

Duckling Palace

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photographs by Elton Gregory

Overview

This non-fiction text describes how the SPCA cares for orphaned ducklings. It includes a report on the work of the SPCA, an explanation of how ducks waterproof their feathers, and instructions for what to do with a motherless duckling. This text is quite long and is likely to generate much discussion, so you might prefer to read it over two sessions. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2006*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of asking questions and summarising. It also provides excellent opportunities for learning and practising strategies for working out and clarifying the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the information about ducklings and the SPCA
- the speech bubble with extra information on page 3
- the subject-specific vocabulary, for example, “ducklings”, “SPCA”, “Society”, “Prevention”, “Cruelty”, “stray”, “wild”, “hatched”, “incubators”, “recycling”, “heat lamp”, “straw”, “hatch”, “feeds”, “pellets”, “wooden”, “pen”, “release”, “Adult”, “oil”, “gland”, “base”, “bill”, “feathers”, “waterproof”, “grooms”, “nest”, “local”
- the conversational tone
- the use of questions directly addressed to the reader
- the use of italics for emphasis
- the idiom “the wide world”
- the metaphor of a palace and a king
- the mix of text forms
- the indicators of time – “You know it’s spring when”, “only a few days”, “just a few hours”, “When ducklings arrive”, “By the time”, “For their first week”, “at about sixty-six days old”, “At about eighty-five days old”
- the use of paragraphs
- the use of commas to separate ideas in a sentence
- the numbers written as words
- the abbreviation “SPCA”
- the hyphenated words – “upside-down”, “twenty-five”, “sixty-six”, “eighty-five”, “hot-water”
- the words with silent letters, for example, “hatched”, “hatch”, “climb”, “right”, “eighty-five”, “cupboard”
- the words ending in “le” – “people”, “handle”, “possible”, “little”.

Introducing the text

Look through the book with the children and have them think, pair, and share their predictions about the topic and text structure, for example, the mix of text forms. *What can you tell me about ducklings?* Together, create a list or web of words they might expect to see in a book about stray ducklings.

If your purpose is for the children to practise asking questions of a text, have them think, pair, and share their questions. If necessary, start them off by modelling asking a question of the text yourself. Record the questions in the group reading book or on a chart to refer to during the reading.

Alternatively, on the whiteboard you could write a selection of the subject-specific vocabulary from the text to read with the children (for example, write “ducklings”, “incubator”, “SPCA”, and “stray”). Discuss the meanings of the words and encourage the children to speculate about connections between them.

What do you think this book is going to tell us? If necessary, prompt with *Think about what the SPCA would do with the ducklings.* You could then add the word “palace” to the list and see how that changes the children’s ideas – or stimulates questions.

Review the strategies the children could use to decode new words, for example, breaking longer words into chunks or syllables and looking for parts of the word that are familiar. Move on to a discussion of strategies they could use to work out word meanings, for example:

- reading on to the end of a sentence or paragraph;
- looking for definitions or explanations in the text;
- referring to illustrations or photographs;
- making connections to what they already know and to the introductory discussion;
- using their knowledge of word structure.

Share the purpose for the reading with the children. Note that you could reread this text a number of times with a different purpose each time, depending on the needs of your children. Here are some examples of purposes for reading:

- *I want you to look for information that answers any of our questions and to think of new questions while you read this text.*
- *There’s a lot of information about looking after ducklings in this text. I want you to be thinking about what the main points are so that we can summarise this text after the reading.*
- *I want you to practise at least two ways of working out the meanings of new words while you’re reading this text.*

During the reading

Session One

Read the title and the names of the author and the photographer.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties. Encourage them to write down any words that they are unsure of.

Pages 2 and 3 – *Do these pages answer any of your questions? What is the duckling palace? How did you work that out?* Read the first sentence inside the speech bubble to the children and then ask them to read the remainder of the information silently. Check their understanding: *What is the SPCA? What does Lloyd mean by returning animals “to the wild”?* Remind the children of the purpose for reading, for example, *If you were going to interview Lloyd about the ducklings at the duckling palace, what would you want to find out? Or What do you think are the most important ideas on these two pages?*

Page 4 – *Why do some ducklings end up at the SPCA?* Read the sign and discuss why it’s important.

Page 5 – *Look at the photographs and think about any questions that you might want to ask.* (The children’s questions are likely to involve the incubators, and the second paragraph includes a clear explanation.) Have them read the page and consider whether their questions were answered. If necessary, support the children with chunking “in-cu-ba-tors”.

Page 6 – If necessary, read this page aloud to model the use of commas to support phrasing in these compound sentences. *Does this information make you think of a question?* (That is, a question about the reason why Lloyd doesn’t want to handle the ducklings.) Note whether the children link this to the information in the speech bubble on page 3.

Page 7 – At the end of this page, review the children’s questions. *Have we answered our questions? Are there any more?* Note that there is an apparent paradox here – a conflict between the idea of the mother duck leading the ducklings to water (page 4) and the idea of ducklings getting wet and cold if they get into water. If the children don’t bring it up at this point, leave it to come back to later.

Pages 8 and 9 – Use familiar references to support the children in visualising the time spans (twenty-five days is about three weeks, sixty-six days is about the length of a school term). *Why would Lloyd need to release the ducklings in safe places?*

If you plan to read this text over two sessions, this is a good place to stop and review the questions and/or summarise the main points.

Session Two

Introduce the paradox: *I’ve thought of a question. I’m wondering why the mother duck leads her ducklings to water when the text says, on page 7, that ducklings get wet and cold if they get into water ...*

Page 10 – Support the children’s understanding of this explanation by talking about oil before the reading. You could rub some oil onto a child’s hand and pour water over it to demonstrate the concept of “waterproof”.

Page 11 – Note that the focus of the explanation shifts to the duckling. *I wonder if this answers my question ...?*

Page 12 – Encourage the children to preview this page. Ask them to read the heading and then skim-read the text boxes. *What sort of text form is this? How do you know?* Ask them to read the page, then retell the instructions to a partner: *What are you going to do if you find a duckling?*

Draw the information from the two sessions together. *Do we have any questions that are still not answered? Where else may we have to go to find out?* Reflect on the type of questions that were asked. *Which questions were the best?* Review the usefulness of “Where”, “What”, “Who”, “When”, “Why”, and “How” questions. *Which information was new and interesting?*

Support the children to synthesise the information by asking *Can we make a list of the dangers to ducklings?* (Examples include losing their mother, getting cold and wet, being run over, and not getting food.)

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Ask the children to choose a double-page section they found particularly interesting and read it to a partner. Listen in, observing their fluency and expressiveness and how they manage the subject-specific vocabulary. *Tell me why you chose this part of the text to read.*

Identify some of the subject-specific words and talk about the strategies the children used (or could have used) to work them out. There are some words that the children may have heard but not met in print before or that they might know but that are used in this text with a different meaning, for example, “bill” and “pen”. Practise together with the word “release” on page 8. *If you didn’t know what it meant, how could you work it out?* The children may recall the mission of the SPCA to return wild creatures to the wild (on page 3); they may also recall the idea of not getting too friendly and the phrase “into the wild”, which both signal the idea of letting go. In addition, if the children read on, they’ll see that the text and photograph on page 9 strongly reinforce the idea of setting the ducklings free. Have a dictionary handy as another way of checking.

Have the children provide information to create a mind map of how to look after ducklings. This is an excellent activity for evaluating how well they have synthesised the information.

Identify the indicators of time in the text and draw out the idea that they help the reader to follow the sequence of events. Together, construct a timeline of the growth of a duckling to adulthood. You could also discuss the convention of using number words in a written text but numerals in a mathematics context.

Draw the children’s attention to the author’s use of paragraphs. Explain how each paragraph has a main idea. Ask the children to reread a page or two with more than one paragraph and to summarise the main idea of each paragraph.

Focus on the conversational tone of the information. *How does the author make it seem as if she is talking to us?* You could talk about the direct address to the reader (“You know”, “you need”) on page 2, the use of contractions, and the use of italics for emphasis.

Focus on the impact of the design on the text. Explain that every book has a designer as well as an illustrator or photographer and that it’s the designer who decides how to put everything together. *What has the designer done to help make this book easy to follow and to understand?*

Locate examples of hyphenated words in the text. *Why are these words joined by a hyphen?* Draw out the idea that two words joined with a hyphen have a single meaning but that separately they can mean two different things.

Focus on some of the words with silent letters, for example, you might want to explore the silent “gh” in “eighty-five” and “right”. Help the children to draw on their developing spelling knowledge and to list further examples. You could start a chart of some of the other words in the text with silent letters and have the children add other examples of words with the same silent letter as they come across them.

Write some of the words ending in “le” on the whiteboard and talk about how the end sound of these words is pronounced. Think of other examples, such as “apple”, “prickle”, or “table”.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2006*.

You could read the article “Looking After Ducklings”, which describes a child’s experience of caring for stray ducklings, in *Cricket Bat Smash!: Journal of Young People’s Writing 2001*.

Draw a duckling inside an incubator or alongside their water and food and add labels, using the text as a reference.

Together, create a glossary by writing definitions for some of the topic-specific words.

Visit the library or the SPCA website to find out more about the SPCA.

Interview a person who works for the SPCA doing animal rescue work.

Encourage the children to use some of the features of the writer’s style to create a conversational tone in their own writing.