Tales from Hans Andersen

Hans Andersen

About the author
Hans Christian Andersen was born in Odense, Denmark, in 1805. When he was 11 years old, his father died. When he left school he became an apprentice weaver, then a tailor, but he was not happy in this kind of work. At the age of 14, he left home and went to Copenhagen to seek his fortune.

For three years he lived in poverty. He earned a little money singing in a choir and he tried acting and ballet dancing, but failed at both. When he was 17, Andersen came to the notice of a director of the Royal Theatre, who had read one of his plays. He arranged for Andersen to be educated and sent him to a school near Copenhagen, but his teacher was a cruel man who teased him about his ambition to be a writer. In 1828, when he was 23, Andersen passed his entrance examinations to the University of Copenhagen.

Andersen's writings began to be published in Danish in 1829. In 1833 the king gave him a grant of money for travel and he spent 16 months travelling through Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy.

In 1835 Andersen published Fairy Tales for Children – four short stories he wrote for the daughter of an acquaintance. Adults and children who read the stories wanted more. Andersen published 168 fairy tales in all. They have been translated into almost every language.

He never married and had no children of his own. Hans Andersen died on August 4, 1875.

Summary
The tales in this collection are five of the most famous Hans Andersen stories that many people have known since early childhood.

The Ugly Duckling
When the last duckling hatches, all the other ducks reject it because it is not like them: it looks ugly. The other animals he meets all treat him unkindly. Eventually, he is so unhappy and lonely that he asks a group of swans to kill him. At this point he discovers that he is a beautiful swan, not an ugly duckling.

The Nightingale
A king discovers that there is a nightingale in his country which is famous for its beautiful song. His servants find the bird and bring it to the palace. The nightingale's song pleases the king so much that he wants it to live in his palace. But the bird needs its freedom and escapes back to its wood. Someone gives the king a replacement – a mechanical bird made of wood; its song is beautiful but never changes and eventually it breaks. Some time later when the king is near to death, the real nightingale returns to see him and sings for him. The king recovers.

The Little Mermaid
A young mermaid is intrigued by life on land and wants to experience it for herself. On a visit, she saves a shipwrecked prince from drowning. She falls in love with him and wants to return to the land permanently. An old woman gives her a magic drink which turns her into a human being, but she can't speak and her feet always hurt. She can never return to being a mermaid, and if she doesn't marry the prince, she will die. She returns as a land person, but the prince marries someone else. The mermaid is given a chance to save herself, but to do this she must kill the prince. She cannot do this.

The Emperor's New Clothes
Two men want to make easy money so persuade the gullible emperor that they can make him some new clothes which only clever people can see. The emperor pays them money and the men pretend to work. The emperor sends servants to check up on the men's progress. Not wanting to appear stupid the servants report that the work on the new clothes is going well. When the men finally present the invisible clothes to the emperor, he can't see them, but because he doesn't want to appear stupid either, he pretends to be impressed. It is only when he goes for a walk through the streets of city that someone – a child – comments on the fact that he has no clothes on.

Thumbelina
Thumbelina is a tiny girl who is born in a flower. First, she is taken away from her home by a toad who wants her to marry his son; she is rescued from this fate by some fish only to find herself captured by beetles. She escapes from...
Their tree and finds refuge in the house of a field mouse, but here too there is danger. She is forced to work for the mouse and is then promised in marriage to his friend, the mole. She saves a bird from near death, looks after it until it is better and then lets it go. She escapes just before she is due to marry the mole and is taken by the bird to a warm country far away. Here she marries a tiny prince.

Background and themes
Hans Andersen's Tales have a magical quality which makes them irresistible children's stories, but they also have moral lessons to teach.

Feeling rejected: The ugly duckling represents individuals who are rejected by society because they are different in some way from the majority. The same theme crops up in Thumbelina who is considered ugly by the beetles because she hasn't got six legs.

Freedom: Freedom is also a key theme running through The Nightingale and Thumbelina. The nightingale can only sing happily when it is allowed to live freely and not in captivity. Similarly Thumbelina dreads the thought of living as a domestic slave for the toad or the mole and is only happy when she escapes and makes her own choice of husband. In The Little Mermaid the mermaid pays for and eventually dies for her freedom. The Emperor's New Clothes is an attack on hypocrisy and those people who will agree to anything to avoid appearing stupid, especially if going along with the majority viewpoint brings them personal advantages. Significantly, it is the innocent child who points out the truth of the situation.

Discussion activities

The Ugly Duckling, pages 1–6

Before reading
1 Discuss: Talk about Hans Andersen. Ask students if they know any of Hans Andersen's stories. In case they know the stories only in their first language(s), have them try to explain the plot in English.
   Do you know Hans Andersen?
   Where was he from?
   Do you know any of his stories?
   Do you know the titles of his stories in English?
   Can you tell us what the story is about?
2 Pair work: Put students into pairs and have them talk about the animals on page 6.
   Which animals do you like?
   Which animals do you dislike?
   Which of these animals can you find in your country?
   Which of these animals do people in your country eat?

After reading
3 Discuss: Talk about the message in the story. Have students work in groups and discuss the following questions:
   Are there people like the ugly duckling? Can you think of an example?
   How do you feel if people are not nice to you just because you are a little different from other people?
   What can you do or say to people like the ugly duckling?
4 Role play: Have students work in small groups. One student in each group takes the role of the ugly duckling. The other students choose the animals or people whom the ugly duckling encounters. Tell them that they have to be very nice to each other even though the ugly duckling is ugly. Encourage students to be creative. Monitor them and ask some groups to act out their dialogues in front of the class.

The Nightingale, pages 7–12

Before reading
5 Guess: Talk about the picture on page 12. Have students look at the picture on page 12. Ask the following questions:
   What is the 'nightingale'?
   Can you find the nightingale in the picture?
   What is on the table?
   Who do you think this man is?
   What do you think he is saying?

After reading
6 Pair work: Have students ask and answer the following questions:
   Why doesn't the bird want to live in the king's palace?
   Why is the real nightingale better than the wooden one?

The Little Mermaid, pages 13–22

Before reading
7 Discuss: Talk about mermaids. Have students discuss in small groups about mermaids. Ask the following questions:
   Do you believe in mermaids?
   Where do you think they live?
   How long do you think they can live for?
   What do you think they eat?
   Do you know about any other creatures like mermaids – half human and half something else?

After reading
8 Pair work: Put students into pairs and ask them to discuss these questions.
   Is 'The Little Mermaid' a happy story or a sad story?
   The little mermaid was the youngest of six sisters. Do you think this is important for the story?
   Do you think you can leave your family and your world if you love someone from different world?
   What did you learn from this story?
9 Watch and compare: Assign students the task of watching the Disney film The Little Mermaid. This could be in class or at home. After watching, ask
students what the differences are between the book and the film. Ask them which they prefer. If there is no time for all the students to watch the film, you could ask the students who have seen the film to explain the plot.

**The Emperor's New Clothes, pages 23–26**

**Before reading**

10 **Class survey:** Talk about clothes. Put students into groups. Have each group conduct a survey using the questions below. Ask students to share their findings with the rest of the class.
- How many times do you change clothes per day?
- What kind of clothes do you like?
- What colours are good on you?
- How often do you get new clothes?
- How do you get information on fashion?

**After reading**

11 **Discuss:** Talk about real life. Put students into groups and ask them to discuss the following questions:
- What things in real life are like the emperor's new clothes?
- Do you ever say you understand something because you don't want people to think you are stupid?

**Thumbelina, pages 27–33**

**Before reading**

12 **Pair work:** Talk about the name ‘Thumbelina’. Show students the picture on page 28. Tell them that her name is Thumbelina. Write ‘Thumbelina’ on the board and ask students if they can guess why the girl is called Thumbelina. Put students into pairs and have them ask and answer the following questions:
- Why do you think she is called ‘Thumbelina’?
- What names do you want to give her?
- If it’s a boy, what names do you want to give him?

**After reading**

13 **Retell:** Retell the story of Thumbelina. Have students work in groups to retell the story for 5–6-year-old children. Encourage them to make it easy to understand. Then have each group to read out the story to the rest of the class.

**Extra activities**

14 **Discuss:** Put students into groups. Have students choose their favourite stories and characters. Explain that they have to give reasons for their choices. Have them discuss in groups.

15 **Pair work:** Talk about children's stories. Put students into pairs, and have them ask and answer questions about the children's stories they enjoyed when they were little. They could be the stories from their own countries or they could be from the other countries. Students have to explain what the characters are and what the story is about. Monitor the pairs. Ask some pairs to share their stories with the rest of the class.

16 **Artwork project:** Draw and write a storyboard. Divide students into five groups. Give each group one of the stories from the book. The goal of the project is to make a storyboard for each Andersen story in the book and to do the storytelling in front of the class. Have each group choose a project manager that should negotiate what each member of the groups can contribute. They need to decide how to tell the stories using their storyboards. This project could be done over a period of time as it takes time to draw pictures. If you let your students work on the artwork in class, create the situations that students need to interact in English. For example, put all the materials (e.g. paper, pens, pencils, paints, scissors, rulers, etc.) at the front of the classroom, and have students talk to you/other students to get the materials they need. Or walk around the classroom and ask some students individually to explain what they are working on. When each group is ready, hold a storytelling day. You could invite an audience from outside the class.

17 **Discuss and write:** Have students put themselves in the characters' places. Write the following characters on the board:
- the ugly duckling
- the mother duck
- the nightingale
- the king
- the little mermaid
- the emperor
- the emperor's servant
- Thumbelina

Have students choose one character from the list and ask them to imagine that they are those characters. Put students into pairs. Have them talk about what they would do or say in each situation in the stories. Then ask each student to write a paragraph on what they talked about.
- You are (character's name).
- What are you going to do?
- What are you going to say?
- Will the story change?

18 **Retell:** Show and talk about the storybooks of Hans Andersen. Ask students to try and see if they can find a storybook of Hans Andersen in other languages in the library or at home. If some of them have access to those storybooks, ask them to bring them to the class. Have them show the books to the class. Before retelling the stories, have the rest of the class ask questions about the books/pictures/stories.

**Vocabulary activities**

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.