

A Useful Online
Toolkit for the Teacher

Teaching Through Fairy Tales:

The Ugly Duckling

by Hans Christian Andersen

Teacher Guidelines

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The Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Andersen

1. General Information

Textual Genre for Instructional Use: Classic fairy tale

Recommended grades: 3rd–4th Grade of Primary School

Estimated teaching time: 6–8 teaching hours, depending on the available instructional time and the needs of the class

2. Methodology for Developing Teaching Proposals

The following teaching activities are based on the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2013), which views students as active learners and promotes the development of critical literacy. Through this approach, students are encouraged to understand and question social, cultural and linguistic practices. The model focuses on the “design of learning”, a concept that describes teaching as a dynamic process in which learners and teachers collaboratively construct knowledge by drawing on students’ prior experiences, linguistic resources, cultural backgrounds and social contexts.

More specifically, teaching practice is proposed to include the following dimensions (Kalantzis & Cope, 2013; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015):

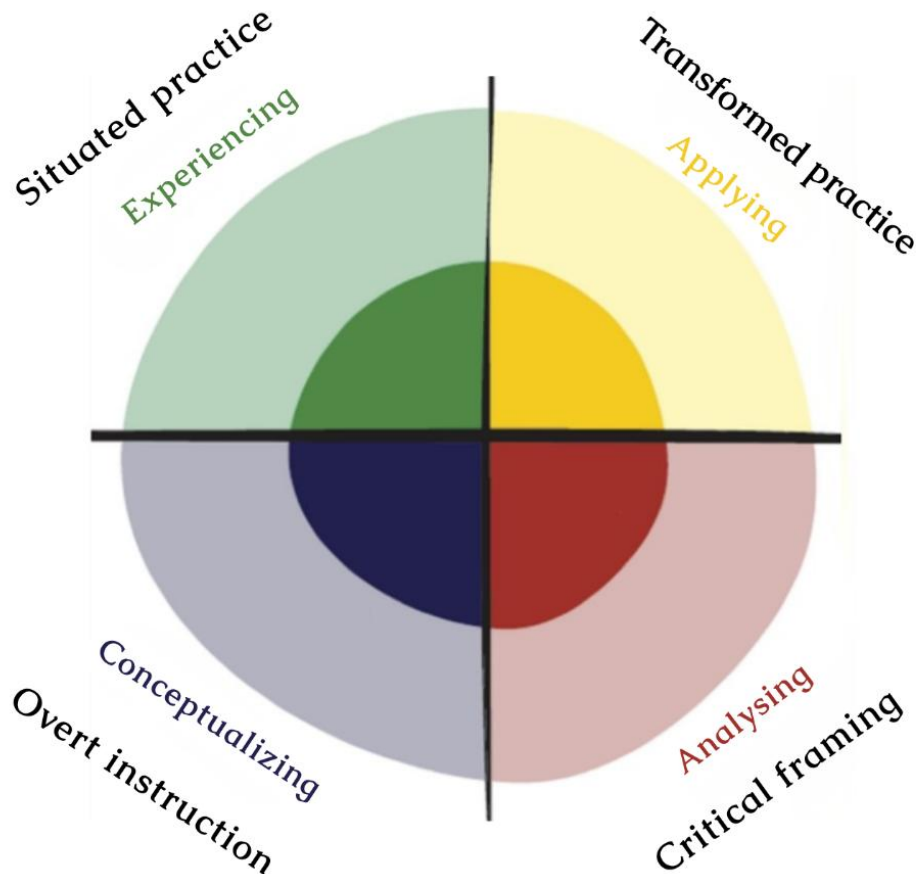
- **Multimodality:** Students recognize that information and meaning can be communicated through multiple modes, including language, images, sounds, movement and gestures. They learn not only to read or write, but also to understand and create meaning through different forms of communication.
- **Multiculturalism:** Teachers acknowledge and value students’ diverse cultural identities, experiences and backgrounds, helping them understand and appreciate the cultural diversity that exists around them.
- **Learning by Design:** Students become active co-designers of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. They construct knowledge by creating their own texts and engaging in authentic learning experiences that foster creativity, collaboration and problem-solving.

According to this approach, learning is organized into four pedagogical processes¹ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2013):

- i. **Experiencing**, where learners actively engage with the topic by connecting it to their prior knowledge, personal experiences and cultural backgrounds.
- ii. **Conceptualizing**, where learners use language and concepts to identify, classify, compare and organize information, establishing relationships between ideas and developing a deeper understanding of the topic.

¹ The terms Experiencing, Conceptualizing, Analyzing and Applying have replaced the earlier terms Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing and Transformed Practice (Kalantzis et al., 2019, pp. 98–99).

- iii. **Analyzing**, where learners critically examine ideas, perspectives and relationships by identifying causes, consequences, assumptions and viewpoints. Through critical reflection, they evaluate different perspectives and strengthen their critical thinking skills.
- iv. **Applying**, where learners transfer and use their newly acquired knowledge in authentic contexts. They demonstrate their understanding by solving problems, creating meaningful products and applying what they have learned to new situations.



The schematic representation of the Multiliteracies model (Cope & Kalantzis 2009; 2015)

3. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the activities, students are expected to:

- recognize the values of acceptance and inclusion,
- develop a better understanding of the concepts of racism, stereotype, and prejudice,
- identify racist behaviours in their everyday life, at school, and in society,
- reflect on the effects that such behaviours may have on those who experience them,
- adopt attitudes of rejection and resistance toward racist behaviours,
- develop skills of critical reading and interpretation of literary texts.

4. Application of the Multiliteracies model

[≈ 1-2 teaching hours]

Experiencing

The teacher selects texts that are appropriate for the students' age and that draw on their everyday experiences, so that students can easily understand both their meaning and content and, consequently, become interested in them (e.g., children's songs, fairy tales, children's books, films, cartoons, comics, etc.).

Activity 1 aims to activate students' prior knowledge and personal experiences related to the topic under study. To achieve this goal, the teacher informs students that they will need to visit the library, choose two favourite children's fairy tales, bring them to class, and present them.

During the presentation, each student is given time to introduce their books by mentioning the title, the plot, and the reasons for choosing them. The teacher encourages students' active participation by implementing a simple game: they hold a soft ball and, after answering the first question, pass the ball to a classmate. Once the student has completed their answer, they return the ball to the teacher, who continues the activity by passing it to another student, until all students have participated and shared their opinions. Indicative questions include:

- What did you like most about this fairy tale?
- Which hero or heroine did you identify with the most?
- What message do you think the story conveys?
- Is there a character you identify with more than the others? Why?

The purpose of this activity is not to assess students, but to create a safe learning environment in which all children can share their personal experiences and thoughts.

[Before implementing the second activity of this phase, the teacher proceeds to read aloud the fairy tale *The Ugly Duckling*].

After the reading and the initial discussion of the fairy tale have been completed, in **activity 2** the teacher invites students to reflect on the story and identify scenes that may have caused feelings of sadness, rejection, or exclusion. Students are encouraged to discuss whether they have observed similar situations in their own environment. It is clarified that the purpose of the activity is not to illustrate the fairy tale, but to connect the literary text with students' personal experiences. Therefore, students may choose to draw any scene from the fairy tale, provided that they feel it is connected to their experiences or emotions.

Before the drawing activity begins, the teacher may discuss with students the symbolism of colours and the ways in which colours can express different emotions. Students are encouraged to choose colours that best represent the feelings evoked by the scene or experience they have selected.

After completing the activity, each student briefly presents their drawing to the class, explaining:

- which scene from the fairy tale inspired their drawing,
- which personal experience or memory is connected with it,
- why they chose the specific colours and symbols.

The teacher moderates the discussion with sensitivity, encouraging respect for students' personal experiences and avoiding putting pressure on any child to share experiences that they do not wish to disclose.

At the end of the activity, all drawings are placed on a large poster or sheet of paper, creating a “Wall of Memories.” This collective composition serves as a visual reflection on how the same literary text can evoke different thoughts, emotions, and memories in each reader, highlighting the connection between literature and students' personal experiences and everyday lives.

[≈ 1 teaching hour]

Conceptualizing

At this stage, students are invited to gradually construct the basic concepts related to the fairy tale and, subsequently, to the phenomenon of racism.

In **activities 3–7**, students work with the excerpts provided either individually, in pairs, or in groups, with the aim of identifying the concepts that emerge through the narrative. They are not asked merely to locate specific words, but mainly to interpret the content and formulate broader concepts.

The teacher asks students to underline or mark words, expressions, or sentences that lead them to identify concepts related to the broader theme of racism. At the same time, students are encouraged to justify each choice by explaining which part of the text led them to that conclusion. A whole-class discussion follows, during which each student or group presents its findings.

In **activity 8**, the teacher divides the class into small groups of four or five students and gives each group an A4 sheet of paper on which students will write the words they identify in the excerpts and create an “Anti-Racist Dictionary.”

Initially, students are asked to consult the dictionary provided as a reference in order to understand the meaning of the words. They are then invited to identify words that they believe are connected to the story of *The Ugly Duckling* and to their own experiences. Students may identify concepts such as difference, exclusion, acceptance, prejudice, stereotype, racism, behaviour, empathy, cooperation, respect, and inclusion, among others. The teacher encourages students to discuss the meaning of each concept, provide examples from the fairy tale, and connect the concepts with specific excerpts so that they become fully understandable to all group members.

If students have difficulty defining a concept, the teacher guides them toward reliable sources (such as the WHO or UNICEF) so that they can formulate simple and comprehensible definitions.

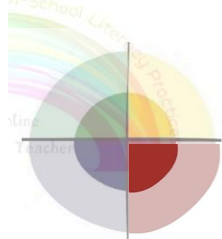
After completing the activity, each group presents its dictionary to the whole class. A discussion follows, during which similarities and differences among the groups are identified. The class then creates a collective “Anti-Racist Dictionary,” which may remain displayed in the classroom or be enriched throughout the school year.

During the activity, the teacher ensures that any misunderstandings are clarified and that scientifically accurate terminology is used, without restricting students’ active participation.

In order to gradually introduce students to the stage of analysis, the following guiding questions may be particularly useful:

- Which behaviour in the story shows prejudice?
- When is the Ugly Duckling marginalized?
- Is there any point in the story where acceptance or empathy becomes visible?
- How would you describe the behaviour of the other animals toward the protagonist?

At this stage, students are encouraged to understand that the words they identify in the dictionary do not constitute merely theoretical definitions; rather, they acquire meaning through the literary text. In this way, the transition to the stage of analysis and to the broader framework of multiliteracies is supported, where students will critically examine the meanings of the fairy tale.



Analyzing

[≈ 2 teaching hours]

At the analysis stage, students are invited to examine the literary text critically and interpret its messages and the behaviours of its characters. The teacher divides students into small groups and asks them to focus on the fairy tale, with the aim of exploring the characters and the relationships that develop among them.

In **activity 9**, students identify the main characters of the fairy tale and record their characteristics, actions, and the ways in which they behave toward the duckling. The discussion focuses not only on emotions that may justify the protagonist’s reactions at different points in the story, but also on the motives that may lead the other characters to adopt particular behaviours. The teacher encourages students to support their views by referring to specific passages from the text and providing examples or excerpts that justify their interpretations.

In **activity 10**, students remain in their groups and are invited to create a drawing depicting the way they believe the fairy tale would have changed if the other animals had accepted the duckling. After completing their drawings, each group presents its work to the class. The teacher may display the drawings in the classroom, creating a small exhibition through which students observe the different perspectives and interpretations that emerged.

At the end of the activity, a discussion follows in order to help students realize that attitudes and behaviours are often influenced by stereotypes, prejudices, and social perceptions related to diversity.

After the character analysis has been completed, the teacher organizes a collaborative discussion activity. In **activity 11** students first work in pairs, discuss the questions provided, and record their ideas, which they later present to the whole class.

The teacher encourages students to analyze ideas, interpret meanings, and use examples from both the fairy tale and their own personal experiences or situations from everyday life.

The discussion focuses on the following issues:

- what the author may have intended to convey through the fairy tale,
- which perceptions are reflected regarding diversity,
- how prejudices and stereotypes influence people's behaviour,
- how social acceptance, respect, and empathy can be cultivated within the school community and society more broadly.

The teacher acts as the facilitator of the discussion, encouraging the participation of all students and creating a safe environment for expression. Intervention takes place when necessary in order to clarify concepts, manage possible disagreements respectfully, and help students justify their views.

After the discussion, students record the main conclusions in writing or on a worksheet and present them to the class. The teacher writes the common ideas on the board and helps students formulate basic messages related to diversity, social cohesion, and the value of empathy.

The activity concludes with a brief reflection, during which students are invited to mention one element that impressed them the most and one attitude they would like to adopt in their own interpersonal relationships.

[≈ 2-3 teaching hours]

Applying

In **activity 12**, students are invited to investigate how the same literary work can be interpreted differently by people of different age groups and life experiences. The teacher divides the class into two groups and explains that each group will undertake a different task related to collecting opinions about the message of the story.

The first group rereads the fairy tale and records its own views, while the second group retells the story to other adults in their environment (parents/guardians, grandparents, friends, etc.). After the narration, students ask these individuals to express their thoughts about the message of the fairy tale, focusing on what they consider to be the most important point of the story.

During the next lesson, each group presents to the class the data it has collected. The teacher moderates the discussion and encourages students to compare the different opinions, identifying similarities and differences between their own interpretations and those of the adults.

The teacher uses the guiding questions provided in the lower part of the activity to help students formulate conclusions regarding the role of age, life experiences, and social context in shaping

opinions. Through this process, students realize that a literary text can acquire multiple meanings and interpretations, which are shaped by each reader's experiences, values, and perspectives.

Finally, **activity 13** constitutes the creative application of all the previous stages. Students are invited to synthesize the knowledge and experiences they have gained through the study of *The Ugly Duckling* and create their own anti-racist fairy tale that promotes respect for diversity, inclusion, and equality.

The teacher may begin by presenting to students the work of the National Council Against Racism and Intolerance (NCRI) and inviting them to participate in a children's anti-racist fairy tale writing competition organized by the Council.

Students work in groups. Through discussion and with the support of the teacher, they design the basic structure of their story. They are reminded that the fairy tale should include, among other elements:

- a hero or heroine,
- an environment where the story takes place,
- a problem faced by the characters,
- characters who express a stereotype or prejudice,
- a resolution achieved through acceptance, respect, and cooperation.

The teacher emphasizes that the goal is not merely to present a story with a happy ending, but to communicate clearly the message of equality and empathy without reproducing stereotypes or racist perceptions.

Throughout the writing process, the teacher supports the groups, encourages cooperation and the exchange of ideas, and guides students toward the use of appropriate vocabulary and the creation of characters that highlight the value of acceptance.

After completing the writing task, each group illustrates its fairy tale and presents its work to the class. During the presentation, students explain the message they wish to convey, the choices they made in shaping their characters and plot, and the ways in which they sought to promote acceptance of diversity.

The activity concludes with a reflection during which students discuss how literature can contribute to overcoming stereotypes and fostering a society characterized by acceptance, respect, and inclusion. Through this final activity, students move from being readers to becoming creators, applying in practice the knowledge and values they have developed throughout the previous stages of the multiliteracies model.

GLOSSARY OF USEFUL TERMS

A

Antiracism: Challenges dominant racist discourses and highlights the social inequalities and power relations that are (re)produced through everyday communicative practices. It seeks to foster a society in which individuals coexist with mutual respect, challenges stereotypical perceptions, and promotes social justice and the protection of human rights (O'Brien, 2009; Tsami et al., 2021).

Assimilation: The absorption of one group of people (e.g. immigrants) into another, in such a way that the distinctive characteristics (e.g. language, religion, customs, and traditions) of the former group are no longer distinguishable (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

B

C

D

Diversity: The state of differing from the majority in terms of religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, social class, physical appearance, behavior, etc. (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

E

F

G

H

I

Inclusion: The process of integrating all individuals into the social community while respecting their diverse identities and individual characteristics, eliminating all forms of exclusion or discrimination (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

J

K

L

M

Minority: A group of people who are connected through their origin, beliefs, and/or behavior, but who, on the basis of these characteristics, differ from the broader social group to which they belong (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

N

O

P

Prejudice: The expression of a negative predisposition toward an individual or group, not based on objective criteria or evidence, but rather on personal preferences, stereotypical perceptions, or individual interests. This negative predisposition may be related to different characteristics of the individual or group, such as biological sex, gender, race/ethnicity, or religion (e.g. “All people of Albanian origin are thieves”; Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

Q

R

Racism: Discrimination against individuals or groups based on certain characteristics, aimed at excluding them from the wider social community.

The forms of racism encountered include:

1. Racial racism
2. Social racism [religious, political, gender-based discrimination (sexism), etc.] (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

S

Stereotype: A conventional, oversimplified characterization attributed to members of a group of people or to objects, based on generalizations. For example: “Men are better drivers than women,” “Act like a man/lady,” “He’s a man, so he’s allowed to say a few extra words!”, “This game is for boys/girls,” “Don’t cry like a little girl,” “Men don’t cry,” etc. (Mandala & Makrygianni, 1997).

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