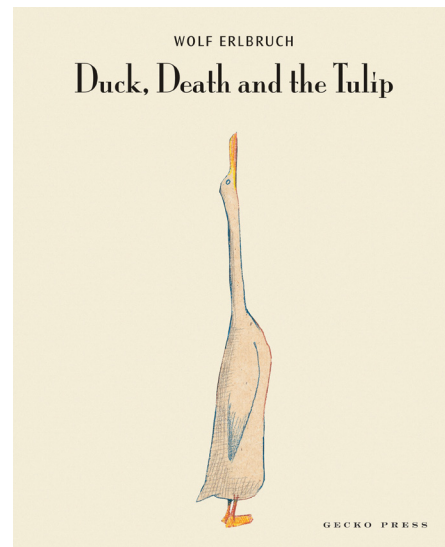


Teacher Notes

Duck, Death and the Tulip

Wolf Erlbruch



Summary

From award-winning author and illustrator, Wolf Erlbruch, comes one of the world's best children's books about grief and loss.

In a curiously heart-warming and elegantly illustrated story, a duck strikes up an unlikely friendship with Death. Duck and Death play together and discuss big questions. Death, dressed in a dressing gown and slippers, is sympathetic and kind and will be duck's companion until the end.

"I'm cold," she said one evening. "Will you warm me a little?"

Snowflakes drifted down.

Something had happened. Death looked at the duck.

She'd stopped breathing. She lay quite still.

Explaining the topic of death in a way that is honest, lightly philosophical and with gentle humour, this enchanting book has been translated into multiple languages, adapted into an animated movie and short film and performed on stages worldwide.

Talking about this book

Duck, Death and the Tulip is a sensitively written and presented picture book which introduces the subject of death to teenagers and children. These notes are intended to inspire creativity in planning as well as show how this excellent book can provide opportunities to promote a broad and balanced approach to English.

This book has themes of exploring empathy and the values of others, curiosity, thinking (critically, creatively and reflectively), diversity, cultural values, and respect.

With this book, students can use language, symbols and texts for understanding and creating meaning. They can learn to manage their own learning through presenting, writing and speaking activities. By listening to other people's views they learn to relate to one another and by participating in more discussion they can contribute more.

Duck, Death and the Tulip does not suggest any particular view of death and the dying process but leaves it up to individuals to form their own opinions and ideas about this. It is well suited to schools where students of many faiths and traditions can contribute their own ideas. The teacher's questions might look like this: "What do you think?" "How do you feel about...?" "What do you already know?" "What do people from other cultural traditions and countries think about it?"

Resources for teachers
working with children
aged 6 to 15+ years

Curriculum areas:
English
Visual arts
Movement
Drama
Music
German language

Themes:
• Curiosity
• Cultural diversity
• Empathy
• Respect



GECKO
PRESS

English

INTRODUCE THE BOOK

Explain to the students that a German author created this picture book. Perhaps look at a map to locate Germany and give some background about the author.

Wolf Erlbruch is a celebrated and original German author and illustrator. Winner of the 2006 Hans Christian Anderson Medal for Illustration, he has received many other awards. Erlbruch is recognized for his witty and winsome stories and his sophisticated synthesis of collage and drawing.

→ **TALK** to students about how picture books can communicate rather sensitive subjects and what they think this book is going to be about. Explore some of the student's ideas about death. Then read the story. Gather some responses to the book.

→ **ASK** students to discuss with the person next to them about what they like/dislike about this book. Discuss what they think about death. Does this book provoke some lines of thought or impressions about what they think of death?

→ **ASK** students what feelings they experienced when their listened to/read this book? Talk about why we as human beings have these feelings about death.

→ **ASK** the children what they would like to know about death and compile these to learn about together.

→ **TALK** about what the intentions of the author were to present this subject to young people. Is Wolf Erlbruch trying to encourage people to think about death or to teach them something he knows?

→ **TALK** about how these two things influence how we respond to death—do we want someone to teach us something or encourage us to think about something for ourself?

WHO IS THE BOOK FOR?

Ask the children to respond to this book by considering such questions as

Why would this book appeal to some people and not others?

What are ideal age groups to read this book?

Can this book be presented to younger people and older people?

→ **EXTEND** Challenge the students to prepare a way of introducing this book to a younger or older audience, perhaps thinking of members of their family as a reference, by preparing lesson plan with the person next to them, much like a teacher would. They should consider, "How would you present it differently to different audiences?" "How would you phrase questions differently?"

REWRITE THE STORY

→ **TALK** about rewriting this story for different ages and audiences.

How would you change the characters, the plot, or the setting?

How it would begin?

Would you change the main events in the middle?

What would you do if you wanted the audience to experience a specific point of view regarding Death?

PERSONIFICATION

→ **DISCUSS** personification as a language tool to express ideas.

→ **DEFINE** personification as a way of bringing an idea to life.

What has the author brought to life here?

How has Wolf Erlbruch personified Death?

→ **TALK** about the qualities and characteristics Wolf Erlbruch has given to Death and ask the students to support their ideas with references to what Death has said to duck.

→ **TALK** about other examples of personification.

How might good and evil be personified?

What things have the students seen personified on television, in films, in ads or in books?

→ **ASK** students to take a quality like love or anger and personify it into a character. Relate their ideas and techniques to those of Wolf Erlbruch's character of Death.

WHAT IS AN OBITUARY?

Look at obituaries and funeral speeches of well-known people. Discuss the purpose of such writing in our culture. Why is it important for people to mark the passing of their loved ones?

→ **ANALYSE** the structure, content and components of these articles and collate a list of structural markers/content that will be used for the students to create their own obituaries and funeral speeches either of a well-known person or a fictitious character.

WRITE A EULOGY

Write a funeral speech for the duck and/or people who are well-known to the students. Research online and in books from the library as well as the student's own knowledge. Write the article using the criteria acquired from the analysis in the last activity. Students should present their speeches so that class can assess their classmates performances according to the success criteria of a good speech.

BIAS IN OBITUARIES

Discuss how an obituary could be written for a famous and/or controversial person well-known to the students. Take the perspective of someone close to their cause and someone prejudiced against it. Talk about how one's own beliefs and values inform how we think about other people. Introduce how respect, democracy, freedom of speech and tolerance can influence our views on people and experiences.

COMIC STRIP

Compose a comic strip or a series of pictures and captions personifying a subject like Death. Consider two characters for this composition. Research comic strip examples to clarify what makes a successful comic strip-style story.

INTERVIEW WITH DEATH

Compose an interview with Death. Ask the students to compose an interview with a partner and present to the class. Talk about questions and responses.

→ **EXTEND** Challenge students to compose an interview with the personification of another subject like love.

REVIEW THE INTERVIEW

Write a review of this book for a local newspaper, magazine or TV/radio review program. Select success criteria for this activity by looking at newspapers, magazines and TV/radio to form structure and components of such an article.

POETRY

Write a poem about Death. You could write a poem after researching other examples of Death poetry. Look at good examples of practice and form success criteria in pairs or as a class.

WRITE A SEQUEL

Write a sequel to this picture book. What is going to happen to the Fox and the Hare?

DEATH IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Discuss how different groups of people experience and understand death through their culture and how they say goodbye to their loved ones. Compare differences between people in your country, looking at local cultures and communities. Focus on respect and understanding.

→ **EXTEND** Ask groups of students to research other countries and their traditions and present these as a project to the class preparing posters and brochures/leaflets.

Visual Arts

SHADING AND LIGHT

Analyse Wolf Erlbruch's use of art materials in his illustrating. Focus on drawing—shading areas of the skull in regards to how the light falls on it. Look at how shading creates the existence of light.

→ **FOLLOW UP** with examples from art books to show how artists do this. Students can use these pictures to practice their own drawing using light as a subject or draw from objects they can see such as plants or containers.

COLLAGE

Look at the book to see what Wolf Erlbruch has used as a subject of collage, i.e. Death's clothes. Ask students to observe the techniques he has used closely.

Challenge students to create their own character from their own imagination, e.g. happiness or sadness, and then apply some technique of collage to present them. Ask them to use drawing or collage to express their imaginative compositions and present their creations to the class.

Movement

DANCE ROUTINE EXPRESSING A THEME

Gather examples of dance routines from YouTube videos where dance has been used a medium for expressing themes like happiness, love, anger. Discuss what techniques and dance elements help to successfully express these themes.

Create a dance routine for the subject of Death. Challenge students to create dances, individually, in pairs or groups for other subjects like happiness, anger, etc. Evaluate components/elements of dances, perhaps particular moves, speeds and rhythms.

Drama

ACT OUT A SCENE FROM THE BOOK

Have students act a part of the story in pairs, one playing the duck and the other Death. Evaluate and discuss which components, elements, techniques and conventions of drama expression were the most successful and refine performances in the light of them.

CREATE A SHORT PLAY, SKIT OR FRIEZE

Challenge the students to present plays, skits or a frieze about meeting a subject like Death, e.g. love, peace, war, dream, despair etc.

What would they say?
How would they react?
What do they want to teach us?
What is the purpose of their existence?
How would these things be created in terms of dramatic arts?
What methods could present these ideas effectively and with impact?

Music

RESEARCH PERSONIFICATION IN MUSIC

Ask students to select instruments and sounds that can personify death. Look at other examples of music where the composer has personified certain qualities. Holst's 'The Planets' may be a good model for personifying the planets of the solar system. Identify how instruments and percussion are used to present particular moods, feelings or ideas.

CREATE A COMPOSITION

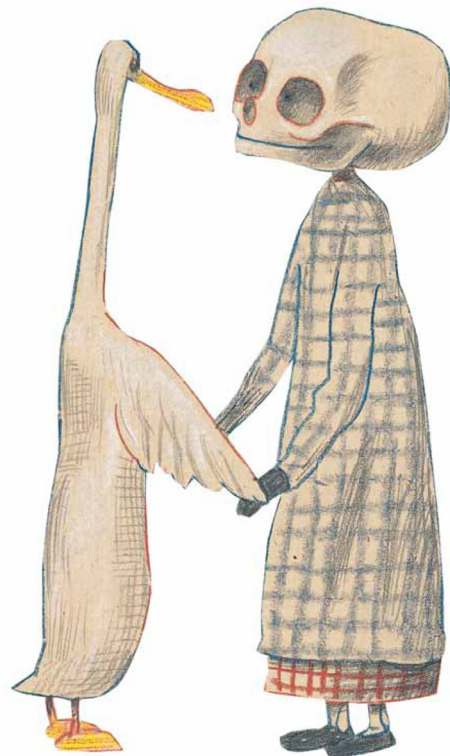
Challenge the students to present lyrics and musical/percussion compositions representing a theme such as death, love, joy, melancholy or boredom. Evaluate the performances according to how successfully the composition personified the feeling or experience.

German language

COMPARE TEXTS

Look at the words in the German edition, *Ente, Tod und Tulpe*, and compare the meanings.

Sometimes the meanings in the two versions don't match. Why could this be?
How has the translator translated the tone, emotion, and rhythm of the words?
What makes it tricky to translate a picture book?
Is it easier to translate something that has very few carefully selected words, like a poem?



For more information

United States contact: Kathleen Clarke, kclarke@lernerbooks.com
United Kingdom contact: Louise Corcoran, lcorcoran@bouncemarketing.co.uk
Australia contact: Steve Spargo, steve.spargo@walkerbooks.com.au
New Zealand contact: Sandra Noakes, sandra.noakes@harpercollins.co.nz
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