

The Ducks & Us Song

✧ Discussion / Reflection Guide ✧

Here are some suggestions, facts and focal points for individual and group engagement. We encourage you to use *The Ducks & Us* song and guide as a catalyst for thought, discussion, perspective and, of course, fun with environmental learning that includes social-emotional awareness!

We invite you to send us your feedback, stories, special info and comments about the inventive ways you contemplate and express your own place, in harmony, with the wild world.

Song Synopsis:

Claire comes to the park to visit with her friends, the ducks, and eat her lunch. The ducks emphatically eat the crumbs she drops. The ducks' behavior reinforces Claire's belief that they need her food. She leaves the park for home, returns with stale bread and begins to joyfully dole out crumbs to the eager ducks. During her visit with ducks in the park, Claire, unexpectedly, meets Lou, the park attendant, and two other park visitors, Chas and Kate.

As Claire, Chas and Kate share personal stories about offering their food to the ducks, Lou offers kind and wise counsel—food for environmentally friendly thought.

Lou's ideas prompt Claire, Chas and Kate to question their way of interacting with wildlife in their habitat. Their spontaneous exchange that afternoon in the park sheds light on the distinctive differences between human and wildlife needs.

Through genuine curiosity, mutual trust and a little science, Claire, Chas and Kate discover new perspectives in their beloved park and a harmonious way to share it with their self-sufficient, wild "friends."

Note To Instructors:

This program's primary objective is to provide an avenue of inspiration, guidance and discovery that engages and makes sense to you and your students. "The Ducks & Us" learning tool demonstrates ways in which both scientific and social-emotional factors are relevant when it comes to wildlife safety and preservation.

In your work with individuals and groups, we encourage you to pay considerable attention to the very personal nature of human engagement with wildlife. By juxtaposing the science of wildlife protection with an acknowledgment and understanding of "soft" human needs, environmental stewardship and human self-awareness form a significant and meaningful link.

As group facilitator, we encourage you to use the song as an invitation to reflect/write, tell and discuss pertinent stories.

Begin by playing the CD.

Let the class have a moment to digest what they heard.

Ask a few focused questions about the park visitors.

Question:

What beliefs prompt Chas, Kate and Claire to give human food to the ducks?

EXAMPLES:

- Claire and Chas: "The ducks will not survive without my food."
- Chas: "Stale bread is best recycled by leaving it for or giving it to the ducks and other wildlife."
- The ducks beg for and gobble up my food so it must be good for them if they like it so much.

Environmental educators tell us bread can attract rats and are deleterious to the water and to ducks.

Ducks, like many wild animals, are opportunistic eaters and will eat whatever is available. Ducks rely upon us to exercise wise regard for their natural impulses and innocence.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

- Kate: "The ducks like to play with me."

Environmental educators tell us wildlife is best served by keeping their distance from human culture for self-preservation.

It is common to mistake our needs for someone else's. Recognizing our own needs enables us to ask for assistance whenever required, to practice empathy and to be receptive to our planet-mates, different from us though they may be.

Question:

What are some of the personal motivations that prompt park visitors to interact with the ducks?

EXAMPLES:

- Having the ducks "come around" offers us company, a sense of connection with nature, solace and fond memories.
- Flocks of ducks flying around close can evoke a sense of power and ward off loneliness.

Questions:

1. Can Claire enjoy the ducks' company without casting her lunch to the ducks?
2. How can Chas honor the memory of his father without repeating this familiar activity?
3. Can Kate find an audience for her singing that is as attentive as the "hungry" ducks?
4. What can we do to help the ducks quit begging?

Begin to relate the program to class members.

- Does this activity remind you of other park visitors you know or yourself?
- What kind of activities do you engage in at the park for solace, a connection with nature and fun?

Please describe one of those times or memories.

Forms of active observation while in the company of ducks and other wildlife:

- Take pictures from considerate distance.
- Draw a picture of the ducks you see in the park.
- Make journal entries about your observations.
- Write a poem or a letter.
- Share your creative expression with a friend.
- Breathe and enjoy.
- Draw a map of a crust of bread as it travels from your pantry to the duck's digestive system to parasites to lake water to swimmer's itch to...

Note:

It may not seem like one person refraining from feeding the ducks can make a difference but one crust of bread, eaten by a duck, can produce a plethora of parasites. Multiply plethora by 5 crusts of bread and then ten, get the idea?

FUN FACTS

A sample duck food menu (chosen by ducks)

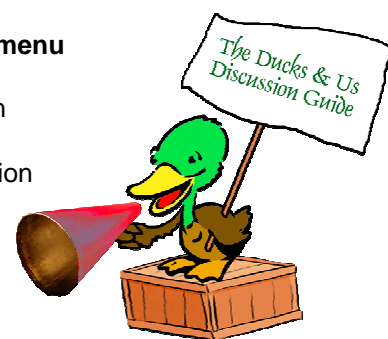
- slugs
- worms
- crustaceans
- grasses
- aquatic plants
- fish
- insects
- small amphibians
- small mollusks

According to Wikipedia...

- Most ducks have a wide flat beak adapted for dredging.
- Dabbling ducks feed on the surface of water or on land, or as deep as they can reach by up-ending without completely submerging.
- Along the inside of the beak they have tiny rows of plates called lamellae like a whale's baleen. These plates let them filter water out of the side of their beaks and keep food inside.
- The word duck (from Anglo-Saxon *dūce*), came from the verb "to duck," meaning "to bend down low as if to get under something" or "to dive", because of the way many species in the dabbling duck group feed by upending. (See photo on back of "The Ducks & Us" CD jacket or CD online.)

An alternative duck food menu (chosen by people)

- your undivided attention
- keen observation
- unconditional appreciation
- curiosity
- admiration
- a song
- worms and slugs from your compost heap



Mark Magill

Closing Note

A mother and her young daughter sat near me at the edge of the lake in a neighborhood park. A duck couple emerged and waddled over towards me where I sat on a bench, holding an apple core. Clearly, the ducks thought I had "something" for them. I didn't.

I turned to the woman who had been patiently accommodating her child's curiosity about the ducks, holding her close, safely letting her squat near the water to see the ducks as they paddled around.

I told her about *The Ducks & Us* and asked whether she had some suggestions for the discussion guide, things people could do to enjoy the ducks, instead of throwing food at them.

She said: "My child is so thrilled to be in the park and to just see the ducks at all. I know we aren't supposed to give them our food and, anyway, I wouldn't want to complicate this simple activity that my daughter so enjoys all on its own."

Her comment reminds me of how wonder-filled children can be.

Pamela Sackett
ELA's Founding Artist & Director

P.S. Please visit emolit.org for an Associated Press article about "angel wing," a crippling feather deformation resulting from "a poor diet," such as calorie-dense bread. Afflicted young birds require physical therapy to recover; "angel wing" is incurable in adults. Affected birds can't fly! (<http://www.emolit.org/ducks+us.html>)

Thank you for making use of "The Ducks & Us" learning tool...WE can make a difference!



This guide presented as a service of
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