

Podcast: [What If World](#)

Episode: 29: What if elephants were small and could talk and meerkats were big?

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Transcription by Keffy

[Rising harp scales followed by the What If World theme song.]

Lyrics: What if kittens played the glockenspiel? And what if unicorns were real? What if you could fly or travel back in time, we welcome you to What If World. What If World. This is What If World.

Mr. Eric: Hey there folks, and welcome back to What If World, the show where your questions and ideas inspire off the cuff stories. I'm Mr. Eric, your host and today we're doing something a little bit different. You see, we got a question from Elizabeth, and well, why don't we just start with that because I really, really love this question.

Parent: Say, I am Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: [Laughs]

Parent: And what do you like?

Elizabeth: Elephants.

Parent: And what's your question?

Elizabeth: What if elephants could talk?

Mr. Eric: Elizabeth you have the greatest laugh, I hope you never stop laughing. And I love your question. Now, What If World is made better every week by each of your ideas, by all of our imaginations put together. And Elizabeth, there was another little girl from another part of the world who had a similar question.

Now, let's just listen to Avi's question.

Avi: Hi, my name is Avi and I'm four years old and I like ballet. And my question is, what if elephants were small and meerkats were big?

Parent: Say thanks.

Avi: Thanks.

Mr. Eric: Whoa, Avi, that is super cool. So we have some related questions here and we've got a lot of questions coming in so we're going to do

something brand new, totally different, totally awesome! We're going to put your questions together so we have: What if elephants could talk? And also: What if elephants were small and meerkats were big? So cool. So let's find out together.

What if elephants were small and could talk, and meerkats were big?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Not long ago in the Howvannah, none of the animals or creatures were able to talk until one day an elephant named Del Efante found a magic bellows. A bellows is a strange sort of tool. Kind of looks like a weird accordion and you pull on the handles to make it bigger and suck in air, and then you push them back together to blow out that air. People used to use it to stoke fires.

Del Efante found this mysterious bellows one day. He put his trunk at the little tip where the air comes out and then he pushed just a little bit on the bellows part.

[Sound like an elephant trumpeting with something stuck in its trunk]

He made a startled elephant noise as air sprung out of the bellows and into his trunk giving him the ability to talk.

Del Efante: My goodness, I can talk. And I have a smooth and sultry voice, especially for an elephant.

Mr. Eric: Del Efante went around all of the Howvannah, pushing down on this bellows for anyone that wanted the ability to talk. Soon there were talking lions, hyenas, scorpions, toucans, meerkats, zebras, giraffes. Even some rocks and trees learned how to talk. Del Efante was the most popular elephant in all the Howvannah and he started a talk show.

The Howvannah didn't have internet, radios, or television. Instead, creatures would gather all around to a big outcropping of stone that acted as a stage, and they would watch Del Efante interview different guests that had the ability to talk.

They wouldn't even try to eat each other that day. They'd just enjoy some water together and the show.

[Energetic talk show music plays]

Del Efante: I am Del Efante, the biggest, loudest talking elephant in all the Howvannah. Today is a very special day.

Mr. Eric: Wildebeests and toucans and hyenas all giggled with excitement.

Del Efante: Because today we have one of the Howvannah's cutest families as our guests. Can you 20 kids come on up here?

[Talk show music plays again in the background with applause]

Mr. Eric: A whole mob of meerkats suddenly rose from their seats and stepped up to the stage. Meera was the most confident of the meerkats so she decided to do the talking.

Meera: Hello Del Efante, thanks for having us on your show. We're... we're really uh, quite excited.

Del Efante: Well, we're going to get straight to the hard hitting questions. What is it, do you think, that makes meerkats so tiny and cute? And adorable and everyone just wants to hug you and squeeze you and have you as pets?

Meera: [Sighs]

Mr. Eric: Meera had heard questions like this before.

Meera: Well, our size doesn't have anything to do with how uh, powerful we are or what we're capable of and we don't like to be identified as just cute little creatures here for your enjoyment.

Del Efante: Wow. Is it not cute, my audience, when the meerkat gets mad?

[Audience applause and laughter]

Look at them all. They chitter and they bite.

Mr. Eric: And the lions roared with laughter.

[Roars and laughing]

Right beside those cackling hyenas.

Meera: Now, listen,

Mr. Eric: Said Meera.

Meera: Not a one of us has gotten to bite anyone on this stage. If we wanted to bite, we could. A whole mob of meerkats is no laughing matter.

Del Efante: Oh ho ho. I think my audience begs to differ. You are very funny to us. And very cute. And we laugh when you try to do things.

Meera: Well that's not fair. I promise that anything you can do, we can do better.

Del Efante: Oh ho ho ho! That is quite big talk from quite a little creature. Very well. What say you, how do we compete this?

Mr. Eric: A zebra raised its hoof in answer.

Zebra: What if you both competed to see who could knock down that tree faster.

Meera: Well, that seems sort of an unfair challenge.

Del Efante: That sounds like a plan.

Mr. Eric: So Del Efante stepped down from the large stone outcropping that made the stage and walked over to that tree, giving it one single push with his trunk. The tree fell immediately.

Del Efante: It appears I win.

Meera: Well, that's not fair. It's not like you can knock down the same tree twice.

Del Efante: Very well. Why don't you pick the tree back up, then.

Mr. Eric: All 20 meerkats looked at each other. They didn't feel like they had much choice, so they gathered around that tree and did their best, lifting from one end, pulling from the other end, but the tree wouldn't budge.

Lionel: I think we know who won that round.

Mr. Eric: Said Lionel the Lion.

Del Efante: All right, what is our next challenge?

Mr. Eric: A toucan raised its hand.

Toucan: Who can drink the most water?

Meera: Seriously? That's not even remotely—

Mr. Eric: But Del Efante had already lapped up half a lake.

Del Efante: I win again.

Mr. Eric: A scorpion raised its tail.

Scorpion: I know, who can dig the biggest hole?

Meera: All right. We're actually quite good diggers.

Mr. Eric: Meerkats are in the mongoose family, they have claws that are nearly an inch long and they're actually really good diggers. But 20 sets of claws digging couldn't compare to Del Efante.

Del Efante: I think I will use this tree to help me dig a very deep hole.

Mr. Eric: And he picked up that fallen tree with his trunk and used it to scoop out tons of dirt.

Del Efante: I win again.

Mr. Eric: All the creatures of the Howvannah kept cheering on Del Efante every time he won. At the end of the day, Meera and her family were feeling quite discouraged. Back in their burrows, the meerkat mob was not happy about that contest.

Meera: It's like all they care about is size.

Mr. Eric: Said Meera.

Tabby: Eh, they just think he's the best because he has those magic bellows.

Mr. Eric: Said her brother Tabby.

Meera: The magic bellows, you say? That gives me an idea.

Tabby: Take the bellows and throw it in the river?

Meera: No, we're going to take the bellows and use them the other way.

Tabby: Huh?

Meera: Just follow me.

Mr. Eric: So Meera, Tabby, and the whole family snuck off in the dark toward a herd of elephants. Del Efante slept with his trunk wrapped around the magic bellows, so it was really tricky to pry it out.

Tabby: He's just too big and strong.

Meera: Just help me push all the air out of the bellows, you'll see.

Mr. Eric: And the two of them jumped down on the magic bellows until all the air had swirled out of it, giving a few dry blades of grass the ability to talk.

Grass: We could really use some water...

Meera: Not now!

Mr. Eric: Said Meera.

Tabby: Just keep quiet and we'll give you water.

Grass: Okay.

Mr. Eric: Just then, Del Efante snored. [Elephant snort-snoring]

But thank goodness he didn't wake up. Meera and Tabby pushed the end of the bellows back into Del Efante's trunk. Then, since they couldn't push out any more air they pulled the bellows apart. As the bellows filled with air, Del Efante got smaller and smaller and smaller until he was no bigger than a meerkat.

Meera: Now watch this!

Tabby: Watch what—

Mr. Eric: Meera stuck the bellows in Tabby's mouth and pushed them together and as she did, Tabby got bigger and bigger until he was the size of an elephant.

Tabby: Whoa!

Meera: Sshh!

Tabby: [Quietly] Whoa.

Mr. Eric: The meerkats went from one elephant to the next making them all small so that everyone of the meerkats could be big.

The next morning, Del Efante woke up to find his bellows missing.

Del Efante: Where has my bellows gone? And why does my voice sound like this. And why is this grass suddenly so much bigger?

Grass: Well, it's because those meerkats finally watered us. Also you're about  $1/100^{\text{th}}$  the size.

Del Efante: What!?

Mr. Eric: Del Efante looked around. The whole herd was tiny. First it seemed like kind of a good thing. They only had to drink a little bit of water and that's really important in such a dry place. Then they had a lot of trouble

reaching up to the tops of trees to eat their share of leaves. Meanwhile, the meerkats were really enjoying their new size. They were able to jump over entire rivers! They were able to outrun wildebeests and cheetahs. They could easily dig up the burrows of other creatures that they ate for food.

Meera: Wow, it's only gam and we've already eaten twice as much as we usually would!

Tabby: Then why am I still twice as hungry as I'd usually be.

Meera: I don't know. And I'm actually really thirsty. We ought to head back to the river and—she looked back to the river. The 18 other meerkats had been running around so much, they were so thirsty that they'd drank half of the river up.

[Record scratch]

Meera: That's going to be a problem.

Mr. Eric: Meera and Tabby ran back to the rest of the mob.

Meera: Hold on, you. Just, just slow down. We've got to make this water last.

Meerkat: But we're so thirsty.

Other Meerkat: Yeah, and hungry, too.

[Frantic elephant trumpeting]

Meera: Why, who said that?

Mr. Eric: Meera looked down to see a tiny herd of elephants crowding around them.

Del Efante: Meera,

Mr. Eric: Said Del Efante

Del Efante: You are not as good at being big as we are. You must use the bellows to make us all back to normal.

Meera: Not as good at being big.

Tabby: Uh-oh. He shouldn't have said that.

Del Efante: Well, yes. You've only been big half a day and already your people are thirsty and hungry.

Meera: Well, you've been little for half a day and you haven't even left the river bed or made yourself burrows. You're terrible at being little.

Del Efante: Well, why don't we let the people decide.

Mr. Eric: Said Del Efante. And all the creatures of the Howvannah gathered together again. This time, little Del Efante tried to speak to the audience.

Del Efante: Now this meerkat says that he is better at being big than I am at being little.

Mr. Eric: A monkey said,

Monkey: Ooh ooh ooh ah ah ah. It's funny hearing you talk.

Del Efante: No, I have a very good voice. I have always been told that.

Lionel: Well, that was before you were so little and cute.

Mr. Eric: Said the lion.

Meera: Now listen!

Mr. Eric: Said Meera.

Meera: He thinks we don't know how to be big but we do. See how many trees we've already knocked over?

Mr. Eric: She gestured out to the Howvannah where all the other meerkats had been trying to climb trees but they were just too big, and the trees kept tipping over.

[Elephants trumpet]

Del Efante: The tree I knocked down yesterday, it needed to be taken down.

Meera: Huh? But—

Del Efante: We elephants help take care of the trees.

Meera: Well, we meerkats help to keep the pest and rodent population under control.

Mr. Eric: They engaged in a whole new set of contests. When the meerkats dug holes, they were so big that half of the audience fell into them. When the

elephants tried to drink the most water, there was nothing left to drink. And when they tried to have an eating contest, the meerkats couldn't find enough pests and rodents to eat. And when the elephants tried to eat leaves, well, their tiny little tummies couldn't handle them anymore. Before the contests were even over, all the animals were exhausted.

Meera: It seems... we're the winners, I think.

Mr. Eric: Said Meera.

Del Efante: Never. We will defeat you... eventually.

Mr. Eric: Said Del Efante. Before long, that herd of elephants and that mob of meerkats were all passed out on the rocky stage. When they woke up, the other creatures of the Howvannah had used the bellows on them make the elephants big again, and the meerkats little.

Del Efante: I must say, being little is very difficult. No wonder you are always so grouchy.

Meera: Don't you get it? We like being small and living in burrows and climbing trees without knocking them down. We just don't like all you other Howvannah creatures thinking you're better just because you're bigger.

Del Efante: Is that why you were so bad at being big? To prove to me that size does not matter?

Meera: Uhh... yeah. Yeah, that's why we were all so bad at being big. We were just trying to prove a point.

Tabby: Ugh, no. Being big was terrible. I don't know how you do it.

Del Efante: Well, you know, it does have its challenges.

Meera: Well, listen. You've got some trees to right up, and we've got some holes to fill in, so why don't we just get to work setting things back to normal.

Mr. Eric: And so the elephants and meerkats worked together keeping the trees healthy and the pests under control. But every once in a while, when a bigger creature and a littler creature had a dispute in the Howvannah, Meera and Del Efante would have them switch places with the magic bellows. It's funny how quickly those arguments ended when two creatures saw things from each other's heights.

The end.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric:

Oh man. Avi and Elizabeth, I am so happy we had your questions today. This was our first combined story day and you helped us do it. Thank you both so, so very much.

I'd like to thank Karen Marshall, my editor and producer. Craig Martinson for making my favorite theme song. Jason O'Keeffe, that's my brother, and he made us a new logo that I'm just super excited about. And finally, I'd like to thank all you kids out there. The big kids, the little kids, the medium kids, for being nice to everybody regardless of their size.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme song plays.]

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