



Mughal Miniatures: The Elephant and the Drummer

History

The Mughal Empire was founded by Babur, a prince of Afghanistan. When he was driven out of his kingdom of Samarkand, he invaded India in 1526, and defeated the Sultan of Delhi, taking his lands to rule.

Babur's grandson, Akbar, was the greatest of the Mughal emperors. Akbar came to the throne in 1556. He was a good soldier and expanded the empire. He ruled justly with tolerance, and people of many religions and races served him loyally.

Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan, loved architecture. He had many famous buildings constructed, including the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal.



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Source: [Tales from India by Bali Rai](#)

Story

The tales of Akbar and his wise adviser, Birbal, are a popular part of Indian folklore. This story ([How Akbar met Birbal](#)) explains how Birbal, an ordinary man, rose to become Emperor Akbar's most-trusted royal adviser - not because of his wealth, appearance or connections but because of his wit and wisdom!

Body Confidence

The Elephant and the Drummer show explores themes of body positivity and self-acceptance which you could explore with your class.

Discussion questions

- What was making Elnaz feel sad?
(*She couldn't dance like the other animals*)
- How did Dholli help her?
(*She showed her love and acceptance, and helped her discover her own unique way of dancing*)



Reflection activity

- What activities make you feel good about yourself?
- Who are the people around you who make you feel good about yourself?
- The body that you have is unique to you. Your body is used for many different functions. Take some time to think about what your body does that you are grateful for e.g. it helps me run and play my favourite sports, it keeps me healthy and strong

Further resources: Twinkl, BBC Teach, Dove Self-Esteem Project Discussion questions

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Dance and Music

Elnaz and Dholli love to dance! The type of dance in the show is called Kathak – it is a storytelling dance and originally comes from North India.

Dance activity

First, watch our short tutorials to learn some of the dance moves from the show:

- [Animals Dance Tutorial](#)
- [Trees & Plants Dance Tutorial](#)

Next, can you make up some elephant dance moves?

- Which parts of your body are you going to use?
- How can you make yourself look big and heavy?
- Will you move slow or fast?

Pick a track from this [playlist \(Passages by Ravi Shankar and Philip Glass\)](#) and put all your dance moves together to create your own dance performance of animals exploring the forest!

Visual Art

The show takes inspiration from the traditional art of Indian and Persian miniature painting. These paintings were very detailed and are like looking through a window into the life and adventures of the Mughal emperors.

Often, they were smaller than the palm of your hand, so the painters had to use tiny brushes and even a horse's eyelash to paint in all the detail!



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Check out some of the paintings here:

- [Akbarname \(Book of Akbar\)](#)
- [Album of Persian and Indian calligraphy and paintings](#)

Art activity

Can you draw a tiny snapshot of your own life? Use bright colours, add lots of detail and finish with a beautiful, patterned frame!



Get in touch – share your photos with us or express an interest in a Spark Festival 2026 performance

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