“Shooting An Elephant” is a story that chronicles a British man’s time as an officer in British Colonial Myanmar (Burma). The story is centered around Orwell as he is called to respond to the case of a man who has been killed by an elephant. The man is described as “lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to the side.” It is clear that the bystanders want for Orwell to kill the elephant by shooting it, but Orwell does not want to do this, because the elephant is likely no longer a threat. Eventually he comes to the conclusion that “it would be murder to shoot the elephant.” He still tracks the elephant down, because he knows that if he takes no action against the elephant, the bystanders will view him as a coward. But if he is right about the elephant being no longer a threat, then he will have regret about having shot the elephant.

*But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him.*

This story is important to use in the anthology project because it discusses the conflict between imperial powers and that the native people in places. In a way, this story is more of an essay about imperialism than it is a narrative story. Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that points back to the main thesis of the story: shooting the elephant would be murder, as it is no longer a threat. He argues that “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. Because this piece of literature doubles as both a short story and a short essay, there are both conflict and argument. The conflict, therefore, is between Orwell and the colonized peoples of Lower Burma. Eventually, when Orwell does get to the point of trying to kill the elephant, he finds himself physically unable to kill it.

*I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.*

Orwell believes that the reason why he has had to carry out this arduous task of killing the elephant is because the British people are exerting power in regions of the world where they are not welcome. This story, therefore, moves to argue that imperialism is unnatural and unnecessary.