

# Shooting the elephant essay examples

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



There are some choices that one is forced to do and live with. In George Orwell's essay "shooting an elephant," he recounts some life event when he was forced to choose between two evils. Several years later this episode still haunts George. This story takes place during five unhappy years of the writer. He hates his life and when a dilemma faces him, he is forced to kill a valuable animal at work in order to save his pride. In his own thinking, George is justified in killing the animal. His character in the essay has been demonstrated as one having a lot of pressure in making decisions and coping with the horrifying results that follow. There was a potential to show off his high morals and confidence but this was taken away when he shot the animal. Its death is a symbol of Orwell's weak character but also indicates pride.

George Orwell is very unhappy in his job and he lives in isolation mentally. He hates imperialism, the Burmese natives and his job. He lives alone in his thoughts and does not admit that "imperialism was an evil thing" to his fellow country men. He fears being humiliated publicly so he adheres to the pressure of killing the elephant in order to save his pride. He is however ashamed of the shooting but as usual he does this in his mind. He does not want to "look like a fool" in front of the crowd that is why he pulls the trigger. However, this decision involves common sense and poor morals." "The crowd would laugh at me", he says this in order to justify his actions but in real sense guilt was eating him up for killing an innocent animal that was tamed and so peaceful. This is indicted in his next sentence when he says that "it seemed to me like it would be murder to shoot him"

According to Orwell the elephant must die for his pride to live. If Orwell

walked near the elephant, he could get killed and the Burmese people would laugh at him. He considered the laughter and said “ that would never do,” and decided that leaving without killing the animal was not an option either. “ A sahib must act as a sahib, he has to appear resolute and make definite decisions.” This implies that the Burmese people would consider him a weak man if he decided to bail out of killing the animal. Since the British have created an image that demands respect from the Burmese people, they have to live with the image that they want to create and uphold. Ignoring his conscience he pulls the trigger and shoots the animal, though it does not die immediately.

Orwell highly values respect among the people. He even says that “ every white man’s life in the East was one long struggle to be laughed at” . This is a weakness on the side of the reader that plagues the writer through out the essay displaying his weakness and softness. According to the writer this was something that the British had to live with to uphold their image among the Burmese. This softness foreshadowed the collapse of the author’s morals which caused the slow and agonizing death of the animal. His mistake, though justified by his pride, cost him his good character and had to watch the animal die in pain. This sight was so disturbing in his mind that he had to leave the scene, “ In the end I could not stand it. and went away” . This shows that the writer is ashamed of his actions and regrets killing the animal but he is still defending his pride. He could not afford to be humiliated. As if the decision made was not a mistake, Orwell justifies his actions by giving a reason for killing the elephant. His shame mental but he has an uplifted ego as he says, “ afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been

killed it put me legally in the right and it gave me pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered if any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking like a fool". This indicates that his actions were justified and everybody would appraise them since he did not look like a fool, instead he acted bravely. In his mind he knows that he would have demonstrated a higher ethical standard if he had not pulled the trigger. His standards, sense of self standing and confidence perished with the animal. To him this was less important as compared to his pride and ego. Even though the shooting disturbs the author, the reader is not able to convey the mistake made in the action. The animal died in "tortured gasps" that "continued as steadily as the ticking of the clock". Orwell must live with the guilt and the lost integrity, but it is a small price to pay when his ego and pride are still intact. Though the decision made by the author in shooting the elephant was immoral, the community made it justifiable.

## **Works Cited**

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