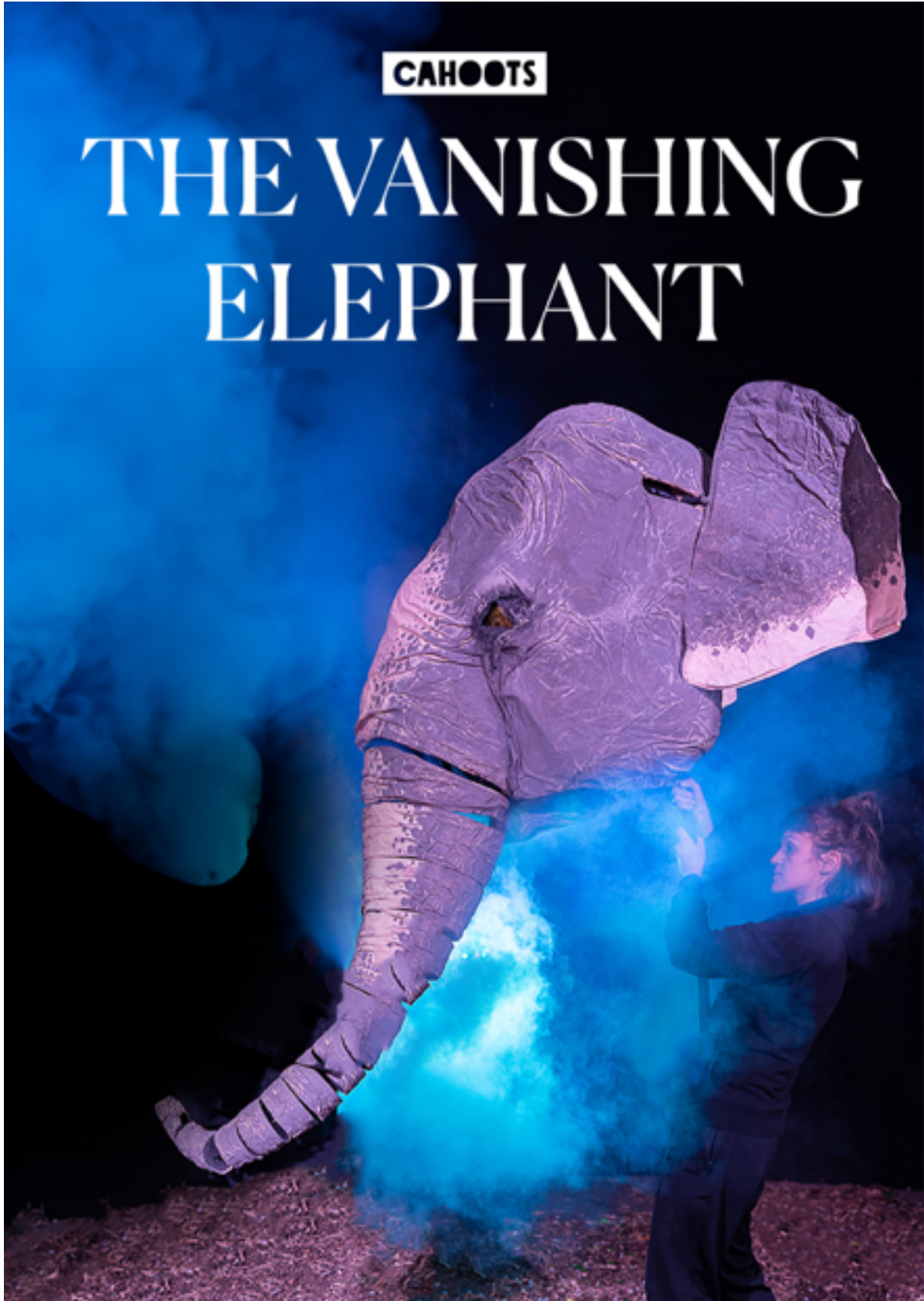


# The Vanishing Elephant Sample Study Guide



# The Vanishing Elephant

The Vanishing Elephant tells the story of an Asian Elephant called Janu. Janu is born in Bengal, India and like any young animal, is full of curiosity about the world around her. One day, Janu hears the sound of an elephant hunt, she is captured and separated from her family. Her life changes dramatically; she must learn the ways of humans. She is to be trained to work on clearing the jungle so that railways can be built. The training is sometimes cruel, but she does make friends with an Indian boy named Opu. It is this friendship that lies at the heart of The Vanishing Elephant.

Opu is an orphan who dreams of becoming a Mahout (an elephant trainer) but this dream is shattered when Janu is sold to a circus in America who change her name to 'Jenny'. Jenny makes the strange journey across the sea until she reaches an entirely new world. She does not know if she will ever see Opu again, but carries his memory deep within her.

Jenny has many adventures as the circus travels across the United States. She escapes onto the Great Prairie, she saves a woman from an angry tiger and in 1918 she meets a famous escapologist called Harry Houdini. Houdini desires to be not only an escape artist but a great magician, he plans to make Jenny magically disappear from the stage of the Hippodrome Theater, New York.

Meanwhile, far away in India, Opu is now an old man. He reads in a newspaper about the adventures of Jenny the Elephant, now famous in her own right. He concludes that this elephant is indeed his old friend. Despite ill health, he makes the same difficult boat journey to New York that Jenny once made. There, on the stage of the Hippodrome, they meet again.

## About Cahoots

Cahoots is a Belfast based theatre company creating theatrical magic for children and their families. Our distinctive style combines magic and illusion, physical theatre and original music.

Cahoots tours to ever-growing audiences at home and across the world. Our work is acclaimed in Ireland, the UK, Asia, America and has been enjoyed in theatres, schools and healthcare settings since 2001.

In June 2021, Cahoots were named Arts Organisation of the Year at the Arts & Business NI Awards.

Previous Cahoots productions include: Danny Carmo's Mathematical Mysteries, The University of Wonder and Imagination, Secrets of Space, Penguins, Nivelli's War, Shh! We Have A Plan and Egg.

The Vanishing Elephant offers a wide range of opportunities for school audiences to engage with curriculum subjects such as: Science, History, Fine Arts, Language Arts, Physical Education, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding.

This study guide includes:

- Additional activities that can be enjoyed before or after attending the performance.
- Historical context of The Vanishing Elephant.
- A vocabulary list - an index of terms used in the show.
- Suggested further resources.

If you are a presenter in North America looking for more information on how to bring this production to your community, please contact Holden & Arts Associates at [sk@holdenarts.org](mailto:sk@holdenarts.org)

If you are a teacher or school group, please contact your presenting venue.

If you are a presenter, teacher or school group outside of North America, for more information on how to bring this production to your community, please contact Cahoots on [info@cahootsni.com](mailto:info@cahootsni.com).

## Related Further Activities

### Science

Janu is an Asian elephant born in India. See what you can find out about the other species of elephants; Where are they from? How many species are there? What do they eat? Do they stay with their families when they grow up or do they live alone?

Once you are confident in your elephant knowledge, why not share it with a classmate? Present your work to them and try to answer any questions they may have.

### Language Arts

Imagine you are Opu and you are writing a diary entry describing a specific scene in the show. This could be when he is young and first meets Janu, or when he is older and reads about Harry Houdini in the newspaper. What might he be feeling? Describe his environment, what can he see and hear?

### Physical Education

Janu is taken to the circus where she is trained to learn routines and perform to an audience. Team up with some of your classmates and choreograph a routine or act to perform together, this can be in the style of an old circus like we see in the show, or something more modern set to your favourite song!

### Fine Arts

Design a Puppet - The animals you see in this show are puppets made especially for this production. Each puppet is made with paper, paint and soft foam material. Try making your own puppet with the materials you have access to! You could use paper, cardboard or even make a sock puppet!

Design a Poster - Jenny the elephant becomes famous all over America when travelling with the circus. Have a go at designing a poster the circus may have used for advertising her act. You can also write a short description of the show to entice audience members!

### History

The Vanishing Elephant is based on the story of the real Harry Houdini who vanished an elephant named Jennie in the Hippodrome Theater in 1918. In this telling, we follow the perspective of the elephant.

In what ways is the world different from how it was back then? Did the theater have electricity? Could audience members call their friends and family on the phone and tell them about the show? Do some research to compare and contrast the differences between how people lived back then and how we do now.

## Drama

Each of the characters we meet in the show have their own backstory and reasons for their actions. Choose a character and try to imagine what it's like to be in their shoes. Think of their path leading up to the events of the show and their feelings throughout.

Sitting in a seat in front of your class, pretend to be this person and answer questions asked to you by your classmates exactly how you think your character would! Take into account the way they may sit and the voice they might have.

The questions asked might include things like:

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- How did you meet Janu the elephant?
- How do you feel about Janu performing in America?
- If you could change any of your actions in the show, what would you change and why?

## The Historical Context of The Vanishing Elephant

The Vanishing Elephant is based on true events! In 1918, Harry Houdini made a five tonne elephant named Jennie disappear.

Harry Houdini vanished Jennie the elephant at the Hippodrome Theater on January 7th 1918 (over 100 years ago!) The theater was located on Broadway and at that time it was the largest in the world.

Back then, there was far less concern for animal welfare, meaning elephants like Janu were often mistreated. However, today there are laws in place to make sure performing animals are taken care of properly. The use of animals in circuses is banned in six US states.

## Discussion Questions

Here are some questions to ask yourselves and others relating to this story. There are no right or wrong answers; share what you think and feel and listen to what each person has to say.

- The Vanishing Elephant takes place in the 1900s, when things were very different to how they are now. What differences can you see between how we live now and the world of this story? Try to focus on how people may have seen the world and each other.
- Is there a villain in this story? If so, who? Why do you think they did the things they did?
- Why do you think Opu and Janu became such good friends? What are some similarities or shared experiences between these characters?
- What is your view on animals performing in circuses? How would you feel seeing a routine like the one Jenny performs?

## Vocabulary List

Term	Definition
Ankus	A hooked weapon used in India to control captive elephants.
Babu	In the Assamese language this term is used to describe a baby.
Baker	A city in the U.S. State of Oregon.
Batten Down	A phrase meaning to prepare for possible trouble or difficulty.
Bengal	Bengal is a region in the northeastern part of India. The region is now divided between Bangladesh and the Indian State of West Bengal.
Billings	The most populated city in the U.S. State of Montana.
Buffalo	The second largest city in the U.S. State of New York.
Calcutta	The capital city of India's West Bengal state.
Chicago	The most populated city in the U.S. State of Illinois
Cleveland	A city in the U.S. State of Ohio.
Danby	A town in the State of New York.
Escapology	A performance of escaping from chains, boxes, etc. as a form of entertainment.
Hartford	The capital city of the U.S. State of Connecticut.
Hippodrome Theatre	The world's largest theater at the time of its opening in 1905, situated in New York. It was demolished in 1939.
Hot Springs	A city in the U.S. State of South Dakota.
Koomkie	A trained female elephant used as a decoy in the capture of wild male elephants.
Mahout	A person who works with, rides and tends to elephants.
Milwaukee	A city in the U.S. State of Wisconsin.
New Haven	A coastal city in the State of Connecticut.
Prairie	A large open area of grassland.
Rapid City	A city in the U.S. State of South Dakota.
Rupees	The Indian Rupee is the currency used in India. The symbol for this currency is ₹.
St. Paul	The capital city of the U.S. State of Minnesota.
Tamarind Tree	A tropical Evergreen tree which bears edible fruit that can be found in tropical Africa and Asia.
The Great Plains	A broad expanse of flat lands that span over ten of the states of the U.S.
Utica	A city in the State of New York.

## Further Resources

For more information on the real Harry Houdini: <https://www.thegreatharryhoudini.com/vanishingelephant.html>

For more on the Hippodrome Theatre: [http://www.performingartsarchive.com/Theatres/Theatres-H/Hippodrome\\_NYC/Hippodrome\\_NYC.htm](http://www.performingartsarchive.com/Theatres/Theatres-H/Hippodrome_NYC/Hippodrome_NYC.htm)

For more information on elephants: <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/animals/general-animals/elephant-facts/>

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