

## **Farmer Duck by Martin Waddell & Helen Oxenbury**

Often described as the four years olds Animal Farm.

Begin by looking at the title page with your group. Ask the children what they see. They will clearly see the duck. Pursue this discussion further. How do they think the duck feels? Why might he feel like this? It is important in any discussion of this nature that the children do not come to think that there is a set of expected answers.

The children might identify the grey skies and the general air of isolation and despondency that pervades the picture. (Not using these words of course!) It is also useful to compare the two end papers, one grey and gloomy the other full of cheerful colours that depicts an entirely different mood.

How do the different colours make them feel? Why do they think the illustrator has made the end papers different in this way? Looking at the pictures in this way could be the starting point for a variety of painting activities, helping children to represent moods and feelings through combination of colours.

After a reasonable amount of time has been allowed for discussion, read the book through with the children encouraging them to join in.

This book readily lends itself to the use of puppets, masks or simple animals costumes. If these props are available then children should be encouraged to use them outdoors as well as in. There are many important issues to discuss in this book that it would be well worth exploring them through some simple drama techniques which can be used for any story or poem that you wish to explore in depth:

- **Role on the wall.** This is an explanation of character and once completed can be displayed. Have a large piece of paper ready to note down the children's ideas. What do they know about duck? What do they think they know? What would they like to know? Write down their questions alongside their observations.
- **Hot seating.** Invite one of the children to come and sit in a chair to then be the duck. Ask the rest of the group to ask "the duck" any of the things that they might like to know. They might like to begin by using the questions devised in the previous activity. The children should be allowed to develop their questions with relative freedom. The idea is to explore the Duck's character not to guess a series of preconceived ideas fondly held by the adult. You might want to repeat either of the above activities using the farmer or one of the other animal characters as the subject of your discussion.
- **Conscience alley.** The idea of this activity is to help the duck make a decision. For example, this might be choosing whether or not to continue working for the farmer after experiencing a bad day. The children need to form two lines equal in numbers and facing each other. You will need one child to be the duck. One line of children has to tell the duck why he should leave the farm and the other line needs to give him good reasons to stay. The duck walks first down one line, listening to the advice of each child in turn and then down the opposite line listening to the opposing voices. It is not necessary for the duck to come to a final decision. The important issue underlying this activity is the opportunity for children to see both sides of the argument.

**Freeze frame.** An opportunity for the children to explore what might have happened at the meeting of the animals. Show them pages in the book where the meeting takes place. Work with the children to put them in the roles of some of the animals at the meeting. Encourage them to discuss what they might be doing – talking with a friend, taking notes, thinking, waiting to speak and so on. When an agreed signal is given the children 'freeze'

into position, they can then be asked to share what they are thinking – in role at that moment. The ending of the story of Farmer Duck is usually assumed to be happy and triumphant as the animals set to work on their farm (the farmer having been banished in an animal coup).