

**theatre
for young
america**

Leader Guide

MAKE IT • PLAY IT • EXPLORE IT • PERFORM IT

UGLY DUCKLING



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The ArtsKC Fund



**National
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UGLY DUCKLING



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Adapted from the Story by
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THE STORY of the Ugly Duckling



Quick Story Summary

The Hatching: A Mother Duck hatches her eggs near a pond. Two ducklings hatch normally, but the third egg is unusually large. When it finally hatches, out comes a big, awkward duckling who honks instead of quacks and swims with wild energy.

The Duckyard: The other farm animals make fun of the Ugly Duckling for being different. He tries to help old Mr. Turk and Fernando gather corn, but mean birds steal his bucket. Feeling out of place, he decides to venture out into the world.

The Journey: Mother Duck warns him about winter dangers. Out in the wild, he survives freezing pond ice and avoids hunters. He briefly stays with Chickie and Sonnie, but leaves when they tell him to give up swimming and soaring.

The Transformation: In spring, he returns to the pond. Two majestic white swans arrive looking for a missing egg from the previous year. Looking down at his reflection, the Ugly Duckling realizes he isn't a duck at all. He has grown into a beautiful swan and happily joins his new family.



Meet the Characters



The Ugly Duckling (Swan): Curious and resilient. He struggles to fit in as a duck, but loves swimming, diving, and dreaming of flight.

Mother Duck: Kind and protective. She encourages her babies and always offers the Ugly Duckling a loving home.

Turk: An old, opinionated turkey who loves giving advice and avoids hard work or getting wet.

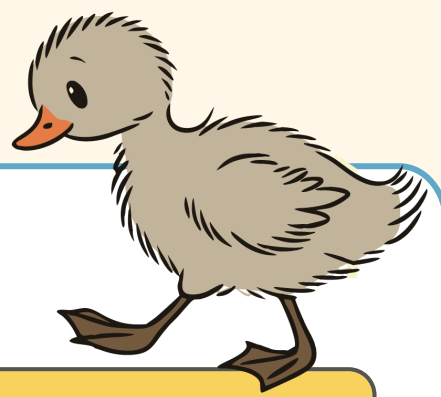
Fernando: A grand, proud old duck who wears a red rag on his leg as a special award.

Ducklings One & Two: Mother Duck's smaller, well-behaved ducklings who follow directions perfectly.

Chickie & Sonnie: A short-legged hen and a cozy cat who think the Duckling is silly for wanting to swim and soar.

Swan One & Two: Graceful, gentle swans who help the Duckling realize who he truly is.





THE BIG IDEAS



It's Okay to Be Different

The Ugly Duckling feels different from everyone around him. What makes us different can also make us special.



Be Kind to Others

The farm animals judge the Duckling because he looks and sounds different. Mother Duck shows him that kindness and belonging matter.



Growing Takes Time

The Duckling doesn't know who he will become. Everyone grows, changes, and discovers themselves at their own pace.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



MAKE IT



PLAY IT



EXPLORE IT



PERFORM IT

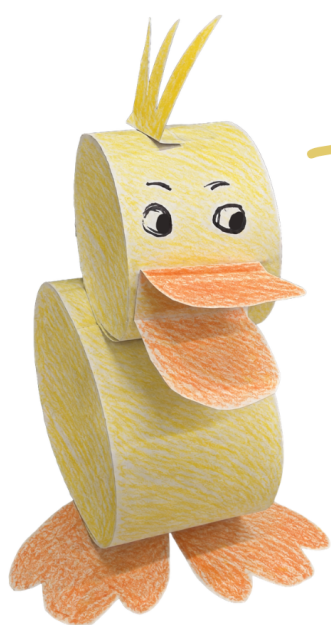
This guide is designed to help students take their experience of The Ugly Duckling from the stage into their own imaginations.

The activities are connected, creating a simple journey from **MAKE IT to PLAY IT to EXPLORE IT to PERFORM IT**. Students first create a duck, then discover its personality and what makes it special. From there, they explore the world of ducks and ponds before giving their character a chance to take the stage.

You can use the activities in order to create a complete theatre experience, or choose individual activities based on your students, your schedule, or the connections you want to explore.

There's no wrong way to play. Pick one activity, try them all, or create your own adventure!





THE UGLY DUCKLING — PAPER CRAFT

Materials



Printed template



Crayons or colored pencils



Scissors



Glue stick

Directions - You get to decide your waterfowl's appearance!

- 1 Color the “duck” pieces.
- 2 Cut along the dashed lines.
- 3 Use the solid lines as guides for folding & gluing.
- 4 Glue the head and body together.
- 5 Attach the plume, bill, and feet.
- 6 Draw eyes and any other features you want

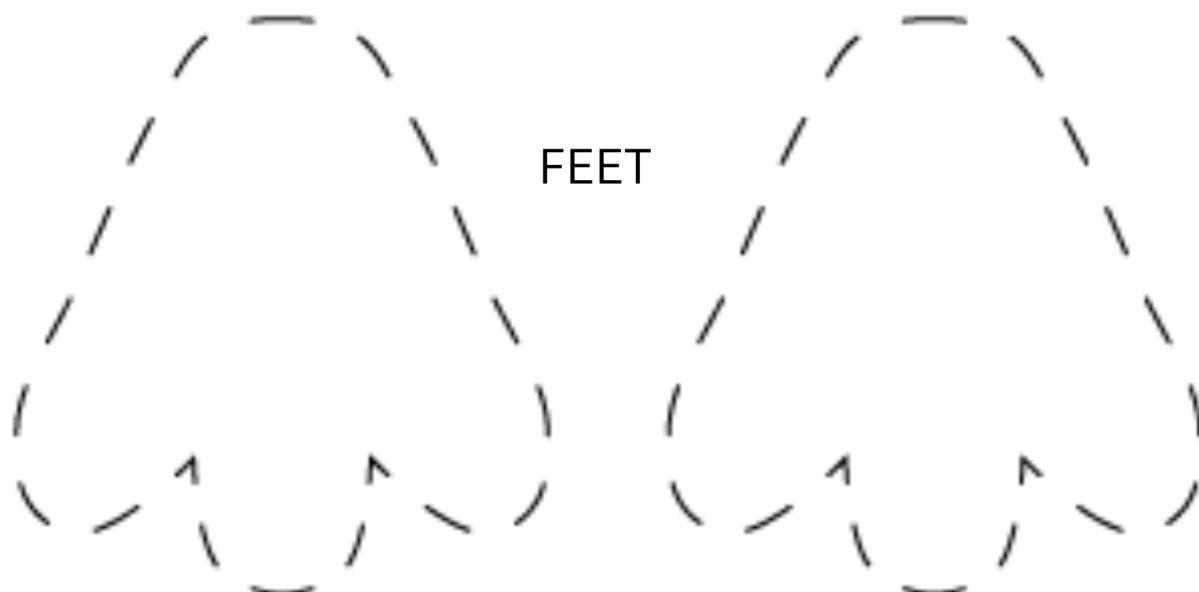
PLUME



BILL



FEET



Head

Body



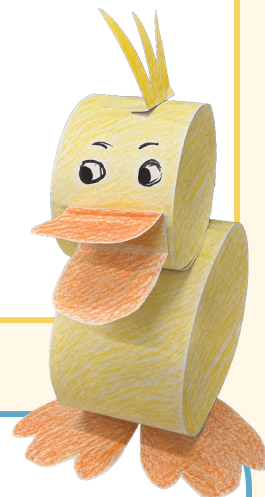
MAKE IT



Give Your Duck a Character

Once everyone has made their duck, invite students to decide:

- What is your duck's name?
- Is your duck shy, silly, brave, bossy, curious, lonely, or friendly?
- What does your duck like?
- What is your duck afraid of?
- What makes your duck special?



PLAY IT



What Makes Me Special?

After seeing the show, talk briefly about how the Ugly Duckling feels different. Then ask:
“What is something special about your duck?”

Maybe it has...

- funny feet
- a giant bill
- bright feathers
- a big personality
- a vivid imagination
- kindness
- bravery

Then give each child a chance to give their duck a special talent:

- “My duck can make everyone laugh.”
- “My duck can fly higher than any other duck.”
- “My duck is the best listener in the pond.”



Duck-to-Duck Conversations

Pair students with their ducks. Have the ducks “meet” for the first time.

Give them a few prompts:

- “Hello! What’s your name?”
- “What do you like to do?”
- “What are you really good at?”
- “What are you afraid of?”
- “What is your favorite thing about the pond?”
- “What is something nobody knows about you?”

Then let students improvise a short conversation between their ducks.

Challenge: What happens when two very different ducks meet?

You could have a shy duck meet a very bossy duck, a duck who loves swimming meet one who hates getting wet, or a duck who dreams of flying meet one who thinks flying is ridiculous.





EXPLORE IT

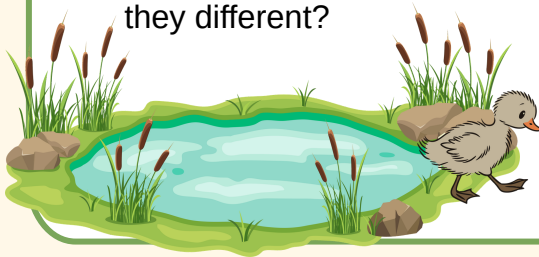


Life at the Pond

Ducks and swans are built for life on the water. Explore what makes them such good swimmers and pond explorers.

Ask students:

- Why do you think ducks can float?
- What do ducks use their webbed feet for?
- Why do ducks have feathers?
- What happens when water gets on a duck's feathers?
- How are ducks and swans alike? How are they different?



Duck, Dive & Paddle!

Turn the science into movement. Have students pretend they are ducks exploring a pond.

- Paddle! Waddle around using your “webbed feet.”
- Dive! Bend down and pretend to search underwater for food.
- Preen! Pretend to clean and arrange your feathers.
- Flap! Stretch your wings and practice flying.
- Freeze! A predator is nearby! Stay perfectly still.

Reflection: “What do you think would be hardest about being a duck? What would be the most fun?”



PERFORM IT



The Duck's Big Audition

Tell the students:

“Your duck has heard that the Duck Pond Theatre is holding auditions!”

Each duck has to **slate** and show the director one special thing it can do.

sing | dance | tell jokes | fly | make funny noises | tell a story | do a dramatic walk | etc.

The teacher/director can ask:

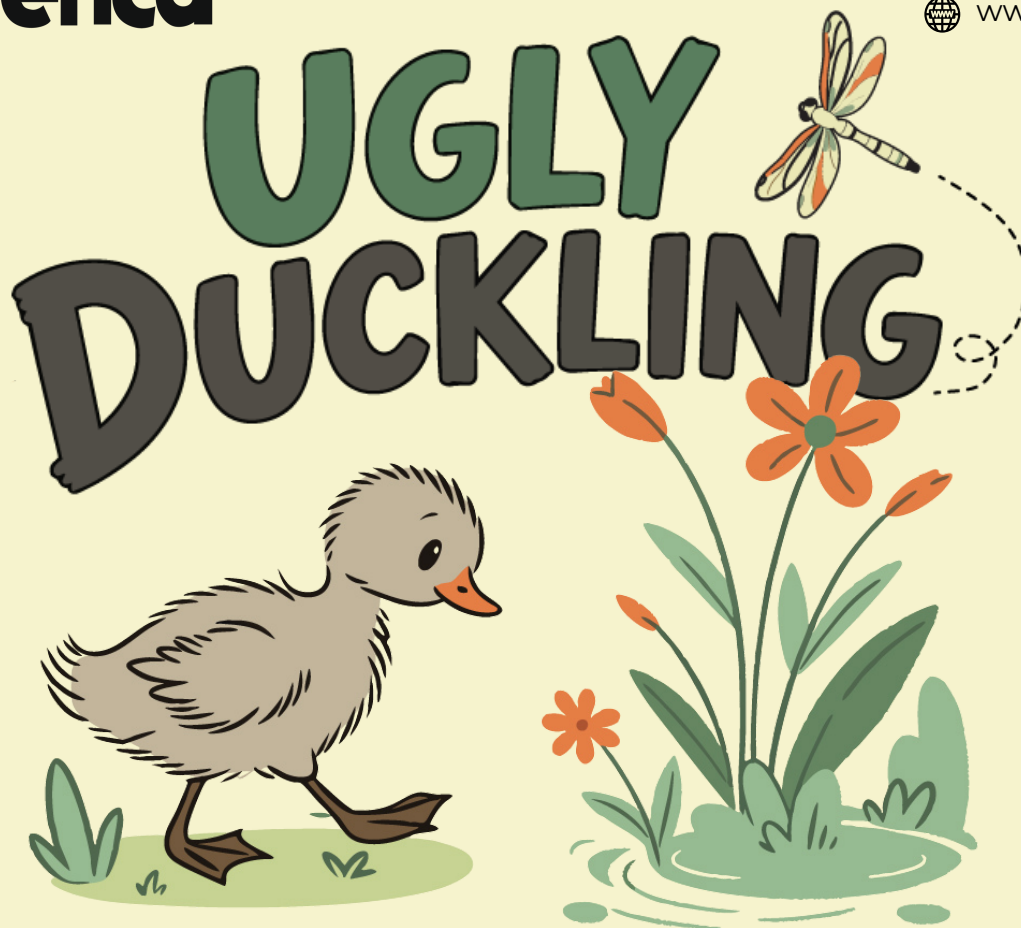
“Why should I choose your duck for the show?”

This activity encourages students to practice performance, confidence, character, and imagination.

Theatre Word: **SLATE**

A slate is a brief introduction an actor gives before an audition. It usually includes the actor's name and the role or material they are presenting.

Every duck has a story. Every story deserves a stage.

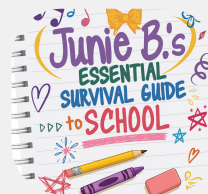


Upcoming Shows



The Great Christmas Cookie Bake-Off!

11/27/26 - 12/23/26



Junie B.'s Essential Survival Guide to School

3/9/27 - 4/10/27



Go, Dog. Go!

5/4/27 - 5/22/27



The Sleeping Beauty

6/12/27 - 6/26/27



Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

7/13/27 - 7/24/27