



THE UGLY LITTLE SWAN

JAMES RIORDAN

ILLUSTRATED BY BRENDAN KEARNEY



BOOK BAND: TURQUOISE

BEFORE YOU START

Prepare a **group journal** to help you record group discussions and responses to the text as you work through the book.

Although this story – and Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Ugly Duckling*, whose plot it broadly follows – is about eggs laid in the ‘wrong’ nest, it refers to the little swan ‘not look[ing] like his brothers or sisters’. This could lead to children discussing assumptions people make based on similarities or differences of appearance between siblings or between children and parents, which will need to be handled with sensitivity, bearing pupils’ backgrounds in mind.

Prepare an outline of the little swan ready to complete using the **Role on the Wall** technique.

SESSION 1: CHAPTER ONE



Focus: Predicting, Questioning and Empathising

Begin by sharing the cover and back page, including the blurb, and discussing them with the children.

- Look at the character shown both on the right on the front cover and hatching out of an egg on the back cover. Who do you think this might be and what kind of a character do you think they are?
- Does this character remind you of any characters you know from other stories?
- Who do you think the character on the left on the front cover might be?
- What does the body language of the two characters on the front cover tell you about their relationship?
- What does the blurb tell you about this story?

Read Chapter One and share the illustrations. The class can explore their responses to it with the help of the **four basic questions**. These questions can be used as a basis for discussion throughout the sessions.

- Tell me... was there anything you liked about this text?
- Was there anything that you particularly disliked...?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns... any connections that you noticed...?

As children respond it can be useful to write down what they say under the headings 'likes', 'dislikes', 'puzzles' and 'patterns'. Record the children's responses in the **journal** and return to any queries as the sessions continue.

Consider the opening of the story and the situation.

- What do you think has happened so far in the story?
 - What do you notice about the illustration of the egg that hatches last (pages 6-7), compared to the appearance of the other five eggs (pages 4-5)?
 - Why do you think the mother swan finds the hatchling 'ugly', when in fact it is only different?
 - What do you think might happen next in the story as a result of the hatchling looking different, and its mother calling it 'small and brown and *ugly*'?
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Introduce the outline of the little swan, to be added to using the **Role on the Wall** technique.

Ask the children to come up with words or phrases to describe the little swan's feelings and personality or his outward appearance or behaviour. Even at this early stage children might infer how it might feel for your mother to call you 'small and brown and *ugly*'. In the next chapter they can add to the **Role on the Wall** as he has further experiences.

- What do you know about the little swan at this point in the story?
- What do his mother's reactions suggest?
- What do you think his siblings will think about him?

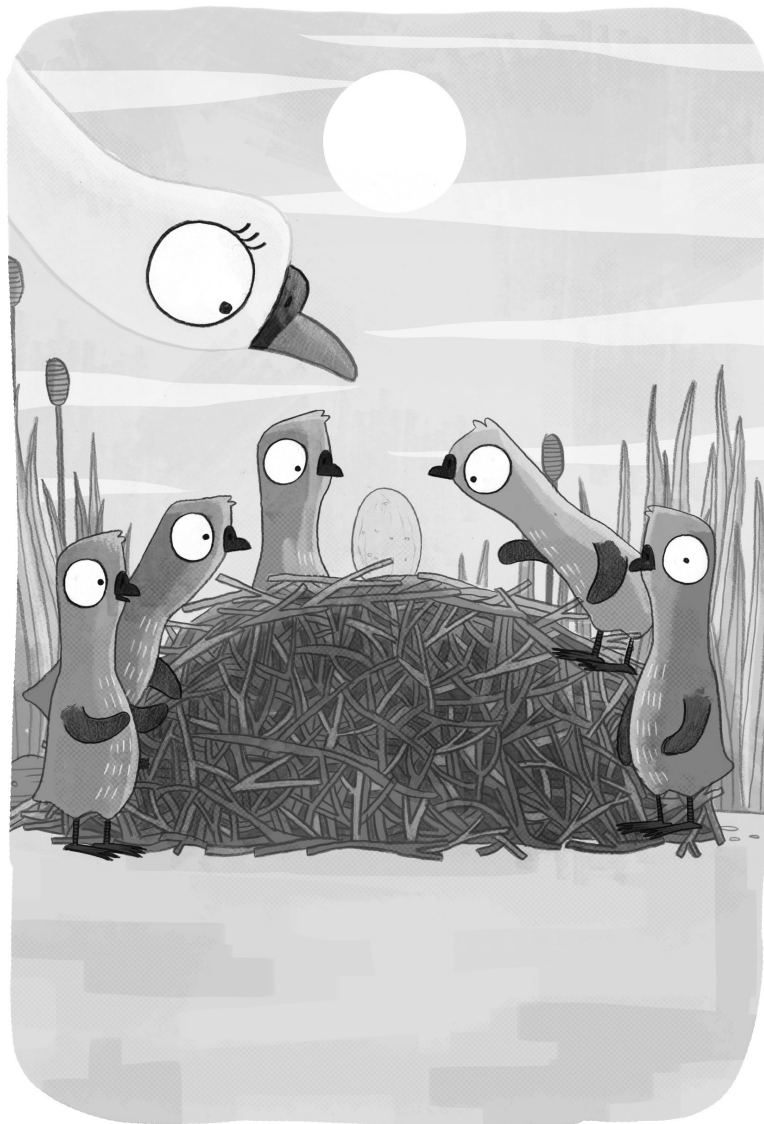
Revisit the **Role on the Wall** outline at key points in the story as the children find out more about the little swan.

Allow the children time and space to reflect and discuss their responses to the story so far and to make personal connections to the story, such as talking about a time when they or someone they know felt different or inferior.

- How did it feel to be thought of as different or less good?
- What happened?
- What did anyone else – your family or friends – think about this?

Re-read the last page.

- How do you think the author feels about the little swan? How do you think she wants you to feel?
- What do you predict will happen next?



SESSION 2: CHAPTER TWO



Focus: Empathising, Questioning and Predicting

Read Chapter Two, stopping at different points to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around the **four basic questions**.

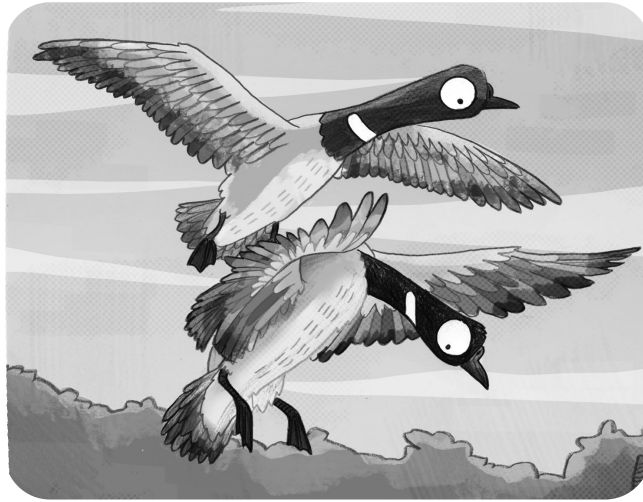
Ask the children to reflect on the little swan, his appearance and behaviour, and especially how he is treated in turn by the other babies, the big swans, the angry dog and his father. Support them in discussing how the illustrations reinforce the message of the words. Following this, ask the children what they might do if they were in his position.

- How is the little swan treated by the other babies?
- What is the impact on you of the word 'hissed'?
- What emotion do you think it conveys?
- How do the big swans, the angry dog, and his father treat the little swan?
- How do you think he might have felt?
- What do the illustrations tell you about the little swan's feelings?
- What does his body language suggest about his reaction to his treatment?

Children could try **role-playing** then **freeze-framing** the interactions between the little swan and the other characters, and **thought-tracking** to capture his emotions and those of the characters he is interacting with.

- What do you think the little swan should do?
- Where do you think he should go next?
- What do you think will happen next in the story?

SESSION 3: CHAPTER THREE



Focus: Clarifying, Thinking Aloud and Empathising

Read Chapter Three. Support the children in understanding why the geese might be migrating, and explain about migration in general.

- How does the invitation from the wild geese make you feel?
 - Do you think the little swan finds their invitation attractive? Would you go if you were him?
 - What could be dangerous about being a wild goose or migrating bird?
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Allow the children time to consider the illustration on pages 16-17 and discuss what might happen to the little swan in the old woman's hut.

- Do you think the old woman's hut looks appealing?
 - Would you like to live there?
 - Do you think the little swan would like to live there?
 - What details do you notice in the illustration that make you think this?
 - Do you know of other stories about old women who live in huts? Do you have positive or negative connections with these stories? (Children may mention the witch in Hansel and Gretel, Baba Yaga from Slavic folklore, the grandma in Red Riding Hood, and so on.)
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Discuss the other animals' objections to the little swan. The birds objected because of his appearance, the dog because he is angry, but the cat and hen object because of things he cannot do.

- Why do you think the cat thinks the little swan should be able to purr?
- Why do you think the hen thinks the little swan should be able to lay eggs?
- How do you think the little swan feels to be thrown out? How does the illustration show this?
- How do you think the author wants you as a reader to feel? How do he and the illustrator achieve this?
- What do you think the little swan should do now?
- What do you think will happen next?

The children's personal experience of unkindness or being rejected or isolated might be shared at this point. Discuss the importance of being kind and welcoming.

The children could also revisit the **Role on the Wall** to see how the little swan might be changing as the story progresses.



SESSION 4: CHAPTER FOUR



Focus: Empathising, Re-reading and Questioning

Read Chapter Four. Consider how the little swan might feel to be alone again.

- How do you think the little swan feels to be living 'all alone again' on a lake?
- How do you think the author wants you as a reader to feel about the little swan?
- How does the illustration on page 21 support this?
- What is the impact on you as a reader of the illustration on pages 22–23?
- How do you think the scene affects the little swan?
- How do the words and pictures convey that time has passed, and that the little swan has changed?

Share some photographs of male and female adult mallards, and remind the children that many birds migrate seasonally.

- Do you find these birds beautiful, as the little swan does?
- Why do you think he will never forget them?

Look at the illustration on page 25 and the text 'Autumn and winter passed...'

- What do you notice about the illustration of the little swan?
- How do the words and the picture work together to show the passing of time?
- What do you think has happened to the little swan in the time that has passed?

At this point children could write the little swan a **note of advice** or encouragement, depending on whether they think he should stay alone on the lake or keep trying to make friends with other creatures, even though he is constantly rejected. Add these notes to the **journal**.

Re-read pages 26–27.

- How do you think the little swan felt as he saw the ducks fly back to the lake?
- Do you think he is right to consider approaching them? Why do you think he might be reluctant to do so?
- Have you ever felt lonely, or had to pluck up courage to approach someone else for help, company or friendship? How did it feel?
- How do you think the returning ducks will react?
- Do you think the ducks will be more sympathetic to the little swan than the other creatures have been? Why?
- What do you think you know that the 'little swan' has yet to realise?
- What do you think will happen next?



SESSION 5: CHAPTER FIVE



Focus: Re-reading, Empathising and Summarising

Read Chapter Five.

- What does the little swan discover when he swims towards the ducks?
 - Were you as surprised as he was?
 - What do you think of how his situation was resolved?
 - Did he actually need to do anything for everything to turn out well in the end? Or just wait for nature to take its course? Or do you think that being patient and resilient in the face of unkindness is also important?
 - How do you think the he is feeling now he has realised who he is?
 - How do you think the other ducks feel?
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Having read to the end of the story, talk about the book as a whole. Engage the children in **book talk**, discussing how the book made them feel and allowing them time and space to tell you their likes and dislikes, referring to different parts of the text or particular illustrations.

You could provide photographs of cygnets and mallard ducklings for comparison, to see whether they find the ducklings 'ugly'. You could show pictures of mallard and swan eggs, and consider how they differ in appearance.

Review the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions that the little swan has felt throughout the story, his high and low points, and how the illustrations support the text. Use **hot-seating** to explore the character of the little swan further. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses.

Ask the children to choose words to describe the little swan's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity that he has felt in the story to create a **graph of emotion**.

Through modelling, ask the children to describe their favourite part of the story. Provide the children with an oral scaffold, for example: *the most memorable part of the story was... because... ; my top moment in the story was... because...* and in pairs ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative. Encourage children to give reasons for their choices and invite some children to share these.



IDEAS TO SUPPORT THE SESSIONS



These are areas you could further develop depending on your professional judgement of the children's learning needs and their interests.

Developing wider reading experiences

Read Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*, available online, and consider ways in which the texts are similar or different.

Read and explore stories with similar themes involving change, such as:

- *Tadpole's Promise* by Jeanne Willis, illustrated by Tony Ross – Andersen Press
- *Winter's Child* by Angela McAllister, illustrated by Grahame Baker-Smith – Templar
- *Orion and the Dark* by Emma Yarlett – Templar

Migration is very accessibly explained in *We Travel So Far* by Laura Knowles, illustrated by Chris Madden – Words & Pictures

Other stories in which there is identity-related confusion include:

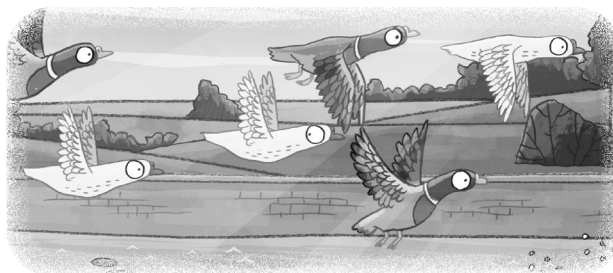
- *The Tigon and the Liger* by Keilly Swift, illustrated by Cosei Kawa – Lantana Publishing
- *Foxy and Egg* by Alex T. Smith – Hodder
- *Croc and Bird* by Alexis Deacon – Red Fox

Supporting reading fluency

- While reading with the group, model skills and strategies such as predicting, sampling, confirming, self-monitoring, self-correcting, 'thinking aloud', interpreting things which are only implied, and the full range of cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic).
- Occasionally, you could hide some words with a post-it note, asking the children to refer to the illustration for ideas. You could give another clue by revealing the first syllable or letter.
- You could make a pairs game to develop visual memory and book language, creating cards using laminated images from the book. Make pairs of cards, one card for an illustrated location or character and one for matching words from the story. Spread these out face down. Children take turns to turn over two cards. If they match, they can keep them. If not, they have to turn them back over again. The game proceeds until all the pairs have been found.
- You could create a simple jigsaw by writing questions with corresponding answers directly underneath on one side of a piece of paper, then printing an illustration on the reverse and cutting the sheet of paper up to separate the questions and answers. The children lay out the questions and answers in order. They can check their layout by turning them over to see if they have created the illustration correctly.

Vocabulary building

- Make **word collections** based on the text, e.g., *hissed, hatch, pecked, geese (and goose), purr, autumn, feather*. Children can make collections of words which describe a particular character and their feelings or a place, event or situation.
- The text could also be used to investigate the structure, impact and placement of a wide number of prefixes and suffixes. For example, children could investigate any patterns in adding -ing (*waiting, flying*) to a verb; they could look at regular and irregular past tense verbs (*wanted, hissed, barked, chased, surprised, scared, carried, lived, asked, cried, passed, landed, dipped, dropped, stretched; was, went, came, burst, flew, said, had, were, grew, thought, could, made, saw, shone, shook, swam, did, ran, threw, felt*).



Opportunities to revisit the text independently

- With the children, make a set of magnetic or stick story props to use in a retelling of the story and to support children in their own independent retellings. If possible, provide extra copies of the book to support this.
- If the children have a good memory of the text through repeated readings, they can be given copies of the story to read to partners. This helps children to see themselves as readers.
- Allow the children to re-enact the story through play. Revisiting stories through a range of play-based experiences helps children to step into the world of the book and to explore it more completely.
- Use **hot-seating** to explore the main character further. One member of the group **role-plays** a character and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses.
- Make a **story map** as a way of retelling the story. This breaks the story down into episodes and sequences its events. This kind of graphic representation helps children to hold on to the shape of the story more confidently.
- Encourage the children to take the book home to read alongside a parent or carer and suggest that they use the 'Tips for grown-ups' pages to support their discussions.

Experiences linked to the text

- Look at the ways text is used creatively in the book, such as the eggs cracking on pages 4–5, 'WHOOSH!' on page 14 and 'BANG! BANG!' on page 15. Can the children find examples of this in other books?
- Use recycled materials, papier mâché or clay to create your own bird and decorate it.
- See which birds children can observe near where they live, including ducks, geese and swans if possible.

These resources were created by Bloomsbury and The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). For more teaching resources, visit:

www.bloomsburyguidedreading.com

www.clpe.org.uk