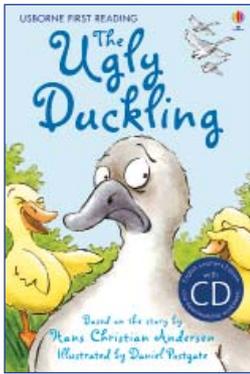


The Ugly Duckling • Teacher's notes



Author: based on a story by Hans Christian Andersen

Reader level: Intermediate

Word count: 761

Lexile level: 390L

Text type: Children's classic author, fairy tale

About the story

This much-loved tale begins with a mother duck proudly counting her six eggs. Five are smooth, small and white but the sixth one is huge. She patiently incubates them, until at last the big day comes and her fluffy yellow ducklings hatch out. At least, five of them hatch out. The big egg takes longer to break, and eventually a large, grey, ugly duckling emerges.

From the very start, things don't look good for the ugly duckling. The farm animals tease him so much that he runs away, hides in a swamp, is blown this way and that and rejected by every animal he sees. The ugly duckling barely survives the long cold winter, but when spring arrives he is bigger and stronger. To his surprise, the swans he meet don't tease and reject him. In fact, one look at his reflection in the water and the ugly duckling realises he has become a beautiful swan himself.

About the author

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was born in Odense, Denmark, the son of a shoemaker. At the age of 14 he moved to the capital city, Copenhagen, hoping to become an actor or a dancer. When he didn't succeed at either, he went back to school, then tried his hand at writing. Initially it was his adult novels and poetry that received the most attention, but he is now world famous for his spellbinding fairy tales, including *The Emperor and the Nightingale* which is also available as an Usborne English Learner's Edition. *The Ugly Duckling* was partly based on Andersen's own life and his awkward, unhappy childhood.

Key words

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words, which are important in the story.

ugly	pecked	crept
duckling	p23 gobbled	p35 purr
p3 smooth	p25 bush	hissed
p4 hatch	p27 swamp	p36 swiping
p6 Hooray!	wild	p37 hop
p7 hurry	p29 gun shots	p38 flock
p8 shell	fright	p39 swans
p9 tumbling	hunt	shining
p12 turkey	p30 splashed	p40 froze
p14 gasped	hid	p41 reeds
spluttered	p31 fierce	beat
p16 pond	glaring	p42 glorious
p21 just [meaning 'only']	p33 windy	p43 perhaps
	blown	p45 stroked
p22 farmyard	p34 reached	p46 gazed

Key phrases

p8	to burst open
p15	Then you'll see
p16	One by one
p19	The next moment
p23	puffed himself up to be red in the face
p24	to shoo [...] away
	Out of my way!
p26	on and on
p27	all night long
p29	gun shots
p32	as fast as he could
p34	As darkness fell
p35	to lay eggs
p36	get out
p38	the sun was setting
p44	no longer

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Before reading

Bring an egg (a duck or goose egg, if you can find one) into the classroom and show it to the class. Ask them to describe it. What would happen if you dropped it? Now ask the class what's inside. They may talk about the yellow (yolk) and white of an egg, but someone might say 'a chick'. If not, prompt students with a question: what might grow inside an egg? Ask the class what's needed for a chick to grow. [Only eggs fertilised by a male can produce chicks, and then they need to be kept warm for the baby birds inside to develop and hatch out.] How are the eggs kept warm? [The mother bird – usually – sits on them.]

You could make a list of birds and teach the class the names of their young: hen and chick, goose and gosling, duck and duckling, swan and cygnet, and so on.

Does anyone know a story about eggs hatching? Show them the Ugly Duckling cover. If they don't already know what the story is about, can they guess from the picture?

Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

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|-----|---|-----|--|
| p4 | Does the mother duck seem worried about the unusually large egg? | p31 | Has the duckling's ugliness helped him at last? [It saved him from being eaten.] |
| | Can you spot anything else unusual in this picture [knitting, handbag, hat] | p34 | Do you think the duckling will find a friendly welcome here? |
| p6 | What's making the tapping sound? | p41 | Do you recognise the Ugly Duckling in this picture? What's happened to him? |
| p14 | If it is a turkey chick, what will happen when it goes swimming? | p43 | Do the swans look as though they're going to peck and bite? |
| p17 | How does the mother duck look? Do you think she is worried about her ducklings? | p44 | Have you seen a picture like this before? [Look back to page 21.] |
| p23 | How do you think the Ugly Duckling feels? [sad, rejected, lonely, confused] | p46 | Do you think the ducks know what the swan looked like before? |
| p29 | Why are the men shooting at the ducks? | | |

After reading

Ask the students if the Ugly Duckling was really an ugly duckling. How do they think his egg got into the mother duck's nest? Do you think the farm animals would have been so mean to the Ugly Duckling if they'd known he was actually a cygnet?

Do cygnets look at all like swans? Which other animals look vastly different from their parents? [Some even go through a complete change, e.g. caterpillar to butterfly, tadpole to frog.]

Andersen used to say that the story of the Ugly Duckling was the story of his own life. What can you guess about his childhood? As an adult, he wasn't especially good-looking (you might find a picture), but his writing was very successful. Do you think that made up for being unhappy as a child?

Did you know?

Some birds, such as various species of cuckoo, deliberately lay their eggs in another bird's nest, so that they can avoid the hard work of incubating and feeding their young.

