

Cousins of Clouds
by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer
Illustrated by Megan Halsey and
Sean Addy

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About the book:

Tracie Vaughn Zimmer has a long-standing affection for elephants, and it shows. This book is a celebration of these remarkable animals: their huge size, their affectionate parenting, their loyalty to one another and sometimes to humans, their voracious appetites, their amazing trunks, their enjoyment of mud baths. The poems, some in the voices of the elephants themselves, are richly varied in form and tone. Each is accompanied by a brief sidebar explaining, or expanding on, the information it contains. Distinctive illustrations incorporating painting, collage, and found objects are a rich and playful counterpart to the text and may inspire young readers to create their own visual and poetic tribute to their favorite animals.

COUSINS OF CLOUDS

Elephant Poems

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Illustrator: Halsey, Megan

Illustrator: Addy, Sean

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Category: Picture Books

Classification: Poetry

REVIEWS:

“Zimmer writes with passion and sympathy... illustrators inject dashes of visual wit.. Purposeful, both informative and heartfelt.” - Kirkus

“Zimmer’s lovingly crafted works, moving. Warm and expressive mixed-media collages.” - Publisher’s Weekly

Author Interview:

1. How did you come to write a book about elephants?

Well, I love all animals but elephants are my absolute favorite! I can’t remember not being fascinated by their immense size, human-like feelings and that wacky trunk! I started writing the poems for my own amusement and to synthesize everything I’d learned over the years. It was like a grown-up science project.

2. Can you describe the format for this poetry collection?

It is kind of a two-for-one book. There are lots of poems, of course, but I couldn’t resist adding a non-fiction element for all those stray facts that could not be stuffed inside of the poems! The poems vary too. There are letter poems, cinquain, a sonnet, and my favorite- free verse. I fell in love with poetry before I fell in love with elephants, a very long time ago.

3. What advice do you have for young poets?

This may be a shock but don’t rhyme. Or, send rhyme out to recess! Poetry has so many tools to experiment with and rhyme is only one. Why not try some alliteration or personification or a giant vat of hyperbole? There are so many ways to play!



Cousins of Clouds

Pre-reading:

Use the chart below to brainstorm before and after reading the book:

Everything I know about elephants before reading Cousins of Clouds	Everything I learned:

Circle the fact that you found most interesting about elephants and discuss with a friend.

Teacher's Guide

Title: "Cousins of Clouds"

Type: Narrative free verse

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
What does this narrative poem explain to the reader about elephants?	Why do you think the author chose to include this story in the collection?	Can you define the following words by reading them in context?
What poetic elements are used to bring this poem to life?	What is your favorite line? Why?	Prophet, remote, swooped, quarrel, erupted, fracture, shrivel, pitiful
Do you think the prophet was justified in his actions or not? Why?	Can you make any connections to this poem from your life or to other stories?	Draw a picture for each of these words that will help you remember what it means.
What facts are also included on this page? Do you like the addition of the non-fiction element?	Why do you think so many cultures think elephants have special powers?	Use at least one of these words before the day is over!

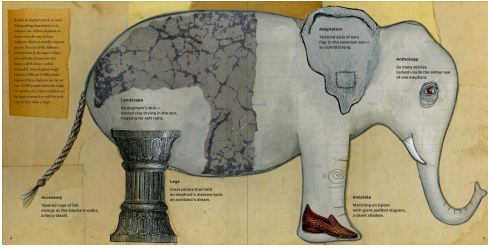
Mini-lesson ideas:

Define narrative poems with this poem as an example

Writers know and use the importance of strong verbs

Poets revise over and over again (use narrative writing project below for specific examples)

Imagery is a tool that uses words that appeal to your five senses.



Title: Elephant Haiku
Type: Haiku

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>Why would an elephant’s leg be an “architect’s dream?”</p> <p>Explain the titles of each of the poems.</p> <p>Find examples of metaphor on this page!</p>	<p>Why does the author compare the elephant to a shadow in the poem “Invisible?”</p> <p>How can stories be locked inside the eyes of an elephant? What does the author mean?</p>	<p>Give an example of the following words: Taper, scored, bulk, and tattered</p> <p>Brainstorm a list of synonyms for these words from the haiku: Begging, massive, swings, silent</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

Metaphors are comparisons between two things that help a reader make connections and see something in a new, fresh way.

Poets use metaphors because they are stronger than similes.

Haiku usually focus on the natural world and feature direct observation.

EXTENSION/Homework:

Write a haiku about your favorite animal! Remember that the best haiku capture a single moment in time (like a photograph). Haiku (like all good poetry) should make you see something in a new way, with fresh eyes.



Title: “Vantage” &

“Beggars of Bangkok”

Type: Narrative free verse

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>Create a venn diagram comparing the two elephants in these poems.</p> <p>How do the elephants earn their keep?</p> <p>What is the literal meaning of these two poems? What is the figurative (or deeper) meaning?</p>	<p>Which elephant do you think has a more difficult life?</p> <p>Would you like to take care of an elephant? Why or why not?</p> <p>Do you think animals should be taken from the wild to serve people or not? Why?</p>	<p>Rate the following words by how well you know them</p> <p>(0- never heard it (1- heard it once, maybe (2- read it before (3- know it</p> <p>Mahout Bangkok Tattered Speckled Metronome Cacophony Flail Prickle Serrated Pachyderm Vantage</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

Writers try to find the exact right word to describe something. Brainstorm ways they know these words or can find them. Find three words in a current draft that could be more specific or interesting.

Reading lesson: In a T-chart have students discuss what the poem says in each stanza (the literal meaning) and on the other side what it means (the figurative meaning).



Title: “Ivory” & “Mud Spa”

Type: Mask

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>Compare the tone of these two poems. (Remember: Tone in poetry is as easy to recognize as it is when your mom calls your name. You know whether you're in trouble or not. It's all in the TONE.)</p> <p>Why do elephants slather themselves in mud? Why do you think they like it so much?</p> <p>Why do you think the author wrote these poems as a mask?</p>	<p>Are there other products that should be protected? Why? Do you think this is a difficult process or not?</p> <p>Do you think ivory that has been gathered from elephants who have died a natural death should be sold at market or not? Why? What if the profits were used to support environmental projects?</p>	<p>List ten things people might buy as SOUVENIRS.</p> <p>Explain the word BOYCOTT to a five year old.</p> <p>Make a list of five things that you find SUBLIME!</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

A mask poem is when the writer pretends to be an animal or inanimate object and writes through their point of view. See also: "Old Elm Speaks" by Kristine O'Connell George. Poets make this choice to give the reader a new perspective or window into what it is like to be that animal or object.

Title: "Fortress"

Type: Shape

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
What does this poem	Why do you think the	Look up a dictionary (or

describe? Why is the word “Hyenas” repeated? What examples of personification are used in the poem? Why was this poetic element used?	author used a shape in the poem? What does it add to the meaning? Why does the whole herd work to protect one baby? Do humans ever act similarly?	internet dictionary) definition for the following words. Do they match the meaning in the poem or not? Fortress Rumble Lasso Slink
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Mini-lesson ideas:

The difference between shape and concrete poetry. [Shape poems use significant other poetic elements and arranged to mirror the subject. Concrete are visual but use limited words and repetition only]

Title: “Trunk” & “White Elephant”

Type: Shape & Cinquain

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>How can an elephant’s trunk be so many different things? What is the author trying to say here?</p> <p>Why are elephant’s trunks so amazing? How come young ellies look so silly with their trunks?</p> <p>How can you tell African and Asian elephant’s apart by their trunks?</p> <p>How were white elephants both a privilege and a curse?</p>	<p>Why might you consider trading in one of your arms and hands for a trunk? What would be the advantages? Disadvantages?</p> <p>Why are rare things (like white elephants) so much more valuable?</p> <p>Have you ever been given a “white elephant” gift? What is the polite thing to do with a gift you dislike?</p>	<p>Draw the amazing APPENDAGES of at least four different animals!</p> <p>Create a list of things or people that are SACRED to you, your family, religion or culture.</p> <p>List 5 things that could be considered a TOKEN of friendship.</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

What is the form of a cinquain? Try writing a series of cinquain on the same topic. Poems should be read aloud during revision.



Title: “Elephant Blues” Type: Blues Lyrics

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>In one sentence, tell what this poem is about.</p> <p>List the problems the elephants face in this poem. Do you have any similar problems or not?</p> <p>What is a recent discovery about the way elephant’s communicate with each other?</p>	<p>Why do you think the author decided to write this as a blues song?</p> <p>If the elephants could play instruments to accompany this poem which ones do you think they would choose? Why?</p>	<p>Create a word map of the word PLIGHT. Where does it lead you?</p> <p>Turn and talk: Tell your reading partner two reasons why someone might FLEE</p> <p>Define INFRASOUND so that your little brother or sister could understand it.</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

- What is rhyme scheme?
- Why do writers use repetition in poetry?
- What is rhythm in poetry?
- How do poets develop rhythm in a stanza and a line?

Title: “Dear Lola” & “This Is Just To Say”

Type: Apostrophe & Parody

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
Who is the speaker/writer in the poem “Dear Lola?” Why is she writing? Who is writing the poem in “This Is Just To Say” For what is he apologizing? What are three facts you learned about elephants from the non-fiction paragraphs?	Who was the last person to whom you wrote a letter? Why do people write letters? Why do they write poems? Do you think animals should be kept in zoos or not? Create a venn diagram about the advantages and disadvantages.	What are the two metaphors used to describe an animal in “Dear Lola?” “This Is Just To Say” is an example of a parody. Define parody and explain why this poem meets that requirement.

Mini-lesson ideas:

Why is a parody not plagiarism?

Why do authors write parodies?

Write a parody of your favorite poem.

Apostrophe poems write directly to an inanimate object or animal as if they could respond.

Write an apostrophe poem to your pet or dream pet.

Title: “Grace”
Type: Free verse

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>What is the setting of this poem? Why is setting important to all writing?</p> <p>Where does the author use onomatopoeia in the poem? Why here?</p> <p>What details are used to bring this poem to life? How do you choose good details for your own writing?</p>	<p>Do you think elephants and other wild animals should be performers? Why or why not?</p> <p>Why do you think people enjoy seeing animals perform?</p> <p>What is your favorite line in the poem? Why?</p> <p>Which illustration is your favorite in the book so far? Why?</p>	<p>Brainstorm a list (or make a word map) of all the terms you associate or think of with a circus. Categorize them in as many ways as possible. (Ex: active, verbs, nouns, colors, etc.)</p> <p>CONNOTATION/ DENOTATION: After defining the terms decide if the following words have positive or negative connotations: Kindergartners, recess, ringmaster, parade, stray, haunt</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

Define connotation and denotation. Why is the connotation of a word important to a writer? Can a writer ever completely hide how they feel about a subject or not? How do you think the author feels about performing elephants?



Title: “Sonnet for Sanctuary”
Type: Sonnet

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>What does this poem describe? What is the author’s slant or bias about sanctuaries?</p> <p>Are sanctuaries a good place for elephants or not? What would you consider a sanctuary for yourself?</p> <p>What does the author mean when she says, “they’re finally home?” when obviously elephants aren’t from Tennessee.</p>	<p>The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee offers ellies an amazing retirement but does not allow the public in at all. Do you think this is good or not? Why?</p> <p>Elephants can be quite dangerous to manage. In fact, it is the most dangerous occupation in the US. What should be done to insure animal and trainer’s safety?</p> <p>What animals or causes interest you?</p>	<p>There are two distinct meanings of a SANCTUARY. Still, there are some similarities between the words- what are they? Prove your understanding by writing two sentences for each of the definitions.</p> <p>Elephants migrate almost daily between feeding grounds in the wild. What other animals MIGRATE?</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

Writers write for a variety of purposes- to explain, inform, entertain, persuade. What do you think the author’s purpose was for writing this poem? This book? Write about an animal in each of the four purposes!

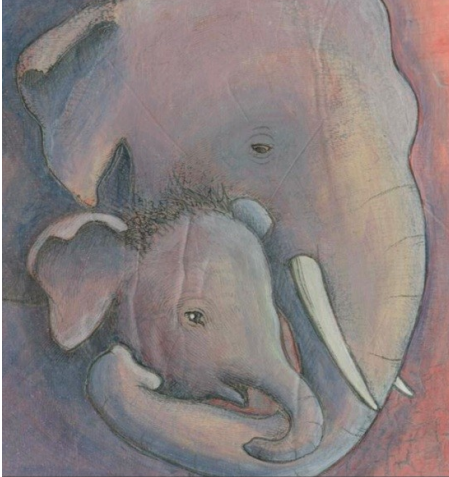
Title: “A Riddle”

Type: Riddle

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>Why doesn't the author come out and tell you the subject of the poem ?</p> <p>Who is the narrator of this poem? How do you figure out who is speaking in a poem?</p> <p>How many clues are given about the identity of the narrator?</p>	<p>Do you like puzzles and riddles? What makes a good riddle?</p> <p>Why do you think the author decided to write this poem as a riddle?</p> <p>Do you think adults or kids enjoy puzzles or riddles more? Why?</p>	<p>Rank the following words by how well you know them with best on top:</p> <p>Hindu Rotund Tusk Patron Merchant Offerings Spirit Ganesh</p> <p>Turn & Talk: Compare your ranking with a friends and discuss meanings of words.</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

Sometimes poets write just for fun! Using “A Riddle” as a guide write your own riddle poem about something from your own culture or about an animal that you love!

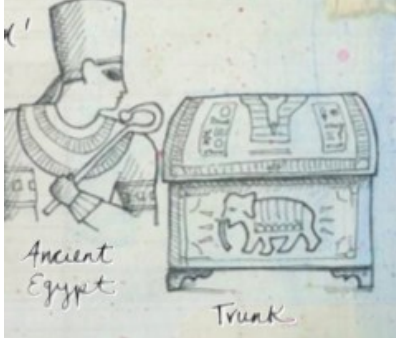


Title: “Patience”
Type: Free verse

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
How would you describe elephant mother’s after reading this poem?	Create a venn diagram that compares good human mom’s to good elephant moms.	In pairs try to come up with both synonyms and antonyms for the following words:
How does the author “show” rather than “tell” what a good mother looks like?	Can you imagine living with all the women in your family for your whole life like female elephants do?	Soak Nomadic Bulk Siphon Misty Clamber
In the last stanza is the author talking about a bath?	Who would lead the herd in your family if the matriarch was the leader?	Scold Nuzzle Gentle

Mini-lesson ideas:

Poems are about first-hand observation. Many of the poems in the collection seem to be written as if the writer is watching the events happen in real time. Look through the collection and identify which ones meet this criterion. Put a post it note on each poem that does. Turn and talk: Why do authors do this? What does it give the reader? Reading connection: as you read poems today see if they are first hand observations. Then, try to write a poem about an animal by direct observation.



Title: “Inspiration”

Type: Free verse

Comprehension:	Discussion:	Vocabulary:
<p>Where can you find images of elephants? Why are they found even where they've never lived?</p> <p>What do you think an elephant is a symbol of in different societies? Why?</p>	<p>What is the author trying to say about elephants? Do you agree?</p> <p>If you were going to create a piece of art based on an elephant what media would you choose? Why?</p>	<p>Turn and Talk: Challenge! Use each of these words in a sentence with your friend-</p> <p>Image Pharoah Hewn Palace Sculpted Illustrated Medieval Imagination Behemoth</p>

Mini-lesson ideas:

: Writers (and poets especially) use strong verbs to bring their writing to life. Find all the verbs in this poem. Now read the poem but leave the verbs out. Discuss the difference. How can you replace boring verbs (especially linking or helping verbs) with strong, active ones?

Writing Project:
Narrative Poetry
Read: “Cousins of Clouds”

Define: A narrative poem is one that tells a story. This story can be a true story, a myth, a folktale, or fiction. The narrative poem in this book was inspired by a few different stories about elephants and that in Asia some believe they once had wings and were called cousins of clouds. Well, I couldn’t just ignore that juicy detail! I set out to write a poem to explain how it came to be.

Step One: Brainstorm

Brainstorm a list of fairytales or folktales that you could rewrite as a narrative poem:

--

Step Two: Draft

Write a DRAFT of your poem. Just get the story down, to start. Don’t worry about how many words or anything. Just tell the story. You might right your first draft to look like a poem, and play with line breaks or you might not. It’s up to you. Use this chart to help you brainstorm first if you like:

Sense:	Details:
Things you can SEE	
Things you can HEAR	
Things you can SMELL	
Things you can TOUCH	
Things you can TASTE	

Step Three: Cut! Cut! Cut!

Go through your draft and cut absolutely ANY word that isn't necessary. Now, play again with line breaks.

Step Four: Revise

The most difficult part of writing a narrative poem is to tell a story in the fewest possible words. Finding the EXACT right word is not just important it's necessary!

Here are some words that changed in revisions of Cousins of Clouds:

Original:	Revision:
Before man wrote words	Before man TAMED words to the page
Landed above the prophet in a tree	Swooped in with the first ribbons of dawn
A quarrel broke out among them	A quarrel ERUPTED
The prophet unleashed a terrible curse	The prophet INVOKED a DREADFUL
Vaporized the elephant's prized wings	Shriveling the elephants prized wings into pitiful ears

The differences are subtle but added together the revision is much stronger!

You try:

**HINT: VERBS are the MOST important words! Find ACTIVE verbs!

Your original:	Revision:

Step 5: Read It Aloud

Poetry is about sound just like music. Reread your poem now and listen for clunkers. If your tongue trips on the words, it probably needs to be revised!

Step 6: Share!

Have a poetry mic event where students share in front of the room. Or, post in the hallways or bulletin board. And, share with the author: tvzimmer@mac.com