GCSE

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WEDNESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2022 – MORNING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2

19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading and Transactional/Persuasive Writing

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

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Revealed: new evidence about the life and death of Jumbo, the giant Victorian sensation.

During his time as the greatest animal celebrity of the Victorian age, Jumbo the elephant outshone the biggest names of music hall and theatre. Now Alan Lee reports on the latest research on this remarkable animal, including Sir David Attenborough's work for his documentary about the elephant.



Jumbo the elephant drew millions of visitors, became a firm favourite of Queen Victoria's children and much later even inspired Walt Disney's classic cartoon film, 'Dumbo'. Yet behind all the adoration, Jumbo lived a sad, often painful existence.

Now Sir David Attenborough has become the latest researcher to try to uncover the truth about Jumbo, the "gentle giant". Jumbo stood four metres tall and weighed more than seven tons. The skeleton of the elephant is kept at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and Sir David was given unique access to it during the making of a BBC documentary.

Using the latest techniques, Attenborough and a team of scientists painstakingly examined Jumbo's bones. And they have come to some fascinating conclusions about Jumbo's medical condition and diet.

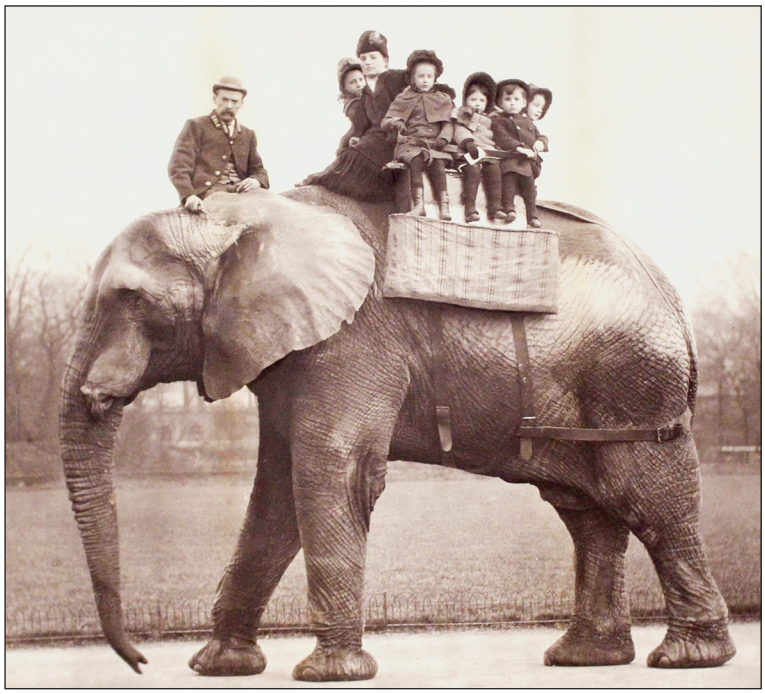
The elephant arrived at London Zoo in 1865. "Hardly anyone in Europe had seen a living African elephant 150 years ago," Sir David points out. Jumbo became an instant hit, attracting crowds of awe-struck Victorians who came to marvel at his growing size, take rides on his back and take photos using early cameras. Among those who are said to have adored Jumbo were Queen Victoria's children and a young Winston Churchill.

His keeper was Matthew Scott, who developed a strong bond with Jumbo. It was even claimed he discovered a way of communicating with the animal. The young elephant was disease-ridden when he arrived in London, but Scott nursed him back to health and did his best to treat him well. He even slept in the elephant's pen to keep him company. Yet Scott knew little about elephant behaviour and away from the crowds there was a darker side to Jumbo. He would have terrifyingly violent rages, where he would smash the wooden frame of his enclosure. "He did it so often that carpenters had to be called again and again to make repairs," says Sir David.

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He even broke his tusks in his frustration. Scientists now believe the reason for his rages was bad toothache caused by his monotonous diet, largely of sticky buns and hay. They found clear signs of damage to his teeth and indications of infection. Matthew Scott was also said to feed Jumbo whisky and beer to keep him calm, adding to his health problems. It is also known that 300 coins were discovered in Jumbo's stomach after his death – probably payment for rides which the elephant scooped up and swallowed.

Photographs from the time show as many as a dozen people on his back and the rides also caused some injury. Jumbo suffered joint problems. His bones were shown to be like those of an animal in its 50s, rather than in his mid-20s as he was when he died.



There's no evidence that he ever attacked anyone but zoo officials became increasingly worried. They feared that he would turn on Scott, or even worse, a child, causing a scandal, so when, in 1882, the Barnum Circus in America offered £2,000 for Jumbo, an enormous sum at the time, they found London Zoo in a mood to accept.

"It was an opportunity for the zoo to get rid of its problematic elephant," says Sir David. "A shocking decision was made to sell."

There was an outcry – 100,000 children wrote to Queen Victoria begging her to intervene, adults protested at the zoo – but there was no reprieve. Jumbo was put in a crate and shipped across the Atlantic with his loyal keeper. Huge crowds were waiting and Jumbo-mania erupted.

His popularity never faded but he died just three years later. While exercising at a railway yard in Canada, during a circus tour, Jumbo was struck by a train and killed. He was aged just 24, a tragically young age for an animal that can live to 70 in the wild. Matthew Scott is said to have wept uncontrollably as his best friend took his last breath.

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