

Duck Skates **Classroom Activities**

The following are ideas for classroom tie-ins for use with the book *Duck Skates* (by Lynne Berry, illustrated by Hiroe Nakata). The activities are listed in no particular order, though I have indicated activities that will tend to be most appropriate for younger students (pre-K and K) vs. older students (grades 1, 2, and 3). Please feel free to pick and choose among any and all of the activities, to suit your particular students, your teaching style, and your curriculum needs. Have fun!

Picture hunt and story-writing

Hiroe Nakata has included some fabulous details in her illustrations! Use these details to engage students with the story and as potential story-writing prompts for older students.

For OLDER and YOUNGER students

Ask students if they can spot the following:

- Details in the ducklings' house:
 - A goldfish bowl
 - A duck doll
 - A bird cage
 - A picture of swimming ducklings on the wall
 - What else? Keep searching!
- A duckling peeking out the window of the house
- A bright red cardinal in quite a few of the pictures—see if you can spot him:
 - Perched in a tree
 - Perched on a sign
 - Flying away from a snowball
 - Rolling on a snowball
 - Singing
- A brown bunny and a white bunny in several of the pictures—follow their pictorial subplot!
- A reindeer
- What else? Keep searching!

For OLDER students

Use the picture hunt to extend into a story-writing exercise. Ask students to write about:

- What happened to the bunny rabbits before and after their appearance in the *Duck Skates* story?
- What else happened to the reindeer while the ducks were having their adventure?
- Where did the cardinal come from and why is he following the ducks?
- What happens to the cardinal after he disappears from the ducks' story?

What does an author do? What does an illustrator do?

The picture hunt above can be a great jumping-off point for talking about how words and pictures work together to tell a story—and therefore the roles of author and illustrator.

For YOUNGER students

Discuss the following with students:

- What story do the words tell? What happens in the story that we hear about in the words?
- Do the pictures tell a story that we don't hear about in the words? Here, you might focus on the cardinal's antics/pictorial subplot.
- How do you think the illustrator decides what pictures to draw? Here, you might point out that the author and illustrator of a book rarely work together closely. Most often, the author writes the story (words only on a plain sheet of paper), the story goes to a publisher, and the publisher sends the story to an illustrator. The illustrator reads the story and uses his or her imagination to decide what to draw, with little if any input from the author. Ask students:
 - If you were the illustrator, what additional picture details might you have added to the *Duck Skates* story?
 - What other activities might you have added for the cardinal?
 - Have students draw a new picture of something the cardinal might have done during the story.

For OLDER students

Take a more in-depth look at the writing and illustrating process—and engage students in thinking further about these processes—with questions such as:

- Who do you think has the more difficult job, the author or the illustrator? Why?
- Who do you think has the more fun job, the author or the illustrator? Why?
- Do you think the words and pictures of the *Duck Skates* story suit each other? Why or why not?
- If you were an author, how would you feel about sending your story off to a publisher, knowing that you wouldn't get to decide what the illustrations would look like?
- Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea for the illustrator to draw pictures for a story without any input from the author? Why? (Additional prompts: Do you like what the pictures add to the *Duck Skates* story? Do you think the author would have thought of the extra picture details that the illustrator thought of?)
- If you had been the illustrator of the *Duck Skates* book, would you have done anything differently? If so, what? If not, why not?

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness, or phonological sensitivity, refers to the ability to recognize that words are made up of smaller sounds, as well as the ability to manipulate these sounds. Sound recognition and manipulation are two of the skills that help children decipher written language, as they learn to recognize the relationship between spoken sounds and written symbols. Rhyming books can help develop phonemic awareness.

For YOUNGER students:

When reading the book aloud, ask students to help you complete the rhyming lines.

For OLDER students:

Ask readers to identify the rhyme pairs in *Duck Skates*. Ask students to choose two or more rhyming words as a starting point to write their own poem or story.

Making connections

Strong readers make connections: between what happens in a story and what happens in their lives, across different stories, and within a story. (For ideas about making connections across stories, see the "compare & contrast" exercise below.)

For YOUNGER students:

To help young readers make connections between *Duck Skates* and what happens in their lives, ask students to help you list all the things the ducks do during their day in the snow. Have students done any of the same wintertime activities? Ask students to rank the activities, from favorite to least favorite. Or, ask students to vote for their one favorite activity, and graph the results on a bar graph (activities on the x-axis, number of students who voted for each activity on the y-axis). Use the graph to answer the questions: Which activity is the favorite of the most number of students? Which activity is the favorite of the least number of students? Remind students how great it is that different students have different favorites!

Alternatively, prior to reading the book, ask students what they like to do on a snowy day. Ask students whether they think the ducks might do any of the same activities. Read the book to find out!

For OLDER students:

To help students make connections within *Duck Skates*, you might talk about how the story has a circular construction: The story is a home-adventure-home story, with the ducks starting at home, going out for an adventure, and ending up back home. Ask students: how is the ducks' time at home at the start of the day different from their time at home at the end of the day? How does this help change a story beginning to a story ending?

Verb work

Duck Skates is full of action and strong, action verbs!

For OLDER students:

Consider adding some of the less familiar or more challenging-to-spell verbs from *Duck Skates* to vocabulary and/or spelling lists: stumble, topple, zoom, dodge, fling, tramp, trudge, tromp, sigh.

Ask groups of students to choose three of the verbs from your list, then write and perform a short skit that uses/shows the actions of those verbs.

Work with students to identify interesting verb usage, for example, "Five ducks wrestle ten wet boots." Does this paint a more vivid picture than to say, "Ducks take off their boots"? What sort of picture does it paint? Is it easy or difficult for the ducks to get their boots off? What verbs could replace "wrestle" to paint a different sort of picture? Use examples and questions such as these to show students the descriptive power of verbs!

For YOUNGER students:

Get students moving! As needed, demonstrate the action of different verbs from the book. Then play a "Simon Says" style verb-work game: "Simon says topple. Simon says dodge. Simon says trudge in place..."

Position words (with craft activity)

Duck Skates has many position words: up, out, in, down, by, to, from, on, near, inside.

For YOUNGER students:

After reading the book, have students make *Duck Skates* puppets. (See instructions at: www.lynnberry.com/duckpuppet.htm. The materials are simple, the process is simple, and the puppets are adorable!) Play a "Simon Says" style game to practice position words with the duck puppets: "Simon says put your duck ON your head. Simon says put your duck NEAR your right ear. Simon Says move your duck FROM your right shoulder TO your left shoulder..."

Math skills

Duck Dunks hides some basic math concepts and skills.

For YOUNGER students:

The ducklings frequently participate in different activities; two ducks do one things, as three ducks do another. Give students a chance to count the ducks engaged in each activity. Or ask students to represent ducks engaged in different activities by miming those activities (or using their duck puppets to show the activities). For example, when three "student ducks" duck (during a snowball fight), and two student ducks mime throwing snowballs, how many total ducks do we have? Students will discover that no matter how the ducklings break into groups, they always add up to five! $3 + 2 = 5$, $2 + 3 = 5$, $4 + 1 = 5$, $1 + 4 = 5$: this introduces some basic addition and properties of addition.

Another repeated theme in the story is that five ducks have ten skates, boots, feet, etc. Preschoolers can count to ten, kindergarteners may start to see the pattern: 5 ducks X 2 boots per duck = 10 boots. They don't know that they are doing multiplication, but they are learning the concept nevertheless!

Compare & contrast: other snow books

For OLDER and YOUNGER students (modify terminology, approach, and specific questions to suit the age group):

Work on identifying similarities and differences between books by comparing and contrasting *Duck Skates* with other books about snow or wintertime activities. Examples of books you might choose for this activity include *Snow*, by Uri Shulevitz; *The Snowy Day*, by Ezra Jack Keats; *Snowflake Bentley*, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin; and any other of your favorite picture books about snow or winter. Some items you might wish to introduce as your students compare and contrast books:

- Fiction vs. nonfiction; realistic fiction vs. fantasy
- Rhymed vs. unrhymed
- Many words vs. few words
- Voice. Introduce the concept of voice by talking about how the writing makes you feel, and comparing/contrasting the feel of *Duck Skates* with that of other books. For example:
 - Does the writing feel serious? Or silly/funny?
 - When you read the book, do you feel rambunctious and loud? Or quiet and still?
 - Does the writing make a day in the snow seem exciting? Or peaceful?

- Style of illustration. In a picture book, the illustrations have a "voice," as well, and the questions in the above list apply. In addition:
 - Are the writing voice and the picture "voice" the same or similar within a single book (i.e., do they suit each other)? Why or why not?
 - If you were the illustrator of one of these books, what would your pictures look like? Would your pictures have a different sort of "voice" (i.e., would your pictures be more/less silly, more/less serious, more/less spooky, more/less colorful, etc.)? Why or why not?
 - Ask students to draw a new cover or illustration for one or more of the books.

Feel free to use Venn diagrams in comparing/contrasting books! (Each book would be a circle in the Venn diagram; similarities would go in the overlap between circles, and differences would go outside the overlap.)

Compare, contrast, & extend: Duck Dunks

For OLDER and YOUNGER students (modify terminology, approach, and specific questions to suit the age group):

Duck Dunks is a companion book to *Duck Skates*, allowing another opportunity for compare/contrast work, as well as an opportunity to extend (i.e., have students think about and/or write their own stories). You might approach this work by asking students to focus on story elements: Are the characters in the two books the same or different? What about the plot? The setting?

In considering these questions, ask students to get specific about various aspects of the different story elements, for example:

- **Plot.** The two books do tell different stories, so the overall plots are different. But are any aspects of the plot the same? One aspect of similarity you might discuss with students is that both are circular plots. *Duck Skates* is a home-adventure-home story (the ducks start at home, go out and have an adventure, and end up back home). *Duck Dunks* is not a home-adventure-home story (the story doesn't start with the ducks at home), but does have circularity in the language used at the beginning and end of the story. So the books are similar in having circularity, though different in the specifics of their circularity. Explore with students: are there other ways in which the two plots are similar? Ask students to extend: if you were writing a duck book, what would happen in your story? For younger students, write a group story or have students work on picture stories; for older students, ask students to write their own story about the ducks.
- **Setting.** How are the settings different? Are there any similarities? Ask students to extend: if you were writing a duck book, which setting would you choose? The *Duck Skates* setting? The *Duck Dunks* setting? A new setting? Why?
- **Characters.** Are the characters in *Duck Dunks* and *Duck Skates* the same five ducks? How do we know? (The individual ducks don't have names, so they could be five completely different ducks!) Is there evidence in their behavior? Their appearance? Are there any differences in the ducks between the two books? Ask students to extend: if you were writing a duck book, what sorts of things would the ducks do? Would they do a lot of quiet, sitting-still things? Or a lot of active adventure things? Knowing what we know about how the ducks tend to behave, what else could you imagine these particular ducks doing in *Duck Dunks* or *Duck Skates*? Have students write a short additional scene for either or both of the books.