

The Ugly Duckling

Hans Christian Andersen was born in the small Danish town of Odense, in 1805. Like the ugly duckling, he was awkward and special. With nothing to sustain him but sheer determination, Hans headed for Copenhagen. There, he went to college and later wrote an assortment of plays, novels, articles, and his beloved children's tales. He penned "The Ugly Duckling" in 1844. This lovely story of a homely bird that "blooms" into a gorgeous swan has been translated into dozens of languages—English among them. It remains one of Anderson's most celebrated works.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do the other birds make fun of the ugly duckling?
2. Why is the ugly duckling afraid to show his face to the swans?
3. At the end of the story, the ugly duckling decides "to be kind to all living things, from peacocks to potato bugs." Why?

Before:

Introduce the book and tell the children a little bit about it. Follow that with a comment or question that is related to the story such as, What would happen if all of us in this classroom looked exactly alike? Same hair, same eyes, same height, same noses? Encourage a discussion so the children can comment, ask questions, and express their feelings. Set the stage for listening by asking an "I wonder" statement based on the cover illustration.

- I wonder why anyone would think this duck is ugly?

During:

Encourage the children to comment on the illustrations, ask questions, and predict what will happen next in the story. Children gain confidence and a sense of achievement through being able to correctly predict how a story will end. Point out "rare words" (e.g., those words that are not commonly used in every day conversation) and help the children relate the meaning in a way that makes sense to them.

After:

Discuss the story. Ask questions...

- How is the ugly duckling different from the other ducklings?
- Why do the other birds make fun of the ugly duckling?
- How do you think the ugly duckling felt when the dog came up on him?

- Did the old woman and her cat and hen make fun of the ugly duckling?
- Have you ever been made fun of? How did that make you feel?
- What would have happened to the ugly duckling if the man hadn't come by and broken the ice to free him?
- Was the ugly duckling really a duck? What was he?
- What makes a swan beautiful?
- What are the differences between a duck and a swan?
- What lesson can we learn from this story?

Art/ Writing idea

Have children draw a picture of the ugly duckling after it has grown into a beautiful swan. Around the picture, ask children to write words to describe the swan, such as white and feathery.