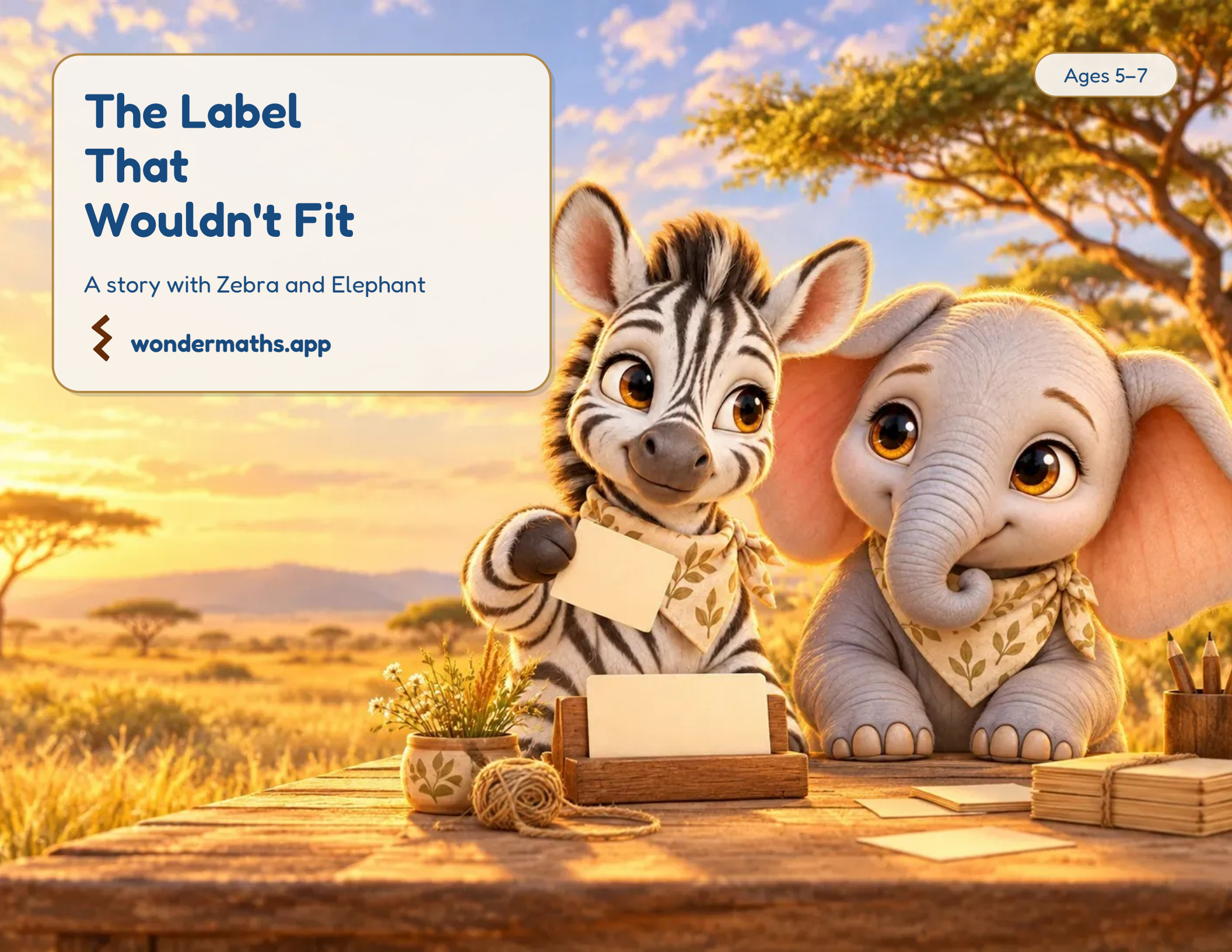


The Label That Wouldn't Fit

A story with Zebra and Elephant

Ages 5–7

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Hello, little label makers. I'm Ori. Let's visit Zebra at the savanna mail desk.
Ting! The little bell at the savanna mail desk rang. Zebra had a delivery to label. She lifted a small paper card with her hoof. It caught on her scarf instead.
“My scarf is not a package.”
Elephant gave a soft chuckle and set a smooth label holder on the desk. The holder had room for one long card and one small card. Zebra peeled the paper from her scarf. This delivery deserved a careful label.



The first load held two bundles of ten sticks and three loose sticks. Zebra chose the long card marked twenty and the small card marked three.
“Twenty and three. Two parts for one delivery.”
Swish. She slid the three over the zero at the end of twenty. Together, the cards showed twenty-three. Then she slid them apart. Twenty and three were both still there. The sticks had not moved at all.



The next load held four tens and seven ones. Zebra found a long card and slid a seven over its zero. She read her new label.
“Seventy-seven. But that does not match.”
Zebra reached for every card on the desk. Then she stopped.
Elephant rested his trunk beside the holder.
“What could you keep?”
Zebra looked from the load to the label. Seven loose sticks. Seven on the small card. That part matched.



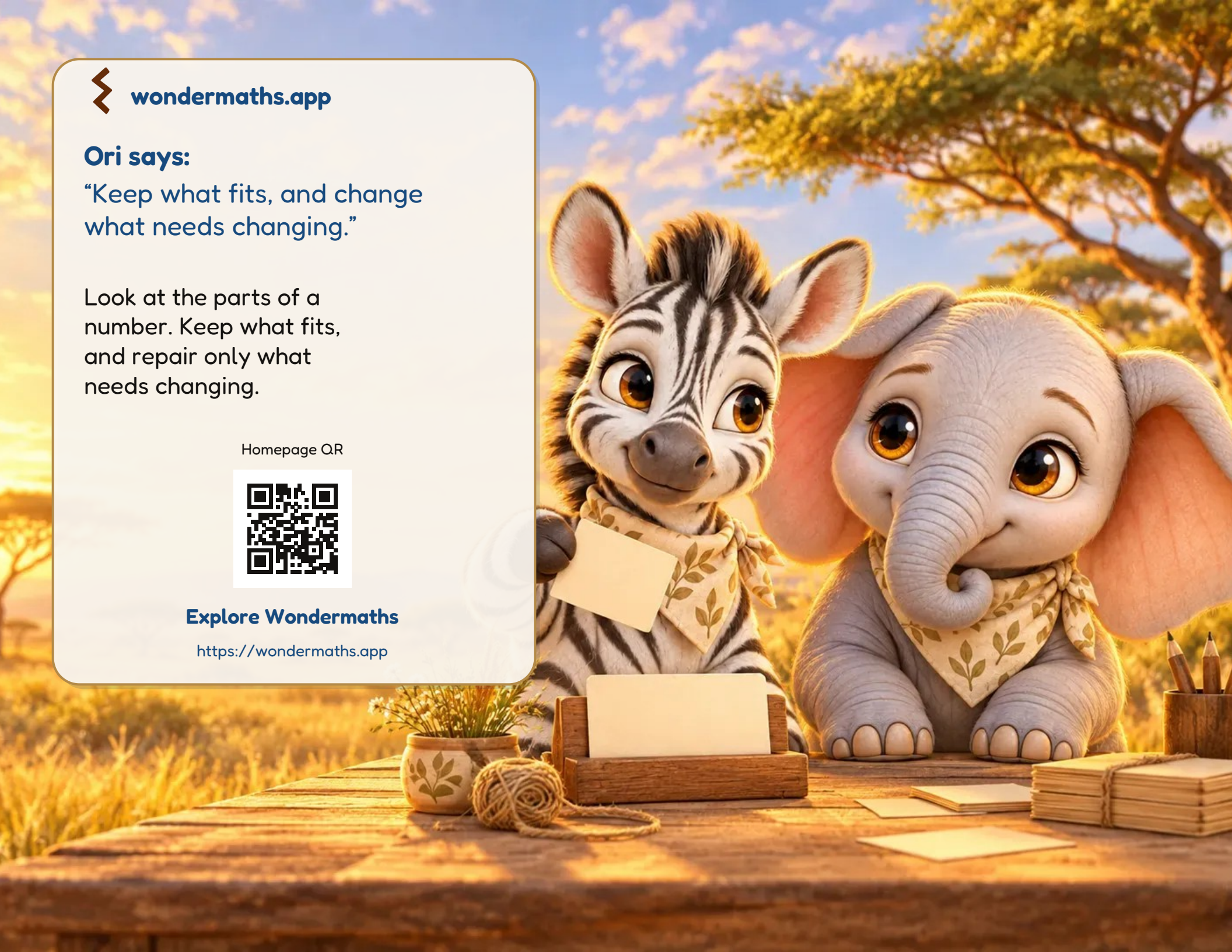
“I can keep my seven.”
Swish. Zebra spread the cards apart. The long card said seventy. The load had only four tens. She put seventy back and chose forty. The small seven stayed beside the holder, ready to help.
“Forty and seven.”
She slid the seven onto the final zero. Forty-seven. Zebra checked the bundles and loose sticks once more. Tap. The label went onto the right delivery. She had fixed one part without starting everything over.



One more load waited: four tens and no loose sticks. Zebra placed forty in the holder. The small zero lay nearby.
“Nothing loose. Does the zero still matter?”
She looked at the two places. Without the last place, the written label would look like four. But the load held forty. Zebra kept the zero in its place. Four tens, zero ones. Forty. Elephant nodded. Nothing was missing from this careful label.



The finished parcels stood by the mail tent. Zebra looked at the label holder, then at her scarf. No paper was stuck there now.
“A label for the load. A scarf for me.”
She touched her raised hoof to Elephant's curled trunk. A small, happy tap. The deliveries were ready. Outside, the acacia leaves whispered.
The little mail bell rested quietly until the next delivery. Zebra had learned a useful way to try again: when something does not match, look at the parts. Keep what fits, and change what needs changing.



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Ori says:

"Keep what fits, and change what needs changing."

Look at the parts of a number. Keep what fits, and repair only what needs changing.

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