

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Blind Men and the Elephant

By John Godfrey Saxe
1873

John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) was an American poet best known for his poem, "The Blind Man and the Elephant," which is a re-telling of an Indian parable. As you read carefully, try to figure out the author's message. What makes a thing what it is?

[1] It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
Though all of them were blind,
[5] That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant
And, happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
[10] At once began to bawl:
"God bless me, but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
[15] So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis very clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal
[20] And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "The Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

[25] The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most the wondrous beast is like
Is very plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
[30] Is very like a tree!"



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The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, "Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can:

[35] This marvel of an elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope
Then, seizing on the swinging tail

[40] That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,

[45] Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong.
Though each was partly in the right,
They all were in the wrong!

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. What patterns do you notice in this poem? Cite evidence from the text. [RL.5]

2. Summarize the action of the poem. [RL.2]

3. Explain the last two lines, "Though each was partly in the right / They were all in the wrong." What do you think the author means by this? [RL.4]

4. As a parable, or a simple story used to illustrate a lesson, what knowledge or moral does the poem impart to the audience? [RL.2]

5. What other objects or animals might substitute for the elephant? Pick an item and try to describe it as its parts compare to other things. [RL.3]
