

Zebra and the Missing Third Note

A little concert about finding the start

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Ages 3-5



Ting! Zebra tapped a little metal cup beside the waterhole. Lion had a wooden block. Hippo had a bowl of water. Three friends, three little sounds. Zebra wanted to make a tiny concert for Elephant. The plan was simple: one friend, then another, then the last. Zebra would play the third note, after Lion and Hippo. “I'll make the ending sparkle!” Zebra said. Come sit beside me, little one. Zebra had a very important ting to find.



Lion tapped his block. Zebra's hoof bounced. “Here comes my ting!” Zebra cried. But Hippo had not played yet. The cup rang over Hippo's little plop. Two friends had tried to play together. Zebra lowered the cup. The ending had arrived in the middle. “I jumped in,” Zebra said. “I'll wait for two sounds next time.” Hippo dried a small splash from his nose. Zebra made room for another try.



Lion tapped again. One. A breeze fluttered the little flag beside the friends. Two! Zebra lifted a hoof. “Now!” Zebra said. Hippo's bowl was still waiting. That second sound had come from the flag, not from a friend. Zebra looked from the flag to the three instruments. Her hoof grew still. “The wind isn't in our concert,” she said. “I counted a flutter!” Now Zebra knew that simply waiting for any two sounds would not work.



Zebra took a slow breath. She remembered how Lion had begun each try. She carried the flag to Lion's end of the row. Its cloth brushed her ear. “Pause. Find the start. One at a time,” she said. Zebra walked beside the friends, beginning at the flag. Lion was first. Hippo was second. Zebra was third, and last. She stopped beside her cup. “I don't need to hurry,” Zebra said. “My note has a place.”



The breeze fluttered the flag again. This time Zebra let the flutter pass. “Pause. Find the start. One at a time,” she whispered. She nodded to Lion at the flag. First came Lion's tap. Zebra waited. Hippo let one drop fall into his bowl. Second came Hippo's plop. Zebra lifted her hoof and gently tapped the cup. Third came Zebra's ting. There was room for every sound. The tiny concert had its ending.



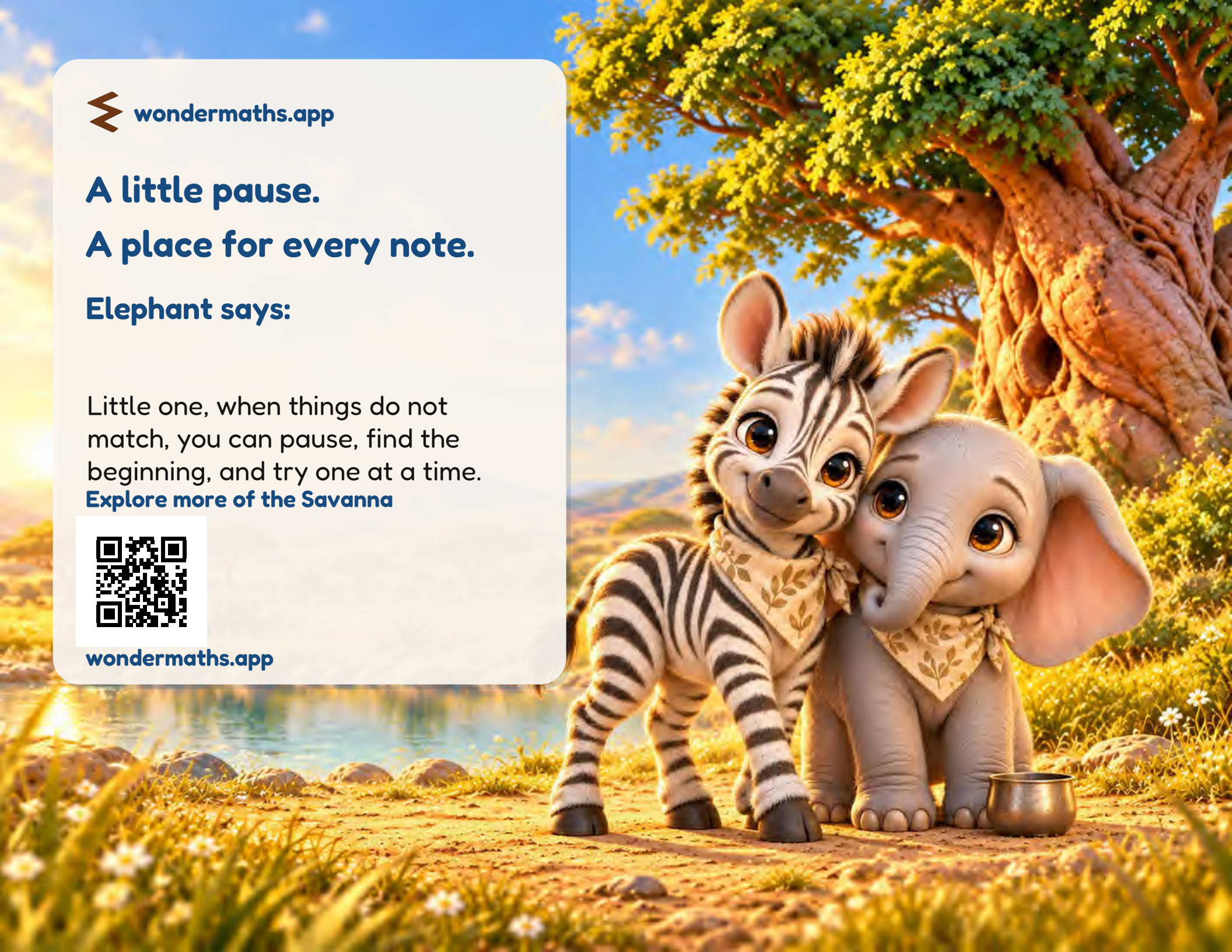
Zebra's ears perked up. “What if our concert starts over here?” she asked. She moved the flag to her own end of the row. Nobody changed places. Zebra began at the flag and checked each friend again. Zebra was first now. Hippo was still second. Lion was third, and last. “I'm the same Zebra,” she said, “but I'm first from this start! Lion gets to make the ending.” She gave Lion a cheerful nod. A place could change when the beginning changed.



“Pause. Find the start. One at a time,” Zebra said. She began beside the flag. Ting. First, Zebra. She waited for Hippo. Plop. Second, Hippo. Lion raised a paw. Tap. Third, Lion. Zebra giggled. “Our ending has wooden paws!” The new concert sounded different. It still worked. Elephant swayed beside the water, and the three friends played it once more, leaving a little space for one another.



When the concert was over, Zebra set the cup beside Lion's block and Hippo's bowl. She placed the flag at one end of the three instruments. “I can find their places, too,” she said. “First the block, second the bowl, third the cup.” She did not rush. There was no missing note now, and no friend left out. We rested together in the baobab's shade. Little one, when things do not match, you can pause, find the beginning, and try one at a time.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A little pause.
A place for every note.
Elephant says:
Little one, when things do not match, you can pause, find the beginning, and try one at a time.
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