

These notes are for:

- Grades 2-4
- Ages 7-9

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Science
- Visual Art

Example of:

- Chapter book
- Junior fiction
- Illustrated fiction

Experience of:

- Reflecting on text
- Reading & writing
- Speaking & listening
- Viewing & creating

Themes:

- Friendship
- Pets
- Responsibility
- Persistence
- Teamwork
- Problem solving & flexible thinking

Values addressed:

- Care & compassion
- Responsibility
- Doing your best

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

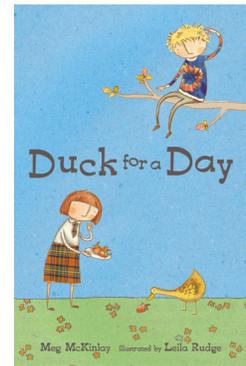
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Duck for a Day

Duck for a Day

Author: Meg McKinlay
Illustrator: Leila Rudge
ISBN: 978-0-7636-7840
\$12.99 (\$15.00 CAN)
96 pages
February 2012



Synopsis

What would you do to take care of the class duck for a day?

When Mrs. Melvino brings the new class pet, Max, to class, all of the students are desperate to take him home for the night. However, they must show that they can meet all of Max's strict demands before Mrs. Melvino allows it.

Abby works hard to make her home appropriate, but when Max finally comes home with her, he waddles away to the park. Abby must enlist the help of her annoying neighbor, Noah, to bring Max safely home.

Duck for A Day is a fresh and engaging story about persistence, responsibility and what can be accomplished through teamwork.

Author Information

Meg McKinlay grew up in Victoria, Australia, in a book-loving, TV and car-free household. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. She lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia, where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing.

Leila Rudge was born in England and grew up making mud pies with six siblings and Jeni from number fifteen. After completing an Illustration Degree at Bath Spa University, Leila headed to Australia to seek her fortune (and the sunshine). Creating tiny characters for books is her favorite part of illustrating.

How to use these notes

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *Duck for a Day*. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. The activities cater to a range of ages and ability levels. Please select accordingly.

Meg McKinlay on *Duck for a Day*

Sometimes it's easy to say where a story idea comes from, but often it's less clear. I think the very beginnings of *Duck for a Day* formed when I saw an interview with the cartoonist Michael Leunig, who draws lots of ducks. He was talking about how people are sometimes confused by his ducks, wanting to know what they're about, and he said, "I thought everybody would understand what a duck is about, and it's just . . . there is the duck."

That line stayed with me. It had a certain weight — the idea of "the duck" who was just "there," refusing to explain himself, but just being. A duck character began to form in my head, and one day the line "The duck was different. The duck had demands" came to me and I stopped in my tracks. Because I knew it was a line that had fallen out of a story, one that I was going to write. I had no idea what it was going to be about, other than that there would be a rather glorious and stubborn duck in it, but eventually other ideas came along and attached themselves to it and slowly, the story began to form.

I rewrote the book many times, trying to get it "right" and almost gave up. But then I saw some of Leila Rudge's early sketches of the characters and they were all so perfect and so real that I couldn't help but keep going. The characters of Abby and Noah (not to mention Max!) are very dear to me and I'm really pleased I managed to find their story.

Before Reading *Duck for a Day*

- From the title of the book only, what do you think the story might be about? What genre do you think it will be? How do your predictions change after looking at the cover? What about after reading the blurb?
- As a class, brainstorm the word "duck." Draw the outline of a duck on the board then inside it, write down facts people know about ducks, words they would use to describe them, places or objects they connect ducks with — anything at all!
- What sort of personalities do you think the characters on the cover have? Why?
- Vectors are lines which draw attention to particular parts of images. They can be either visible (eg. a finger pointing at an object) or invisible (eg. a character's gaze directed at an object). What vectors can you see on the book cover? What do they draw our attention to? (Some possible answers could include the characters' gazes drawing attention to the duck, the duck's bill drawing attention to the strawberry, or the boy's dangling legs drawing attention to the title.)
- What adjectives would you use to describe the title font (lettering) used by the designer? Why do you think they have chosen this font?

Classroom Activities and Discussion

- Create character maps for Abby, Noah and Mrs. Melvino. Draw a picture of each character in the center of the page and then around it write:
 - their name
 - information about their age, appearance, family, hobbies etc.
 - their role in the story
 - adjectives to describe their personality
 - three quotes from the novel which demonstrate their personality
- How does Abby view Noah at the start of the novel? How has their relationship changed by the end of the book? What brought about these changes? Do you identify (feel you have something in common) with either of these characters? Explain your answer.
- At the end of the novel, Mrs. Melvino admits that her demands regarding Max may have been "a bit too . . . demanding." Do you agree? Why do you think she behaved this way? Why do you think her attitude changed?
- Discuss the meaning of the word "goal". What is Abby's goal in the book? What are some of the steps she takes to achieve this goal?
- Think of a time you had a goal. Did you reach it successfully? What were some of the factors that contributed to this? Make a list of goals for the future and keep this somewhere you can refer to it regularly. Include short-term (within the next week), mid-term (over the next few years) and long-term goals (when you are grown up).
- Write a story retelling Max's escape to the park from his perspective.
- Working in small groups, choose an episode from the book and compose a play script based on it. Perform this for the class.
- Write an additional chapter to the novel. Think particularly about the friendship between Noah and Abby and how this might develop. Also consider Mrs. Melvino and whether her attitude to Max changes as a result of her experiences in the novel.

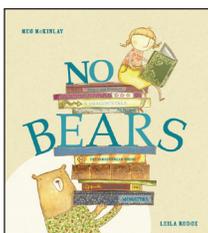
- Look at Leila Rudge's illustrations. How would you describe her style? What is unique about it? Choose one page of the story and illustrate it in your own style.
- After reading the chapter "The Duck has Demands," create an instruction booklet for looking after Max. Make sure you include illustrations and diagrams.
- Survey class members about the pets they have at home. Create a bar graph displaying this information. What are the most popular animals to keep as pets? Work out the average number of pets each class member has.
- Choose an animal often kept as a pet and use the internet or a book from the library to research what would be involved in caring for it. Consider diet, space, exercise requirements, grooming, vaccinations etc. Use this research to develop an infomercial about looking after your chosen pet. If possible, create a short film of your infomercial.
- Abby creates an album with photographs and diagrams to show how she can transform her backyard into a suitable environment for Max. Choose an animal and design an ideal habitat for it in your house or backyard. Make sure you consider access to food and water, shelter, a sleeping area, exercise, play, safety and security (will the animal be able to escape?). Create a model of your habitat and present this to the class in the role of an animal expert from a Zoo.
- Research companion animals in schools and in the workplace. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having animals at work or school? Have a class debate arguing the statement: "All schools should have a class pet policy".
- Design a poster promoting the benefit of class pets.
- Research ducks on the internet. Include information on different breeds, life cycle, diet, habitat, physical characteristics and relationships with humans. Present this information as a "Duck Data" poster, including a labelled diagram of a duck.
- Use the internet to find 10 unusual facts about ducks. See who can find the strangest fact!
- Play "duck, duck, goose." Have all students sit cross-legged in a circle facing inwards. One student, the "fox," walks around the outside of the circle, tapping random students on the head and saying, "duck." When they pat a student on the head and say "goose" instead of "duck," that student must jump up and try to catch the fox. If the fox manages to run around the circle and sit in the empty place without being caught, then the student still standing becomes the new fox.
- Read the final line of the novel, "It was just a few small hops, after all." Why is this line significant? Who else makes small "hops" in the book? What sort of hops are they, and in what direction?

Reviews

"Meg McKinlay is an experienced and well-recognised author who has a great capacity to create lively stories that appeal to younger readers. In *Duck for a Day* she captures a child's longing to have a personal relationship with an animal, as well as the chaos that can ensue when that animal behaves in an unexpected way. McKinlay's strong sense of narrative and her ability to craft strong characters means that even a novella such as this carries several themes, challenging the reader to question their values and assumptions as Abby learns to question hers. Heart-warming and funny, *Duck for a Day* is a delightful story." — *NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children website review*

". . . McKinlay's characters are so well drawn, and Rudge's illustrations equally so, that this chapter book ... lands squarely in the delightful category." — *Magpies, Volume 25, July 2010*

Also by Meg McKinlay



No Bears
Illustrated by Leila Rudge
9780763658908
March 2012