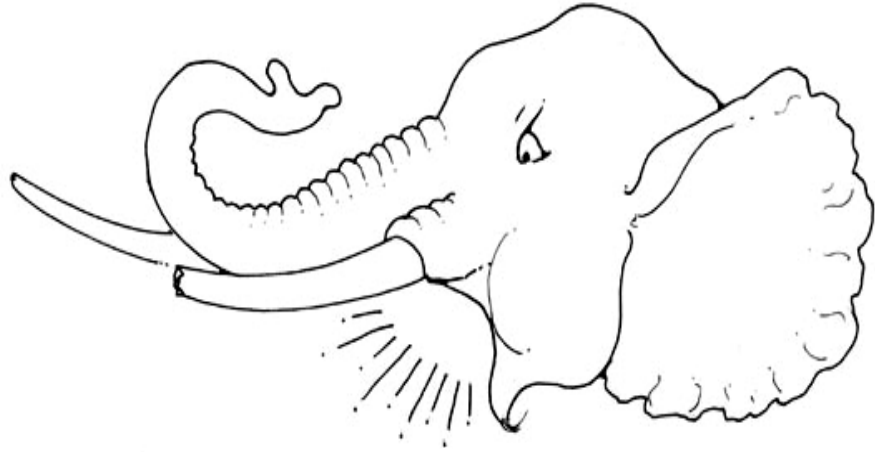
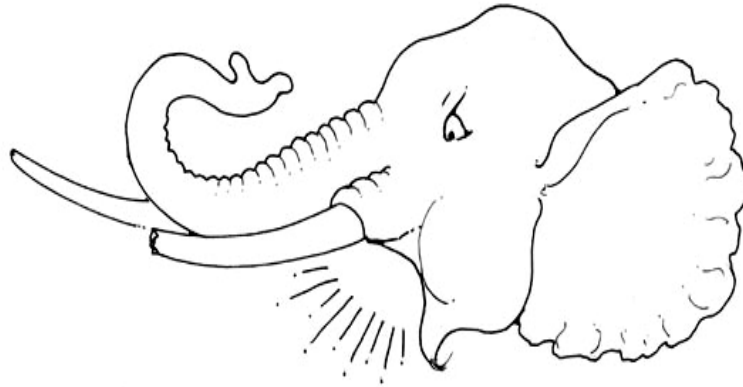


THE INVISIBLE POACHER



*and how knowing and
believing the real facts about
how HIV/AIDS is spread
will help those who have lost
their parents grow up strong
and safe*

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In the village of Campfire, there lived an old grandmother who had four sons. All her sons died of AIDS each leaving behind orphans, eight in total. After the death of their parents, the children went to live with her in her house which stood at the edge of a large forest. The children kept on asking their grandmother; “Why did my father and mother die ? Didn’t they know then what we know?” Grandmother said: “Let me tell you a story about the invisible poacher and the elephant who moved very slowly”.

This is the story the grandmother told:

“There was once an elephant who use to move very slowly, Oh so very slowly. He was very big and very intimidating. When he walked along the river his jungle mates would shake. When he started to run he would shake the ground and make them all fall down; Rumble, rumble, rumble, Hear the jungle rumble ...

Trees shake and sway as the birds fly away. Lions run and hide with their babies by their side. Rumble, rumble, rumble. Hear the jungle rumble! But what was it that made such a huge elephant move fast and caused so much disturbance? It was a mouse!!!

That old slow elephant lived deep in the forest and had a family, and often whenever there was trouble, he would summon his entire family, his wife and children. Three of his older children were grown up then, while the third one was still young and vulnerable. Each of the older children had families of their own.

Deep in the forest there was a river which passed across the ridges. The source of the river was also believed to be somewhere to the West where the sun would hide at the end of day. There was a single watering point for all the animals on that river and all the animals always had a fantastic time when drinking from this point.

One day, the old slow elephant gathered his family to discuss the dangers in the jungle. After every one had given their views, it was generally agreed that the number one threat was the mouse. The old slow elephant spoke in his slow rumbling voice, “We must keep our trunks off the ground at all times when we are on your way to the river. We must keep clear of all the rubbish heaps and watch

out for all creeping creatures. In that way we shall guard against our enemy the mouse”

A little bull asked, “Father, what about the lions and other walking animals?”

“They fear me,” said the old slow elephant. “While I am around they are no threat to us”.

Late one afternoon, one of the older sons of the elephant family who lived far away with his own family decided to go the watering point. He told his wife and children he would not come home until late. He observed all the rules that the family had agreed. He kept his trunk up and looked carefully on the ground for creeping creatures.

Something new was standing by the road but he ignored it since it was not creeping or crawling. It did not look like an animal since it stood on two legs. And so he went on with journey. When he came closer, this strange new creature held forward something that the elephant thought looked like his own trunk. The elephant stood there for some quick minutes. The shadowy creature raised its “trunk” and “Bang!” A great sound came.

Then rumble, rumble, the elephant went running, but every step became more difficult until soon he felt dizzy and fell down. He tried to blow the trumpet but was short of breath. He tried to whisper something but realised he was alone. He knew for sure that it was not a mouse attack. He knew he would die. He remembered his family, his parents, brothers and sisters. He would have wanted to tell them something but it was too late.

It was not until the next day when the entire family realised that he had not returned to the herd. Then they searched and the reality dawned on them. Sorrow, anguish and sense of loss overwhelmed them .

Grandma paused in her story

“Can you predict whom they held responsible?” she asked

And the children said, “ Yes, the mouse!”

But then one of them asked, “But grandma how can a such a small animal as a mouse threaten an elephant?”

Granny said; “Just hold on and listen”. She went on with her story:

“The elephant family later gathered for the funeral, which includes visiting the fallen member. They would move in circles, placing their trunks on the carcass. They were so angry with the mouse and did not even realise that the tusks were missing! But the old slow elephant did!

This incident happened at the watering point on the banks of the river west of the Sun and east of the Moon. So the old huge and slow elephant, gathered his family including his orphaned grandchildren around him. “Though we must still fear the mouse,” he trumpeted, “We must take every step we can to save ourselves.” Let us leave this watering hole and move far away from where our kinsman was killed. Let us travel far away. So he and many members of the herd started watering at another point at the far end of the forest.

But some younger members of the herd would not agree to this. They could be heard saying;” We’re still young and strong and sharp eyed. We can spot any mouse and we can outrun it.” So they stayed in their former homes.

One year after the incident, the lonely wife of the first casualty ventured back to the same spot where her husband died to seek consolation. But fate is sometimes unkind and she met the same shadowy creature with the trunk pointed at her. She too was shot. She too tried to run. She too tried to trumpet and she too died.

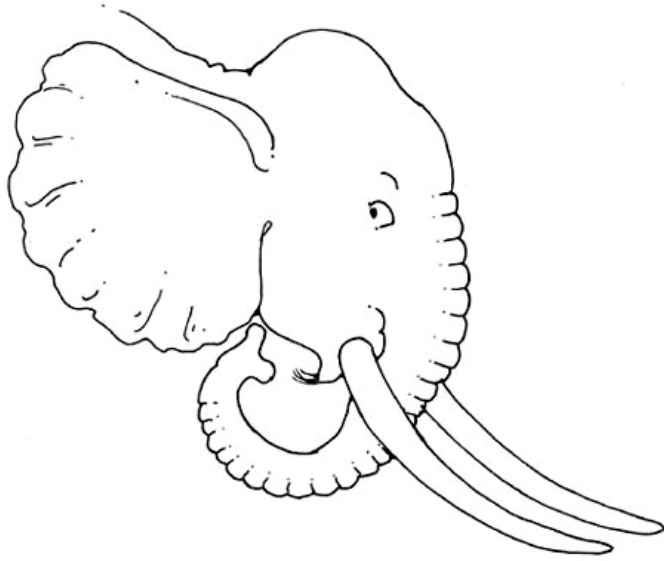


The following day, the news reached the village. The children who had remained with their mother were devastated. Now completely alone and so alone, they moved across the forest to live with their grand parents who were very slow and always loved to move very slowly.

Among the herd a meeting was urgently called and every one was asked to check with their other families, their cousins, friends and neighbours. From this “finding out” shocking truths became plain.

Many young elephants had been killed in mysterious circumstances and a resemblance had started to emerge on the causes of their death. The scenes where death took place were the same, with missing tusks and many similar signs. However, something was obviously different. Not all the deaths occurred at the watering point west of the sun and east of the moon. Death had occurred all over the jungle and many baby elephants had been left without adults to protect them from marauding lions, jackals and hyenas. Could the mouse have been responsible for all this?

Because the slow and huge elephant grandfather was well known, many baby elephant orphans came to live with him. He kept them close and would not allow them to wander away in the forest but he was very old then and did not have enough resources to support the now bigger extended family. The children had to learn to help each other and so the older children began to take their turn helping the younger ones. So well did they keep them safe that not one of them died.



Among the rest of the herd a state of alert was declared. Trumpets were blown to warn young elephants from venturing way deep into the forest. But these youngsters became impatient with their elders and, soon, many young elephants started venturing into the forest because it was cool to hang out with friends. They thought, “We are still young and strong and sharp eyed. Even if the mouse is not responsible we can spot any other animal and outrun it.”

So they ignored all the warnings. The more they ignored the warning, the more they were attacked by the creature with the long trunk who killed from a distance. Some lived with their wounds but others died leaving behind their loved ones. The invisible poacher had taken its prey.

The death toll was so high that even other animals noticed that the elephant population had fallen drastically. There was no more trumpeting and bull fights, no rumbles and falling of trees. The forest was somehow quiet and herds of elephants were markedly absent at the old watering point. But by this time the older and

wiser elephants were beginning to piece together the real truth. But they still were not quite sure.

Then one day the old elephant who liked to move slowly again ran fast, its trunk high in the air. He and his friends had found the answer. Was the mouse still the enemy number one? No, the creature on two legs with the 'trunk' had been identified. They now knew where he hunted from and how he hunted and would not go near.

Some years down memory lane, the old elephant who liked to move slowly realised that the younger orphans were now coming of age and would soon start venturing deep into the forest. He would tell them in turns and told them this story, about their parents and what happened at the watering point West of the sun and east of the moon. He told them stories each evening on what their parents wished for them and tried to give them as much support as possible.

One of the grandchildren then asked a rather strange question; "Grandma; is AIDS the invisible poacher and did AIDS take away our parents?"

Grandma answered softly, "Yes, and this is why I always teach you about HIV and AIDS so that I do not have to lose you. That is why we must not believe old stories about how AIDS is spread as the elephants believed the story about the mouse. That is why we must find out the truth as the old slow elephant did. When we have found the truth we will know that we have the power to control HIV/AIDS through our own actions.

Now let me tell you the end of the story.”

The elephant population increased by as a result of the support the old slow elephant grandfather had given to the baby orphans.

Many elephant families started thriving. The trumpets would be heard from time to time and the bulls started fighting again!

“Grandma!” said one of the children. “So you are the old elephant! Hehehehe, “and they ran to her and hugged her.

From that time on, the orphaned children understood what happened to their parents and that they had a choice to stay safe from AIDS even as they grow up.

Author's note

AIDS in Africa is like the Invisible poacher who comes to destroy families, but African children under new banner of resilience and determination are overcoming AIDS. Africa now knows AIDS and will not call it mouse! It is not the traditional myths or a curse from God. Children now growing up and learning in African schools now know about AIDS and Africa will live.

NOTES FOR THE TEACHER

About the Story

The story, written by an African educator, is suitable for any child over ten in almost any country, It particularly emphasises the importance of facing up to the truth about HIV/AIDS which has long been a central problem for HIV/AIDS education "The mouse" has taken many forms, blaming others; fatalism and denial of links between the HIV virus and AIDS. The same issues are covered in the Joanne, Fatima and Gregoire story. Towards the end of the story there are important references to how Aids orphans can help each other.

Activities.

The most important activities in this story are discussion and survey.

The children must learn to "translate" the allegory:

What do you know and think about how HIV is spread? Can you identify the Mouse and the Poacher? What do other people in your family and community really think? What can and should be done? The discussions have an important component, that of differentiating between what people say they think and what they really think.

Issues about AIDS orphans can also be raised here. What is the community's responsibility to them? We cannot leave all to the "old slow elephants."

Written specially for this publication by M.C. Rabudi, a programme Manager at Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium, a national AIDS service organisation based in Kenya- East Africa. KANCO is a Child-to-Child collaborating centre

