (Human or Animal) that made you very sad.



## Chapter VIII. Saying Good-Bye

---

- The Elephant culture is ancient and they respect their ancestors. For example, Elephants show their love and respect to family members when they “go home.” In what ways do your family and community show respect when someone has died?
- What does Kani’s mother mean when she says that “songs come from old white bones”?

**Activity:** Write down descriptions of certain aspects of Elephant culture, and then for each one make a list of your own. Does the culture you grew up in share many things with Elephants?

## Chapter IX. Song of the Savanna

---

- What does the Song of the Savanna mean to you?

**Activity:** Billy says that Human children are just like Elephants, and if anyone can help them, children can. What does he mean by that? What are four things you could do to help Elephants?

## Chapter X. Graduation

---

- Describe the different stages that Kani went through as he was growing up. Is this similar to your life or that of your mother or father?

**Activity:** Visit The Sheldrick Wildlife Trust website (<https://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org>) and find out how Roho and Luggard ended up there. See how their life was different before they got there, and how is it now. Imagine what their paths in life will be like. What are five things the Elephant carers at the Trust do to help the orphan Elephants heal from trauma?

## Chapter XI. The Ancient Path

---

- The author talks about the lives of the two cousins becoming more and more separate. But despite the differences, they loved each other as much as ever. How is it possible to grow apart and closer at the same time?
- Do you think you will always be close to your friends all your life?

**Activity:** What does agency, or self-determination mean? How does this apply to Elephants? Do they have agency in the wild, do they have agency in a zoo? Can you give three examples where you demonstrated agency in your day?



## Chapter XII. A Time of Change

---

- What does “sanctuary” mean? Why do Animals need sanctuary? What was Lucy’s experience at the Sanctuary?
- Billy is an African Elephant, and Barbara, the new Elephant at the zoo, is an Asian Elephant from Thailand. What are the differences between these two species of Elephants?

**Activity:** Visit Boon Lott’s Elephant Sanctuary (<https://www.blesele.org/>) to see how retired zoo Elephants can live in Sanctuary. How are the lives of the Elephants living at the Sanctuary different from the life Lucy is living in the zoo or from those who live in the wild?

## Chapter XIII. Humans Are Confusing

---

- Now that they are both elder Elephants, describe how the lives of Billy and Kani are similar or different.
- How did life on the Savanna change Kani? How did life in the zoo change Billy?

**Activity:** Why is zoo life so unhealthy for Animals?. (FYI: Dr. Dame Daphne Sheldrick who wrote the foreword for the book is also the Great Mother that Kani talks about, and the person who founded the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust.)

## Chapter XIV. Letter from America

---

- How did you feel about what happened to Billy/Imenti in this chapter? Do you think he was happy or sad?
- Did Sanctuary make up for the suffering he experienced?

**Activity:** As a family, sit outside and look at up the stars and listen. See what you notice, what you hear, what you feel. Sit quietly like this for at least 20 minutes. Then share what the experience was like.

## Chapter XV. Going Home

---

- Think about all the feelings that Billy wrote about to Kani. Which ones have you felt? What do you think Billy means when he says without love, his heart would crack like the African earth when rain does not come? Why was it important to Billy that one of his bones be sent back to Africa?



- What makes up the place you call home and why is the place you call home so important to you?

**Activity:** Elder Elephants, both female and male, play a major role in Elephant society. Research what roles each play and then ask your grandparents, aunts, or uncles if they feel like the Elders in Elephant society.

## Concluding Thoughts

---

- What are the five main things you learned from the story of Billy and Kani?
- What did the story teach you about Elephants?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- Did listening to Billy and Kani's story change you? If so how?
- Why do you think we have used a capital "E" in the spelling of Elephants?
- How would you describe this book and the story to your friends and family? (Don't give away the end!)

