

The Ugly Duckling: a free story kit for classrooms, libraries and families

Watch the free first chapter

<https://andersenworld.com/tales/the-ugly-duckling>



The story

A different-looking hatchling endures mockery and exile through changing seasons until spring reveals his true identity as a swan.

Hans Christian Andersen first published "Den grimme Ælling" on 11 November 1843, in "Nye Eventyr. Første Bind. Første Samling".

About the author

Hans Christian Andersen was a Danish writer, born in Odense on 2 April 1805; he died on 4 August 1875.

He wrote his fairy tales in Danish; in Denmark he is known as H.C. Andersen.

How the story unfolds in our film

The Strange Hatching. In a duck nest by the reeds, one large egg hatches last, revealing a gangly, grey hatchling unlike his yellow siblings—met with immediate dismay.

The Farmyard Outcasts Him. Mocked and pecked by all the farmyard birds, the grey one flees into the wild marshes, alone.

Autumn Longing. Hiding in the reeds, he glimpses magnificent white birds flying south and feels a strange, inexplicable longing.

Winter Survival. Through the frozen months, he shelters in the ice-crusted marshes, barely surviving the cold and solitude.

Spring Reflection. As warmth returns, he sees his reflection in the clear water—now a graceful swan—and joins his true family gliding on the pond.

Themes

- Inner worth beyond outward appearance
- Endurance through suffering
- Belonging and self-discovery
- Transformation and acceptance

Age guidance

Suitable from about 4 years. The questions and activities are grouped for ages 4–6, 7–9 and 10–12; choose what fits your group.

The first chapter is free and lasts about 2 minutes; the whole film runs about 5 minutes.

The film is illustrated and narrated with AI, adapted from Andersen's original Danish text.

Discussion questions

Ages 4-6

1. How was the last duckling different from his brothers and sisters?
2. How do you think he felt when the other birds pecked at him?
3. Where did he go when he ran away from the farmyard?
4. What did he see in the water in the spring?

Ages 7-9

1. Why do you think the farmyard birds treated the grey duckling so badly?
2. The duckling feels a longing when he sees the white birds flying south. What do you think he was longing for?
3. How did the seasons change the story? What happened in autumn, in winter and in spring?
4. Was the duckling ever really "ugly"? Explain your answer.
5. Have you ever felt you did not fit in somewhere? What helped?

Ages 10-12

1. The story is called "The Ugly Duckling", but he was a swan all along. What does the title tell us about how the others saw him?
2. How does the story show the difference between what something looks like and what it is?
3. The duckling survives a hard winter alone. What does endurance mean, and where do you see it in the story?
4. At the end he finds his "true family". What makes a place where you belong?
5. If you could change one moment in the farmyard, what would you change, and how would the story be different?

Activities

The duckling's year · 30 minutes · 4-6, 7-9

You need: A large sheet of paper folded into four, Crayons or paints

1. Fold the paper into four boxes and label them: the hatching, autumn, winter and spring.
2. In each box, draw where the duckling is and how he feels at that time.
3. Talk together about how the pictures change from the first box to the last.

Feelings map · 20 minutes · 4-6, 7-9

You need: Paper, Pencils

1. Draw a line across the page from the hatching to the pond in spring.
2. Mark the moments in the story where the duckling feels sad, scared, lonely, curious and happy.
3. Add a face for each feeling and say what happened at that moment.

A letter to the duckling · 30 minutes · 7-9, 10-12

You need: Paper, Pencils

1. Imagine you can send one letter to the duckling while he is alone in the marshes in winter.
2. Write what you would like to tell him, and what you know he does not know yet.

3. Read some letters aloud and talk about the words that would help most.

Two points of view · 40 minutes · 10-12

You need: Paper, Pencils

1. Choose one moment in the farmyard.
2. Write a short paragraph about it as the grey duckling, and another as one of the farmyard birds.
3. Compare the two: what does each one see, and what does each one miss?

Vocabulary

hatchling: a baby bird that has just come out of its egg

reeds: tall, thin plants that grow at the edge of water

marsh: soft, wet land, often full of reeds

mockery: laughing at someone in an unkind way

longing: a strong wish for something you do not have

reflection: the picture of yourself you see in water or in a mirror

swan: a large white water bird with a long neck

graceful: moving in a smooth and beautiful way

Reflection

- Think of a time someone was left out. What could you do the next time it happens?
- What is one thing about you that others cannot see just by looking at you?
- Who are the people with whom you feel you belong?

Sources

- Story Engine: the film's adaptation
- First-edition record
- Author page (approved), citing the author record and Wikipedia
- Author page (approved)
- Story Engine: the film's beats
- Story Engine: the film's themes
- Tale catalogue (ages)
- Film files (lengths)
- Production record

Free to print and share for teaching and reading.