

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 clearThis wonder of an ElephantIs 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 opinionExceeding 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.

What patterns do you notice in this poem? Cite evidence from the text.	[RL.5]
Summarize the action of the poem.	[RL.2]
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]



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Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1.	What makes a thing what it is? Is the way it is seen/perceived by others, or is it something else?
2.	What makes a person who they are—their reputations, their genes, their actions, or something else? Explain your answer.
3.	What is "identity" and where does it come from? Use evidence from this text, from your own experience, and from other art or literature to answer this question. How does this poem help you understand the concept of identity?