

*Duck, Death and the Tulip* published by Gecko Press, 2008

### A Note for Teachers

*Duck, Death and the Tulip* is a sensitively written and presented picture book which makes the subject of death more appealing to teenagers and youth. It may also have applications appropriate for a more primary audience. It is a valuable resource for implementing the requirements of the New Zealand Curriculum. These notes are intended to inspire creativity in planning as well as show how this excellent book can provide opportunities to promote a broad and balanced approach to English. It can also be used as a tool to implement the values, principles and key competencies as promoted in the New Zealand Curriculum.

**Values:** Inquiry, curiosity, thinking (critically, creatively and reflectively), diversity, cultural values, exploring empathy and the values of others, integrity, self-respect and respect for each other are components of a values-based approach to this picture book.

**Principles** permeate this book and the purposeful activities by providing opportunities for students to explore cultural diversity and to promote participation in a 'learning-to-learn' approach to English. Talking partners and collaboration enhance individual reflection and composition.

Many of the **Key Competencies** are skilfully practiced when using this book. In the areas of thinking critically and creatively one can make better sense of experiences like Death. Here, the students use language, symbols and texts for understanding and creating meaning. They can learn to manage their own learning through presenting, writing and speaking activities. By listening to other people's views they learn to relate to one another. By participating in more discussion through the 'talking partner' approach they can contribute more.

### Class Organisation

**Talking Partners** promote everyone in the class to contribute to class discussion and clarify their own thinking. Using this approach helps the students understand what is being asked of them and to clarify success criteria. Instead of asking the students to put up their hands in response to your questions, ask them to talk to their talking partner. That way no one can drift off and you have full class participation. Perhaps get a few students to report to the class to gain some whole-class purpose. When you want the students to clarify their success criteria for writing, such as clarity of message, paragraphing, punctuation, impact of vocabulary and metaphor, to name a few, ask them to share their writing with their talking partner and ask for feedback from them. This way the students feel supported in their learning by their talking partner.

**Teacher Questioning** is essential for promoting open-ended thinking. *Duck, Death and the Tulip* does not in any way suggest any particular view of death and the dying process but leaves it up to individuals to form their own opinions and ideas about this. It is well suited to a culturally diverse school where students of many faiths and traditions can contribute their own ideas. The teacher's questions might look like this:

“What do you think?” “How do you feel about..?” “What do you already know?” “What do people from other cultural traditions and countries think about it?” This line of questioning promotes thinking.

**Formative Assessment** practices are well-suited to this context. Students can assess books, speeches, poetry, plays, dance, drama, music and their own written or orally presented tasks for success criteria. The teacher simply facilitates and guides the establishment of criteria and also from their own knowledge of the achievement objectives in the School Curriculum. Students use the ones that fit their own stage of learning and judge their own success through their talking partners and self-assessment practices. Thus, individual responsibility and reflection are promoted.

**Feedback** is essential for students to clarify their understanding – of the texts they view and the texts they create. Give students opportunities to talk about their work and if they are achieving the criteria established earlier. This informs them as to where they have to go next in their learning.

Here follows a condensed view of the English School Curriculum coverage using the Achievement Objectives. Most of them will be applicable in all the activities described.

## **The School Curriculum – the English Achievement Objectives**

The English school curriculum is structured into two strands: making meaning (listening, reading and viewing) and creating meaning (speaking, writing and presenting). The objectives outlined below are based on levels 3-5. The student's proficiency in the objectives will indicate their level – teachers will need to refer to their descriptions for further analysis.

By working through the following knowledge, skills and understanding, students will be integrating information, processes and strategies purposefully and confidently to identify, form and express ideas.

| <b>Knowledge/Skills/ Understandings</b> | <b>Making Meaning:</b> Listening, Reading and Viewing                                       | <b>Creating Meaning:</b> Speaking, Writing and Presenting                                  |
|---|---|--|
| Purposes and Audiences                  | Show increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences. | Show a level of understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.  |
| Ideas                                   | Show an increasing understanding of ideas, within, across and beyond texts.                 | Select, form and communicate ideas on a range of topics.                                   |
| Language Features                       | Show an understanding of how language features are used for effect within texts.            | Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an understanding of their effects. |
| Structure                               | Show increasing understanding of text structures.   | Organises texts, using a range of appropriate structures.                                  |

## A Programme of Activities

### English

1. Explain to the students that a German author created this picture book. Perhaps look at a map/atlas to locate Germany and give some background to the author – *Wolf Erlbruch is a celebrated and original German author and illustrator. Winner of the 2006 Hans Christian Anderson Medal for Illustration, he has received many other awards. Erlbruch is recognised for his witty and winsome stories and his sophisticated synthesis of collage and drawing.*
  - Talk to the children about how picture books can communicate rather sensitive subjects and what they think this book is going to be about. Explore some of the student's ideas about death. Then read the story. Gather some responses to the book.
  - Ask the students to discuss with their talking partners about what they like/dislike about this book. Discuss what they think about *death*. Does this book provoke some lines of thought or impressions about what they think of death?
  - Ask the children what feelings they experienced when they listened to/read this book? Talk about why we as human beings have these feelings about death. Simply compile a list of responses as present as an inquiry board.
  - Ask the children what they would like to know about death and compile these learning outcomes as part of the inquiry display on this subject.
  - Talk about what the *intentions* of the author were to present this subject to young people. Is Wolf trying to encourage people to think about Death or to teach them something he knows?
  - Talk about how these two things influence how we respond to Death – do we want someone to teach us something or promote us to think about something?
2. Ask the children to respond to this book by considering such questions as *Why would this book appeal to some people and not others? What are ideal age groups to read this book? Can this book be presented to younger people and older people?* Challenge the students to prepare with their partner a way of introducing this book to a younger or older audience by preparing a lesson plan, much like a teacher would. Consider, “*How would you present it differently to different audiences?*” “*How would you phrase questions differently?*”

3. Talk about rewriting this story for different ages and audiences – *how would you change the characters, the plot, setting, how it would begin, changing the main events in the middle of the story or what would your intentions be if you wanted the audience to experience a point of view regarding Death?*
4. Discuss *personification* as a language tool to express ideas. Define personification as a method of bringing an idea to life. What has the author brought to life here? How has Wolf Erlbruch personified Death? Talk about the qualities and characteristics Wolf has given to Death and ask the students to support their ideas with references to what Death has said to Duck. Talk about other examples of personification. How might Good and Evil be personified? What things have the students seen personified on the TV, in films, in commercials or in books they've read? Ask the students to take a quality or them like Love or Anger and personify it into a character. Relate their ideas and techniques to those of Wolf Erlbruch's character of Death.
5. Look at obituaries and funeral speeches of well-known people. Discuss the purpose of such writing in our culture. Why is it important for people to mark the passing of their loved ones? Analyse the structure, content and components of these articles and collate a list of structural markers/content that will be used for the students to create their own obituaries and funeral speeches either of a well-known person or a fictitious character.
6. Write a funeral speech for the Duck and/or people who are well-known to the students. Research the Internet, books from the library as well as the student's own knowledge. Write the article using the criteria acquired from the analysis on the last activity. Present their speeches and the class can assess their classmates performance according to the success criteria of a good speech.
7. Discuss how an obituary could be written for a famous and/or controversial person well-known to the students, e.g. Martin Luther King just after he was assassinated. Take the perspective of someone close to his cause and someone who was racist. Talk about how one's own beliefs and values inform how we think about other people. Introduce how respect, democracy, freedom of speech and tolerance can influence our views on people and experiences.
8. Compose a comic strip or a series of pictures and captions personifying a subject like Death. Consider two characters for this composition. Perhaps research comic strip examples to clarify some criteria for what makes a successful comic strip-style story. Use the Internet or other sources of research. Form success criteria.
9. Compose an interview with Death. Ask the students to compose an interview with their partner and present to the class. Talk about questions and responses. Challenge the students to compose an interview with the personification of another subject like Love.
10. Write a review of this book for a local newspaper, magazine or TV/radio review program. Select success criteria for this activity by looking at

newspapers, magazines and TV/radio to form structure and components of such an article.

11. Write a poem about Death. You could write a poem after researching other examples of *Death* poetry. Look at good examples of practice and form success criteria in pairs or as a class.
12. Write a sequel to this picture book. What is going to happen to the Fox and the Hare?
13. Discuss how different groups of people experience and understand Death through their culture and how they say goodbye to their loved ones. Compare differences between peoples in New Zealand, looking at local cultures and communities. Focus on respect and understanding. Ask groups of students to perhaps research other countries and their traditions and present as a project to the class preparing posters and brochures/leaflets.

### Cross-Curricular Dimensions – The Arts

#### Visual Arts

1. Analyse Wolf Erlbruch's use of art materials in his illustrating. Focus on drawing – shading areas of the skull in regards to how the light falls on it. Look at how shading creates the existence of light. Follow this up with examples from art books to show how artists do this. Students can use these pictures to practice their own drawing using light as a subject or draw from objects they can see such as plants, cubes or containers, for example.
2. One can focus on collage as a form of art. Look at the book to see what Wolf Erlbruch has used as a subject of collage, i.e. Death's clothes. Ask them to observe the techniques he has used closely. Challenge the students to create their own character from their own imagination, e.g. Happiness or Sadness, and then apply some technique of collage to present them. Use drawing or collage to express their imaginative compositions or suggest materials, resources or techniques that are also available for them to use as an additional method of presentation and present their creations to the class as a talk. They may want to present their character as a 3-dimensional form as in clay. Present, evaluate and appreciate.

#### Movement

1. Gather examples of dance routines from the Internet, ballet videos or modern dance articles where dance has been used a medium for expressing themes like happiness, love, anger. Discuss techniques and dance elements to form success criteria.
2. Create a dance routine for the subject of Death. Challenge students to create dances, individually, in pairs or groups for other subjects like Happiness, Anger and so forth. Evaluate components/elements of dances, perhaps particular moves, speeds and rhythm.

## Drama

1. Challenge the students to act a part of the story, one playing the Duck and the other Death. Evaluate and discuss excellent components, elements, techniques and conventions of drama expression and refine performances in the light of them.
2. Challenge the students to present plays, skits or a frieze about meeting a subject like Death, e.g. love, peace, war and so forth. What would they say? How would they react? What does Love, Peace, War and Anger want to teach us? What is the purpose of their existence? How would these things be created in terms of dramatic arts? What methods could present these ideas effectively and with impact?

## Music

1. Challenge the students to select instruments and sounds that can personify Death. Present a musical composition to the class. Perhaps look at other examples of music where the composer has personified certain qualities. Holst's *The Planets* may be a good model for personifying the planets of the solar system. Identify how instruments and percussion are used to present particular moods, feelings or ideas.
2. Challenge the students to present lyrics and musical/percussion compositions. Evaluate the performances according to success criteria in personifying feelings and experiences like Love and Anger.

## Foreign language

1. The original text can be printed from the website [www.geckopress.com](http://www.geckopress.com)

Note: Gecko Press encourages students and teachers to send in reviews of the books to our website for publication, as well as scans of artwork and writing. We reserve the right to monitor reviews where they may cause offence. We encourage teachers to send us ideas and experience which may be helpful to others.

# DUCK, DEATH AND THE TULIP

## by Wolf Erlbruch

Press release 1 August 2008

**'*Duck, Death and the Tulip* is now my favourite book of all time'**

Kim Hill, Radio NZ National Program

In a strangely heart-warming story, a duck strikes up an unlikely friendship with Death.

*"Who are you? Why are you creeping along behind me?"*

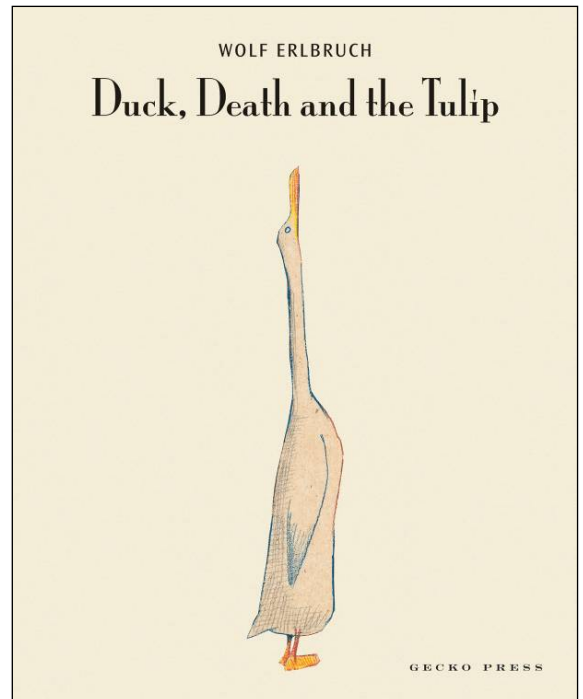
*"Good. You've finally noticed me," said Death. "I am Death."*

*Duck was scared stiff. You couldn't blame her for that.*

*Duck, Death and the Tulip* is the much anticipated translation of Wolf Erlbruch's masterpiece.

*Duck, Death and the Tulip* will intrigue, haunt and enchant readers of all ages. Simple, warm and witty, this book deals with a difficult subject in a way that is elegant, straightforward, and life-affirming.

Publisher Julia Marshall says she chose this book "because of the way it moves people and because of its extraordinary beauty."



### THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Wolf Erlbruch is a celebrated and original German author and illustrator (including *The Mole Who Knew it was None of His Business*). Winner of the 2006 Hans Christian Andersen Medal for Illustration, he has received many other awards. Erlbruch is recognised for his witty and winsome stories and his sophisticated synthesis of collage and drawing.

Translated by Catherine Chidgey and edited by Penelope Todd.

Gecko Press specializes in English versions of books by well-established authors and illustrators, which have a strong track record in their own and other countries, and are winners of international awards.

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