

SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT (TEACHER GUIDE)

I stood **at the edge of the road**, rifle in hand, hesitating before the watching crowd. **To act as** they expected—to assert authority—was my only recourse, even though shooting the elephant **against my will** felt like betraying my own reason. **In moments like this**, when the weight of expectation presses down, one realizes how fragile one's freedom becomes. **With the rifle poised against** my shoulder, I found myself torn between conscience and duty—between telling the truth of my heart and doing what was proper.

The elephant, standing eight yards from the road, began tearing up grass, beating the tufts against its knees to clean them, then stuffing the blades into its mouth. Watching it **from a distance**, I sensed a peacefulness that contradicted its size. To let it wander off, rather than controlling the spectacle, would have been both merciful and wise. But **to choose** mercy—to choose to stand aside—felt impossible, given the sea of expectant faces crowding around me **with their eyes fixed on** my act.

I remembered marching down the hill, **feeling like** a fool, rifle slung carelessly over my shoulder, among the jeering crowd behind me. **To appear** resolute, to look unwavering, was what they demanded. Yet, knowing that I ought not **to shoot**, I still held the rifle ready. **In that moment**, I realized how imperialism—**turning people into** performers for an indifferent audience—destroys not only the oppressed but the oppressor as well.

I felt the two thousand wills behind me, pushing me forward **into the role** I did not want. Shooting this elephant, standing in its calm innocence, should not have been my fate. And yet, **to back down—to retreat** without doing what was expected—would have invited derision. **In the eyes of** the crowd, pulling back would have been a sign of weakness: “He cowered,” they would say, “he failed **to embody** the firmness of his station.”

So I raised the rifle, preparing **to fire in front of** two thousand pairs of eager eyes. The elephant looked no more dangerous than a grazing cow, with its massive body relaxed, its trunk-guided meal undisturbed. **To pull** the trigger, I thought, would be **to destroy** not only an animal but the last vestige of my integrity. Yet, the burden of expectation weighed heavier than the burden of killing.

To shoot was **to pretend**; **to continue** pretense was **to lose** myself. I squeezed the trigger slowly, feeling the recoil through my hands and down to my resolve. In fleeing afterward—walking away from the lifeless form—I carried the stain of that moment, the knowledge that my act had been dictated by the masses, not by my moral judgment.

Later, in quietness **away from** prying eyes, I reflected on what I had done. **To stand for** something greater—justice, empathy, reason—no longer seemed possible under the mask I had worn. I had performed my **duty for appearance's sake**, and I realized that **to please** the crowd was **to betray** myself.

Source: Orwell, G. (1936). *Shooting an Elephant*. The Orwell Foundation. <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/shooting-an-elephant/>

Key

Prepositional Idioms

Infinitive Idioms

Gerund Idioms

Spotlight on Grammar Features

Use the following as a reference when answering student questions.

Prepositional Idioms (word must be followed by a specific preposition to maintain meaning)

- at the edge of – at the boundary or limit of something
- against my will – without my consent or desire
- in moments like this – during situations of this kind
- with the rifle poised against – positioned ready for action
- from a distance – from far away
- with their eyes fixed on – watching intently
- in that moment – at that exact time
- into the role – assuming a specific duty or part
- in the eyes of – in the opinion of
- in front of – before the view of
- away from – at a distance from
- for appearance's sake – to keep up outward show

Infinitive Idioms (verb followed by infinitive form, required for correct meaning)

- to act as – to serve in the role of
- to assert – to declare or state firmly
- to let – to allow or permit
- to choose – to decide to take a particular action
- to appear – to seem or look like
- to shoot – to fire a weapon
- to back down – to withdraw from a challenge
- to retreat – to withdraw or pull back
- to embody – to represent in physical or visible form
- to fire – to discharge a weapon
- to pull – to exert force to move something toward oneself
- to destroy – to ruin or end something completely
- to pretend – to act in a false way
- to continue – to keep doing something
- to lose – to stop having something
- to stand for – to represent or support
- to please – to make someone happy or satisfied
- to betray – to be disloyal to

Gerund Idioms (verb followed by gerund form, required for correct meaning)

- feeling like – experiencing the sensation of being (emotion/state)
- turning ... into – causing something to change into something else

