

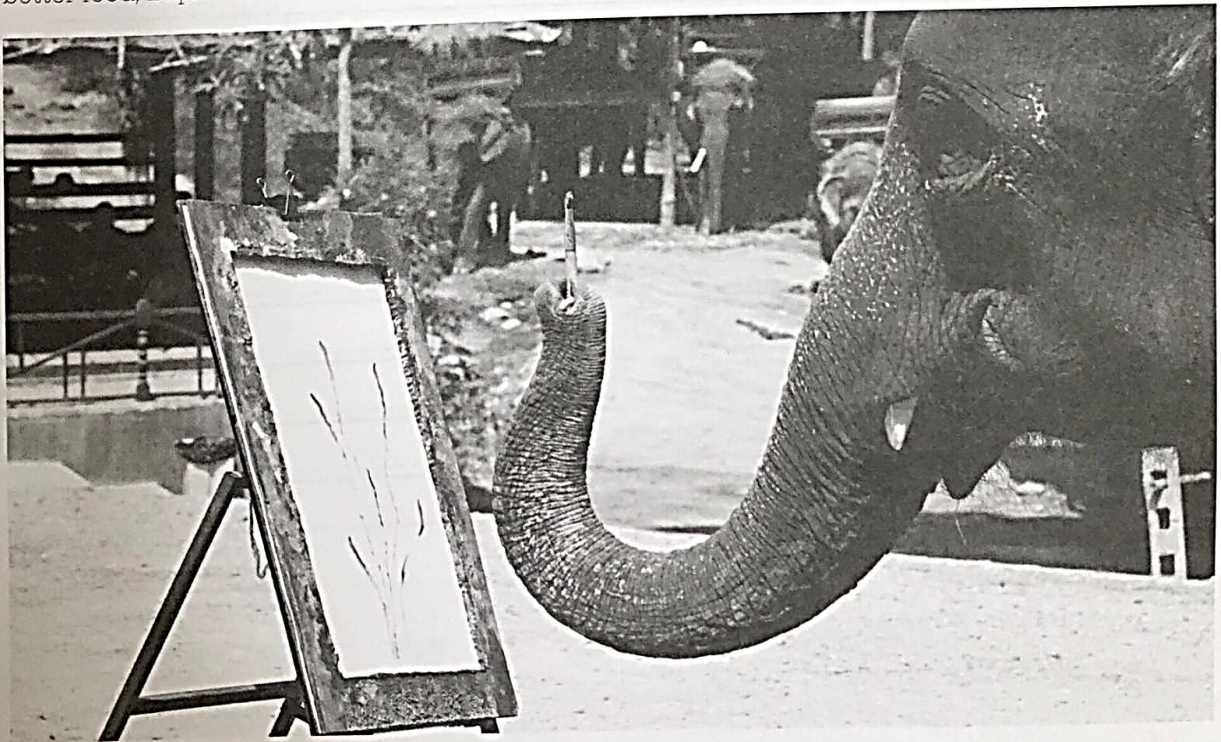
Passage A: The artistic elephant

An elephant called Noppakhao, also known as Peter, has painted dozens of works over the last few years, some of them **fetching** as much as \$700. He has a delicate brushstroke, a deliberate and controlled style, and an eye for colour that would give Picasso a run for his money. He paints pictures of other elephants, landscapes and flowers, preferring to paint from life rather than to produce abstract works. His most recent painting is a self-portrait.

Noppakhao – whose name translates as 'nine colours of the gemstones' – lives in Ayutthaya province in Thailand. He was introduced to painting eight years ago as part of the Asian Elephant Art & Conservation Project (AEACP), and the purpose of his artistic **endeavours** is to raise money for his **keep** and that of the 90 other elephants on the site, as well as for the training of caretakers. He works with his ¹*mahout*, Mr Pipat Salangam.

He is a popular and extrovert elephant who loves fun and being the centre of attention. According to his keepers, the 11-year-old bull elephant exhibits a wonderful sense of **dexterity** with the paintbrush. His *mahout* replenishes his brush with paint, but all the movements he makes with it grasped in his trunk are his own. The 'canvas' is paper produced from elephant dung, which is beautifully textured, odourless, and environmentally **sound**.

In the past, elephant painting has led to accusations that the animals are harshly treated in efforts to train them. However, the AEACP insists it does not **tolerate** any abuse of the elephants, either while painting or in everyday interaction. It says: 'We **strive** to give as many elephants as we can a happy, healthy, enriched existence. Money raised by the AEACP is used to provide **captive** elephants with better food, improved shelter and proper veterinary care.'



¹ elephant keeper

Passage B: The elephant and the blind men

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived six blind men. They were friends, but each of them thought himself very wise, much wiser than the others.

One day these six wise blind men went for a walk in a zoo. They could not see the animals but they wanted to listen to them, and they were especially interested in the elephant, of which they had heard much.

That day the zoo-keeper had forgotten to lock the gate of the elephant's cage. Elephants are naturally very curious animals, so it immediately pushed the gate to the cage to see if it might open. To its great delight, it swung wide and the elephant was able to stroll through. Just at that moment the six blind men were passing the elephant's cage. One of them heard a twig snap and went over to see what it was that was walking nearby.

'Greetings!' said the first blind man to the elephant. 'Could you please tell us the way to the elephant enclosure?' The elephant made no noise, but it shifted its weight from left to right, and rocked backwards and forwards. The first blind man walked over to see if this big silent person needed any help. With a bump, he walked right into the side of the elephant. He put out his arms to either side, but all he could feel was the unyielding body of the elephant stretching away in both directions. The first blind man said to the others, 'I think I must have walked into a wall. That's the only explanation.'

The second blind man joined the first. He took up a position to the front of the elephant and grabbed hold of the animal's trunk. He quickly let go of it and shouted, 'Don't be ridiculous. This isn't a wall. This is a snake! We should keep away in case it's poisonous.'

The third man didn't believe either of the other two and decided to find out for himself what it was. He walked to the rear of the elephant and touched its tail. He laughed and said, 'This is neither a wall or a snake. You are both wrong once again. It is quite clear that this is a rope.'

The fourth man knew how opinionated and stubborn his friends could be, always claiming that they were right and the others wrong. He took it upon himself to give his verdict and settle the matter. He crouched down and felt around the bottom of one of the elephant's legs. 'My dear friends,' explained the fourth man, 'this is neither a wall nor a snake. It is no rope either. What we have here, gentlemen, is a tree trunk. That's all there is to say. Let's move on.'

The fifth man had become impatient by now and he realised that it was up to him to pronounce definitively upon the matter. He walked up to the front side of the elephant and felt one of the animal's long tusks. 'What I am holding is long and curved and sharp at the end. It must be a spear. It is not safe to stay here.'

The sixth blind man was by now very puzzled that so many and such different answers could have been given by his five friends. He walked up to the front side of the elephant and grabbed something huge which flapped. He dismissed the other explanations and stated categorically that what they had found was a fan.

The six erstwhile friends began arguing with each other, each maintaining that they alone were right and justifying their opinion. They became very aggressive about it, and started insulting each other.

The zoo-keeper heard the noise the men were making, ran to where they were, and took hold of the escaped elephant, speaking gently to it. The sixth blind man called out, 'Could you please help us? My friends and I do not seem able to figure out what this nearby object is. One of us thinks it's a wall; one thinks it's a snake; one thinks it's a rope; one thinks it's four tree trunks; one thinks it's a sharp weapon. We are in danger of seriously falling out about this matter. Which of us is right, and how can one thing seem so different to six people?'

'Well,' said the zoo-keeper, 'you are all right. And you are all wrong. This is an elephant, but because you each encountered only a part of it, none of you were able to recognise what it really is.'