

Horton Hatches the Egg



Story Summary: Mazie was a lazy bird who did not like sitting on eggs. It was boring and she wanted to take off and see the world, so she asked Horton, the elephant to sit on the egg while she took a vacation. Horton sits through the fall, through the icy cold of winter and into the spring. Then hunters capture the elephant and take him to a circus ... tree, egg and all. Poor Horton, he doesn't like being a captive, but being "faithful 100%", he will not leave the egg. Then, just as the egg is about to hatch, Mazie returns and wants to claim it. Horton is laughed at by his jungle friends, exposed to the elements, captured by hunters, forced to endure a terrible sea voyage, and finally placed in a travelling circus. All through the ordeal Horton repeats this refrain:

*I meant what I said, and I said what I meant:
An elephant's faithful one hundred percent.*

Mayzie finds Horton at the circus just in time to see her egg hatch. She demands the egg back, but is denied it by Horton and onlookers when it hatches into a tiny winged elephant.

The moral of the story is "be responsible, even when it's difficult." This moral is established in several ways. First, Mayzie's demonstrated irresponsibility in leaving her egg for someone else to watch leads to her losing the implied benefit of her egg- a baby Mayzie. Second, Horton's **demonstrated responsibility** in keeping his promise to Mayzie by staying with the egg, even when it's hard to do so, gives him the benefit of a baby Horton hatching from the egg. Finally, the elephant's **ability to stay true and steadfast despite all manner of disasters** carries a traditional spiritual message: he is faithful, **not only to his external obligations, but to his inner self as well.**

I. Objective: To develop oral language facility students talk to partners from their own experience with a topic. Over a period of time, increase the amount of time and the size of the group.

Example: Three topics to introduce *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss:

being responsible, taking risks for a principle, enduring hardship

II. Before sharing the story, give students these open ended sentences.

Children can choose one to complete orally or in writing.

Upper primary students can be asked to finish the sentence and write two more sentences on the topic.

1. Keeping a promise is important because.....
2. To be lazy means.....
3. Persistence can be important when

III. DEBATE:

When the learner is ACTIVELY involved.

Have a debate with half the class giving reasons why Mazie should get the egg and the other half giving reasons why Horton should get the egg.

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1V.

The student produces a response to literature that is:

Interpretative: Why do you think Horton stayed on the nest?

Analytic: How is this story like the story of Beauty and the Beast?

Evaluative: What might be a better title for this story?

Reflective: What other book character needs to read this story?



Poor Horton. Dr. Seuss's kindly elephant is persuaded to sit on an egg while its mother, the good-for-nothing bird lazy Maysie, takes a break. Little does Horton know that Maysie is setting off for a permanent vacation in Palm Springs. He waits, and waits, never leaving his precarious branch, even through a freezing winter and a spring that's punctuated by the insults of his friends. ("They taunted. They teased him. They yelled 'How Absurd! Old Horton the Elephant thinks he's a bird!'") Further indignities await, but Horton has the patience of Job--from whose story this one clearly derives--and he is rewarded in the end by the surprise birth of... an elephant-bird. *Horton Hatches the Egg* contains some of Theodor Geisel's most inspired verse and some of his best-ever illustrations, the dated style of which only accentuates their power and charm. A book no childhood should be without. (Ages 2 to 7) --Richard Farr

Some see this as the triumph of hard work, patience, and loyalty. I guess I can see that. Certainly, lazy Mayzie is as villainous a deadbeat parent as I can think of, and Horton strikes a noble contrast.

However, I couldn't help reading this as Dr. Seuss' take on nature vs. nurture. Horton does all the real nurturing, and out comes an elephant-bird, a Lamarckian triumph and an inspiration to adoptive parents. I'm not sure if it's what Dr. Seuss believes to be true or if it is what he wishes to be true, "it should be, it should be, it should be that way."

I could do without the scene where the hunters point their rifles straight at Horton's heart, but that's just me. Evidently I'm too gentle for the world of children's literature.

Big thumbs up, though, good story, good rhymes, and not as insipid as the lazy-Mayzie "wocket in my pocket"-era Seuss. Most importantly, my daughter loves it.

Teaching children patience and persistence . . . well, that takes a lot of patience and persistence. *Horton Hatches the Egg* is a way to provide a small fictional example when setbacks and delays occur. My youngsters didn't understand Thomas Edison's comment about genius being 99 percent perspiration until they were well past their Dr. Seuss days. I like to think that their hard-working adult selves (for the three who are adults) were formed in part by Horton's example in this book.

This book contains many valuable lessons to encourage such as: **keeping your word; being honest; looking out for those in need; sticking through to the end; facing your fears; and many others.** It's a remarkable thing to realize also how well the ridiculous image of an unhappy elephant sitting on a nest in a bare tree can create all of those good notions. Way to go, Dr. Seuss!