



PAIRED TEXTS
texts that share a
theme or topic

The
World's
First
Supers

150 years ago, an African elephant named Jumbo was the most famous creature in the world.

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

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AS YOU READ,
THINK ABOUT:

How have attitudes about wild animals changed?

On September 15, 1885, one of the world's most beloved celebrities died in a tragic train accident. News of this event made headlines around the world. In the streets of New York City, grown men took off their hats and wept. In England, a **distraught** Queen Victoria proclaimed that she had lost a most dear friend, a gentle giant.

This beloved hero was not a president or a king. In fact, he was not even a human being. But he was a giant: a 6-ton African elephant named Jumbo.

Jumbo was, in the late 1800s, the most famous creature in the world. As a young elephant, he was the star attraction of one of the world's first modern zoos, the London Zoological Gardens. Queen Victoria visited him regularly, feeding him sweet rolls made by her personal chef. Children would line up for hours in the rain for a chance to ride on his back.

In 1882, Jumbo came to America after he was purchased by circus owner P.T. Barnum. Barnum, a brilliant showman, made Jumbo into an even bigger star. He called him “the **colossus** of elephants, the biggest and most famous animal in the world!” He sent Jumbo on a tour across the country in “Jumbo’s Palace Car,” a luxurious private railcar painted red and gold. Jumbo earned millions for Barnum and became a true **phenomenon**. His picture was everywhere—in newspapers and magazines, even on packages of sewing thread, baking powder, and cigars.

Barnum exaggerated Jumbo’s size, claiming he was the biggest elephant on Earth.

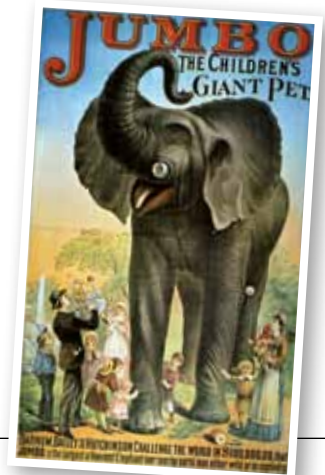


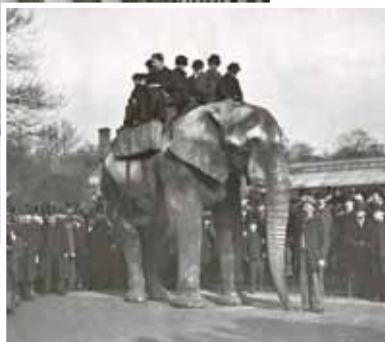
ILLUSTRATION BY GARY HANNA; GRANGER, NYC/THE GRANGER COLLECTION (POSTER)

Pop-Culture Icon

There’s no doubt that Jumbo was a beautiful



Above: Jumbo was transported to America in this crate. Right: Visitors to the London Zoo paid to ride on Jumbo's back.



thought was given to whether animals should be taken from the wild, or to their well-being in captivity. Cages were small and dirty. Diets were unhealthy. Not surprisingly, many animals died.

Captured by Hunters

Jumbo was probably born in the area that is now Ethiopia, in Africa. Today, African elephants are endangered, and hunting them is illegal. But in the mid-1800s, when Jumbo was born, the soulful trumpeting of elephants rang out in all corners of the African continent. Large herds stomped through

jungles, forests, savannas, and deserts.

It is likely that hunters killed Jumbo's mother for her ivory. A helpless calf, Jumbo was sold to an animal dealer who chained him, packed him into a crate, and shipped him by boat to Europe. Many animals died during such miserable voyages, but Jumbo survived. He was sold to a zoo in Paris called Jardin des Plantes.

Jumbo was not treated well in Paris. After three years, he was traded to the London Zoological Gardens, along with two anteaters, for a rhinoceros. It was a lucky break for Jumbo, who arrived in London filthy and undernourished. He was put under the care of Matthew Scott, a zookeeper who was quiet, unhappy, and badly in need of a friend. The **scrawny**, sickly elephant and the lonely bachelor hit it off right away.

Sold to the Circus

It's impossible to say whether Jumbo was content in London, but under Scott's care, he grew. And grew. And grew, nearly doubling in size in just a few years. Jumbo became the largest elephant in captivity and one of England's most cherished "citizens." That's why it was a shock when, in 1881, the zoo decided to sell Jumbo to the American P.T. Barnum. The sale of this "national treasure" outraged people throughout England. Mobs showed up at the zoo to protest. They showered Jumbo

animal, strong and majestic. But why did he become so famous? He did no special tricks, couldn't juggle balls with his trunk, or walk on two legs. He was not even particularly big. Measuring about 11 feet from the tips of his padded toes to the tops of his wrinkly shoulders, he was of average size for a male African elephant.

In some ways, Jumbo was a pop-culture icon: a Jennifer Lawrence with a trunk, say, or a 6-ton Channing Tatum. Indeed, he was the perfect celebrity for the times. People were moving to cities and looking for new kinds of entertainment. There was great curiosity about the natural world, especially about exotic creatures from far-off lands few people could hope to visit.

Zoos were relatively rare until the 19th century, when hunters, explorers, and rich adventurers from America and Europe began prowling the wilds of Africa. They brought home "trophy" like lion heads, leopard skins, and prized ivory elephant tusks, the last of which could be carved into treasures or displayed as proof that a hunter had conquered Africa's largest beast. Live animals were captured and sent home to be put on display for the public.

A city's **status** was measured by the variety of animals in its zoo. Yet even the most learned scientists did not understand how to care for these animals. Little

THE GREAT JUMBO KILLED

STRUCK BY THE LOCOMOTIVE OF A FREIGHT TRAIN.

THE HUGE BEAST LOSES HIS LIFE IN A
CANADIAN TOWN—THE DWARF ELE-
PHANT ALSO BADLY HURT.

St. THOMAS, Ontario, Sept. 16. — The
Barnum, Bailey & Hutchinson show arrived
here from Chatham yesterday morning and un-
loaded near where their tents were pitched, a
short distance east of Miller-street. While the
evening performance was in progress

The world mourned Jumbo's tragic death.

with sugar buns (which he loved) and huge bouquets of flowers (which he also loved . . . to eat).

Zoo directors thought that Jumbo was too unpredictable. At night, if Scott wasn't with him, Jumbo would have temper tantrums, ramming his head against the walls of his cage.

Male elephants can become violent, and more than one director admitted to having nightmares about Jumbo going berserk in the crowded zoo.

So Jumbo was loaded into a special crate and, with Scott at his side, set sail for his new life in America as part of Barnum's "Greatest Show on Earth." For three years, he toured North America, where he looked on calmly (or, some said, with boredom) as Barnum's trained elephants marched and pranced around him. Barnum looked forward to decades of riches with Jumbo; African elephants can live to be 70 years old.

Sadly, Jumbo's life was cut short just a few years after his arrival in the U.S. In September 1885, the circus was in Canada, and Jumbo was waiting to be loaded into his private railcar. Scott heard the sound of an oncoming train in the distance. According to one account,

Male elephants stay with their mothers until they are 14 years old. Females may stay for life.

Scott screamed for Jumbo to follow him onto an embankment. Jumbo followed, running so quickly that he nearly hit a fence. In a panic, Jumbo ran back onto the track and was struck by the train. He died a few minutes later, clutching Scott's hand with his

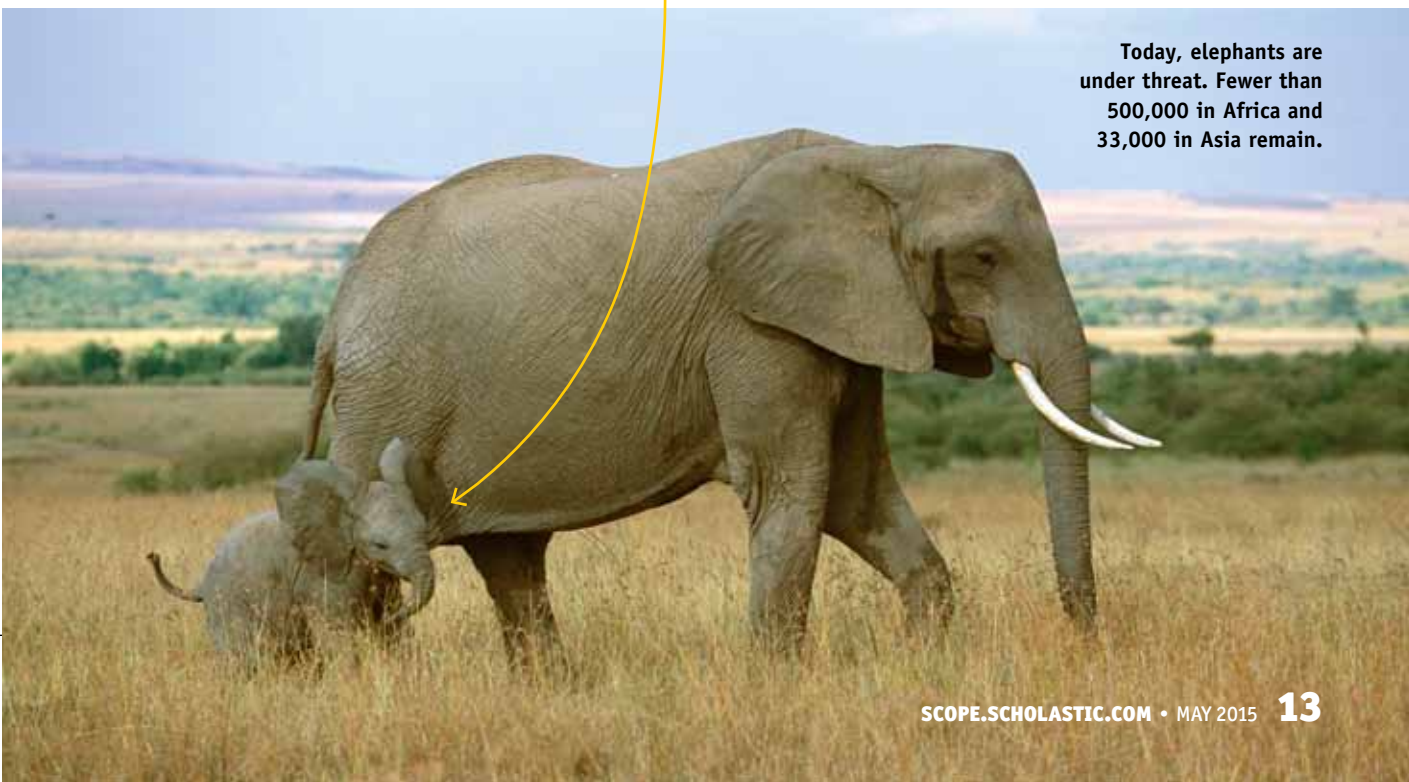
trunk. Scott wept for hours and had to be carried from Jumbo's side.

In the Wild

Even in death, Jumbo remained the world's most famous animal. Barnum donated his hide to a university and his skeleton to the American Museum of Natural History. In 1935, a Broadway musical was based on Jumbo's life, as was a movie in 1962.

Though human interest in the animal world has continued to grow, there has never been another animal celebrity quite like Jumbo. Times slowly changed, and many scientists and animal lovers began to appreciate that taking animals from the wild can be dangerous and cruel. Today, conservationists are working hard to protect elephants in their natural habitat. ●

Today, elephants are under threat. Fewer than 500,000 in Africa and 33,000 in Asia remain.





Say Goodbye to the Elephants

America's biggest circus has decided to stop using elephants in its shows.

BY ADEE BRAUN

“Ladies and gentlemen, children of all ages . . . welcome to the Greatest Show on Earth!” So begins each performance of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus. And what a show it is! Dancers and clowns perform in the ring as acrobats flip and soar overhead. Stunt riders zoom motorcycles around inside a metal cage as jugglers toss flaming batons into the air.

But none of these performers are the real stars. The real stars of the show are the elephants. For

more than 140 years, crowds have gasped in awe as the enormous animals balance on two legs, cradle humans in their trunks, and, like a squad of 5-ton cheerleaders, create formations with one resting its front legs on another's back.

Soon, though, these beloved performers will be gone.

Ringling Bros. has announced

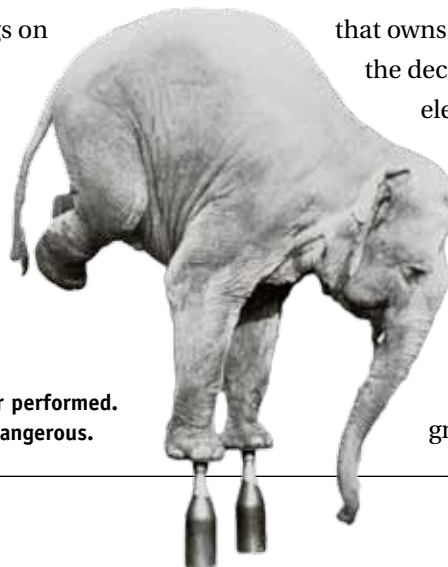
This trick is no longer performed. It is considered too dangerous.

that by 2018, elephants will no longer be part of the show.

Mood Shift

According to Feld

Entertainment, the company that owns Ringling Bros., the decision to remove elephants from the circus was based on a “mood shift” among circus goers—a reference to the public's growing unease



BERTRAND GUAY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (CIRCUS ELEPHANT); GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES (BALANCING)

with the idea of elephants performing for our entertainment. In fact, animal rights advocates have been calling for circuses to stop using elephants for decades. Many activists believe that wild animals should not be used for entertainment.

Some animal welfare organizations have accused Ringling Bros. of mistreating its elephants—of leaving them in chains for hours on end, for example, and of separating babies from their mothers before they are ready. Ringling Bros. denies such accusations. On the contrary, says the company, all animals receive exceptional care. According to the Ringling Bros. website, the elephants are under the constant care of top-notch veterinarians, receive plenty of fresh food and water, and enjoy daily baths and exercise. “We’re very proud of our animal care,” says Stephen Payne of Feld Entertainment.

What Do Elephants Want?

Once the 13 Asian elephants

currently performing with Ringling Bros. retire, they will go to an elephant conservation center in Florida that Ringling Bros. has operated since 1995. This 200-acre facility, dedicated to the conservation, breeding, and study of elephants, is currently home to about 40 Asian elephants. Some are retired from performing, while others are still growing up. Yet others, according to Ringling Bros., are there because

they were not comfortable performing—they did not want to join the circus and were not forced to do so.

It is no doubt true that some elephants take to performing more readily than others. But is it fair to suggest that any elephant would *want* to join the circus? In the wild, elephants travel up to 30 miles a day. They are highly social and intelligent creatures who greet each other by touching trunks, like a handshake; who protect sick and injured members of their herds and mourn their dead. Even though



As for the lions, tigers, and other animals in the circus, Ringling says it has no plans to retire them. But who knows? Ringling Bros. wants to please its customers. Perhaps the fate of these animals is up to us.

conditions for circus elephants have greatly improved since the days of Jumbo in the 1880s, would an elephant ever choose to live in a stall, travel across the country by train, and perform tricks on command when it could be roaming the forests of its natural habitat?

Wonder and Love

Ringling Bros. and others have argued that the elephant acts in the circus do more than **enthrall** audiences; they also educate the public about these magnificent animals and **cultivate** concern for their survival in the wild. And of the approximately 10 million people who attend a Ringling Bros. circus each year, many certainly do leave with a sense of wonder and love for the animal kingdom.

But perhaps we’ve come to understand that loving animals means setting them free. If we want to learn about elephants, there are plenty of videos on YouTube, not to mention hundreds of books and online articles that we can turn to.

As for Ringling Bros.? “We’ll miss the elephants,” says Payne. “But there are still going to be lots of reasons to come to the Greatest Show on Earth.” ●

WRITING CONTEST

How have attitudes about wild animals changed since the time of Jumbo? Why might attitudes have changed? Answer both questions using information from both texts. Send your response to **ELEPHANT CONTEST**. Five winners will each get a copy of *The Zoo at the Edge of the World* by Eric Kahn Gale. See page 2 for details.

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