

Swan Lake via Marsh Lake

A lesson in support of Kindergarten English Language Arts, Science, and Arts Education (BC/Yukon Curriculum)



Photo Credit: Jukka Jantunen

Summary

1. Subject(s): English Language Arts, Science, Music, Dance
2. Topic or theme: Swans, Swan inspiration in music and dance,
3. Grade/Level: Kindergarten
4. Curriculum Connections:
 - English Language Arts K- Big Ideas:
 - Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy.
 - Stories and other texts can be shared through pictures and words.
 - Science K- Big Ideas:

- Plants and animals have observable features
- Arts Education - Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music, and visual arts express meaning in unique ways.
- 5. Objectives: Students will be introduced to the topic of swans using *Ella Bella Ballerina and Swan Lake*, by James Mayhew, video of swans in flight at Swan Haven (Yukon Territory), and video and audio from the Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake*. The exposure to the art forms of dance and music will enhance respectful appreciation of the physicality of swans and encourage reflection about how characteristics of swans have influenced and enhanced a human art form. Dancing and enjoyment will be highly encouraged.
- 6. Time Allotment: Approximately 30-40 minutes

Purpose

The goals of this activity are to support future classroom visits to Swan Haven Interpretive Centre, to plant seeds of thinking about swans in a broad context, and to offer a cross-curricular lesson incorporating elements of science, music, dance, and English Language Arts. Using an engaging story and a classic ballet, juxtaposed with footage of swans at Swan Haven, students will observe animal characteristics, and reflect on how humans have interpreted these features and been inspired to create art in turn.

Implementation

Learning Context: What do we know about swans?

Prior knowledge: This might be a good time to review some expectations. Students will need to be ready to hear a story, ready to chat, and perhaps have a few good ‘describing’ words under their belt (or maybe they learn some new ones today).

Procedure

- a. **Setting up the lesson:** Introduce the class to the subject of swans in a manner that suits your style and their needs. Perhaps you leap into the room in a tutu, flap your way to the storytime corner, and demand they flap over and join you for a story. Perhaps you offer a visual of a swan and go straight to the whiteboard and begin asking for characteristics because your class has some prior knowledge and is all business. Perhaps you ask your students if any of them have ever seen a swan in real life, and talk to them as a group about any experiences they may have already had with swans (do some modelled writing as you go). Perhaps you make a list of words that rhyme with

swan, or dramatically unfurl a poster from Celebration of Swans and write down the students' suggestions in a thought cloud when you ask them "tell me everything we already know about swans!" Basically, you will need to prepare your students to hear a story and to begin thinking about swans.

- b. **Storytime:** After introducing the subject of swans, read the story of "Ella Bella Ballerina and Swan Lake". After the story, ask your students about the book and what they noticed about the swans and dancers. Do some modelled writing if this works for your group. Share that the ballet in the book is real, and play a short clip of "Dance of the Little Swans" from Swan Lake (or any Swan Lake ballet clip will do). Write down any thoughts they share in response. Show them next a clip of swans at M'Clintock Bay in the Yukon, and ask them to both look and listen carefully. Add to your thought cloud what the swans looked like (i.e.: Swans have: ... Swans do: ...), and sounded like. Allow for sharing.
- c. **Time to Move:** After the sharing, if this is available to you and to your students, guide them in a visualization activity: "Imagine you are a swan. You are rather large for a bird, and you have a long neck to eat plants on the bottom of lakes. You move very carefully. You are covered in soft, warm feathers, and your wings feel strong." Begin playing the classic Swan Theme from Swan Lake. Invite students to move slowly and to feel the wind on their feathers. Join them, even if you just stretch a bit. Depending on how they feel about the music and how much they are enjoying dancing, allow a minute or two for the experience. Bring them back by thanking them, asking what that felt like, and if they enjoyed it.
- d. **Questions and Considerations:** Ask your students why the person who wrote the ballet decided to put swans in as characters. Ask your students how they thought the real swans looked when moving and if the ballet dancers looked like that too.
- e. **Closing:** Go over the thoughts the students shared that were written down and challenge the students to see if they remember to look for swans going by in April and May. "Can you remind me to look for them too?" Appreciate any sharing that you receive. If you use a class calendar, maybe now is a good time for a reminder graphic.
- f. **Independent Practice:** If available to you, send a link with the music you used in class to parents/guardians and invite them to share their own knowledge of swans with their children if they wish.

Extensions:

- a. Now that you have had a discussion about swans and made some memories, you might want to use the topic to branch into other areas. Discuss the words we have for

swans in English and French (*cygne*), but also discuss the many other names that swans have in Yukon First Nations Languages. Swans are also known as:

Southern Tutchone: [dägay](#)

Gwich' in (Fort McPherson dialect): daazrai i

Kaska: [degaye](#)

Northern Tutchone: Togok

Tlingit: gúkl'

Source: Yukon Native Language Centre search, 2020

<http://ynlc.ca/languages/index.html>.

This is not yet a complete list, and the input of your school's Language Keeper or Teacher or First Nations' Studies Teacher is important to respectfully seek if pursuing this path. The more information you can find, the better.

- b. Did your students really enjoy moving their bodies? Was it something you would like to try again? If yes, consider trying an 'animal moves' read-along to get everyone thinking about the ways in which other animals use their bodies, using the following website: http://teacher.scholastic.com/commclub/animal_moves_activity/index.html
- c. Branching out with movement in the classroom, you may wish to ask questions like "Have you ever looked at an animal and tried to move like them? Have you ever noticed how many stories have an animal character or feature animals? I wonder why? Let's see if we notice this even more now." Observing an animal and attempting to move exactly the same way allows children to notice physical differences like knees bending differently, joints in different places, and other observations about the characteristics of living things.

Materials & Resources

An ounce of preparation: Below are some options for materials.

- a. Instructional Materials and Technology:
 - Mayhew, J. 2011. Ella Bella Ballerina and Swan Lake. B.E.S

- A clip of the Dance of the Little Swans from Swan Lake (Youtube has many , including <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd2nTXsivHs>, or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GsaJWIF3ws>)
- For a highly comedic video involving dance and the swan theme -but meant to get laughs- as Miss Piggy dances with (and torments) ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHbGqJ_MonU&t=122s
- For a video of dancers not in swan attire but in rehearsal mode, if your students want to see the practice involved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5Yp-vTol2E>
- An audio clip of the Swan Theme from Tchaikovsky's ballet (Youtube may help, try <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cNQFB0TDfY>). This is also available on Spotify and can be ordered online as a CD from numerous orchestras.
- Video of swans landing and flying at Marsh Lake, YT, with good enough audio to share their vocalizations. Many are available online on Youtube, and you can also connect with our friends at Yukon Wildlife Viewing on social media and at their website: <https://yukon.ca/en/swans> or use the following from CBC Kids: <https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/the-feed/honking-swans-noisily-return-to-yukon>

b. Additional Resources: If you find your students have had their interest piqued on the subject of swans or ballet, here are some other books that you may wish to make available in your reading corner:

- Marshall, J & Sendak, M. 1999. Swine Lake. Michael di Capua Books.
- Allman, J.R. 2020. Boys Dance! Random House Children's Books.
- Allman, J.R. 2020. B is for Ballet. Random House Children's Books.
- London, J. 2009. Little Swan. Two Lions.
- Clover, P. 2017. Swan Lake: (Classic Stories Series). Starry Forest.
- Lerner, C. 2001. On the Wing: American Birds in Migration. HarperCollins.

Assessment

Can your students observe and describe some physical characteristics of swans? Can students articulate their reactions? Can students identify with the book or dance or music? Can students form connections between the physical motions and grace of swans, and the ballet?

Check for comprehension as you encourage sharing. Observe if you have had any students who have been very quiet and check in with them to support any inquiries or connections they may be making.

This activity supports future classroom study of swans, and plants the seed for future learning about water, migration, and other special features of Swan Haven!

Differentiated Instruction

Open to anything, up for everything: You know all too well that students learn in different ways. By consciously thinking about this, you'll be able to use different teaching techniques to reach as many children as possible in your classroom. Use what you know of your students to apply any augmentations you see fit.

- a. **Language Learners:** As you read from the story, use visual cues to support early literacy and language. Demonstrate the writing of the word swan by printing it on a visual of a swan, and the same for lake, dance, and book. Where possible, indicate with your finger when you are reading about a particular character.
- b. **Students who may need calmer alternatives for success:** Make space for reactions and comfort levels, and let enjoyment be the focus during the dancing. Though the ideal is that everyone engage, have a plan for students who need an alternative or reduced stimulation during this activity. For example, if your classroom has a safe space for students who may benefit from a corner that is quiet or has a different amount of light, enable the students to decide where they feel most comfortable should the music or the dancing become “too much”. Calming forts, light cubes or blanket corners can be excellent spaces to take in what is happening without feeling trapped or overwhelmed.
- c. **Kinesthetic Learners:** While the music from the ballet is played, invite students who have the urge to dance or move to do so. Allow a safe area for this, such as a designated foam square or in a taped off “dance space”. If this is very distracting or if the entire class wishes to dance, play the song on a speaker and establish safe boundaries for dance to occur, or save this for immediately prior to outdoor time. Omit if chaos is likely to reign.
- d. **Advancing or Exceptional Learners:** Throughout the reading of the books, offer your advanced learners additional challenges if possible, such as:

“I need to know how many swans are shown in this book. Each time you see a swan on a page, please count (in your head) or chart it on the board and tell me at the end of the book.”

“This is a video of Trumpeter Swans flying and landing on Marsh Lake, not far from where we are. I want you to make three guesses about how many swans you can see on the screen, and at the end of class we will press pause and count them all together.”

“There is a villain in this story, and while I am reading, I want you to draw me a picture of what he eats for breakfast and where he lives.”

Now let's have a really good stretch.



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