

Touching story

Maths

Ages 11-14

Pupils may have heard the Indian story of the blind men and the elephant. The men touch the elephant to find out what it is like but because each man touches a different part, when they compare notes afterwards they have completely different ideas about an elephant.

"Elephant maths" happens when you look at a mathematical object from all angles and see it in as many different ways as possible.

For example, you think you know what a half is? Close your eyes and imagine a half. Now open your eyes and draw what

you saw. Doing this in small groups or as a whole-class activity can be enlightening.

Tasks where everyone can take a different perspective and contribute something of value can be rare in maths lessons. They help the teacher to learn what structures are in the learners' minds and they broaden everyone's view.

Good mathematicians can look at a concept from many different viewpoints and see it in complementary ways. Learners benefit from encouragement to do this as often as possible ■

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Get the point: elephants can teach a lot about maths