Have you ever felt as if the world goes “Quack” while you go “Honk”? That’s Ugly’s problem too, in this sparkling version of Hans Christian Andersen’s classic fairy tale “The Ugly Duckling.” With deft and witty dialogue, hummable songs, energetic dance numbers, and a variety of memorable characters, HONK! takes Ugly through the hurtful, tender, dangerous, and sometimes comic moments he faces because he is different. But in the end—with determination, the love of his mother, and the support of some unlikely characters—he discovers who he is, what he wants, and where he wants to be.

George Stiles (Music) and Anthony Drewe (Book and Lyrics) premiered HONK! in 1993. Since then it has had many successful productions world-wide. In a note about the play, Anthony Drewe wrote: “The principal theme of the show is clearly the acceptance of others who may appear different for whatever reason. The main message we wanted the audience to go away with was that different is OK, it is something to be welcomed, embraced and celebrated rather than feared, misunderstood or persecuted.” That has always been the message of the Wheelock Family Theatre, and we joyously present it once again in HONK!

Hans Christian Andersen was born in Denmark in April of 1805, to humble parents. His father had some social aspirations but failed to achieve them; nonetheless he took his son to plays and made toys for him, and both parents encouraged their son’s creativity. Young Hans liked to make his own puppets and perform plays with them, often acting out stories from the literature he had read, including the plays of Shakespeare. In addition, he made amazing and delicate paper cuttings which people still marvel at today. In 1816, his father died, and Hans had to support himself with low-paying jobs. However, despite the fact that people considered him unattractive, gawky, and too tall, he decided to try to become an actor and set out for the Royal Theatre Company in Copenhagen. There, one of the leaders, Jonas Collins, noticed his intelligence and sent him to a private school and later to Copenhagen University. Neither was a positive experience for Andersen, so he began to focus on his writing, publishing his first work in 1822. By the time he published the first volume of Fairy Tales for Children, in 1835, he was a successful author. At first the tales did not sell well, but their fame grew steadily, until in a few years they became recognized as storytelling masterpieces. Andersen reached the social heights his father had aspired to, interacting with the greatest writers and musicians of his day: Balzac, Robert Browning and his wife Elizabeth, Victor Hugo, Dickens, Brahms, Wagner, and Liszt among them. Andersen received knighthoods from the kings of Prussia and Bavaria and was honored by many other literary awards. He became ill with cancer and died in August of 1875.

Sources: www.en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Christian_Andersen
www.online-literature.com/Hans_Christian_Andersen
More ways to learn about Hans Christian Andersen…

*The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen*, by Beth Wagner Brust
*The Perfect Wizard: Hans Christian Andersen*, by Jane Yolen and Dennis Nolan
*The Young Hans Christian Andersen*, by Karen Hesse and Erik Blegvad

**other tales, other versions**

Some of Hans Christian Andersen’s most famous tales are listed below. Although they do not all end happily, they share the quality of real human experience, a warm moral center, and an understanding of the human heart. All are widely available, singly or in collections.

- “The Brave Tin Soldier”
- “The Emperor’s New Clothes”
- “The Little Match Girl”
- “The Red Shoes”
- “The Snow Queen”
- “Thumbelina”

Looking for versions of “The Ugly Duckling” presents one with an embarrassment of riches—a quick internet search produces over 10,000 results for books alone! In addition there are two Disney films, countless translations, and representations in art and music. A few interesting choices are listed below, with their writers/illustrators.

- “The Ugly Duckling,” by Jerry Pinkney - “lively in words and pictures,” *(Booklist)*, a Caldecott Honor Book
- __________________, the Graphic Novel (Graphic Spin), by Martin (RTL) Powell and Aaron Blecha
- __________________, (Flip-Up Fairy Tales), by Masuma Furukawa
- __________________, by Roberta Angaramo – “sunny and comic” *(Booklist)*
- __________________, by Robert Ingpen – “a darker version” *(Booklist)*
- __________________, Level 1 (Easy-to-Read Puffin), by Harriet Ziebert and Emily Bolan
- “The Ugly Duckling and Other Tales,” an Audio CD, by Rebecca Burns
- “El Patito Feo,” (Spanish version), by Irene Borday

[www.childrensylouetube.blogspot.com/favoritefairytales](http://www.childrensylouetube.blogspot.com/favoritefairytales)
Suggestions for activities:

- Read and illustrate one of Andersen’s fairy tales other than “The Ugly Duckling.”
- With supervision, learn how to make a paper cutting and try one of your own.
- Create a puppet show of one of the fairy tales and present it to the class.
- Write or act out your own version of one of the tales, or create a completely new tale.
- After reading about Andersen’s life, make a list of words that describe him, and create an artistic poster using those words.
- Interview a classmate, then write his or her biography.

being different

Ugly’s story is everyone’s story. We all feel different sometimes, we all struggle to fit in, find ourselves, and take pride in who we are. The quotes below can serve as discussion points for understanding Ugly’s steps along the way.

- “Different isn’t naughty, different isn’t bad so why should being different make me sad?”
- “Qu..onk! Qu..onk! Qu..onk!”
- “I didn’t want to be unique. I don’t like my grubby feathers, and I hate my stubby beak.”
- “I’m…I’m not a duck, I’m not a duck, I’m a swan!”
- “I was different as a duckling and now I’ll be just as different as a swan. I like being me. I like my honk. I like being different!”

Another way of getting at these ideas might be the following.

- There always seems to be someone who wants to feel superior by making someone else feel bad. Probably this has happened to everyone in the class. Share some of these experiences, and talk about what you did in response.
- Have you ever tried to change something about yourself in order to fit in with a group? Was it a good idea? Explain.
- Just as Ugly was proud of his ability to swim, most of us have a difference we do like: having curly hair, running fast, drawing well, being a good friend, doing math problems easily. Share one or two of the things you especially like about yourself, or about a classmate.
- The ugliest animal, the bullfrog, is one of the most helpful to Ugly. Do you find that surprising or not? Explain why.
- Explain Bullfrog’s phrase “warts and all.” Is there someone you love “warts and all”? Explain. What do you think are your “warts”?
- Eventually Ugly chooses to be different, by returning to the duckyard with Penny to be the only swans on the duck pond. Do you think it is a good decision?
- Ugly’s outer appearance changes, but not his inner self. What stays the same about him? What do you admire about the way Ugly handles his challenges?
how animals look and sound

- Ugly, like other animals, changes his appearance greatly when he grows up. Find pictures of the baby and adult forms of some animals you know. Describe the changes that you see. Which animals change the most? Do you think they become more beautiful as adults? Explain why or why not.
- Some baby animals not only look different from their parents, but they also have a special name. You might already know that baby ducks are called ducklings, but did you know that baby swans are called cygnets? What is the name for a baby horse, cow, cat, dog, pig, chicken?
- One of Ugly’s problems is that he can’t make the sound the ducks do. Can you quack? How about honk? What sounds do other animals make—can you sound like a horse, cow, pig, lion, chicken, bird? How about singing “Old Macdonald Had a Farm”?

friends and family

- Describe all the things Ida does during the play that show she is a very good mother to Ugly. Name something that someone in your life has done to help or support you and why you chose it.
- How do Ida and Drake change during the play? Do you think they will be different as parents and partners now? Why or why not?
- How does Bullfrog act as a friend to Ugly? How do his jokes help Ugly, even though they aren’t very funny?
- “I don’t care whose egg I came out of – you are my mother, you raised me and that’s what counts.” Do you agree with this statement that Ugly makes to Ida? Explain why or why not.
- When Penny comes back to Ugly in the spring, they decide to start their own family together. How will Ugly’s new family be different from his first one?

Suggestions for activities:

- Draw a picture of your family. How is it the same as Ugly’s family? How is it different?
- If you have brothers and sisters, do they look like you, or not? What is fun about looking the same? What is fun about looking different?
- What do you think is the most important thing about a family? Create a short play that explains your answer, or write a poem, or perform a rap, or make a dance.
- To test Bullfrog’s idea that beauty is a fad, find pictures of people you think are beautiful or handsome now. Then look for pictures of good-looking people from 30 years ago, or 50, or 100. You might find old photographs at home, or you could search online. Do the people in the older photos look beautiful to you?
Penny and Ugly realize very quickly that they want to be together. They just “click.” Have you ever met someone you liked very much right away? What made you like him or her so much? Write a poem entitled “We Click” and read it to your friend.

**watch out!**

In the beginning of the play the barnyard animals sing about the quiet, stable, pleasant life they lead on the farm. But there is danger, from people, predators like the cat, and the weather.

- What are some of the dangers that Ugly and other animals face during the play? Ugly manages to make it through all the dangers he faces. What and who help him succeed? Who is helping you succeed in your own life? What do they do that helps you the most?
- Ugly escapes from the cat but then doesn’t know how to find his way home. But his mother keeps searching until she finds him. Have you ever been lost? Did you know what to do? Tell what it was like to be lost and how you were found.
- Not all the animals are as fortunate as Ugly. What happened to some of the geese? How did you feel when that happened? Do you think that part of the play should have been left out? Explain why.
- Queenie and Lowbutt are pets, so they are safer than wild animals like the geese. But also they never get to try new things or have new adventures. If you were an animal, would you rather be a wild animal or a pet?
- The Cat is especially dangerous because he is sneaky and deceptive.
  - He makes Ugly think he will be given lunch, rather than become lunch.
  - He lies to the geese, saying the hunters have all gone home.
  - He disguises himself as Ugly’s father to lure him away.
  Why is this type of danger sometimes so hard to see and resist? Can you think of any situations in real life that present this type of danger?
- Even after Ugly escapes the Cat, he must face the winter cold. What do different kinds of animals do during the winter? What do you do? Do you like to go outside, or would you rather stay inside?

**Suggested activities:**
- Probably you, like Ugly, have faced some dangers in your life. Tell the class about one of them. Did you learn a lesson from the experience? What was it?
- Do you have an animal as a pet? Draw a picture, bring in a photograph, or describe something you like about your pet or about your favorite animal.
- Animals live in different kinds of places. Make a list of some of them—house, doghouse, birdcage, barn, field, pond, forest, rocky cliff, etc.—and match the places with an animal that might live there.
- Find pictures in magazines of a snowstorm and of all the activities a person might do when it snows. With permission, cut them out. Or go online to find pictures, and print out
several of them. Then make a collage or poster. Does your collage make a snowstorm look like fun or not? Explain why.

**many different feelings**

During the play, the characters experience many different feelings. Choose a character that fits one of the feelings below, and describe a time when he or she felt this way. Were there moments when you had some of the same feelings? How did the play manage to make you feel that way?

- Sadness
- Pride
- Fear
- Jealousy
- Curiosity
- Love
- Happiness

**Activities:**

- Think of a time in your life when you felt one of these emotions. Tell it to the class, write it as a story, poem, rap, or song, act it out as a play or dance, or illustrate it in a painting or drawing. Give it a creative title.
- Draw a circle for a face, and give it an expression that shows one of the feelings above. Think of a “smiley face” or computer emoticons as models.
- In pairs or small groups, use sock puppets to act out your own version of a scene from the play. Make sure the characters’ feelings are clear.

**characters galore**

List the characters in the play and ask the class to describe the ones they remember—what they wore, how they acted, and something they said that helped to explain what type of “person” they were. A list of characters follows.

- Ugly
- Drake, Ugly’s father
- Greylag the goose
- The Cat
- Turkey
- Bullfrog
- Jay Bird

- Ida, Ugly’s mother
- Grace, the red-banded duck
- Dot, Greylag’s wife
- Maureen and Henrietta, barnyard neighbors
- Queenie the Siamese cat
- Lowbutt the chicken
- Penny the swan
Character Fill-ins

Choose from the following: Penny, Ida, Greylag, the Cat, Turkey, Jay Bird, Drake, Bullfrog

__________________________ likes to lead people but doesn’t know where he is going.

__________________________ is always nervous until Thanksgiving has passed.

__________________________ makes Ugly feel better and tells him “someone’s gonna love ya.”

Ugly thinks ________________________________ is the most beautiful thing he’s ever seen.

The only character who believes in Ugly from the beginning is ____________________.

__________________________ interviewed Ida on TV but doesn’t really care about how worried and sad she is.

Someone who learns how hard it is to do a mother’s job is ____________________.

_______________________ finally gives up and runs away in confusion when he sees Ugly is a swan.

pun & jokes: adventures in fowl play

One of the delights of this script is its puns, wisecracks, and word play. A pun is a play on words that relies on a word’s having more than one meaning or sounding like another word. What are the two meanings that create the pun in each of the following?

- “blatant fowl play is suspected... down on the farm”
- “It doesn’t do for a duck to look sheepish, it confuses the other animals.”
- Duckling: “What’s Mama laid?”
  Drake: “It’s a sort of orange preserve often found on toast.”
  Duckling: “No... what’s Mama laid?” (pointing to Ugly)”
Activities:

- Do you understand the puns below? Do you think they are funny? Try one of your own.
  - I wanted to be a ballet dancer, but it was too-too difficult. (tutu)
  - I was once a carpenter, but then I got bored. (board)
  - I used to be a lumberjack, but then I got the axe. (got fired)
  - I wanted to teach tennis, but it just wasn’t my racket. (plan or scheme)
  - I used to be a poor student until I lessened my hours of TV. (lesson)

- Create a humorous cartoon or drawing, or illustrate and explain a pun.
- Tell a joke you already know.
- Make your own word game, such as a word scramble or word search square.
- What moment in the play was the funniest? Draw that scene.

it all goes together to make a play

Acting:

- Who was your favorite character? What did the actor do to make you like him or her best? Answer the same questions for your least favorite character, the funniest character, or the character who most made you think.
- What character would you like to play? Why?
- What would be the best part about playing Ugly? What would be the hardest part about playing him?
- The Cat is Ugly’s enemy throughout the play. Would you like to play a “bad guy” character like him? Why?
- Actors in a musical have to be able to sing and dance, too. What singing and dancing moments do you remember best? Why?
- What do you remember about the way different actors used their speaking voices? Do you think you could change your voice to fit a particular part?
- Think of the television and movie actors you know. Which ones would you choose to play the various characters in HONK!? Explain your choices.

Costumes, sets, lights:

Before the actors even say a word, what we think about them is shaped by what they wear and the constructions and spaces of the sets.

- Do you think that designing costumes for animal characters is a special challenge? Why or why not?
- What were your favorite costumes? Did any of them surprise you? Did they look too much or too little like animals? Did the colors seem right for each costume?
- How well did the costume designer create the transformation of Ugly from cygnet to swan? Were you surprised? Did you think Ugly was more beautiful in his swan costume than he was before? Explain why.
- How well did the sets help you to understand where the characters were? Which ones seemed friendly places? Which ones seemed scary? Did each scene look like a real place, or just a hinted idea of it?
- How do you think the snowstorm was created? What effect did that scene have on you as you watched it?
- Think of a scene where the lighting was used in a special way. How do you think it changed the way you felt during that scene? Would you like to learn to design the lights for a play? Is there any moment during the play that you would have lit differently?

**Activities:**
- Design your own costume, set, or lighting for a scene in the play. Make a drawing or model to share with the class, and explain why you made it as you did.
- Create a new dance for the play.
- Write your own version of the following important songs from the play, conveying the same message:
  - “Hold Your Head up High” – You can learn to be proud and confident.
  - “The Joys of Motherhood” – Children make all a mother’s work seem worthwhile.
  - “Now I’ve Seen You” – The person you love is the most beautiful of all.
  - “Warts and All” – People will see past your flaws to the real you.
- Design your own poster advertising *HONK!*
- Write a letter to Wheelock Family Theatre explaining what you liked best about the play.
- Create a song, rap, or poem that tells what happens in the play.
- What do you think will happen next in Ugly’s life? Write the next chapter of his story.