Directions: Read the two informational texts below. Fill out the Elephants: In the Wild vs. In Captivity worksheet based on the information in the texts. Then, use the Opinion Writing graphic organizer to explain how you think people should treat elephants and where you think elephants should live.

Wild Elephants

Elephants are not only one of the smartest animals on the planet, but also one of the most empathetic. They care deeply about one another and have been observed in the wild helping each other when in trouble and wrapping their trunks together to give an “elephant hug.” Wild elephants communicate in a variety of ways. They “speak” by touching one another, gesturing with their bodies, making different sounds like squeaks, trumpeting noises, rumbles and even noises so low that people cannot hear them. In the wild, elephants can live up to 70 years of age, roughly the same life span of many people. Wild elephants are extremely active, walking great distances to find enough food. On the average day, African elephants can walk up to 37 miles and their smaller relatives, the Asian elephants, can walk up to 13 miles a day. Wild elephants not only get their exercise from walking, but also love to forage for food and water, dust bathe, wallow in the mud to cool off from the heat and even go swimming! Being so large and active means that wild elephants need to eat a lot of food. One elephant can eat 300 pounds of food in one day. Elephants’ foods of choice are roots, leaves, plants, fruit, grasses and bark. Wild elephants live in family groups called “herds.” The “matriarch,” or oldest female in the group, leads the herd to the best places to find food and water. When elephants die, their family members grieve just like people. They even return to the site where their kin passed away and touch their bones to mourn.


Captive Elephants

Elephants in captivity live much different lives than those of their wild counterparts. Many elephants in captivity were born in the wild and taken from their families when they were very young. Instead of being in herds with up to 100 other elephants, captive elephants spend most of their time alone. Elephants are very social creatures and have strong family bonds which they are deprived of in captivity. Also, elephants are very large animals requiring large areas to roam that are rarely provided in captivity. Male elephants born in zoos are quickly removed from their mothers and separated from all the other elephants. When the male elephants get older they are usually sent to other zoos for breeding purposes. Though wild elephants can live to be up to 70 years old, captive elephants usually don’t live to be even 40 years old. Captive elephants suffer from many health problems like tuberculosis and foot disease, which is caused by standing on hard floor surfaces for long periods of time and doing unnatural tricks on these hard floors. Many captive circus elephants are forced to learn these tricks by being struck with a bullhook (a pole with a sharp metal point and a hook at the end). Captive circus elephants spend a very large portion of their lives traveling from town to town locked in small cages. Some are even shipped in trucks and railroad cars without heat or air conditioning and often do not have access to food or water for long periods of time. Unlike the wide variety of foods wild elephants eat, many captive elephants are only given dried hay and grains.

# Elephants: In the Wild vs. In Captivity

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Name: ___________________________  Date: _______________________

Source: Humane Education Resource Guide

T eachHumane.org
Opinion Writing: Elephants: In the Wild vs. In Captivity

Name: ___________________________________________ Date: ____________

My opinion is that __________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Reason and Example #1

Reason and Example #2

Reason and Example #3

Conclusion (Provide a summary of your opinion): _________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

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