

CHILDREN'S CLASSICS

THE UGLY DUCKLING

Introduction

The power of fantasy to illuminate human experience is nowhere better illustrated than in this tale by Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen felt himself to be an unrecognized genius and some read autobiography into the closing comment of this story, "It does not matter in the least having been born in a duckyard, if only you come out of a swan's egg!" "The Ugly Duckling" meets us, child or adult, each at his own level of life's encounter.

Vocabulary

appallingly
embarrassed
ashamed
exhausted
brooding
gracefully
desperation
reflection
dreadful
refuge
duckling
swan

Activity Suggestions

1. Science: Children may be interested in a study of the various types of water fowl found in today's world. Many types are threatened by extinction. Here again, students may wish to investigate the causes for the ecological restructuring and will certainly be interested in learning what measures we are taking to preserve the endangered species.

A different approach for younger or less sophisticated classes might be to follow up "The Ugly Duckling" with a long-term adventure in the scientific method. Most classes have hatched chicken eggs; yours can hatch several kinds of eggs and study their progressive development. (The number of exotic eggs you can provide for possible hatching depends on your location and your ingenuity. If you're in the country, try farms; in the city, try the zoo!) Let children speculate concerning the origin and eventual metamorphosis of each egg but don't tell. If and when the eggs hatch, children may also be surprised to find that the young of a species do not always resemble their elders precisely. (The gosling, for example, of the common barnyard goose is a perfectly hideous color for some weeks, a kind of grayish-green.)

2. Understanding Ourselves and Others: The obvious follow-up of Andersen's tale concerns learning not to try to tell a book by its cover.

Children might discuss or illustrate situations that have arisen because they had misjudged a person. Drawings or paintings of the unexpected experience might provide a more graphic reminder of our ability to make misjudgments and, hopefully, to correct them.

3. Literature: Hans Christian Andersen is one of the best-known and best loved children's authors. Some children may wish to learn more about the author himself; most children will welcome an opportunity to read or hear other Andersen tales.